

Critical View: The Representation of Post Sept /11 Psychological Trauma in Two American Novels.

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Abstract : This paper attempts to carry out a close analysis of trauma representation in two American novels : Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close (2005) written by Jonathan Safran Foer and Don Dillilo's Falling Man which was written in 2007. I attempt to convey the event of Sep 11 and the emotional responses to this shattering event. Trauma is a word that is used more in psychology than literature , but in this paper ,I'll discuss the effect of trauma on fictional characters who try to cope with their traumas through language and other means

Key -Words : Trauma, psychology, vicarious trauma, Sept 11

Introduction: The word 'trauma' is more regularly used in psychology . It is a Greek word which used to describe serious injuries on the body. But Psychologists emphasize that in modern times it is more used to refer to the injury inflicted on the mind rather than the body. Cathy Caruth notes that the wound of the mind is more difficult and complicated than the wound of the body because it takes a long time before it is recovered even though the recovery is not complete. (Caruth p. 3) Trauma may be defined as an overwhelming experience of the unexpected and appalling event. Lacapra emphasizes that the one who experiences this shattering and catastrophic event is traumatized because his / her brain is not ready to receive the shock . (Lacapra p. 90)

It is not the accident that traumatizes the victim but the fact that the event happens unexpectedly, which surprises the victim, and it demands a long time before he comes to term with what happens to him.

.Clearly, the terrorist attacks on the twin towers on Sept 11 shocked the world . There were many stories about the event because people experienced the event differently. So many people are traumatized, therefore; we find many stories about the one event. This is the nature of immense collective trauma. Steiner argues what intensifies the collective trauma is the role played by media that shared the events with people all around the world. (Steiner 13)

Because the event happened unexpectedly , people could not describe it or put it into words right away, therefore, the event was called an event without a voice. All the survivors are similarly traumatized but they have different accounts of the what they had experienced .

Keniston and Quinn note that "Early works often attempted directly to capture and convey the events of 9/11 and emotional responses to the events; as time has passed, the approach to the attacks has become more nuanced"(3). Keniston and Quinn added that the texts published some years after the event focused more on the aftermath of the shattering event rather than on the event itself. (4).These texts discussed the themes of loss and tragedies. Worry, hurt, horror, rage, retribution, victim thinking and feeling a complete lack of safety

There are various literary techniques that represent trauma like the doubling and splitting of the self, which , as pointed out by Zerubavel ,is experienced by trauma survivors who often feel like they are existing outside of time, is one that is significant. (Zerubavel 119). Michelle Balaev claims that the approach used to state this doubling and splitting is the technique of dissociation, which includes "the disjunction of time through the use of repetition and negation; imagistic scenes of violence that lack emotional description;

syntactical subversion and rearrangement; temporality; and a doubled consciousness or point of view" (xvi) Survivors will always link the loss of their dear ones and family members with the image of destroyed towers which will be repeated in media every now and then . This image haunts them and makes their life unbearable . Steiner argues that media plays a massive role in changing the personal trauma into collective trauma . (27)

Jurgen Habermas notes that the media transforms the home event all together into an international event and the entire world population into a numb observer. The event of September 11 is not a scene in a Hollywood movie rather it is a shocking reality, plainly took place in front of the "universal eyewitness" of a worldwide public. (qt. in Borradori 28) Media plays an essential role in transforming personal trauma not only into collective trauma but also into a global trauma .

Ron Eyerman defines personal trauma when he claims that "personal trauma is difficult to narrate as it is lived through. It is formidable, not to say impossible, to grasp the meaning of shocking occurrences as they are experienced. It is only after fact that interpretation and real understanding become possible" (49)

Dori Laub then claims that personal trauma becomes collective trauma when the survivor's narratives about the catastrophe are told to an observer, this observer becomes "a participant and a co-owner of the traumatic event ... he comes to partially experience trauma in himself... [and] comes to feel the bewilderment, injury, confusion, dread and conflicts that the trauma victim feels...." ('Bearing Witness' 57) .

Pauline Boss notes that the survivors of the event all suffered of what he calls 'ambiguous loss.' Boss claims that "twenty percent of Americans knew someone hurt, killed, or missing in the attacks," which only shows the influence of the destruction of the Towers had on everyday lives of so many survivors (552)

On the other hand, Jordan argues that this third stage might be "interrupted and prolonged when media coverage continues to provide images of the terrorist attack. This is especially true with anniversaries of the attack,...which may interrupt this stage and provoke a reoccurrence of symptoms" (351)

Psychology presented two ways of trying to come to term with a trauma : 'Acting out' and 'Working through' (Freud, 1914; Freud, 1917). In the working out process, the survivors consciously resort into repeating the disturbing incident in their minds ,which becomes clear in their behaviours, thoughts, language, images even though they try hard to understand what is happening to them .

However , in acting out survivors are the are forced to repeat the Event .They are a compulsively obsessed with the traumatic event, and overexcited to re-enact it without any hermeneutic attempts .Jonathan Safran Foer's *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* and Dillilo's *The Falling Man* were ones of the 9/11 novels that manage to present trauma incredible and nuanced way, thus achieving what Versluys calls " integrating what happened into a meaningful narrative " (Blue 14)Bule also emphasizes that the readers of this novel will definitely go through a parallel course along with the characters in the novel.(Bule 4)The fact that this novel was published four years after the traumatic event indicates that it took time when people started talking about their traumas and their grief. Foer in this novel describes the mind of the shocked person and he also explains how the traumatized could cope with their trauma in different ways

There are some basic features of trauma : First ,the victim or the person who experienced the shock responds to the traumatic event later because the shock takes time to be realized. We cannot actually be prepared for catastrophes , car crashes , loss, and other traumatic

events that sometimes come to pass in our lives. The victim does not realize his traumatization at the time of the occurrence of the event because his mind is not prepared for the shock. Therefore; there is some time between the happening of the trauma and the victim's full awareness. During this time, the traumatized person behaves as if the shock happens to someone else. It is only after some time does he start to be aware of his traumatization.

In Don DeLillo's *Falling Man*, the central characters, Keith Neudecker, survives the event and finds himself running down the street soon after the attack took place. Keith was in the towers the moment the attack took place, but he could not escape the catastrophe. Unconsciously Keith continues running away while at the same time he was trying to understand what is going on around him. He finally ends in the apartment of his wife, Lianne. He isolates himself from the world including his wife. His life is changed entirely. They can't live normally as they used to live before. Keith suffers from an identity crisis because he tries to forget his former self when he attempts to have a relationship with another survivor, Florence. Probably, this is the only way both Keith and Florence could come to terms with their traumas. Both of them try to seek different lives, therefore, they are more connected to their new selves and new identity than they are connected to their former life.

Kai Erikson points out: "Indeed, it can happen that otherwise unconnected persons who share a traumatic experience seek one another out and develop a form of fellowship on the strength of that common tie" (186). Florence's role in Keith's healing is important. But at one point Keith begins to think that he must end this relationship if he wants to continue living with his wife. He tries to find "a way to stop being double in himself, trailing the taut shadow of what is unsaid" (DeLillo 161). This new self-takes him away from his family. This is an indication that trauma complicates one's identity.

DeLillo describes the disorganized scene of "people running past holding towels to their faces or jackets over their heads...[with] smoke and ash...rolling down streets and turning corners...seismic tides of smoke" (3)

In his confusion, Keith starts looking for his friend Ramsey who is killed with the thousands of dead people Keith sees. DeLillo writes: "The whole business of being Ramsey was in shambles now. Keith held tight to the belt buckle. He stood and looked at him and the man opened his eyes and died. This was when he [Keith] wondered what was happening here" (243). Keith is unable to understand what is happening. He cannot remember how he escaped the shattering event. DeLillo writes: "They walked down, thousands, and he [Keith] was in there with them. He walked in a long sleep, one step and then the next" (243). Caruth explains: "What causes, trauma, then, is a shock that appears to work very much like a bodily threat but is, in fact, a break in the mind's experience of time" (Unclaimed Experience 61). When he goes to his apartment to collect his things he finds his ID and some of his official documents. He looks at them as if they belonged to someone else. Everything in that apartment was strange to him. DeLillo describes him: "He looked in the refrigerator. Maybe he was thinking of the man who used to live here and he checked the bottles and cartons for clues" (27). Keith is unable to associate his new character with the person who lived there before the attack. Not only this but he also doubts if he is human. DeLillo explains: "He [Keith] wondered if he was becoming a self-operating mechanism, like a humanoid robot that understands two hundred voice commands, far-seeing, touch-sensitive but totally, rigidly controllable" (226). R. J. Lifton, in an interview with Cathy Caruth, argues that "extreme trauma creates a second self...in extreme trauma, one's sense of self is radically altered. And there is a traumatized self that is created...It's a form of doubling in the traumatized person" (Caruth 'Interview' 128)

Keith suffers an identity crisis. Everything around him seems to be changed. Nothing is like it was. Even when Keith decides to go back to live with his wife, Laine and his only son, Justin, he still feels entirely alienated and isolated from his family. Keith thinks, "Nothing seemed familiar, being here, in a family again, and he felt strange to himself" (DeLillo 5). He describes his life before the traumatic event as the 'other life'. (Dillilo 131)

His present life is different from his new self even though actually he is the same man. Laine, his wife senses that difference in Keith's behaviour: "She saw a man she'd never known before" (DeLillo 59) Keith lives his present in his past. DeLillo compares Keith after the event and Keith before the event: "Keith used to want more of the world than there were time and means to acquire. He didn't want this anymore, whatever it was he'd wanted, in real terms, real things, because he'd never truly known" (DeLillo 128)

The second basic feature of the trauma is that the survivors of the event are not happy and comfortable. They are obsessed with the sense of guilt. They feel guilty because they survived and their dear friends, father, mothers, sisters and dear ones haven't survived. Life for some of the survivors become impossible. They experience an identity crisis. They do not want to be who they were.

Psychotherapists claim that many of the survivors who lost dear ones resort to committing suicide because of the guilt they feel. When Keith thinks of the death of his friend Rumsey it is hard for him to think of his present life anymore. His psychology is affected which makes it difficult for him to understand. Herman explains behaviour when she asserts, "Traumatic events ... shatter the construction of the self that is formed and sustained in relation to others... They violate the victim's faith in a natural or divine order and cast the victim into a state of existential crisis" (51). The scenario of death is often recurring in his mind, "[t]he dead were everywhere, in the air, in the rubble, on the 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 25). His memory of his friend and the image of his death is always there in the background of his mind. Whenever he sees some kind of catastrophe he remembers the death of Rumsey. This is the nature of trauma: It sticks in Keith's brain and comes up unexpectedly when one is not prepared. In the Freudian theory, the survivor repeats unconsciously the past event in his mind every now and then, which makes his complete recovery impossible. As Freud argues, "Indeed, in post-traumatic situations in which one re-lives (or acts out) the past, distinctions tend to collapse, including the crucial distinction between then and now wherein one is able to remember what happened to one in the past but realizes in the here and now with future possibilities" (46-47). Similarly, Holdergerger asserts that the traumatized survivor suffers from frequent repetition of the traumatic event. (Holdergergers 115)

In Foer's *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close*, (2005) Oskar, the protagonist, loses his father in the towers. He is at home when his father calls, but he does not answer his father's calls. When his father is killed he is haunted by guilt. He listens to the messages of his father on the telephone again and again. Without these messages, on the telephone, his father's death would not be that much terrifying to Oskar. Caruth assures that this post-traumatic behaviour as "increased arousal to (and avoidance of) stimuli recalling the event". (Caruth 4) Every time he listens to these messages he becomes more agitated, grieved and depressed until he inflicts injuries on his body. He gives himself bruises. This is his way of self-destruction. He turns his emotional pain into something physical.

Oskar is different from his mother who succeeds in coming to terms with her trauma. Oskar accuses her: "It wasn't fair to Dad, and it wasn't fair to me. But I burned it all inside me" (Foer 35). Oskar feels alienated from his mother when he accuses her of having a

relationship with her friend, Ron .He often expresses his feeling of despair and gloominess by using the metaphor of wearing 'heavy boots' which is repeated more than 15 times through the course of the novel. Oskar says : "I got incredibly heavy boots about how relatively insignificant life is "(Foer 86) He repeats on another page : " My boots were so heavy that I was glad there was a column underneath us "(Foer 163)What increases his sense of grief and sorrow is the fact that his father was only a victim of over 3000 victims . Oskar is afraid that the death of his father is trivialized because of the death of many people with him . For him, his father's death is unique and special even though he was only one of many victims .

Lacapra considers the working out as the method in which a victim might endeavor to " gain critical distance on a problem "(Lacapra 44)It is important that the traumatized person try to distinguish between the past and present and create a distance between them .Oscar does not remain trapped in the past but he starts the process of Working out which helps him to be somewhat liberated from the past and makes him think of his present and even hope for his future. The way Oskar keeps his mind free from the memory of the past inventing things . His deep grief affects him so much that he starts to think how to keep his mind occupied to calm himself:"Being with him {his father }made my brain quite . I did not have to invent a thing. "(Foer 12).His desire to invent things means that Oskar realizes his trauma ,and he starts to cope with it .

Sharing the trauma is another way that enables the victim to cope with it. Psychologists claim that sharing the trauma helps the victim to recover even though it is not complete recovery . It is important to talk about it not run away from it. Sharing his experience would, as Versluys says , "keep him from going insane " (Versluys 6)

Therefore, Oskar makes a journey to New York to share his traumatic experience . He is afraid he cannot keep the secret for himself . He compares himself to the " Sharks , who die if they don't swim" (Foer). He finds a lock in his father's wardrobe and sets a journey to find the key. This journey he makes symbolizes his attempt to find a closure . His communication with many people telling them his story helps him to live in the present and come to terms with his trauma .Some of the people he sends letters to answer his letters and they share their trauma with him . He is not only sharing his trauma with people but forces people to share their traumas with him . Thus, he gives a voice to trauma that goes outside his family .Caruth argues: "History, like trauma , is never simply one's own , that history is precisely the way we are implicated in each other's traumas"(Qt in Codd 244)

He also starts writing in a journal . His agitation and puzzlement are plain because whenever he writes something he comes to correct it right away. (Foer 170)

At last he comes back to his mother who helps Oskar to take off his ' heavy boots ' . He realizes that his mom is " a role model of calm and emotional strength " (Foer ,)When he, finally, confesses to her the difficulty of losing his father she shares him his grief and helps him overcome his trauma by showing him the " ability to rebuild a life " (Foer 145). He finds that although he loses his father, but he still has his mother with whom he might share his loss, and together they might find some hope for bright future again .By communicating with his mother , Holmgren , argues , Oskar becomes "a mourning child who heals adult , who in turn help him to heal" . (Holmgren et al 115)This contact with his mother simplifies his recovery even though it is not complete recovery because the past will always live in the background of his head .The recovery Oskar gains seems to be impossible in the case of grandpa who loses his son In 9/11 attacks . Grandpa cannot distinguish the past from the present . He remains stuck between the traumatic event and his present life . This is , in fact , the second traumatic experience he underwent . The first trauma caused by the attack on their native Dresden during WWII. He lost in that attack his fiancé , Ann who was pregnant but

she could not survive the attack like him. His feeling of guilt makes him unable to speak. This aphasia makes it impossible for him to recover. These traumatic experiences he underwent take away his human essence leaving him as his name symbolizes, a Schell. Grandpa survives bodily but not psychologically, and he tries to be in touch by writing letters but his letters are never sent to anyone. All his letters come to one title "Why I am not where You Are". Grandpa explains his failure to spring back from his trauma into his own life: "And here I am, instead of there. I'm sitting in this library, thousands of miles from my life, writing another letter I know I won't be able to send, no matter how hard I try and how much I want to" (Foer 216).

Grandpa believes that his connection to Ann's sister may help him recover and make him able to live in the present again, but after he is united with her he still feels connected to the dead Ann.

He contemplates: "I thought we could run to each other, I thought we could have a beautiful reunion, although we had hardly known each other in Dresden. It didn't work" (109) When his wife is pregnant Grandpa decides to leave her and travel far away because he is afraid of losing his baby. He cannot bear another shock. He expresses, in his letters, his remorse for not having admitted his fears: "I'm so afraid of losing something I love that I refuse to love anything" (Foer 216). Probably he is terrified that the new baby might bring him back to the present. His desire to stay living in the past derives him to shrink away from his pregnant wife. Lacapra interprets this acting out behavior as he "exist[s] in the present as if [he] were still fully in the past, with no distance from it. Victims of trauma tend to relive occurrences, or at least find that those occurrences intrude in their present existence" (LaCapra 143).

Grandpa is ended in the airport after he fails to communicate with anyone including his wife. The case is different with Grandma who, like grandpa, communicates through letters but her letters are all sent to Oskar. This communication helps her to break from the traumatic past and live in the present. Before she starts writing letters to Oskar she wishes that her communication with Thomas would help her to heal. She would have someone to grieve with, without focusing on her own pain. But she realizes that Thomas does neither allow himself to recover nor does he help her to heal. She expresses her desire to share her trauma with her husband: "I did not need to tell him my story, but I needed to listen to his. I wanted to protect him, which I was sure I could do, even if I could not protect myself" (Foer 81) Thomas leaves her after he fails to communicate with her anymore. She ends up alone with her only child. After Sept 11 He comes back to apologize from his wife, but he finds that his wife has given herself the name 'Schmidt', which Thomas explains as being her "maiden name" (Foer 274) This is a remarkable point. Her changing her name into Mrs Schmidt means that she refuses to be entirely broken like her husband. She refuses to run away and decides to face her problems alone. Though she lost her only son but she still has a grandson whom she dearly loves. Her grandson gives her strength and makes her life bearable. She still has something to live for. She tells her husband when he comes back after the event of 9/11 how she could cope with her trauma for the sake of her little child. She tells him: "Every Thanksgiving I made a turkey and pumpkin pie. I would go to the schoolyard and ask the children what toys they liked. I bought those for him" (Foer 277)

Kaplan in her book trauma culture defines another kind of trauma she calls vicarious trauma which she calcifies: "Most of us generally encounter trauma vicariously through the media rather than directly" (87).

Dillilo presents another victim who experiences vicarious trauma, Lianne. She who was not in the WTC that day, and she did not directly witness the event, but she witnessed

the traumatic event on TV. Kai Erikson clarifies this type of traumatization: "It only makes sense to insist that trauma can issue from a sustained exposure to battle as well as from a moment of numbing shock, from a continuing pattern of abuse as well as from a single searing assault, from a period of severe attenuation and erosion as well as from a sudden flash of fear". He adds : "The effects are the same, and that, after all, should be our focus" (185). Lianne does not experience that trauma directly but she is similarly influenced by the traumatic event. DeLillo writes: "Every time she saw a videotape of the planes she moved a finger toward the power button on the remote. Then she kept on watching." (134) She could not but continue watching . DiLillo adds: "The second plane coming out of that ice blue sky, this was the footage that entered the body, that seemed to run beneath her skin, the fleeting spirit that carried lives and histories, theirs and hers, everyone's, into some other distance, out beyond the towers" (Ibid). Lianne has fixated about re-witness the scene repeatedly . Whenever she puts her finger on the power point on the remote to switch the TV off she can't do it. She cannot avoid watching the attack , even though she feels frightened and stunned. She does not understand why she can't prevent herself from watching. Lianne informs her husband , "I wake up at some point every night. Mind running non-stop. Can't stop it" (DeLillo 124). Her feelings are beyond control. Like Keith, she starts to lose her sense of herself . She tells Keith "thoughts I can't identify, thoughts I can't claim as mine"(DeLillo 125). Vicarious trauma produces the same symptoms as those who experienced the trauma straightforwardly .

DeLillo observes the considerable role of witnessing: "It was something that belonged to another landscape, something inserted,when the witness wonders what has happened to the meaning of things, to tree, street, stone, wind, simple words lost in the falling ash" (103). Lianne links the trauma Sept 11 with the trauma of her father who shot himself . She tells Keith, "My father shot himself so I would never have to face the day when he failed to know who I was"(DeLillo 130). She makes this apparently accidental declaration while watching TV .She cannot run off the reoccurrence of her terror. The image of falling man does not only remind her of Sept 11 but also she remembers her father's death who takes his life by his own hand before his Alzheimer's could develop The image of falling man instigates her terror because it reminds her with falling bodies out of the tower. Those people who decide to die by jumping out of the Tower instead of waiting for their predictable death are like her father who prefers to end his life by his own hands .

The only way to heal from trauma is to live in the present world , to accept it as it is, to manage one's life, and to be detached from the past. At the end of the novel, Lianne decides to separate from the past and try to live her life like before. She goes to her job and resumes her work . She asks her boss to do something new. Her boss suggests she works on a book that discusses the attack of the twin towers . She accepts to work on that book .Doing so she is defying her fears and trying to come to terms with her trauma .As for her problem with Alzheimer, She finally accepts to go to the doctor to put her fears aside. She does not want to end doing what her father did. She is relieved to know that "She was troubled by memory lapses, steeped in family history. She was also fine. Brain normal for age. She was forty-one years old and within the limited protocols of the imaging process, pretty much everything seemed to be unremarkable" (DeLillo 187)

Conclusion

Cathy Caruth argues that the shocking event does not influence everybody in the same way . Some traumatic persons could rise above their trauma after some passage of time but others stay spellbound in their past, and their total healing is unattainable. In conclusion,

the common factor, however, is the hypothesis that trauma in any type hinders, at least temporarily, the growth of the individual.

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