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9/11: Writing Trauma

An Analysis of *Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close* and *Saturday*

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Abstract

The terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001 have represented a globally traumatic event in contemporary human history. The attacks were not only a severely disruptive experience that profoundly impacted the individuals personally involved, but they became a source of trauma that affected the whole world.

During the years following the attacks, the global terror of 9/11 created a fascinating literary sub-genre called post-9/11 fiction, or 9/11 literature, which interested several Anglo-American writers. Moreover, this sub-genre is connected to literary trauma narratives whose themes are associated with extreme psychological states such as fear, paranoia, and post-traumatic stress disorder.

The aim of this thesis is to analyse two post-9/11 and trauma novels, namely *Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close* by Jonathan Safran Foer and *Saturday* by Ian McEwan. It will do so by looking at the history of trauma studies, trauma narratives, and post-9/11 literature. Then, it will examine in depth the two novels, highlighting their connection to trauma fiction and post-9/11 fiction.

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Introduction

Trauma has consistently been linked to the practice of narration. From the early nineteenth-century studies of trauma, the relationship between trauma and the narrative has represented a paradox. Theorists discussed the incommunicability of trauma, but simultaneously acknowledged the importance of narrating the traumatic experience to overcome it. With the events of the Holocaust, the two spheres demonstrated to be more intertwined than ever before. In a way, the testimonies of Holocaust survivors have restored identity to the victims who suffered terrible horrors in concentration camps. Subsequently, debates have been ignited regarding the most suitable techniques to be employed when writing about trauma, since theorists believed that traditional literary modes were not sufficient. Indeed, theorists considered experimental narrative techniques more proper to convey traumatic experiences. Therefore, literary techniques prove to be crucial in disclosing the depths of trauma, more so than bare accounts of facts.

With the tragic events of 11 September 2001, not only survivors, but first responders, writers and literature were needed once again to account for the horrors the world was witnessing. Hence, a considerable body of fiction, known as 9/11 literature, came into being. Given the visual resonance of the events of the World Trade Center on the whole world, novels tried to convey the feelings of trauma and anguish that resulted from witnessing such events. Some novels represent individual and domestic trauma, while others are more politically conscious and represent the global viewpoint of events, refusing to give voice to a single dominant narration of the events.

This thesis aims to analyse two instances of post-9/11 and trauma literature, namely *Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close* and *Saturday*. Starting from the biography of their authors, it will analyse the critical aspects of their narrative techniques such as genre, writing style, and setting. Ultimately, the themes of trauma and the representation of the 9/11 terrorist attacks will be thoroughly accounted for. The

first chapter will provide a historical overview of trauma studies, then it will focus on the concepts of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, shame, and survivor guilt. Subsequently, it will investigate cultural and psychological trauma. The notion of acting out and working through will be enforced to provide context for the novels later analysed. The chapter will then focus on trauma fiction and examine the role of the protagonist, time, and place and their relationship with trauma. Further, the chapter will investigate the crucial role of photography and the digital age considering trauma and its representation. There will be a brief recounting of the 9/11 terrorist attacks, the role of media as well as the dominant narrative promoted by the Bush administration. Ultimately, the subgenre of 9/11 literature and its characteristics will be presented.

The second chapter will focus on Jonathan Safran Foer's *Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close*, the key features of the novel, its the sources, characters, structure, setting, writing style, and genre. Subsequently, the analysis of traumatic temporal and spatial references will be carried out. The investigation of the character's trauma will then provide an insightful analysis of the representation of trauma in fiction. Eventually, the visual component of the novel will be highlighted being one of its most unique features.

Finally, the third chapter will focus on Ian McEwan's *Saturday*. Once again it will consider the biography of the author and his influence and preferred themes, such as political consciousness, the representation of social class conflicts, and the importance of relationships in his novels. In addition, the critical features of the novel will be analysed, specifically the research and intertextual references, the characters, structure, setting, writing style, and genre. Subsequently, it will be discussed how 9/11 constituted a global traumatic experience and how McEwan displays a British point of view of the aftermath of the events. Given these premises, the chapter will delve into the permeating presence of the terror showcased by the media during the attacks, how it affected people around the world, and McEwan's subtle refusal to conform to the dominant narrative of the 9/11 attacks.

1 Trauma Theory, Trauma Narratives, and Post-9/11 Fiction

1.1 *Trauma Theory*

1.1.1 A Historical Overview of Trauma Studies

The term "trauma" comes from Greek τραῦμα, it means "wound" and it denotes a physical injury to the skin. It was in the middle of the nineteenth century that the term started to be associated with an internal wound rather than an external one[1]. Presently, in order to properly address the notion of trauma, it is important to outline the historical overview which brought the term to the concept it represents today. A historical milestone for trauma studies can be traced back to a condition known as railway spine theorised by Sir John Eric Erichsen in the 1860s. Indeed, early-nineteenth-century Great Britain saw the development of railway transportation, which led to an increasing number of trauma cases which featured persistent symptoms without signs of real injuries. Consequently, in 1866, surgeon Sir John Eric Erichsen attributed these symptoms to spinal concussion, a condition which involved a biological pathology, namely an inflammation of the spinal cord, despite the absence of a spinal fracture. The cases presented:

> disordered memory, disturbed sleep and frightful dreams, and various types of paralysis, melancholia and impotence, with a particular emphasis on the sudden loss of business sense.[2]

This study, thus, shifted the focus from the pathoanatomical interpretation to a psychological and psychosomatic one.[3] However, it was

1 Schönfelder, "Theorizing Trauma: Romantic and Postmodern Perspectives on Mental Wounds".
2 Luckhurst, *The Trauma Question*, p. 22.
3 Schönfelder, "Theorizing Trauma: Romantic and Postmodern Perspectives on Mental Wounds".

not until 1889, through the study in *Die traumatische Neurosen* by neurologist Herman Oppenheim, that the term "traumatic neurosis" was adopted.[4] Consequently, in the 1890s, a branch of psychology known as "psychodynamic" developed. Neurologist Jean Martin Charcot was the first to investigate the relationship between trauma and mental illness through his studies on hysteria. Indeed, he realised that hysterical symptoms were psychological rather than physiological.[5] Subsequently, Charcot's pupil, Pierre Janet, continued to investigate the repercussion of a traumatic experience on the development of his patients' personality and behaviours[6] and elaborated the concept of "dissociation". The progress in trauma studies continued with the theories of Sigmund Freud and Josef Breuer who, in *Studies on Hysteria* (1893), concluded that hysteria was caused by psychological trauma.[7]

Theories were then reawakened in the aftermath of the First World War, in which numerous soldiers were diagnosed with a condition called "shell shock". The first example of such condition was examined by Cambridge psychologist Charles Myers, who noticed extreme symptoms on soldiers who stood near several exploding shells, despite the lack of physical injuries. Such symptoms included "blurred and then severely restricted vision, involuntary shivering, crying, a loss of taste and smell (but not hearing), and retrograde and anterograde amnesia".[8] Furthermore, during World War I, psychiatrists established the "psychological first aid", a method whose aim was to "provide a short intervention that would help the soldiers recover and return to the front as soon as possible".[9] Subsequently, the concept of "shell shock" was of great importance for Freud's studies who, in his early work *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920), developed a theory of traumatic neurosis, the representation and the assessment of trauma, which rose several theories. The common factor in these theories was that, in most experiences, trauma of any form disrupted, at least temporarily, the growth of the individual. Freud's trauma studies were governed by what he called *Nachträglichkeit*, which can be translated as "deferred action"; thus, trauma becomes an "internal, retrospective determination of a momentous yet initially incomprehensible event's memorial significance".[10] Moreover, as Luckhurst

4 Schönfelder, "Theorizing Trauma: Romantic and Postmodern Perspectives on Mental Wounds".
5 Ringel, "Chapter 1: Overview".
6 Ibid.
7 Ibid.
8 Luckhurst, *The Trauma Question*.
9 Ringel, "Chapter 1: Overview", p. 2.
10 Forter, "Freud, Faulkner, Caruth: Trauma and the Politics of Literary Form", p. 264.

argues, Freud believed that "the psyche constantly returned to scenes of unpleasure because, by restaging the traumatic moment over and over again, it hoped belatedly to process the unassimilable material, to find ways of mastering the trauma retroactively".[11]

Additionally, with the occurrence of the Second World War the study of trauma regained attention. The "shell shock" condition was replaced by the terms "battle fatigue" or "exhaustion"[12], and was characterised by:

> hypersensitivity to stimuli such as noises, movements, and light accompanied by overactive responses that include involuntary defensive jerking or jumping (startle reactions), easy irritability progressing even to acts of violence, and sleep disturbances including battle dreams, nightmares, and inability to fall asleep.[13]

Moreover, the horrific events of the Holocaust played a key role in the discussion of trauma and became, as Whitehead argues, "a universal trope for traumatic history".[14] Indeed, the Holocaust has been considered to symbolise a fundamental shift in memorial consciousness, focusing on the terrible experiences of those who survived its atrocities.[15] Significantly, Henry Krystal studied the effect of traumatic experiences on concentration camp survivors, elaborating the concept of "alexithymia", namely the inability to comprehend or delineate one's own emotions.[16]

Another crucial milestone was achieved after the events of the Vietnam War which occurred from 1955 to 1975. Luckhurst comments on how, over fifteen years after the end of the war, more than 25 per cent of veterans suffered from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder[17], term which replaced its predecessors. The veterans' psychiatrists described "symptoms of insomnia, hyper-vigilance, alcohol and drug addiction, terror, paranoia and nightmares".[18] Moreover, psychiatrist Robert Jay Lifton in his influential work *Home from the War: Vietnam Veterans — Neither Victims Nor Executioners* (1973) stressed how the Vietnam War was "an atrocity-producing situation, an existentially absurd war that wounded everyone it touched".[19] Lifton's work, further, established "rap groups" in which veterans could share their experiences and receive support.[20] Additionally, the re-

11 Luckhurst, *The Trauma Question*, p. 9.
12 Ibid., p. 9.
13 Britannica, *combat fatigue - Encyclopedia Britannica*.
14 Whitehead, *Trauma Fiction*, p. 151.
15 Ibid., p. 151.
16 Ringel, "Chapter 1: Overview".
17 Luckhurst, *The Trauma Question*, p. 59.
18 Ibid.
19 Ibid., p. 60.
20 Ringel, "Chapter 1: Overview".

search on the survivors and traumatised veterans led to the study of the Post-Vietnam Syndrome, which is characterised by "intrusive, combat-related thoughts and nightmares, numbed responsiveness, and several specific symptoms such as drug dependence, depression, anxiety, and rage".[21] As a result of the several campaigns on the topic, the syndrome by the 1980s became Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).[22] Indeed, in 1980, the American Psychiatric Association (APA) officially incorporated PTSD in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM), crystallising the medicalisation of the term.

In the 1990s, new pivotal theories and scholars emerged in the field of trauma studies, most notably: Cathy Caruth, Shoshana Felman, and Geoffrey Hartman. In Michelle Balaev's opinion these scholars "popularized the concept of trauma as an unrepresentable event that revealed the inherent contradictions within language and experience".[23] Scholar Cathy Caruth produced one of the most influential works on the topic, in which she considers trauma as an event that resists linguistic representation, and which irrevocably afflicts the psyche of the traumatised.[24] Her formulations are based on Freud's theories and supported by the works of clinical trauma specialists, namely Bessel van der Kolk and Judith Herman. In *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, History* (1996) she looks at Freud and defines trauma as something which cannot be known in the moment of its occurrence. As a result, the traumatic affect only becomes evident after a period of "latency" and she explains that the "experience of trauma [..] would thus seem to consist, not in the forgetting of a reality that can hence never be fully known, but in an inherent latency within the experience itself".[25] However, in 2003, Harvard professor Richard McNally published *Remembering Trauma*, challenging Caruth's theories and contributed to a new generation of trauma theorists.[26] Indeed, McNally concludes that "trauma is memorable and describable"[27] and asserts, "emotional stress enhances memory for the central features of the stressful experience. Stress does not impair memory; it strengthens it".[28] Thus, in McNally's point of view trauma survivors are not unable of remembering, but they are possibly unwilling to do so.

21 Friedman, "Post-Vietnam Syndrome: Recognition and Management", p. 931.
22 Luckhurst, *The Trauma Question*.
23 Balaev, "Trauma Studies".
24 Ibid.
25 Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History*, p. 17.
26 Pederson, "Speak, Trauma: Toward a Revised Understanding of Literary Trauma Theory".
27 Ibid., p. 334.
28 Ibid., p. 339.

1.1.2 On Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), Shame, and Survivor Guilt

Since its first inclusion on the third edition of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM–III), Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) has both complicated and legitimated the trauma paradigm.[29] Three elements define PTSD: the traumatic event, the individual's initial response, and the subsequent pathology.[30] Subsequently, two criteria can be identified: criterion A1, the stressor, defines the types of events that can be considered traumatic; criterion A2 specifies the subjective emotional response, namely the event must have been experienced "with intense fear, helplessness, or horror".[31] Additionally, as Caruth states in her influential work *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, the definition of PTSD fashioned by the American Psychiatric Association "provided a category of diagnosis so powerful that it has seemed to engulf everything around it".[32] Consequently, critiques have emerged for the concept of PTSD, David Becker, for instance, claims that survivors of human rights violence, who have been diagnosed with PTSD, "are not necessarily post, stressed, or disordered".[33] Indeed, over time, groups identified as extra-PTSD have argued that although extremely important in its definition, PTSD has begun to feel "unnecessarily constrictive".[34] Nonetheless, PTSD has been a crucial achievement in the field of trauma studies. Hence, theorists argue that what characterises and defines this disorder is the frequency, the persistence, and the intensity with which symptoms manifest themselves.[35]

Furthermore, according to psychoanalysts Laplanche and Pontalis, trauma is "an event in the subject's life defined by its intensity, by the subject's incapacity to respond adequately to it, and by the upheaval and long-lasting effects that it brings about in the physical organization".[36] Indeed, the traumatic experiences irrevocably change the lives of those affected and survival appears to be one of its most critical aspects. As Caruth states, "for those who undergo

29 Kurtz, "Introduction".
30 Schönfelder, "Theorizing Trauma: Romantic and Postmodern Perspectives on Mental Wounds".
31 Ibid.
32 Caruth, *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, p. 3.
33 Larrabee, Weine, and Woollcott, "The Wordless Nothing: Narratives of Trauma and Extremity", p. 359.
34 Ibid.
35 Schönfelder, "Theorizing Trauma: Romantic and Postmodern Perspectives on Mental Wounds".
36 Vanon Alliata, "The Price of Suffering and the Value of Remembering: Patrick McGrath's *Trauma*", p. 123.

trauma, it is not only the moment of the event, but of the passing out of it that is traumatic; that survival itself, in other words, can be a crisis".[37] Indeed, two important dimensions of PTSD are posttraumatic shame and guilt, whose origins can be found in personal trauma.[38] Firstly, posttraumatic shame is the strong belief that the individual has violated their true nature, regardless of how rightly or wrongly they have been perceived by others or by themselves.[39] The individual who endures such shame believes to be flawed, inadequate and inferior. As Morrison argues, "shame is an effective response to the perception of the self as flawed, and thus inevitably involves narcissism, vulnerability, and their various manifestations".[40] Hence, shame emerges in the posttraumatic self as a result of traumatic events that leave the sufferer scared, helpless, and unable to behave morally. Similarly, posttraumatic guilt arises when the traumatised individuals accuse themselves for fail enactments in traumatic events, it is their belief that different actions would have led to different, better outcomes.[41] The sole positive consequence of posttraumatic guilt studied by trauma theorists is that it highlights moral standards. Regardless, posttraumatic guilt might come from surviving a traumatic event. Notably, the well-known survivor guilt attains that the sufferers question their survival among others.[42] In conclusion, in instances of survivor guilt, it has been observed that the survivors often belittle themselves and become disinterest in their own well-being.[43]

1.1.3 Cultural Trauma and Psychological Trauma

The relationship between trauma and culture has always been present in societies. As early as 1925, Russian-American sociologist Pitirim Alexandrovich Sorokin noticed the damages a social change could provoke in a society.[44] Indeed, the damages caused by the trauma of the Russian Revolution included "dramatic increases in poverty, violence, sexual assault, disease, psychological disorders, familial instability (increasing divorce and declining birth rates), death rates, and alcoholism."[45] On cultural trauma Jeffrey C. Alexander writes:

37 Caruth, *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, p. 9.
38 Wilson, Drožđek, and Turkovic, "Posttraumatic Shame and Guilt".
39 Ibid.
40 Ibid., p. 125.
41 Ibid.
42 Ibid.
43 Juni, "Survivor guilt".
44 Gryczynski and Wiechelt, "Cultural and Historical Trauma Among Native Americans".
45 Ibid., p. 195.

> Cultural trauma occurs when members of a collectivity feel they have been subjected to a horrendous event that leaves indelible marks upon their group consciousness, marking their memories forever and changing their future identity in fundamental and irrevocable ways.[46]

Thus, the traumatic experience as described by Alexander implies an underlying social damage and the collective struggle to understand the events.[47] However, not every dreadful event that might take place generates cultural trauma. Hence, collective traumas are not inherently traumatic, but they are socially and culturally mediated. Indeed, Alexander states that:

> For traumas to emerge at the level of the collectivity, social crises must become cultural crises. […] Trauma is not the result of a group experiencing pain. It is the result of this acute discomfort entering into the core of the collectivity's sense of its own identity.[48]

Alternatively, psychological or psychic trauma has its focus on the individual experience and the breach created in their sense of being. Freud was arguably the pioneer of this studies, specifically in his work *Moses and Monotheism* (1939). According to Caruth, psychic trauma is an injury that affects the mind, that disrupts the victim's experience of time, self, and the world and that causes great emotional distress in the individual.[49] Furthermore, psychological traumas present easily recognizable symptoms: repetitive and uncontrolled episodes, hallucinations, flashbacks, and nightmares. Nonetheless, it is important to bear in mind that both cultural and psychic traumas are extensively intertwined. An event could be perceived both as a psychic/personal trauma and a cultural/collective one as it may affect those directly involved but also society at large.[50]

1.1.4 Acting Out and Working Through

Among the scholars that concurred to establish the canon of trauma studies, Dominick LaCapra is arguably one of the most important. Mirroring the theories of Cathy Caruth, in the 1990s, LaCapra writes:

> Trauma is a disruptive experience that disarticulates the self and creates holes in existence; it has belated effects that are controlled only with difficulty and perhaps never fully mastered. The study of traumatic events poses especially difficult problems in representation and writing both for

46 Alexander, "Toward a Theory of Cultural Trauma", p. 1.
47 Gryczynski and Wiechelt, "Cultural and Historical Trauma Among Native Americans".
48 Alexander, "Toward a Theory of Cultural Trauma", p. 10.
49 Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History*, pp. 3-4.
50 Baelo-Allué, "9/11 and the Psychic Trauma Novel: Don DeLillo's *Falling Man* / El 11 de septiembre y la novela de trauma psicológico: *Falling Man*, de Don DeLillo".

> research and for any dialogic exchange with the past which acknowledges the claims it makes on people and relates it to the present and future.[51]

Significantly, LaCapra's work was crucial to draw on psychoanalysis and history in order to highlight the bond between trauma and cultural principles. Thus, in *Writing History, Writing Trauma* (2001), LaCapra offers a distinction between the two concepts of "acting out" and "working through", elaborating on Freud's concepts of "melancholia" as opposed to "mourning", which Freud theorised in 1917 in *Mourning and Melancholia*. On the one hand, the concept of acting out refers to the idea of the individual being constantly brought back to their traumatic experience due to the repetition and interlacement between past and present, "[a]cting out is related to repetition, and even the repetition compulsion – the tendency to repeat something compulsively."[52] On the other hand, working through implies the overcoming of trauma, as it is an attempt to elaborate the intrusiveness of the experience. LaCapra explains, "I see working through as a kind of countervailing force […] I see working through as a desirable process. In working through, the person tries to gain critical distance on a problem and to distinguish between past, present, and future."[53] However, as LaCapra argues:

> […] working through does not mean avoidance, harmonization, simply forgetting the past, or submerging oneself in the present. It means coming to terms with the trauma, including its details, and critically engaging the tendency to act out the past and even to recognize why it may be necessary and even in certain respects desirable or at least compelling.[54]

Thus, acting out and working through are closely intertwined; people who experienced traumatic event need to make an effort to resist acting out in order to overcome their traumata. Nonetheless, LaCapra admits that:

> One's bond with the dead, especially with dead intimates, may invest trauma with value and make its reliving a painful but necessary commemoration or memorial to which one remains dedicated or at least bound. This situation may create a more or less unconscious desire to remain within trauma.[55]

Sometimes traumatised people may resist the process of working out because they feel too deeply linked to their traumatic experiences or because, even unconsciously, they might want to keep on being faithful to their trauma.

51 LaCapra, *Writing History, Writing Trauma*, p. 41.
52 Ibid., p. 142.
53 Ibid., p. 143.
54 Ibid., p. 144.
55 Ibid., p. 22.

1.2 *Trauma Fiction*

Anne Whitehead opens her acclaimed book *Trauma Fiction* (2004) asserting, "the term "trauma fiction" represents a paradox or contradiction". Indeed, trauma studies have highlighted the incommunicability of trauma; thus, the narrativization of such experiences rises questions of incongruity. Nonetheless, the relationship between trauma and narrative has always been in the minds of trauma theorist. Indeed, Freud and Breuer promoted the "talking cure" in *Studies on Hysteria* to help patients narrate their painful and traumatic experiences in order to heal.[56] Freud and Breuer acknowledged that:

> each individual hysterical symptom immediately and permanently disappeared when we had succeeded in bringing clearly to light the memory of the event by which it was provoked and in arousing its accompanying affect, and when the patient had described that event in the greatest possible detail and had put the affect into words. Recollection without affect almost invariably produces no result.[57]

Furthermore, the relationship between these two spheres, narrative and trauma, has been renovated by the events of the Holocaust, when survivors began recounting the horrors they endured. Indeed, after the Second World War, several theorists began to question whether it could be possible to represent the testimony of the Holocaust survivors. Shoshana Felman, to highlight the importance of testimony, writes:

> What constitutes the outrage of the Holocaust – the very essence of erasure and annihilation – is not so much death in itself, as the more obscene fact that death itself does not make any difference, the fact that death is radically indifferent, everyone is leveled off, people die as numbers, not as proper names. In contrast to this leveling, to testify is to engage, precisely, in the process of re-finding ones own proper name, one's signature.[58]

The question of whether trauma could be narrated further opened a debate as trauma theorists themselves believed in its incommunicability within the modes of traditional literature. Felman, thus, investigated the new techniques employed by survivors to express their tremendous experiences. She takes the example of German-speaking poet Paul Celan who attempted to reappropriate his language, German, after it was destroyed by its connotation to Nazis.[59]

> Celan's poetic writing therefore struggles with the German to annihilate his own annihilation in it, to reappropriate the language that has

56 Kurtz, "Introduction".
57 Marx, Benecke, and Gumz, "Talking Cure Models: A Framework of Analysis", p. 6.
58 Felman, "Education and Crisis, or the Vicissitudes of Teaching", p. 53.
59 Ibid., p. 33.

> marked his own exclusion: the poems dislocate the language so as to remold it, to radically shift its semantic and grammatical assumptions and remake—creatively and critically—a new poetic language entirely Celan's own.[60]

During the 1990s, the relationship between the two spheres became more permanent as a result of the publication of "Psychoanalysis, Culture and Trauma" in the academic journal *American Imago* which included contribution of accomplished trauma theorists such as Caruth, Felman, Laub and Krystal.

Moreover, trauma theorists have long debated on the kind of narrative that better captures a traumatic experience. Indeed, Dominick LaCapra in *Writing History, Writing Trauma* discusses about the difference between the "writing *about* trauma" and "writing trauma".[61] Writing about trauma can be connected to his idea of "documentary or self-sufficient research model"[62] which gives priority to

> research based on primary (preferably archival) documents that enable one to derive out indicated facts about the past which may be recounted in a narrative [...]. Writing is subordinated to content in the form of facts, their narration, or their analysis.[63]

Thus, it is a form of writing that reconstructs the phenomenon as it occurred in a moment of history. Whereas, writing trauma might provide "insight to phenomena such as slavery or the Holocaust, by offering a reading over process or period, or by giving at least a plausible "feel" for experience an emotion which may be difficult to arrive at through restricted documentary methods".[64] Further, LaCapra believes that posttraumatic literature should account for and touch the processes of acting out and working through; hence, he comments, "more experimental, nonredemptive narratives are narratives that are trying to come to terms with trauma in a posttraumatic context, in ways that involve both acting out and working through."[65]

Additionally, in "Trauma and Narrative" Joshua Pederson discusses the difference between an objective language, which is historical and archival, and literary language.[66] The former is not suitable because it insists on pinpointing the traumatic experience and fails, the latter is able to evoke trauma and, thus, succeed in the narration

60 Felman, "Education and Crisis, or the Vicissitudes of Teaching".
61 Uytterschout, "Visualised Incomprehensibility of Trauma in Jonathan Safran Foer's *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close*", p. 65.
62 LaCapra, *Writing History, Writing Trauma*, p. 2.
63 Ibid., pp. 2-3.
64 Ibid., pp. 13-14.
65 Ibid., pp. 179-180.
66 Pederson, "Trauma and Narrative", p. 98.

of trauma.[67] By looking at Shoshana Felman analysis of Camus' *The Plague*, Pederson further highlights the ability of literature to have an "imaginative quality"[68] which grants access to the traumatic experience. Furthermore, in "Trauma and Fiction" Robert Eaglestone discusses the relationship between trauma fiction, testimony, and the historical record[69], and, thus, questions whether trauma should be recounted through fiction or only through testimonial accounts. Eaglestone brings forward the example of Spanish writer, politician, and Holocaust survivor Jorge Semprun, who wrote an autobiographical novel in part testimony and in part literary and philosophical reflection, namely *Literature or Life?*. On writing such traumatic accounts about his deportation to Buchenwald, Semprum argues that "to fully grasp the evil 'We'll need a Dostoyevsky!'"[70], suggesting that although testimony writers might write great literary works, "literary techniques are [still] central".[71] Indeed, in Eaglestone's opinion, fiction and testimony are intrinsically connected with one another.

Another crucial aspect about trauma fiction touched by Eaglestone is the appropriation of trauma.[72] When literary works deal with the horrors of human existence, the question of whose right it is to write about it quickly rises. Indeed, scholars Lawrence Langer and Kalí Tal believe that primary witness accounts should be the only acceptable form of writing.[73] On the subject, Anne Whitehead dedicates the second chapter of *Trauma Fiction* in which she discusses the fraudulent Holocaust account of Binjamin Wilkomirski's *Fragments: Memories of a Wartime Childhood*, 1939-1948 (1996).[74] Wilkormirski, notably, fabricated a narrative about his deportation during the Second World War. Before it was exposed, it had won several prizes and was critically acclaimed. Thus, critics such as Deborah Lipstadt argued that "if [Wilkormirski] had told the same story in terrible prose it wouldn't have been mesmerizing"[75], which mirrors Eaglestone's idea that there is no real answer to whom should write trauma fiction, but this so-called "right" is "inextricably intertwined with questions of literary value. If authors can write interesting, thoughtful, moving fiction, they can "get away with it", but a clumsy

67 Ibid.
68 Ibid., p. 99.
69 Eaglestone, "Trauma and Fiction".
70 Ibid., p. 289.
71 Ibid.
72 Ibid., p. 292.
73 Uytterschout, "Visualised Incomprehensibility of Trauma in Jonathan Safran Foer's *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close*".
74 Whitehead, *Trauma Fiction*, p. 31.
75 Ibid.

novel is soon "trauma kitsch" or cultural appropriation".[76]

1.2.1 The Protagonist

As with others forms of fiction, in trauma fiction the traumatic event is conveyed through the protagonist. Thus, the individual protagonist serves both to express an individual, psychological trauma, but also represents the group and culture to which they belong. Indeed, as Balaev argues, "the traumatized protagonist in fiction brings into awareness the specificity of individual trauma that is often connected to larger social factors and cultural values or ideologies."[77] Moreover, it is arguably the role of the protagonist to represent a historical event in which thousands have suffered, such as slavery, the Holocaust, bombardments, and natural disaster.[78] Therefore, the protagonist of a novel about trauma further confirms the intimate relation between traumatic experience and culture. Additionally, these novels demonstrate the individual traumatic experience and its own difficulties. For example, Balaev takes Toni Morrison's *Beloved* as a symbol. In Morrison's novel, about the lives of African Americans in post-1865 Ohio, the author chooses Sethe as her protagonist. The girl is a victim of terrible actions and, thus, traumatised; indeed, she becomes psychotic and emotionally incapable. However, Morrison connects the traumatising experiences of Sethe to that of many others, and to those populations in Africa forced to become slaves, connecting once again the individual's experience to that of a culture.[79]

1.2.2 Time and Place

The trauma novel incorporates several elements of the common reactions to a traumatic event by adjoining them to the narrative. Thus, the two elements of time and space, frequently affected by trauma, are represented in trauma fiction. For instance, authors may employ nonlinear narratives and chaotic temporalities, or evoke places of grief. Indeed, the concept of place has a significant role in trauma fiction, both as a landscape and, as Pierre Nora's conceptualise, as a *lieux de mémoire* or "site of memory".[80] Geoffrey Hartman elaborated a theory based on studies on Wordsworth and on the Holocaust that led him to conclude that "specific sites and landscapes [which] create

76 Eaglestone, "Trauma and Fiction", p. 292.
77 Balaev, "Trends in Literary Trauma Theory", p. 155.
78 Ibid.
79 Ibid.
80 Whitehead, *Trauma Fiction*.

a temporal consciousness" transform a place in "memory place[s]".[81] Moreover, the depiction and centrality of a place in trauma novels creates a connection between the individual experience and the cultural context, as places owe their meaning to a culturally specific and symbolic significance.[82] Indeed, as Whitehead argues, a landscape can be perceived as "modelled by history. Our readings of the landscapes by which we are surrounded always combine inherited memory, factual information, and personal and national politics."[83]

Furthermore, the temporal element is extremely insightful in trauma fiction, as trauma also distorts the traumatised sense of time. Notably, time has always been a focus of literature and Hillis Miller argues, "representations of human time in literary works are singular, sui generis, different from all the others."[84] Thus, in the connection between trauma and literature it is important to explore the concept of time. Pederson, for instance, highlights the important of repetition and return, which, looking back at Freud's trauma theory, signals the victim's connection with the past, whic returns through dreams and flashbacks in a compulsive repetition.[85] Based on Freud's theory, Nick Muntean highlights three temporal periods which can be analysed in the traumatic experience: "the pre-event state of unpreparedness, […] the traumatic event itself, […] and the post traumatic state, in which dreams and memories of the traumatic event haunt the traumatized sufferer".[86] Furthermore, Lawrence Langer offers a commentary on a certain freezing of time, which occurs in consequence to a traumatic event, "trauma stops the chronological clock and fixes the moment permanently in memory and imagination, immune to the vicissitudes of time".[87] Likewise, Caruth comments on a temporal rapture that occurs during a traumatic experience, "what causes trauma is shock that appears to work very much like a bodily threat but it is in fact a break in the mind's experience of time".[88] Indeed, time and trauma are closely intertwined; the anxiety of the traumatic event, which has happened in the past, contributes to the obsession of it repeating in the future and, thus, creates a paralysis in the present.

81 Ibid., p. 49.
82 Balaev, "Trends in Literary Trauma Theory".
83 Whitehead, *Trauma Fiction*, p. 50.
84 Miller, "Time in Literature", p. 87.
85 Pederson, "Trauma and Narrative".
86 Muntean, "It was Just Like a Movie", p. 52.
87 Greenberg, "The Echo of Trauma and the Trauma of Echo", p. 321.
88 Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History*, p. 61.

1.2.3 The Role of Photography and Trauma in the Digital Age

Trauma studies, as already established, have highlighted how difficult it is to provide a proper representation of traumas, emphasising the impossibility of representing something that is so far beyond the standard experience of life.[89] Thus, other media have been employed for such representations. Moreover, studies have begun analysing the relationship between trauma and the digital age, looking at the circulation of traumatic images and videos on the Internet and how they could lead to new forms of re-traumatisation.[90] In addition, the relationship between photography and trauma has been studied at large in the field of trauma studies.

Indeed, the literature on the affinity between photography and trauma has originated two main stances: the first stresses the role of photography in "representing, registering and mediating the experience of trauma"[91], the second deals with the effect representation of traumatic events in photographs has on spectators. As the first direction highlights, photography is often employed to testify the existence of violence and traumatic events. Hence, as Bishop argues "photography is [...] both an icon – a sign linked to its referent by mimetic resemblance – and an index – a sign that is physically connected to its referent, acting like a trace".[92] Luckhurst recalls Ulrich Baer's suggestion that "photographs can capture the shrapnel of traumatic time".[93] Furthermore, the connection between photography and trauma could be perceived when looking at the way in which the belatedness of trauma is discerned to the survivor's eyes, likewise, the photography discloses the scene to the viewers.[94] Nonetheless, the role of photography has been criticised by theorists such as Elsaesser discussing the concept of "disaster-fatigue", which refers to the numbness contemporary audiences have in regard to violent photographic images due to their overexposure to them.[95] Indeed, this concept had already been disclosed by Susan Sontag in 1977. Sontag, in *On Photography* (1977), explained the idea that "images anaesthetize"; thus, although they may provide evidence for events, they also contribute to transforming these images in mere spectacles.[96] However, theorist Ariella Azoulay urges spectators to be consciously involved with traumatic imagery, which, in her opinion,

89 Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History*.
90 Menyhért, "Trauma Studies in the Digital Age".
91 Bishop, "Trauma and Photography", p. 339.
92 Ibid., p. 340.
93 Luckhurst, *The Trauma Question*, p. 163.
94 Bishop, "Trauma and Photography".
95 Ibid.
96 Ibid.

transcends linguistic and national boundaries, and thus to be aware of the collective struggles and pain.[97] In contrast, French philosopher Jacques Rancière rejects the idea that photography may bring collective awareness and argues that the problem with overexposure to images of trauma and suffering is the way the spectator encounters them. Indeed, Rancière condemns the "too many nameless bodies, too many bodies incapable of returning the gaze that we direct at them, too many bodies that are an object of speech without themselves having a chance to speak"[98], denouncing the idea of presenting victims of trauma as nameless bodies and transforming them into mere objects of journalistic commentary.

Similarly to photography, the digital age has, since its beginning in the 1980s, prompted an uncontrollable spread of violent and traumatic images on the Internet, transforming the experience of trauma transmission. Indeed, users of digital media might encounter trauma in several ways such as in news outlets or on social media. For instance, in 2001 people all over the world learned about the World Trade Center attacks on television. Likewise, in 2005, the London tube bombing was shared globally through pictures and videos taken on mobile phone cameras.[99] Moreover, the control over traumatic transmission has changed. If television is somewhat politically administered to prompt collective identification; digital media, such as YouTube, are arguably less controlled. Indeed, images produced by terrorist groups such as ISIS, or social movements, such as Black Lives Matter, can reach large ranges of people eluding censorship that might be encountered through the traditional media.[100] In fact, earlier cultural traumas such as the Holocaust or the Kennedy Assassination were controlled in its distribution by broadcast media; for instance, until 1975 the videos John F. Kennedy's death were kept unavailable to the public. Whereas today multiple videos are available on the Internet, and some include commentary or are part of conspiracy documentaries.[101] Allen Meek argues that this genre of traumatic transmission is "both poison and remedy, needing to be administered in controlled dosages to produce desire effects, otherwise it becomes dangerous like an illicit drug".[102] Moreover, Meeks explores the transitional effect of 9/11 on the control of traumatic transmission, as news agencies broadcasts were overtaken

97 Ibid.
98 Ibid., p. 346.
99 Menyhért, "Trauma Studies in the Digital Age".
100 Meek, "Trauma in the Digital Age".
101 Ibid.
102 Ibid., p. 169.

by ordinary citizens' videos.[103] The collective trauma of 9/11 and its over-replayed images were used to:

> induce a sense of alarm but also to decontextualize the events from their complex historical and political causes and implications. […] The trauma of 9/11 served as a justification for intensified surveillance, policing, incarceration, and military aggression.[104]

Thereupon, it could be stated that the Internet allows ordinary people to record and exhibit images which could lead to trauma, induce shock, and prompt to public social manifestations. This happened in earlier recordings of police brutality against African American citizens, such as Rodney King in 1991 or, more recently, George Floyd in 2020. Hence, technological media have both the power to produce traumatic experiences by replaying traumatic events, but they might also be employed for political agendas.

1.3 *9/11: America's Darkest Day*

The words "America's Darkest Day" appeared on the Detroit Free Press cover of September 12, 2001. On the previous day, the now infamous September 11, 2001, four commercial airplanes were hijacked by nineteen terrorists from al-Qaeda. Two of the aircrafts were deliberately crashed into the North and South Towers of the World Trade Center complex in New York Citys, a third plane into the Pentagon in Arlington, Virginia. After learning about the other attacks, the passengers on the fourth hijacked plane, Flight 93, insurged, leading to it crashing into an empty field in western Pennsylvania. Ultimately, the Twin Towers collapsed due to the sustained damage from the impacts and the resulting fires. The attacks caused the loss of 2,977 people from 93 nations. The events were displayed across the globe by the media. Footage captured by ordinary citizens was shown constantly worldwide and photographs of the event were on the front covers of every newspaper. Reporters draw comparisons to the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor entitling their front covers "A New Day of Infamy", which mirrored President Franklin D. Roosevelt's speech in response to the attack and anticipated a "war-based military response".[105] Indeed, in the immediate aftermath of the attacks, the Bush administration asserted that a "war on terrorism" was both the necessary and legitimate reaction to the events endured.[106]

Subsequently, while examining the events, philosopher Jacques Derrida in *Philosophy in a Time of Terror* (2003) analysed the process

103 Meek, "Trauma in the Digital Age".
104 Ibid., p. 176.
105 Jackson, "The 9/11 Attacks and the Social Construction", p. 26.
106 Ibid.

of naming and remembering the attacks of the World Trade Center and Pentagon through its date:

> For the index pointing toward this date, the bare act, the minimal deictic, the minimalist aim of this naming also marks something else. Namely the fact that we perhaps have no concept, no meaning available to us to name in any other way this "thing" that has just happened, this supposed "event." […] The brevity of the appellation (September 11, 9/11) […] points out the unqualifiable by recognizing that we do not recognize or even cognize, that we do not yet know how to qualify, that we do not know what we are talking about.[107]

Regardless, the U.S. government response to 9/11 has been seen by many scholars as "an opportunity […] [to] impose an agenda of military mobilization, curtailment of civil liberties, cuts to social spending and tax reforms that favor the wealthy".[108]

1.3.1 The Terror Spectacle and the Dominant Narrative

During the media coverage of the events the common phrase used to refer to what was happening was "it was just like a movie".[109] Nick Muntean argues that the events, broadcasted in real time to worldwide and American viewers, led to the comparison to what Americans knew best, which was disaster films.[110] Likewise, in his commentary the day after the events, Ian McEwan writes for *The Guardian*:

> We had seen this before, with giant budgets and special effects, but so badly rehearsed. The colossal explosions, the fierce black and red clouds, the crowds running through the streets, the contradictory, confusing information, had only the feeblest resemblance to the tinny dramas of Skyscraper, Backdraft or Independence Day. Nothing could have prepared us.[111]

Moreover, in Žižek's opinion the collapse of the World Trade Center towers was, for many witnesses, experienced through the lens of Hollywood spectacle.[112] In the decade preceding September 11, 2001, there had been a proliferation of disaster films in the US, some of which uncannily resembled the 9/11 attacks.[113] Nonetheless, the terror of the attack had, arguably, the goal of gaining global attention to demonstrate that the US could be vulnerable and to mine American

107 Le Cor, "Ripples of Trauma in Jonathan Safran Foer's *Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close* and in Art Spiegelman's *In the Shadow of No Towers*", p. 7.
108 Meek, *Trauma and Media: Theories, Histories, and Images*, p. 177.
109 Muntean, "It was Just Like a Movie".
110 Ibid.
111 McEwan, *Beyond Belief*.
112 Meek, *Trauma and Media: Theories, Histories, and Images*.
113 Bird, "History, Emotion, and the Body: Mourning in Post-9/11 Fiction".

economy and status. As Douglas Kellner maintains, although the targets of the attacks were symbolic, they had concrete effects on the airline industry and the global economy.[114] The photos of the planes hitting the Twin Towers, people falling out of the Towers' windows, the Towers crushing down, all were depicted in the front covers of the magazines all over the world by September 12, 2001, and onwards. Moreover, during the attacks, reporters broadcasted live the events providing the public an incessant spectacle. The obscene event took over the TV programming and was the sole focus of television networks who transmitted it without commercial breaks.[115] Indeed, the horror of the events seemed unreal both due to its filmic features and because it was broadcasted everywhere. Consequently, this endless repetition was underlined by Derrida for its neutralising effect.[116] Significantly, the American Psychological Association (APA) released an issue to provide the public advice to cope with the events. In particular, APA advised that people should "limit their exposure to media coverage".[117] Furthermore, Brigit Däwes comments, "the attacks were immediately turned into a media spectacle that decisively shaped the construction of their remembrance".[118] Likewise, Derrida commented on the double meaning this media scrutiny had, arguing that "[the US had] its own interest (the same interest it shares with its sworn enemies) to expose its vulnerability, to give the greatest possible coverage to the aggression against which it wishes to protect itself".[119]

Moreover, the photographs, although controversial, became the symbol of the attacks and went on to create a traumatic impact on those who witnessed them. As Liam Kennedy comments,

> Photography not only documented the events of the day, it transformed them into potent symbols and iconic reference points, and was instrumental in communicating the trauma of a citizenry - its function was not only evidentiary but also testimonial and mnemonic.[120]

Susan Sontag also wrote about the impact on memory of this mediatic storm.

> Nonstop imagery (television, streaming video, movies) is our surround, but when it comes to remembering, the photograph has the deeper bite.

114 Kellner, "9/11, Spectacles of Terror, and Media Manipulation".
115 Ibid.
116 Le Cor, "Ripples of Trauma in Jonathan Safran Foer's *Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close* and in Art Spiegelman's *In the Shadow of No Towers*".
117 Bond, "9/11", p. 412.
118 Däwes, "On Contested Ground (Zero): Literature and the Transnational Challenge of Remembering 9/11".
119 Meek, *Trauma and Media: Theories, Histories, and Images*, p. 193.
120 Kennedy, "Framing September 11: Photography After the Fall", p. 272.

> Memory freeze-frames; its basic unit is the single image. In an era of information overload, the photograph provides a quick way of apprehending something and a compact form of memorising it. The photograph is like a quotation, or a maxim or proverb. Each of us mentally stocks hundreds of photographs, subject to instant recall.[121]

In particular, the photograph of a man falling to his death from the Windows of the World became the symbol of the attacks. On the photograph, Tom Junod writes for *Esquire*, "in the most photographed and videotaped day in the history of the world, the images of people jumping were the only images that became, by consensus, taboo – the only images from which Americans were proud to avert their eyes".[122] Nonetheless, as Laura Frost argues, "the images of 9/11's falling bodies were driven from mainstream American news sources into more obscure channels such as Internet sites that traffic in sensational and pornographic material".[123] One of the most iconic examples of these images is the Falling Man taken by Richard Drew who comments, "I see this not as this person's death but as part of his life. There's no blood, there's no guts, it's just a person falling".[124] Moreover, although it became a taboo, the photo was the subject of Tom Junod's article as well as Henry Singer's documentary, *9/11: The Falling Man*, both of which performed a quest to identify the person falling. Significantly, the photo is a stand in for the people who had no choice but to jump while being the gloomy symbol of 9/11.

Notably, a dooming theme emerges from the spectacle of 9/11, that of a dominant narrative in which the US is portrayed as a "blameless victim".[125] A dominant narrative that did not account for what happened after President George W. Bush announced that the U.S. military had begun strikes in Afghanistan, on October 7, 2001, with the joined forces of Great Britain, Canada, Australia, Germany, and France. When president Bush stated "either you are with us, or you are with the terrorists"[126] in his speech to the Joint Session of Congress and the American People on 20 September 2001, he denied the possibility of questioning the actions of the government. Those who were critical of the government were accused of being unpatriotic. The supposedly highly valued American ideals of democracy and freedom of speech were violated by the oppressive atmosphere of conformity and fear of retaliation that was thus established. Indeed, another photograph became symbolic in the

121 Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others*, p. 22.
122 Junod, *The Falling Man*.
123 Frost, "Still Life: 9/11's Falling Bodies", p. 186.
124 Meek, *Trauma and Media: Theories, Histories, and Images*, p. 182.
125 Bird, "History, Emotion, and the Body: Mourning in Post-9/11 Fiction", p. 565.
126 Bush, *Address to a Joint Session of Congress and the American People*.

world after 9/11, the well-known Hooded Man from the Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq. This photograph, stolen from the circulation between American soldiers in 2004, shows a hooded person standing on a box, with their wrist connected to electrical wires, at the mercy of the torturers. This image, among many others, caused a substantial scandal in the United States after their publication. Notably, these images, writes W.T.J. Mitchell, "are not images of trauma, but images designed to traumatize the viewer, especially those who identify with the victim".[127] Thereupon, the connection between images such as the Falling Man and that of the Hooded Man is the way they both challenge the dominant narrative of America as the victim. One the one hand, the Falling Man was deemed taboo because it showed Americans and America on his knees. On the other hand, the Hooded Man shows the reality of the War on Terror pushed by the Bush administration, which produced equally traumatic and horrible consequences and gave push to other literary works, which condemned the aforementioned, mere, American victimisation.

1.3.2 9/11 Literature

Naturally, the terrorist attacks of 9/11 were a momentous event that marked not only America's history, but worldwide contemporary history. During the following decade, the accounts of the events of Ground Zero became the centre of a growing body of fiction, which led critics to coin the term "9/11 literature" to indicate a series of novels and short stories that directly, or indirectly, described the feelings of loss, terror, and catastrophe ascribable to the event. Houen even writes that the events of September 11th, 2001, are part of a "trauma that is so real it can only be experienced as a kind of fiction".[128] Additionally, in the earliest moments after the attacks, newspapers turned to novelists to write articles on the events. For instance, Zadie Smith, Ian McEwan, Salman Rushdie, were called to articulate their thoughts because they were considered "experts at imagining the unimaginable, [and] the masters of other worlds of possibility".[129] Furthermore, one of the most significant texts after the events has probably been the *9/11 Commission Report*, which was published on July 2004 and was appreciated by the public for its "accessible prose and narrative power"[130], it even went on to become a bestseller. Indeed, the document was a surprising literary success

127 Meek, *Trauma and Media: Theories, Histories, and Images*, p. 193.
128 Houen, "Novel Spaces and Taking Place(s) in the Wake of September 11", p. 419.
129 Ibid., p. 420.
130 Warren, ""It Reads like a Novel": The "9/11 Commission Report" and the American Reading Public", p. 533.

and public reviews reported that "it [read] much like a novel".[131] The success was, in Craig A. Warren's opinion, a consequence of a "hunger for literature as a means of shaping national identity".[132] However, the events that unfolded on September 11th have no real precedent and thus writers faced a difficult challenge in trying to represent them through conventional realist fictional structures. Notably, very few writers have been able explicitly to redescribe the events in their work of fiction; *Windows on the World* by Frédéric Beigbeder and Simon Armitage's *Out of the Blue* (2008) are some remarkable exceptions.[133] Indeed, there has been much debate concerning this new subgenre; for instance, many post-9/11 texts centre their attention on the impact that the events have on their characters and use the event as background for their narratives. Keniston and Quinn assert that the literary works resulting from the attacks of 9/11 are almost exclusively focused centred in New York City and the destruction of the Pentagon and the crash in Shanksville, PA, are not as accounted for by writers.[134] Hence, the definition of post-9/11 fiction has been employed by critics to refer this cluster of fictional works, which include Anglo-American literature and have sparked controversial discourses.[135]

Notably, different narrative modes within the literary responses to 9/11 have been identified. Firstly, it is in Houen's opinion, based on Baer's *110 Stories: New York Writers After September 11* (2002), that this new literary movement has been characterised by a "transformative realism"[136], referring to a story which transforms the shock and emotion of an event into a traditional story with a beginning, middle and end.[137] Thus, a story with a truthful representation of events through which readers can identify with, and are able to process the circumstances as a consequence of a filtered and cohesive narration. A second narrative mode is the "seismographic registering of events"[138], which "uncannily registers subtle shifts in experience and changes in reality before they can be consciously grasped or have fully taken place".[139] This second mode, thus, tries to show readers how the dominant idea media and politics flaunted is not the only narrative; examples might be found in McEwan's *Saturday* (2005) and Mohsin Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* (2007). The third

131 Ibid., p. 543.
132 Ibid., p. 534.
133 Randall, *9/11 and the Literature of Terror*.
134 Keniston and Quinn, *Literature After 9/11*.
135 Gramantieri, "The Mechanisms of Trauma in Post-9/11 literature".
136 Houen, "Novel Spaces and Taking Place(s) in the Wake of September 11", p. 421.
137 Ibid.
138 Ibid.
139 Baer, "Introduction", p. 5.

mode identified by Houen is a "departure from the real to the extent that it poses other possible words"[140], which is conceivably best seen in Paul Auster's *Man in the Dark* (2008) where a 72-year-old man imagines an America that never experienced the 9/11 attacks and is instead in the midst of a civil war as a result of the outcome of the 2000 election, in order to escape the harsh reality of his life. This type of literature gives readers comforting feeling and again allows them to see beyond the major challenges of their own lives and in society at large. It also presents a powerful alternative to the political and media discourse of fear and reprisal.

Additionally, other views on post-9/11 literature have emerged. Richard Gray and Michael Rothberg agree in determining that "the fiction of 9/11 demonstrates [...] a failure of the imagination".[141] Alternatively, according to Gray, this kind of narrative response is old, it can be seen in fiction after World War I, for example in Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925) and can be seen repeated in the American responses to 9/11.[142] However, Gray also identified differences between the previous traumatic events and 9/11. Gray writes, "what is decidedly new in this chapter of the continuing tale of what happens in America after the fall, comes down to two things: the particular nature of the crisis and the specific terms in which writers have reacted to it".[143] Moreover, both Martin Randall and Richard Gray are critical of the modes of realist fiction, but they celebrate a hybrid form. Randall writes, "other more hybrid forms have helped to reveal the profound difficulties of representing such a visually resonant, globally accessible [...] event"[144]; and Gray comments, "the hybrid is the only space in which the location of cultures and the bearing witness to trauma can really occur".[145]

Given these enlightening debates, it is important to discern two waves of literature that were produced in the aftermath of 9/11. The first wave of post-9/11 fiction was inclined to be influenced by the aforementioned expectations demanded from fiction writers to give meaning to what felt like a national, collective trauma in the face of a speechless and shocked public. The literary world was dominated by trauma narratives, and it called for a realistic depiction of the attacks' repercussions that avoided voyeurism. As Baelo-Allué points out, in the first wave post-9/11, works of fiction were often "retreated to the world of domesticity, depoliticizing discourse and assimilating the

140 Houen, "Novel Spaces and Taking Place(s) in the Wake of September 11", p. 421.
141 Duvall and Marzec, "NARRATING 9/11", p. 384.
142 Ibid.
143 Gray, *After the Fall: American Literature Since 9/11*, p. 4.
144 Randall, *9/11 and the Literature of Terror*, p. 3.
145 Gray, *After the Fall: American Literature Since 9/11*, p. 17.

unfamiliar into familiar structures, ignoring, in turn, the panoramic and public".[146] She goes on to cite Jonathan Safran Foer's *Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close* (2005), Jay McInerney's *The Good Life* (2006), Claire Messud's *The Emperor's Children* (2006) and Don DeLillo's *Falling Man* (2007) which focus on the consequences of specific individuals and families after the attacks. Bird suggests that these novels "emphasize the need for reflection on the body, both as a vulnerable site of trauma and as a palimpsest-like history of the human subject".[147] Furthermore, in Baelo-Allué's opinion "these early novels narrow the scope to the psychic, individual trauma that the attacks produced without questioning its political ideological origins".[148] Conversely, the second wave was characterized by the ability to capture the traumatic consequence but also becoming more politically engaged. Examples have been found in Cormac McCarthy's 9/11 allegory *The Road* (2006) or, as Duvall and Marzec pointed out, in Jess Walter's *The Zero* (2006), and in Salman Rushdie's *Shalimar the Clown* (2005).[149] Indeed, in this trauma-centred literary world, there was a need to go beyond the mere dominant narrative of America as a victim, which had been pushed by the Bush administration. Another primary instance of this shift is Amy Waldman's *The Submission*, which Michiko Kakutani praised as it demonstrates the theme a 9/11 novel should be concerned with[150], as:

> it manages to combine the global and the local, the numbness of psychological trauma with the polyphony of cultural trauma, and which is rooted both in the domestic and the personal but does not ignore globalization and the way it affects all types of identities.[151]

Lastly, novels like Mohsin Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* (2007) and *Netherland* (2008) by Joseph O'Neill have been celebrated for their importance in the panorama of post-9/11 fiction.[152]

146 Baelo-Allué, "From the Traumatic to the Political: Cultural Trauma, 9/11 and Amy Waldman's *The Submission* / De lo traumático a lo político: el trauma cultural, el 11 de septiembre y la novela de Amy Waldman *The Submission*", p. 168.
147 Bird, "History, Emotion, and the Body: Mourning in Post-9/11 Fiction", p. 561.
148 Baelo-Allué, "From the Traumatic to the Political: Cultural Trauma, 9/11 and Amy Waldman's *The Submission* / De lo traumático a lo político: el trauma cultural, el 11 de septiembre y la novela de Amy Waldman *The Submission*".
149 Duvall and Marzec, "NARRATING 9/11".
150 Baelo-Allué, "From the Traumatic to the Political: Cultural Trauma, 9/11 and Amy Waldman's *The Submission* / De lo traumático a lo político: el trauma cultural, el 11 de septiembre y la novela de Amy Waldman *The Submission*".
151 Ibid., p. 170.
152 Ibid.

2 Writing Trauma: *Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close*

2.1 *The Wunderkind of Princeton*

Jonathan Safran Foer was born on February 21, 1977, in Washington D.C. He was born in a Jewish family and his mother is a child of Holocaust survivors. Indeed, his American-Jewish upbringing was influential for his future writings. During his years of study, Foer attended Princeton University where he studied philosophy and literature and where he encountered several distinguished professors who helped him grow into the writer he is today. For instance, professor and novelist Joyce Carol Oates was the first to acknowledge his talent, expressing that she was a fan of his writing, which Foer recalls as a "life-altering" moment.[1] Furthermore, among his teachers, Foer met 2002 Pulitzer Prize winner Jeffrey Eugenides, who taught him about narrative devices, literary history, and motifs to increase readers' involvement in one's fiction.[2]

In 2002, at the age of 25, Foer published his first novel, namely *Everything is Illuminated*. The novel is the result of a research on his grandfather's life in Ukraine, to which Foer travelled in 1999. This first literary work earned him several literary prizes including the Guardian First Book Award and the National Jewish Book Award. The novel was critically acclaimed, and it is concerned with the life of a young man, homonymous of the author, in his search for the woman who may have saved his grandfather from the Nazis in Ukraine. This success earned him the reputation of a "wunderkind" as it was written while Foer was only an undergraduate at Princeton.[3]

In 2005, he published his second novel *Extremely Loud & Incredi-*

1 Federici Greenwood, *Foer '99, Oates share 'Writing Life'*.
2 Collado-Rodríguez, "Trauma, Ethics and Myth-Oriented Literary Tradition in Jonathan Safran Foer's *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close*".
3 Ingersoll, "One Boy's Passage, and His Nation's: Jonathan Safran Foer's *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close*".

bly Close, in which he follows 9-years-old Oskar Schell on his quest to overcome his father's death in the World Trade Center's terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001; positioning himself in the index of post-9/11 literary works. In 2009, he published a nonfiction work entitled *Eating Animals*, focusing on the meat industry and food ethics, with the aim of promoting a sustainable agriculture. His third novel, *Tree of Cords*, was published in 2010. To create what was described as artwork, Foer cut the pages of the English edition of Schultz's *The Street of Crocodiles* and sculpted a new story. In 2016, *Here I Am* was published; the book follows a Jewish family based in Washington D.C. and their response to events happening in Israel. Most recently, in 2019, Foer published another nonfiction work, namely *We Are the Weather: Saving the Planet Begins at Breakfast*, as a follow-up to *Eating Animals*; a jarring collection of short essays on the climate crisis. In 2008, Foer taught a creative writing class as a lecturer in fiction at Yale University. He subsequently began teaching at New York University for the Graduate Creative Writing Program.

As previously mentioned, one of Foer's mentors was Jeffrey Eugenides who inspired him to consider the mythic-oriented literary approach that can be traced in the works of T.S. Eliot, Faulkner, and Steinbeck, whose tradition is usually themed around memory and reflecting characters.[4] These elements are indeed employed by Foer, openly in *Everything is Illuminated*, and more tacitly in *Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close*.[5] Moreover, Foer is fascinated with the visual stimuli which he incorporates in his works. Examples can be found in *Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close* and in *Tree of Cords*. On the power of the visual Foer confessed to Eugenides that he has "felt that the visual arts influence [his] writing more than literature does".[6] Consequently, by combining the visual and the verbal, Foer seems to go beyond the conventional nature of literary texts.

2.2 *An Analysis of Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close*

On September 11, 2001, thousands perished in the terrorist attacks of the World Trade Center. In 2005, by creating a "postmodernist pastiche of genres"[7] in which he combined the *Bildungsroman*, the anti-detective novel, and the epistolary novel, Johnathan Safran

4 Collado-Rodríguez, "Trauma, Ethics and Myth-Oriented Literary Tradition in Jonathan Safran Foer's *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close*".

5 Ibid.

6 Mauro, "The Languishing of the Falling Man: Don Delillo and Jonathan Safran Foer's Photographic History of 9/11", p. 596.

7 Däwes, "On Contested Ground (Zero): Literature and the Transnational Challenge of Remembering 9/11", p. 529.

Foer published his second work, *Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close* providing a new addition to trauma fiction. In the novel, nine-year-old Oskar is a highly gifted child trying to overcome the traumatic loss of his father, Thomas Schell, in the 9/11 terrorist attacks. His attempt is carried out as he undertakes a quest, looking for the lock that matches a mysterious key he found among his father's belongings. However, the only clue linked to the key is the word "Black" written on the envelope which enclosed it, leading Oskar to visit every person named Black in New York City. In addition, Foer interweaves the tragedy of 9/11 with that of the Dresden bombing of 1945 to which Oskar's grandparents survived during World War II. His grandparents too are forced to live with their own traumatic memories and the reader watches their story unfold.

When *Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close* was published, the literary world was characterised by an unprecedented patriotism and the idea of straying from the dominant ideals of an American victory culture[8] was met with harsh criticism. Thus, several book reviews and literary critics agreed in disapproving of Foer's second novel. For instance, Michiko Kakutani, who reviewed Foer's novel for *The New York Times*, found it "simultaneously contrived and improvisatory, schematic and haphazard".[9] Others, such as Anis Shivani accused Foer of exploiting the genre of post-9/11 fiction.[10] However, critics were not unanimous in condemning Foer's work; Sam Munson, indeed, praised Foer for his ability of choosing an important subject and elevating it above its "historical din".[11] Moreover, author Salman Rushdie, described the novel as "ambitious, pyrotechnic, riddling, and above all extremely moving".[12] Accordingly, the novel has been considered one of the first literary efforts in response to the tragedy of 9/11.[13]

2.2.1 Sources

There are different intertextual references in *Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close*, but the two predominant are that to Günter Grass's *The Tin Drum* (1959) and to Kurt Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse-Five*

8 Uytterschout and Versluys, "Melancholy and Mourning in Jonathan Safran Foer's *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close*".
9 Kakutani, *A Boy's Epic Quest, Borough by Borough*.
10 Uytterschout and Versluys, "Melancholy and Mourning in Jonathan Safran Foer's *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close*".
11 Munson, "In the Aftermath. Review of the books *Saturday* by I. McEwan and *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* by J. Safran Foer", p. 82.
12 Testard, *Interview with Jonathan Safran Foer*.
13 Ingersoll, "One Boy's Passage, and His Nation's: Jonathan Safran Foer's *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close*".

(1969). Grass's *The Tin Drum* focuses on the effects of World War II from a Polish-German perspective while its protagonist, Oskar Matzerath, begins telling his story from the lunatic asylum in which he is confined. Superficially the parallels between *The Tin Drum* and *Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close* seem confined to the similarities between the two Oskars, whom critics have been quick to describe as two brothers, identifying Oskar Schell as the unimaginative, younger brother.[14] On the one hand, Oskar Matzerath seems to categorically refuse to grow, in other to distance himself from his family's history; on the other hand, Oskar Schell shows signs of a promising growth outside is traumatic experience. Both Oskars play a musical instrument: Foer's Oskar a tambourine, Grass's Oskar the renowned tin drum. Nonetheless, the points of conjunction go beyond the shared first name. As Uytterschout points out, both novels deal with the existence of those who live in the aftermath of a manmade catastrophe[15] as both Oskar Schell and Oskar Matzerath comment "on the fearful state of the world around [them]".[16] Furthermore, the two works similarly offer characteristic compatible with trauma fiction and magical realism.[17]

Additionally, in *Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close* Foer has created a parallelism with Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse-Five*. Vonnegut's anti-war novel is deeply concerned with the consequences of the Allied firebombing of Dresden, as narrated by Billy Pilgrim who survives the bombings. Consequently, Foer seems to borrow Vonnegut's juxtaposition between the Dresden and Hiroshima bombing during World War II to refuse the United States' victimisation as well as the first-person narration. Furthermore, after surviving the war, Billy Pilgrim enters a surreal timeline in which he travels backward and forward through his life. Critics have identified such element in Foer's novel, specifically in the last pages of the novel which show a flipbook of a man plunging from one of the Twin Towers, to his own death, but reversed, as to show the man moving upwards. Vanderwees argues that such analogy between Vonnegut's and Foer's works is created to "emphasizes [the] connectivity between distinct historical traumas".[18] Arguably, much like Pilgrim in *Slaughterhouse-Five*,

14 Uytterschout, "An Extremely Loud Tin Drum: A Comparative Study of Jonathan Safran Foer's *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* and Günter Grass's *The Tin Drum*".

15 Ibid.

16 Kakutani, *A Boy's Epic Quest, Borough by Borough*.

17 Uytterschout, "An Extremely Loud Tin Drum: A Comparative Study of Jonathan Safran Foer's *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* and Günter Grass's *The Tin Drum*".

18 Vanderwees, "Photographs of Falling Bodies and the Ethics of Vulnerability in Jonathan Safran Foer's *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close*", p. 189.

Oskar, Grandma and Grandpa all narrate their story retrospectively, in attempt to gather the reason behind their traumatic experiences and learning how to live in the aftermath of it.[19]

2.2.2 Characters

At the centre of *Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close* is the figure of Oskar Schell, an unusually bright 9-year-old. Oskar is an excited and inventive boy, who is vigilant of the dangers of New York City. He is bright for his age as he is passionate about inventions, his favourite book is *A Brief History of Time*, and writes letters to those he admires. The text does not give a precise description of Oskar, nonetheless he has some peculiar characteristics for a 9-years-old boy,

> For my ninth birthday last year, Grandma gave me a subscription to National Geographic, which she calls 'the National Geographic'. She also gave me a white blazer, because I only wear white clothes […]. Grandma knitted me white sweaters, white mittens, and white hats.[20]

Like Foer, Oskar Schell is also vegan,

> [Grandma] knew how much I liked dehydrated ice cream, which was one of my very few exceptions to veganism, because it's what astronauts have for dessert, and she went to the Hayden Planetarium and bought it for me. (EL&IC, p. 104)

After the loss of his father in the World Trade Center attacks, Oskar is evidently traumatised and throughout the novel tries to overcome his grief. He thinks that finding the lock to his father's key might help him understand his death in the attacks and so begins to wander around The City. Oskar could be described as a "liminal character"[21] and his behaviour is dictated by the traumatic experience he endured, as he recalls when he speaks about his anger towards his mother and his therapist.[22] Indeed, the most compelling passages in the novel can be identified in the moments in which Oskar indulges in passionate outbursts which are then revealed to be mere figments of his imagination. For example, during a therapy session he is asked if any good could have possibly come from his father's death and

19 Michael Cornier, "An Anti-War Novel for the Twenty-First Century: Jonathan Safran Foer's *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* rewrites Kurt Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse-Five*".

20 Safran Foer, *Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close*; henceforth, all quotations are taken from this edition and will be cited as EL&IC.

21 Uytterschout, "An Extremely Loud Tin Drum: A Comparative Study of Jonathan Safran Foer's *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* and Günter Grass's *The Tin Drum*", p. 188.

22 Mullins, "Boroughs and Neighbors: Traumatic Solidarity in Jonathan Safran Foer's *Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close*".

his response is, "'No! Of course not, you fucking asshole!'", but then explains, "that was what I wanted to do. Instead I just shrugged my shoulders!" (EL&IC, p. 203)

The choice of a young boy such as Oskar is not accidental. Foer's nine-year-old protagonist and his youthful ignorance allow to perceive him as open and able to learn from his experiences; nonetheless, Oskar is also extremely precocious which deepens his character.[23] Oskar's story is intertwined with that of his grandparents. Born and raised in Germany, they lived in Dresden until the bombing of 1945 which killed their respective families. When the events of the novel take place, Oskar's grandmother lives in New York, in the apartment building next to her nephew's and her window faces his. She cares deeply for Oskar, "I hope you never love anything as much as I love you" (EL&IC, p. 203) she tells him once, and they spend most of their time together. The reader comes to know about her life by reading her own part of the narrative. She lived in Dresden with her mother, father, grandmother, and her sister, Anna. She was very close to her family and love them dearly, "I asked my father, your great-grandfather, whom I considered the best, most kindhearted man I knew, to write a letter to me". (EL&IC, p. 73) As she mentions in this passage, when she was a little girl, she used to ask people to write her letters and, for instance, she recounts her own grandmother's sixty-seven-pages letter. After the events of 1945, she moved to the United States, where she married Thomas Schell whom she knew from her youth. The two survivors had several problems in their marriage and lacked the ability to communicate their feelings which only led to misery. Thomas Schell, Sr., in turn, is also known in the novel as "The Renter" since Oskar knows he lives with his grandmother. He too was born in Dresden and was in love with Anna, Grandma's sister, who was pregnant with their child when she perished in the air raids. He describes himself in a letter to Grandma Schell,

> I am almost two meters in height. My eyes are brown. I have been told that my hands are big. I want to be a sculptor, and I want to marry your sister. Those are my only dreams. I could write more, but that is all that matters. (EL&IC, p. 80)

He was an artist, a sculptor, but after the raids of 1945 he stopped speaking. When the two meet in New York, they get married but agree not to have a child. Nonetheless, Oskar's grandmother breaks their agreement and when Thomas learns she is pregnant he leaves, returning to New York only shortly before September 11.

23 Mullins, "Boroughs and Neighbors: Traumatic Solidarity in Jonathan Safran Foer's *Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close*".

Lastly, other characters are present in the novel: Oskar's mother, Mr. A. R. Black, and, naturally, Oskar's father, who is evoked by Oskar's recounting. Oskar's mother is a lawyer and tries to fill the hole left by her husband's death, while also trying to hide her own grief. She is unnamed and arguably occupies an ambivalent position; she is often the subject of Oskar's anger and resentment due to Oskar's belief that she is not mourning his father sufficiently or for spending time with her friend, Ron.[24]

Mr. A. R. Black is one of the first New Yorkers whose surname is Black whom Oskar meets during his quest. A 103-years-old war correspondent, who lives in the same apartment complex as Oskar and was once engaged with Francis Scott Fitzgerald's sister. He has not left his apartment in twenty-five years but decides to help Oskar in his search for the lock by going with him to the houses of the other Blacks in New York. Finally, Thomas Schell Jr., Oskar's father, is recalled as a loving father who encouraged Oskar in his love for science and created scavenger hunts for him. His death in the 9/11 attack shatters Oskar's world.

2.2.3 The Structure of the Novel

The narrative structure in *Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close* is arranged into three different components that follow a linear pattern: they start with Oskar's point of view, then one letter from Grandpa Schell, and lastly Grandma's letter. The three narratives are interwoven and have very distinctive narratives voices.[25] Although the three narrators tell different events, they frequently intersect with one another, creating a stimulating reading experience. Indeed, Oskar's own narration appears unreliable since events are recounted differently by the three narrators.[26] For instance, Oskar describes seeing his grandmother writing a message for him on her apartment's window, but, afterwards, the reader discovers in a grandfather chapter that the message was for him, not for Oskar:

> Sometimes she'll write notes for me on her window, which I can see through my binoculars, […] I remember one of the notes she wrote right after Dad died was 'Don't go away.' (EL&IC, p. 70)

This passage is included in one of Oskar's chapters, but it is then proved wrong in Grandpa Schell's chapter, "The next morning there

24 Williams, "A Tale of Two Oskars: Security or Hospitality in Jonathan Safran Foer's *Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close*".

25 Uytterschout, "Visualised Incomprehensibility of Trauma in Jonathan Safran Foer's *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close*".

26 Huehls, "9/11: Jonathan Safran Foer's *Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close* and Art Spiegelman's *In the Shadow of No Towers*".

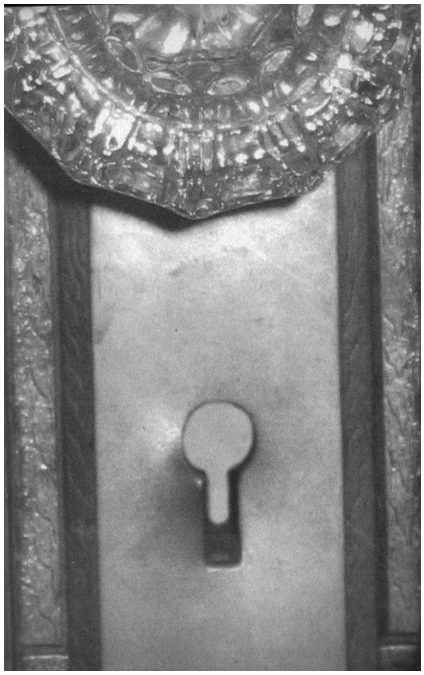

Figure 2.1. Safran Foer, *Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close*, front matter.

was a note written on the window, 'Don't go away,' which meant something, but it didn't mean 'I want to see you again'" (EL&IC, p. 267)

Furthermore, the images present in the novel are also recontextualised as the narrative progresses. For instance, the paper copy of the novel opens with the image of a door (Figure 2.1) which could be at first connected to Oskar's key. However, as the story progresses, the reader finds more photos of doors and doorknobs which are recontextualised by the grandmother's narrative when she explains that they were photographed by her husband[27],

> […] the doorknobs. He took a picture of every doorknob in the apartment. Every one. As if the world and its future depended on each doorknob. As if we would be thinking about doorknobs should we ever actually need to use the pictures of them. (EL&IC, p. 175)

Nonetheless, Oskar's narrative is the centre of the novel and, thus, the reader follows the unfolding of the story through his first-person recounting. He records his experiences in a scrapbook entitled "Stuff That Happened to Me" and the actual reproductions are included, contributing to the visual element of the novel.

Oskar's paternal grandparents are the other narrators in the novel

27 Däwes, "On Contested Ground (Zero): Literature and the Transnational Challenge of Remembering 9/11".

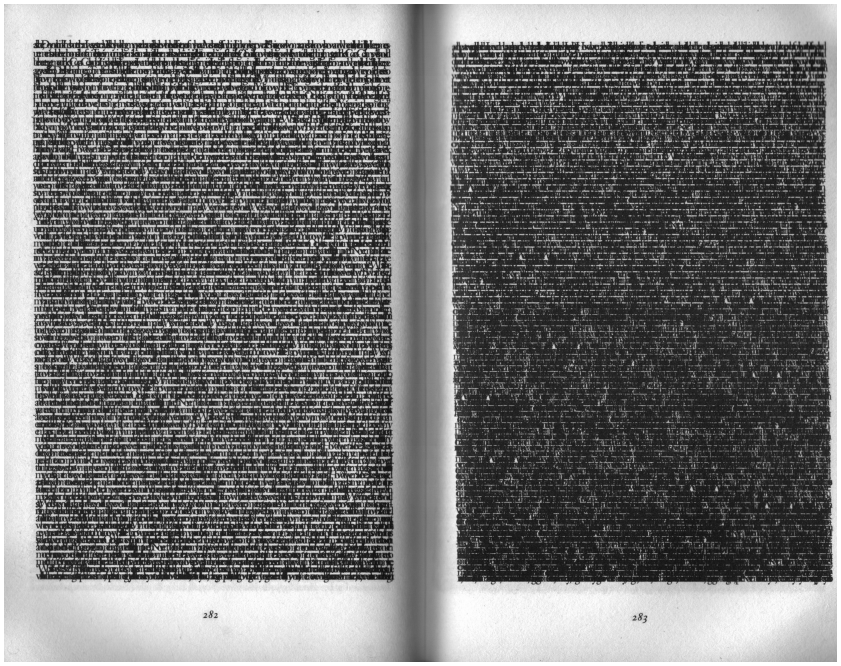

Figure 2.2. Safran Foer, *Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close*, pp. 282-283.

and their accounts are mostly in letter form.[28] On the one hand, Thomas Schell, Oskar's grandfather, addresses his epistles to the child whom he never met, who could be both Oskar's father and the one lost when his pregnant fiancée died in the Dresden bombings. Grandpa Schell's chapters are entitled "Why I'm Not Where You Are" followed by the specific date of when he wrote these unsent letters. He suffers from aphasia and can only express himself through sign language or writing. His failure in communicating physically manifests itself in the pages of the book which are filled with words to the point of being indecipherable (Figure 2.2). On the other hand, Grandma Schell's letter is addressed to Oskar himself. Her chapters are entitled "My Feelings" and are filled with accounts of her life story. However, the reader discovers she is filling the pages by pressing the space bar creating only blank pages, included in the novel (Figure 2.3). As Uytterschout argues the pages symbolise "the (emotional) emptiness of Grandma's life".[29] Consequently, the grandparent's fragmented stories are juxtaposed to Oskar's adventurous quest, reminding the reader of the "incommunicability of trauma".[30]

28 Uytterschout, "Visualised Incomprehensibility of Trauma in Jonathan Safran Foer's *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close*".

29 Ibid., p. 67.

30 Saal, "Regarding the Pain of Self and Other: Trauma Transfer and Narrative Framing in Jonathan Safran Foer's *Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close*", p. 458.

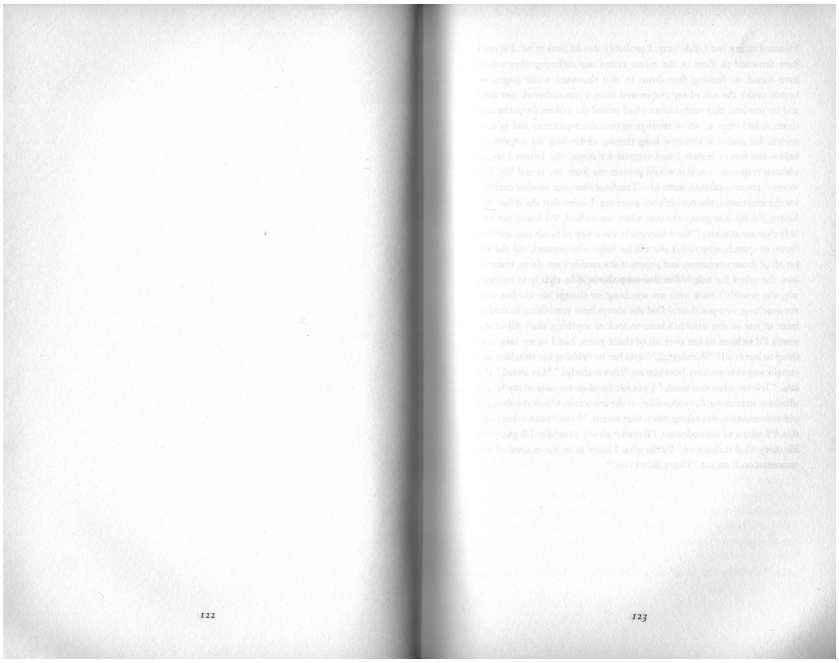

Figure 2.3. Safran Foer, *Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close*, pp. 122-123.

2.2.4 The Setting

The novel is primarily set in New York City, the core of the 9/11 attacks. The city becomes a key component of Oskar's quest for the truth behind his father's key allowing him to meet and engage with a great variety of cultures and people. In fact, the plurality of New York City produces, as Versluys argues, an "epic momentum and psychic uplift".[31] The United States were irreversibly affected by these vicious terrorist attacks and the loss caused by the event is visually represented in the void left in the skyline of New York City. The literary representations of The City have often included the Twin Towers, being the tallest building until their destruction. Consequently, in the aftermath of 9/11, the presence of the Towers appeared to loom mythically over the minds of the New Yorkers and Americans.[32] As Strucken claims, "their absence has spoken more loudly [...] than their presence ever could have".[33] Additionally, the novel develops into an international and transnational theme by changing setting and moving both chronologically and spatially to 1945 Dresden, following the generation of Oskar's grandparents. Indeed, the "Florence

31 Saal, "Regarding the Pain of Self and Other: Trauma Transfer and Narrative Framing in Jonathan Safran Foer's *Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close*", p. 457.

32 Arnold, "Chasing Death's Memory: Representational Space in Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close".

33 Ibid., p. 5.

on the Elbe" was the target of the US and Great Britain's bombing close to the end of WWII. The city is evoked frequently in the grandparents' narratives, and it is a city built on memories dominated by the recollections of their loved ones perished in the air raids. As Ingersoll argues, "the destruction of Dresden functions as an expression of mass tragedy, thus anticipating the infamy of 9/11 [...] and providing the sense of history's repeating itself".[34] Therefore, this additional setting links September 11 to Dresden, and to the atomic bombings of Hiroshima, which are also recalled in the novel. All three events are experiences of extreme terror and have created exceptional traumas in the lives of those affected.

2.2.5 The Writing Style

Foer's writing style for his second novel departs from the realist literary tradition and employs several images and symbols. *Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close* is characterised by what Mikhail Bakhtin identified as "heteroglossia" (*raznorechie*), anticipating a diversity of voices and styles.[35] The novel includes reproduced handwritings and shifting typographical layouts which establish a metafictional and metatextual element. As Uytterschout suggest, by creating a juxtaposition of linguistic and typographical elements, Foer tries to achieve what Ulrich Baer described as "mock[ing] the black and white simplicity of printing paper".[36] However, these elements were subjects of criticism by reviewers especially in the context of 9/11 in which images were exploited by the media.[37] Furthermore, the abundance of intertextual network, closely related to the postmodern tradition, has been occasionally criticised. For instance, Harry Seigel disapprovingly stated that Foer superficially borrowed stances from Italo Calvino, Jorge Luis Borges, and Paul Aster.[38] Huehls instead argues that Foer brilliantly introduces the performative impulse of metafiction by thinning the border between the text's internal and external world[39], which allows the reader to believe that they are

34 Ingersoll, "One Boy's Passage, and His Nation's: Jonathan Safran Foer's *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close*", p. 58.

35 Saal, "Regarding the Pain of Self and Other: Trauma Transfer and Narrative Framing in Jonathan Safran Foer's *Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close*".

36 Uytterschout, "Visualised Incomprehensibility of Trauma in Jonathan Safran Foer's *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close*", p. 68.

37 Däwes, "On Contested Ground (Zero): Literature and the Transnational Challenge of Remembering 9/11".

38 Williams, "A Tale of Two Oskars: Security or Hospitality in Jonathan Safran Foer's *Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close*".

39 Huehls, "9/11: Jonathan Safran Foer's *Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close* and Art Spiegelman's *In the Shadow of No Towers*".

holding the actual book described in the novel. In particular, when Oskar narrates that he has "pulled *Stuff That Happened to Me* from the space between the bed and the wall" (EL&IC, p. 52) and consequently goes through it, the reader finds the actual pages of the Oskar's book in the following pages. This peculiarity continues throughout the novel, as well as throughout the different narrations. When Oskar narrates his experiences through the first person the novel becomes a book that he is writing himself. For example, when he explains how he dropped his cat, Buckminster, from the roof of the school to prove that cats make themselves appear like little parachutes when falling and on the following pages we find a photo of the cat (EL&IC, pp. 190–191). Consequently, the first-person narrative progressively humanises the novel and connects the reader more intimately to the story.[40]

Furthermore, Foer employs postmodern narrative techniques, such as fragmentation and pastiche, to explore the themes of the novel.[41] It could be argued that, in *Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close*, the postmodern fragmentation, which is characterised by a "diverse range of voices, histories, and points of view"[42], takes form in the three different narrative voices of Oskar, his grandmother, and his grandfather. The pastiche is represented in the variety of media present in the text; indeed, the images, and the references to music refine the reading experience. Foer combines a plurality of media by including, for example, letters, newspaper clippings, messages on answering machines. Collectively, by combing a plurality of media, including letters, newspaper clippings, messages on answering machines, Foer honours the postmodernist principles of relativity and pluralism which Alfred Hornung associated with the collapse of the World Trade Center.[43]

2.2.6 The Genre

As indicated previously *Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close* is a mixture of different genres, which allows several interpretations and the creation of an original literary work. In fact, the novel at times resembles a *Bildungsroman*; at others, it recalls an anti-detective

40 Michael Cornier, "An Anti-War Novel for the Twenty-First Century: Jonathan Safran Foer's *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* rewrites Kurt Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse-Five*".

41 Remetir, "Post-9/11 Narrative in Jonathan Safran Foer's *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close*".

42 Ibid., p. 111.

43 Däwes, "On Contested Ground (Zero): Literature and the Transnational Challenge of Remembering 9/11".

story.[44] Additionally, Foer's novel embraces narratives which readers have become accustomed to associate with nineteenth-century novel writing. As Michiko Kakutani writes in her *New York Times* review, Oskar is reminiscent of J. D. Salinger's Holden Caulfield in his alienated wanderings through the boroughs of New York City.[45] Thus, the main narrative appears to be a picaresque journey which Oskar embarks on with the aim of coming to terms with his father's death.[46] The anti-detective story could be perceived in Oskar's treasure hunt: ignited by what he hopes to be a clue left by his father on the *New York Times* and the key found in his father's wardrobe, unfortunately it never leads to a satisfactory conclusion. Indeed, the postmodernist anti-detective story is never able to unravel the mystery[47]; likewise, Oskar never actually comes to know what happened to his father.

Furthermore, Kakutani compares Oskar to Saul Bellow's Moses E. Herzog since he writes letters to people he does not know.[48] Letter writing, as Magali Cornier Michael explains, provides a new mean that allows to express the characters in the novel more freely than speech.[49] Consequently, the letter form is frequently cited in the novel: both Grandma and Grandpa Schell employ it to tell their stories, Oskar is known to write to famous people. Even before the traumatic events in her life, Oskar's grandmother had an intimate relationship with the epistolary form as she received a censored letter from a Turkish labour camp's prisoner, and then purposely asked the people around her to write her letters, namely her own grandmother and father. Thus, hers and her husband's narratives take form via letters: Grandma's is a long letter to her grandson; Grandpa's writes daily letter for years but never sends them, except for one.[50] Oskar himself writes several letters throughout the narrative: to Stephen Hawking, Ringo Starr, and Jane Goodall. Interestingly, Oskar explains that "a few weeks after the worst day, [he] started writing lots of letters. [Because] it was one of the only things that made [his] boots lighter" (EL&IC, p. 11), thus, they are employed

44 Ibid.
45 Kakutani, *A Boy's Epic Quest, Borough by Borough*.
46 Saal, "Regarding the Pain of Self and Other: Trauma Transfer and Narrative Framing in Jonathan Safran Foer's *Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close*".
47 Kravitz, "Thoughts on the Anti-Detective in Paul Auster's *New York Trilogy*, Adam Ross's *Mister Peanut*, and Martha Grimes' *The Old Wine Shades*".
48 Kakutani, *A Boy's Epic Quest, Borough by Borough*.
49 Michael Cornier, "An Anti-War Novel for the Twenty-First Century: Jonathan Safran Foer's *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* rewrites Kurt Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse-Five*".
50 Ibid.

as "a means of asserting agency".[51]

Kakutani also traces Foer's inspiration from the mythic-oriented tradition, in particular Gabriel García Márquez's magical realism. Magical realism could be described as a mode of writing which allows writers to escape into the fantastic.[52] Its narratives are consistently linked to an historical moment and traumatic events; consequently, this mode does provide consolation or relief to its audience. Likewise, in Foer's novel, the narrative is framed in the aftermath of the 9/11 terrorist attacks, as well as in the aftermath of the Dresden bombings of WWII. Moreover, as Eugene L. Arva contends, magical realism enables authors to remodel "what resists representation into an accessible reality".[53] Indeed, in *Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close*, Oskar's inventions are all specifically aimed at building something related to his father, highlighting the connection to his trauma. The first of these creations opens the novel:

> What about a teakettle? What if the spout opened and closed when the steam came out, so it would become a mouth, and it could whistle pretty melodies, or do Shakespeare, or just crack up with me? I could invent a teakettle that reads in Dad's voice, so I could fall asleep, or maybe a set of kettles that sings the chorus of "Yellow Submarine," which is a song by the Beatles, who I love, because entomology is one of my *raisons d'être*, which is a French expression that I know. (EL&IC, p. 1)

Subsequently he proposes another one:

> Sometimes I think it would be weird if there were a skyscraper that moved up and down while its elevator stayed in place. So if you wanted to go to the ninety-fifth floor, you'd just press the 95 button and the ninety-fifth floor would come to you. Also, that could be extremely useful, because if you're on the ninety-fifth floor, and a plane hits below you, the building could take you to the ground, and everyone could be safe, even if you left your birdseed shirt at home that day. (EL&IC, p. 3)

Arva points out how the story of the Sixth Borough represents "the most compelling magical realist writing in this book".[54] The story of the Sixth Borough was told to Oskar by his father: it was presumably an island connected to Manhattan by eight bridges, which one day started floating away until its full disappearance. As it happens in magical realist narratives, there is the juxtaposition of the sensational and the supernatural with concrete references.[55] Indeed, while the

51 Michael Cornier, "An Anti-War Novel for the Twenty-First Century: Jonathan Safran Foer's *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* rewrites Kurt Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse-Five*", p. 12.

52 Langdon, "Magical Realism and Experiences of Extremity".

53 Ibid., p. 16.

54 Arva, "The Analogical Legacy of Ground Zero: Magical Realism in Post-9/11 Literary and Filmic Trauma Narratives", p. 242.

55 Ibid.

story is being told, Oskar frequently interrupts Thomas Schell, Jr., to ask for evidence of the real existence of the borough. Regardless, his father ignores him, following the tradition of magical realism which requires a "continual state of uncertainty and hesitancy".[56]

2.3 *Trauma and the Novel*

As one of the first instances of post-9/11 fiction, *Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close* includes numerous elements of trauma fiction. Johnathan Safran Foer was, thus, able to build a literary artifact to respond to the political challenge of 9/11. Nevertheless, the portrayal of the events of September 11, 2001, has been repeatedly considered a sensitive topic, and as a result, Foer was heavily criticised. Indeed, for several years after the attacks, people avoided talking, writing, or creating films about the attacks. Foer's bright protagonist, Oskar, struggles to confront the reality of his father's death, and so do his paternal grandparents, whose trauma stems from the Dresden bombings of 1945. Progressively, the three narrators disclose their personal trauma, which forces them to acknowledge it and, in some instances, overcome it.

2.3.1 Traumatic Temporality and Spatiality

Arguably, scholars of trauma have highlighted how the strategic use of a non-linear presentation of events is a compelling device to spark the readers' response to a literary work and the understanding of trauma narratives.[57] Indeed, according to LaCapra a traumatised mind does not control its understanding of tenses; thus, past, present, and future conjugate into one another.[58] As previously mentioned, Oskar Schell's favourite book is Hawking's *A Brief History of Time* and, as Collado-Rodríguez pointed out, "Time is a category that does not need to follow human logic".[59] Moreover, Collado-Rodríguez maintains that Hawking described "time" in terms that will be revealed extremely kindred to Foer's narration:

> Imaginary time is indistinguishable from directions in space. If one can go north, one can turn around and head south; equally, if one can go forward in imaginary time, one ought to be able to turn around and go backward.[60]

56 Ibid., p. 243.
57 Collado-Rodríguez, "Ethics in the Second Degree: Trauma and Dual Narratives in Jonathan Safran Foer's *Everything Is Illuminated*".
58 Uytterschout, "Visualised Incomprehensibility of Trauma in Jonathan Safran Foer's *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close*".
59 Collado-Rodríguez, "Trauma, Ethics and Myth-Oriented Literary Tradition in Jonathan Safran Foer's *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close*", p. 54.
60 Ibid., pp. 54–55.

Indeed, this manipulation of time is relevant in Oskar and Grandma Schell's story since the handling of time strongly suggests a connection with trauma fiction. As Cathy Caruth argues, "trauma is at all susceptible to narrative formulation, then it requires a literary form which departs from conventional linear sequence".[61] Consequently, a narrative that disrupts the logical and chronological limits coincides with the narration of trauma, which comes into being through the taunting presences of the traumatic experience in the traumatised individual.[62] Therefore, the temporal issues of Foer's novel and of Oskar and his grandmother's narratives are coherent with the tradition of trauma fiction. Likewise, the collision of past and present, witnessed in the juxtaposition of 9/11 with the Dresden bombings, actively conveys the aforementioned tradition. This can be witnessed at the end of the novel, when Oskar attempts to rewind time and erase his father's death altogether: the last chapter and in the last 15 pages portray a man going upward of one of the Twin Towers instead of falling. This, it represents an attempt of "turning back time"[63] performed by a child who cannot comprehend the horror of the events he suffered. Additionally, Huehls highlights how the novel emphasises Oskar's obsession with "the instant"[64]; in particular, the instant his father's death. This is evident when he imagines himself inside a building as an airplane crashes into it, he erratically wonders:

> I was imagining a plane coming at the building, just below us. I didn't want to, but I couldn't stop. I imagined the last second, when I would see the pilot's face, who would be a terrorist. […]
> Would I jump or would I burn? I guess I would jump, because then I wouldn't have to feel pain. […]
> I remembered my cell phone.
> I still had a few seconds.
> Who should I call?
> What should I say? (EL&IC, pp. 244–245)

As with his ideas about his father's last instant, he wonders what his would look like.

Furthermore, Whitehead suggests that references to the spatial dimension may serve a role in the overcoming of personal traumas.[65]

61 Collado-Rodríguez, "Trauma, Ethics and Myth-Oriented Literary Tradition in Jonathan Safran Foer's *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close*", p. 56.
62 Ibid.
63 Ingersoll, "One Boy's Passage, and His Nation's: Jonathan Safran Foer's *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close*", p. 66.
64 Huehls, "9/11: Jonathan Safran Foer's *Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close* and Art Spiegelman's *In the Shadow of No Towers*", p. 86.
65 Collado-Rodríguez, "Trauma, Ethics and Myth-Oriented Literary Tradition in Jonathan Safran Foer's *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close*".

Indeed, as Arnold suggests, "space […] is intricately linked with identity, social relations, locations, and memory".[66] Furthermore, Balaev argues that "Place […] becomes central to representations of trauma in [a] novel because the physical place of suffering and remembrance of loss becomes an identifiable source for the author to explicate the multiple meanings of [an] event".[67] In the case of *Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close*, New York City is initially the "powerful "site of memory""[68] of the novel; as such, the city was the epicentre of the attack and constitutes for Oskar a place to explore in search for answers. Although several post-9/11 novels have included the Twin Towers in their narrative, Foer has attempted to covey the emotional consequence of their absence. Golimowskia argues that "the desire to regain control over the metropolis is linked to the hope that it would bring back a lost structure in the character's life"[69], thus, this is arguably represented by Foer's choice of including a photo with a cut-out Central Park (Figure 2.4). It would appear that by taking away such meaningful part of New York City, Foer was alluding to the substantial loss of the Twin Towers, and, in Oskar's case, of his father. Moreover, the attack in itself influences Oskar's action in his surrounding; when confronted with the idea of going to a higher floor he is afraid:

> 'I can't go up.' 'Why not?' 'Because you're on the ninth floor and I don't go that high.' 'Why not?' 'It isn't safe.' 'But it's perfectly safe here.' 'Until something happens.' 'You'll be fine.' 'It's a rule.' 'I'd come down for you,' he said, 'but I just can't.' 'Why not?' 'I'm very sick.' 'But my dad is dead.' (EL&IC, p. 90)

By mentioning his father, Oskar creates a contiguity between his father's death, his inability to act, and the physical space in which he finds himself. Additionally, Foer connects space and trauma in the narrative of the grandparents, specifically in their practice of labelling places around their New York apartment "Nothing Places" (EL&IC, p. 110). These places are the direct consequence of the lack of communication between the two, as well as the evidence of their Post-Traumatic Stress Disorders. "Nothing Places" are those parts of the house "in which one could be assured of complete privacy, […] in which one could temporarily cease to exist" (EL&IC, p. 110). The connection between the "Nothing Places" and their trauma is

66 Arnold, "Chasing Death's Memory: Representational Space in Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close", p. 7.

67 Balaev, "Trends in Literary Trauma Theory", p. 161.

68 Collado-Rodríguez, "Trauma, Ethics and Myth-Oriented Literary Tradition in Jonathan Safran Foer's *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close*".

69 Arnold, "Chasing Death's Memory: Representational Space in Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close", p. 4.

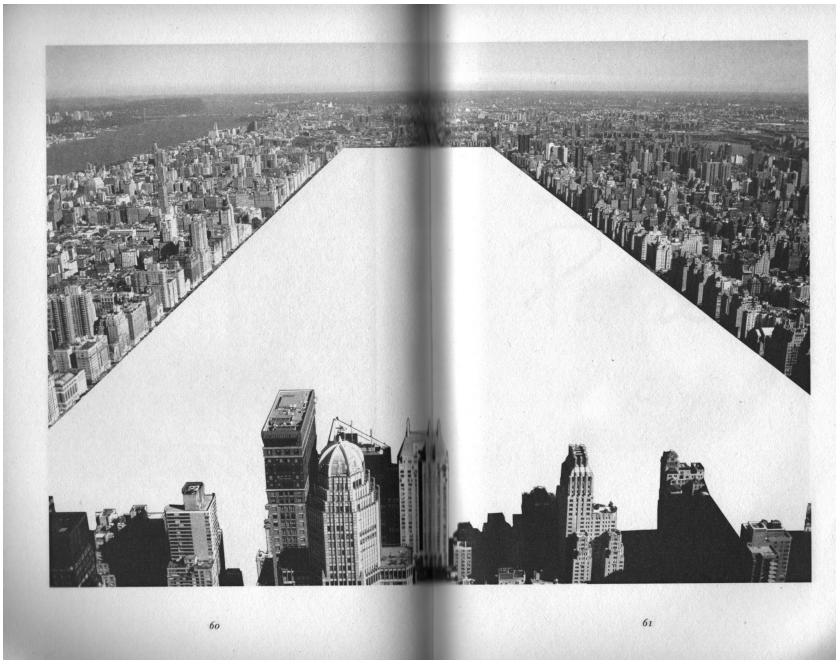

Figure 2.4. Safran Foer, *Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close*, pp. 60-61.

implicitly expressed when Thomas Schell, Sr., recounts:

> But a friction began to arise between Nothing and Something, in the morning the Nothing vase cast a Something shadow, like the memory of someone you've lost, what can you say about that, at night the Nothing light from the guest room spilled under the Nothing door and stained the Something hallway, there's nothing to say. (EL&IC, p. 110)

2.3.2 The Characters' Trauma

Several critics have commented on the modes employed by Foer to convincingly render the traumatised psyche of his characters. Oskar does, in fact, display various symptoms of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, such as depressive episodes, panic attacks, insomnia, and self-harming.[70] And, like the other narrators of the novel, he is unable to explicitly speak about the day his father died, which he identifies as "the worst day" of his life (EL&IC, p. 110). An expression used by Oskar to describe his emotional situation is "wearing heavy boots", which translates into being extremely sad and borderline depressed. Uytterschout and Versluys argue that Oskar's behaviour is coherent with a synthesis of what Dominick LaCapra identified as

70 Saal, "Regarding the Pain of Self and Other: Trauma Transfer and Narrative Framing in Jonathan Safran Foer's *Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close*".

acting out and working through.[71] Oskar is arguably characterised by a feeling of "melancholia" which is "a state of mind in which the victim's notion of tenses (past, present, future) implodes".[72] According to Gleich, Oskar behaviour is "compulsive and narcissistic [in his] obsession with the object of his loss (his father)".[73] Oskar does, indeed, show the unsettling tendency to bruise himself when he is in uncomfortable situations, is afraid, or feels guilty. In one entry of "Stuff That Happened to Me" he recounts in capital letters:

> WHEN I WOKE UP, MOM WAS PULLING MY SHIRT OFF TO HELP ME GET INTO MY PJS, WHICH MEANS SHE MUST HAVE SEEN ALL OF MY BRUISES. I COUNTED THEM LAST NIGHT IN THE MIRROR AND THERE WERE FORTY-ONE. SOME OF THEM HAVE GOTTEN BIG, BUT MOST OF THEM ARE SMALL. I DON'T PUT THEM THERE FOR HER, BUT STILL I WANT HER TO ASK ME HOW I GOT THEM (EVEN THOUGH SHE PROBABLY KNOWS), AND TO FEEL SORRY FOR ME (BECAUSE SHE SHOULD REALIZE HOW HARD THINGS ARE FOR ME), AND TO FEEL TERRIBLE (BECAUSE AT LEAST SOME OF IT IS HER FAULT), AND TO PROMISE ME THAT SHE WON'T DIE AND LEAVE ME ALONE. BUT SHE DIDN'T SAY ANYTHING. I COULDN'T EVEN SEE THE LOOK IN HER EYES WHEN SHE SAW THE BRUISES, BECAUSE MY SHIRT WAS OVER MY HEAD, COVERING MY FACE LIKE A POCKET, OR A SKULL. (EL&IC, p. 173)

The discomfort Oskar feels about his mother finding out he is self-harming is striking. However, Oskar states that "feeling pain is better than not feeling, isn't it?" (EL&IC, p. 245); it enables him to maintain his melancholic state and denies him the ability to mourn.[74] Moreover, the possibly narcissistic aspect of his trauma seeps through as he would like his mother to ask him how he got those numerous bruises, in order to feel sympathetic and feel sorry for him. On the matter, Gleich argues that "the bruising serves two purposes: it causes the bodily pain that the spectacle cannot induce, and it leaves a physical trace of pain".[75] By naming "the spectacle", Gleich is referring to the horrifying images which Oskar searches and watches of the attacks to the Twin Towers, which although capable of leaving a psychological trauma, are not visible on the body.[76] Furthermore, Oskar appears to be under a constant frustration which is visible

71 Uytterschout and Versluys, "Melancholy and Mourning in Jonathan Safran Foer's *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close*", p. 218.

72 Ibid.

73 Gleich, "Ethics in the Wake of the Image: The Post-9/11 Fiction of DeLillo, Auster, and Foer", p. 169.

74 Bryan, ""What about a Teakettle?": Anxiety, Mourning, and Burial in Jonathan Safran Foer's *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close*".

75 Gleich, "Ethics in the Wake of the Image: The Post-9/11 Fiction of DeLillo, Auster, and Foer", p. 169.

76 Ibid.

in his imaginary acts of violence. For instance, towards his school bully, Jimmy Snyder, during a rendition of Shakespeare's *Hamlet* in school. Oskar imagines smashing Jimmy's head with Yorick's skull, and says:

> I smash his head again with all my force and blood starts to come out of his nose and ears. But I still don't feel any sympathy for him. 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. […] 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. THE AUDIENCE is applauding, all of them, because I am making so much sense. (EL&IC, p. 146)

Thus, this inner monologue is showed by Foer to expose the root of Oskar's behaviour. Indeed, he is not thinking about Jimmy Snyder, he is presumably seeking a way to understand his trauma by blaming everyone he cares about: mom, dad, and grandma. This is furtherly proved when he wishes his mother had died instead of his father (EL&IC, p. 171), just to regret it the following moments.

Oskar experiences panic attacks and insomnia, which can be traced back to his PTSD and, in Uytterschout and Versluys's view, to his hypervigilance.[77] According to Cathy Caruth, "To be traumatized is precisely to be possessed by an image or an event".[78] Correspondingly, Oskar is possessed by the five messages left by his father in the answering machine and by the image of a man falling from one of the towers, whom he believes to be his Thomas. Although Oskar keeps them hidden, the messages are replayed numerous times in the narrative; in the last one his father only repeats the words "Are you there?" (EL&IC, p. 301) wanting Oskar to answer. Oskar felt unable to answer the phone and now that he cannot know what Thomas wanted to say, he is tormented by the memory of the messages.[79] Thus, according to Caruth's theory, Oskar has experienced trauma "too soon, too unexpectedly […] it imposes itself again, repeatedly, in the nightmares and repetitive actions of the survivor".[80] Equally, Oskar's obsession with the man falling from one of the towers is a sign of his trauma resurfacing.[81] Indeed, he wants to believe the man

77 Uytterschout, "Visualised Incomprehensibility of Trauma in Jonathan Safran Foer's *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close*", p. 230.
78 Caruth, *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, pp. 4–5.
79 Dowling, "The Human Hole: Problematic Representations of Trauma in Jonathan Safran Foer's *Everything Is Illuminated* and *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close*".
80 Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History*, p. 4.
81 Uytterschout, "Visualised Incomprehensibility of Trauma in Jonathan Safran

is his father so that he can stop imagining worse ways in which he might have died:

> '[…] There's one body that could be him. It's dressed like he was, and when I magnify it […] I can see glasses. […] It's just me wanting it to be him.' […] 'I want to stop inventing. If I could know how he died, exactly how he died, I wouldn't have to invent him dying inside an elevator that was stuck between floors, which happened to some people, and I wouldn't have to imagine him trying to crawl down the outside of the building […]' (EL&IC, p. 257)

In his quest to find the lock for his father's key, he is extremely observant towards possible dangers and avoids heights, for instance, the Empire State Building, or using public transportation, since he associates them with probable targets for terrorist attacks. Consequently, he is extremely susceptible to panic attacks:

> There was a lot of stuff that made me panicky, like suspension bridges, germs, airplanes, fireworks, Arab people on the subway (even though I'm not racist), Arab people in restaurants and coffee shops and other public places, scaffolding, sewers and subway grates, bags without owners, shoes, people with mustaches, smoke, knots, tall buildings, turbans. (EL&IC, p. 36)

Oskar continues to desperately hold on to his father's memory and tries to retain every detail about him, which is the reason behind the treasure hunt for the lock[82]; it allows him to keep his father alive in his memory. Consequently, when he discovers that the key was not his father's his response is the following:

> I found it and now I can stop looking? I found it and it had nothing to do with Dad? I found it and now I'll wear heavy boots for the rest of my life? 'I wish I hadn't found it.' 'It wasn't what you were looking for?' 'That's not it.' 'Then what?' 'I found it and now I can't look for it.' I could tell he didn't understand me. 'Looking for it let me stay close to him for a little while longer.' 'But won't you always be close to him' I knew the truth. 'No.' (EL&IC, pp. 302–204)

Oskar is saddened by the discovery, but knows 'the truth', conceivably, that he has to overcome his grief. Indeed, finding a purpose for the key and, thus, opening the lock mirrors Oskar's opportunity to 'unlock' his trauma.[83] Hence, after excavating his father's empty grave, he has a "new-found insight"[84], which suggests a first step

Foer's *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close*".

82 Uytterschout and Versluys, "Melancholy and Mourning in Jonathan Safran Foer's *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close*".

83 Uytterschout, "Visualised Incomprehensibility of Trauma in Jonathan Safran Foer's *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close*".

84 Uytterschout and Versluys, "Melancholy and Mourning in Jonathan Safran Foer's *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close*", p. 233.

towards a "productive mourning"[85] and an eventual recovery[86]. He is able to confide to his mother about his problems and even about the messages his father had left in the answering machine, anticipating that he will learn start "working through" his trauma.[87]

As it has already been established, Oskar's trauma is interlaced with that of his paternal grandparents. Grandma Schell is, superficially, surviving better than her husband in the aftermath of the Dresden air raids, and she also appears to want to share her story with others.[88] However, as the novel progress, it becomes clear that Mrs Schell is not coping as well as one might have thought. In several parts of the novel, it is hinted that she is suicidal: "I started to walk off. I was going to walk to the Hudson River and keep walking. I would carry the biggest stone I could bear and let my lungs fill with water." (EL&IC, p. 82); or again, when Oskar states, "I saw Grandma carrying a huge rock across Broadway. It was as big as a baby and must have weighed a ton. But she never gave that one to me, and she never mentioned it." (EL&IC, p. 104). Both events happen after moments of crisis in her life; the first after the first meeting with Thomas, Sr., the second a couple of days after 11 September. Grandma clearly suffers from survivor guilt, which can be a direct result of PTSD.[89] A striking moment is when, reminiscing about Dresden, she remembers she collected letters and wonders "If [she] hadn't collected them would [their] house have burned less brightly?" (EL&IC, p. 83), which highlights her "feelings of unworthiness"[90] at her sole survival. Similarly to Oskar, Grandma asserts that "[She] can't remember the last thing my father said to [her]" (EL&IC, p. 308), signalling that she, too, was probably never able to have closure with her past. She constantly belittles herself: she insinuates she is not intelligent enough to advise Oskar. Eventually, Foer chooses to write about her worst self-loathing moment occurring after she comes to know that her son was in the North Tower during the attack. Furthermore, Grandma expresses "detachment and emotional numbness"[91] which are fundamental elements of constriction, a post-traumatic condition in which the "victim surrenders to passivity and

85 Bryan, ""What about a Teakettle?": Anxiety, Mourning, and Burial in Jonathan Safran Foer's *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close*", p. 280.
86 Uytterschout, "Visualised Incomprehensibility of Trauma in Jonathan Safran Foer's *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close*".
87 Ibid.
88 Ibid.
89 Uytterschout and Versluys, "Melancholy and Mourning in Jonathan Safran Foer's *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close*".
90 Ibid., p. 226.
91 Ibid., p. 227.

outward calm"[92]. This is attested when she confesses in her letter to Oskar that "Every day I felt less." (EL&IC, p. 180), or, "Maybe it sounds strange, but I didn't feel anything when they showed the burning building" (EL&IC, p. 224). Like Oskar, she suffers from sleep deprivation and her past taunts her in her dreams. Trauma studies reveal that victims of traumatic events are forced to relive their trauma in dreams.[93] The reader learns about Grandma's nightmares through Oskar's narration:

> It gave me heavy boots that she had nightmares, because I didn't know what she was dreaming about and there was nothing I could do to help her. She hollered, which woke me up, obviously, so my sleep depended on her sleep, and when I told her, 'No bad dreams,' I was talking about her. (EL&IC, p. 104)

Similarly to Oskar, Grandma's narration is also hunted by repetitions, as she watches the images of the 11 September attacks:

> Planes going into buildings.
> Bodies falling.
> People waving shirts out of high windows.
> Planes going into buildings.
> Bodies falling.
> Planes going into buildings.
> People covered in gray dust.
> Bodies falling.
> Buildings falling. (EL&IC, p. 230)

These words, which are repeated in the following three pages, "highlight the neurotic nature of the repetitive instinct".[94] Lasty, like Oskar at the end of the novel, she wishes for things to be rearranged, to move backwards,

> In my dream, all of the collapsed ceilings re-formed above us. The fire went back into the bombs, which rose up and into the bellies of planes whose propellers turned backward, like the second hands of the clocks across Dresden, only faster. (EL&IC, pp. 306–307)

Arguably, Grandma Schell is wishing that her original trauma never happened.

Ingersoll argues that the *débâcles* in the Schell family originate from Grandpa Schell, Thomas Schell, Sr.[95] In Dresden, Thomas was in love with Anna, Grandma's sister, who was pregnant when she died. Anna's loss was devastating for Grandpa Schell, which makes

92 Ibid.
93 Forter, "Freud, Faulkner, Caruth: Trauma and the Politics of Literary Form".
94 Gleich, "Ethics in the Wake of the Image: The Post-9/11 Fiction of DeLillo, Auster, and Foer", p. 170.
95 Ingersoll, "One Boy's Passage, and His Nation's: Jonathan Safran Foer's *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close*", p. 57.

his trauma incomprehensible to him.[96] Therefore, having survived the Dresden firebombing, while his pregnant girlfriend perished, was intolerable and, like Grandma Schell, he suffers from survivor guilt. Thomas suffers from "distorted self-image"[97] which is attested by his feeling of being unworthy: "what a mess I am, I thought, what a fool, how foolish and narrow, how worthless, how pinched and pathetic, how helpless" (EL&IC, p. 33). Having lost everything in the Dresden bombings, leads to Thomas's inability to love and therefore live in the aftermath of the events. His surname, Schell, also bears the meaning of being a shell of a man[98], "a mere bodily surviv[or] stripped of all emotional well-being".[99] Consequently, Thomas, Sr., suffers from aphasia, a condition which denies him one of the most crucial elements for a trauma survivor: acceptance.[100] Indeed, his inability to speak attests an aversion toward the possibility of coping with his traumatic past[101] and he is aware of this, as he compares his silence to a cancer, "I haven't always been silent, I used to talk and talk and talk and talk, I couldn't keep my mouth shut, the silence overtook me like a cancer" (EL&IC, p. 16). Additionally, he cannot be freed from his past and he notably marries Grandma because she is the closest person to the real Anna. Conceivably, Thomas is purely governed by what Freud identified as acting out, which interferes with is ability to overcome his trauma and tortures him[102]:

> [E]verything changed, the distance that wedged itself between me and my happiness wasn't the world, it wasn't the bombs and burning buildings, it was me, my thinking, the cancer of never letting go, is ignorance bliss, I don't know, but it's so painful to think, and tell me, what did thinking ever do for me, to what great place did thinking ever bring me? I think and think and think, I've thought myself out of happiness one million times, but never once into it. (EL&IC, p. 17)

Furthermore, his inability to speak precludes him the possibility to share his experiences which is arguably detrimental, considering that to recover from a traumatic experience "trauma must be admitted, not repressed or denied".[103] In fact, Thomas writes to Oskar's father, whom he never met, "Sometimes I think if I could tell you what happened to me that night, I could leave that night behind me, maybe I could come home to you, but that night has no beginning or end,

96 Uytterschout and Versluys, "Melancholy and Mourning in Jonathan Safran Foer's *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close*".
97 Ibid., p. 221.
98 Ibid.
99 Ibid., p. 222.
100 Ibid.
101 Ibid.
102 Ibid.
103 Ibid., p. 223.

it started before I was born and it's still happening" (EL&IC, p. 208). Moreover, his trauma is renewed when he learns about his son death on 9/11, "and then one day I saw it, Thomas Schell, my first thought was that I had died. "He leaves behind a wife and son," I thought, my son, I thought, my grandson, I thought and thought and thought, and then I stopped thinking" (EL&IC, p. 273). His first thought is that he has died, which in a way, could be perceived as something liberating for him. However, the desperation for his son begins and, accordingly, the typography becomes increasingly smaller, until it becomes almost black on page 284[104] (Figure 2.2). At the end, Thomas's trauma is such that he fails to stay again, thus leading to a new departure from his family.

Although the aforementioned characters are explicitly the centre of the narrative, the novel does cover the effect of 9/11 and traumatic experiences on the community. When Foer brings all the Blacks together at Oskar's school's production of *Hamlet*, Mullins argues, he is showing that "trauma should be a unifying experience across boundaries of identity".[105] Indeed, each of them lived in New York City and had experienced the events of 9/11 in their own personal way, but they were able to share their personal experience and sympathise with Oskar's loss and trauma. Moreover, this idea of a collective of trauma can be witnessed in Foer's interlacing of different generations. In addition, by making Oskar speak about the Japanese woman and the traumatic loss of her daughter in the Hiroshima bombing, Foer is conveying that trauma does not separate victims, instead, it connects them.[106] Vanderwees argues that these narrative choices show that Foer intended to portray 9/11 "not as a unique event but […] rather [as] a recent instance of mass trauma".[107] Hence, Oskar's story might be the centre of the novel, but underneath it the reader can perceive the stories of many others: the grandparents, Oskar's mother's, the victims of Hiroshima, the other victims and witnesses of 9/11.[108] Accordingly, as Caruth suggests, "[trauma] is never simply one's own […] [but] precisely the way we are implicated in each other's traumas".[109]

104 Ingersoll, "One Boy's Passage, and His Nation's: Jonathan Safran Foer's *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close*".

105 Mullins, "Boroughs and Neighbors: Traumatic Solidarity in Jonathan Safran Foer's *Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close*", p. 308.

106 Ibid.

107 Vanderwees, "Photographs of Falling Bodies and the Ethics of Vulnerability in Jonathan Safran Foer's *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close*", p. 187.

108 Saal, "Regarding the Pain of Self and Other: Trauma Transfer and Narrative Framing in Jonathan Safran Foer's *Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close*".

109 Balaev, "Trends in Literary Trauma Theory", p. 151.

2.3.3 The Visual, the Virtual and the Verbal

9/11 has been regarded as "the most photographed and videotaped day of the history of the world".[110] Indeed, the images of the horrific attacks were circulating like never before, worldwide. On photographs, Susan Sontag asserts:

> To catch death actually happening and embalm it for all time is something only cameras can do, and pictures taken by photographer out in the field of the moment of (or just before) death are among the most celebrated and often reproduced of war photographs.[111]

The most notable photographs are that of Richard Drew and of Lyle Owerko, which were printed respectively on The New York Times cover for 12 September 2001 and for the 14 September 2001 special issue cover of Time. Hence, the media coverage of the event presented these images repeatedly, creating a "theatrical spectacle".[112] Moreover, the two photographers famously took photographs of the people falling from the Towers. Subsequently, although the images were considered taboos in the wake of the attack, they were widespread on the virtual realm of the Internet.[113] Indeed, Marianne Hirsch argues that it is "still photography, not film [which] best captures the trauma and loss associated with September 2001 – the sense of monumental, irrevocable change that we, as a culture, feel we have experienced".[114]

In an interview with Dave Weich, Foer argued, "September 11th, in particular, was so fundamentally visual. […] I read somewhere that it was the most visually documented event in human history".[115] Thereupon, by including photographs in his own post-9/11 novel, Gleich suggests, Foer was showing "how literature can act as a counterforce to the spectacle by providing a space where characters and narrators respond to images with sustained dialogue rather than passive spectatorship".[116]

110 Vanderwees, "Photographs of Falling Bodies and the Ethics of Vulnerability in Jonathan Safran Foer's *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close*", p. 175.
111 Ibid.
112 Le Cor, "Ripples of Trauma in Jonathan Safran Foer's *Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close* and in Art Spiegelman's *In the Shadow of No Towers*", p. 2.
113 Vanderwees, "Photographs of Falling Bodies and the Ethics of Vulnerability in Jonathan Safran Foer's *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close*".
114 Däwes, "On Contested Ground (Zero): Literature and the Transnational Challenge of Remembering 9/11", p. 534.
115 Mauro, "The Languishing of the Falling Man: Don Delillo and Jonathan Safran Foer's Photographic History of 9/11", p. 597.
116 Gleich, "Ethics in the Wake of the Image: The Post-9/11 Fiction of DeLillo, Auster, and Foer", p. 163.

In the novel, Oskar is depicted as a child of his time, and, as such, he comes into contact with photographs and the Internet. Images are extremely important in relation to trauma. Luckhurst claims that it is in the images "the psychic registration of trauma truly resides".[117] Some of the images included in the novel are relevant to Oskar's trauma, but others have no immediate relation to it. Thus, some images appear to be an expression of Oskar's own interiority and interests, such as that of Stephen Hawking or of a French astronaut.[118] Similarly, Grandpa has taken photographs to document his life as well as to remember his home.[119] Furthermore, it is on the Internet that Oskar encounters the photos and videos of the falling bodies, as well as other disturbing images for a 9-year-old boy, such as "a shark attacking a girl, someone walking on a tightrope between the Twin Towers, […] a soldier getting his head cut off in Iraq" (EL&IC, p. 42). In particular, Oskar finds several videos of people falling to their death from the towers, which are only available on a Portuguese site, from which he takes image frames and magnifies the pixels, observing:

> I printed out the frames from the Portuguese videos and examined them extremely closely. There's one body that could be him. It's dressed like he was, and when I magnify it until the pixels are so big that it stops looking like a person, sometimes I can see glasses. Or I think I can. But I know I probably can't. It's just me wanting it to be him. (EL&IC, p. 257)

Thus, the virtual medium does not give Oskar the information he wants, which is knowing how his father died, but, nonetheless, it exposes him to traumatising images and videos. Indeed, Foer is acknowledging the role of the Internet in spreading the images of 9/11 and, presumably, demands from his reader a critical engagement with the photographs he included.[120]

In the novel, Foer has not included Drew's notorious photograph of the falling figure; instead, he included a photo illustration based on a photograph by Lyle Owerko, which was included in his collection *And No Birds Sang*.[121] Falling-body images have since their first appearance after the attack been at the centre of debates, David Friend notes how they have been likened to "the stuff of snuff films, torture videos, and sado-porn".[122] However, Vanderwees debates that these

117 Luckhurst, *The Trauma Question*, p. 147.
118 Däwes, "On Contested Ground (Zero): Literature and the Transnational Challenge of Remembering 9/11".
119 Ibid.
120 Mauro, "The Languishing of the Falling Man: Don Delillo and Jonathan Safran Foer's Photographic History of 9/11".
121 Ibid.
122 Vanderwees, "Photographs of Falling Bodies and the Ethics of Vulnerability in Jonathan Safran Foer's *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close*", p. 178.

photographs and images "are the only evidence of human suffering undergone on 11 September 2001"[123], and as such it is crucial that they are somehow included in the narratives about the events. Indeed, Lindfield explained, "not until I saw Drew's picture did the true or of the event, which had nothing to do with the burning buildings an everything to do with burning people, begin to penetrate my numbness and shock".[124] Thus, Vanderwees continues to argue that "the representations of falling bodies in a post-9/11 fiction may communicate human vulnerability"[125] and regards Foer's second novel "as an example of post-9/11 fiction that encourages the readers to engage in a face-to-face encounter with human vulnerability".[126]

Another crucial element in Foer's novel is that of verbal representation and communication. Regarding communication, trauma studies highlight the importance for traumatised patients to recall and put into words their experience in order to overcome it.[127] Thus, it is interesting to notice how the characters of Foer's novel have difficulties in communicating with one another, especially about their traumata. Significantly, Grandma Schell manifests an interest in communicating, for example in her desire to master the English language.[128] However, she decides to abandon her native language, German, completely, which conveys a loss of her identity and a way to forget her past.[129] Most notably, Grandpa Schell has loss his ability to speak due to his trauma, which mirrors the idea in trauma theory that, although a crucial step towards recovery, trauma sometimes resists the possibility to be narrated.[130] His inability to communicate his real feelings is also depicted in the novel when he calls Grandma and tries to convey his message via an enciphered conversation, "'Hello?' I knew it was her, the voice had changed but the breath was the same, the spaces between the words were the same, I pressed '4, 3, 5, 5, 6,' she said, 'Hello?' I asked, '4, 7, 4, 8, 7, 3, 2, 5, 5, 9, 9, 6, 8?'" (EL&IC, p. 269) As Uytterschout suggests, the following pages consist of a series of numbers (Figure 2.5) in which Thomas is trying to tell his story to his wife but is inhibited and too overpowered to put his feel-

123 Vanderwees, "Photographs of Falling Bodies and the Ethics of Vulnerability in Jonathan Safran Foer's *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close*".
124 Ibid.
125 Ibid., p. 181.
126 Ibid., p. 183.
127 Forter, "Freud, Faulkner, Caruth: Trauma and the Politics of Literary Form".
128 Uytterschout, "Visualised Incomprehensibility of Trauma in Jonathan Safran Foer's *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close*".
129 Ibid.
130 Dowling, "The Human Hole: Problematic Representations of Trauma in Jonathan Safran Foer's *Everything Is Illuminated* and *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close*".

ing into a comprehensible communication.[131] Conversely, writing is from Thomas, Sr. the only way to convey his emotions; hence why he writes several letters to his son, he is creating a memoir, however that, too, becomes inadequate.[132] The pages are thus filled with so many words that they become indecipherable and turn into mere black pages (Figure 2.2). Secret conversations and revelations are also present in Oskar's narrative:

> As for the bracelet Mom wore to the funeral, what I did was I converted Dad's last voice message into Morse code, and I used sky-blue beads for silence, maroon beads for breaks between letters, violet beads for breaks between words, and long and short pieces of string between the beads for long and short beeps, which are actually called blips, I think, or something. Dad would have known. […] I made her other Morse code jewelry with Dad's messages – a necklace, an anklet, some dangly earrings, a tiara – but the bracelet was definitely the most beautiful, probably because it was the last, which made it the most precious. (EL&IC, pp. 35–36)

The hidden message in the pieces of jewellery suggests that Oskar is not verbally able to convey his feeling and admit the traumatic consequence of his father's messages, but probably wishes someone would "crack [the] code and unburden him of his terrible secret".[133] Thereupon, the novel possibly tries to accentuate how, oftentimes, words are not sufficient to express such emotionally charged events and experiences; thus, other medium need to be employed to minutely convey what one wants to express.

131 Uytterschout, "Visualised Incomprehensibility of Trauma in Jonathan Safran Foer's *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close*", p. 70.

132 Ingersoll, "One Boy's Passage, and His Nation's: Jonathan Safran Foer's *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close*".

133 Uytterschout, "Visualised Incomprehensibility of Trauma in Jonathan Safran Foer's *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close*", p. 71.

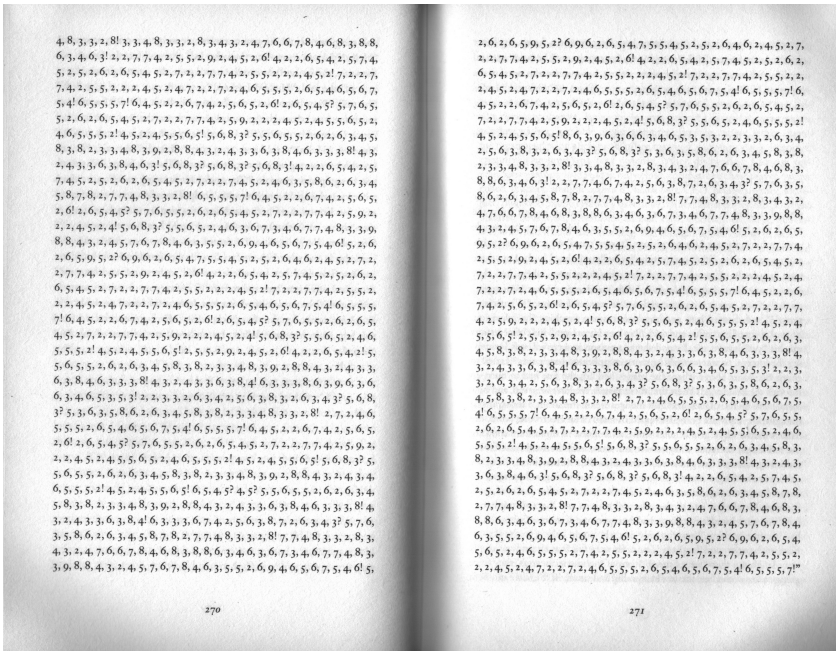

Figure 2.5. Safran Foer, *Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close*, pp. 270-271.

3 Global Resonance: The Trauma of 9/11 in *Saturday*

3.1 *Ian McEwan*

Ian Russell McEwan was born on 21 June 1948 in the military town of Aldershot in Hampshire, England. McEwan's mother, Rose, lived in Aldershot and her first husband, with whom she already had two children, had died during the Second World War. After the war, she married David McEwan, a Scottish sergeant major in the British Army. McEwan's childhood was spent on British military bases in England, and then in Singapore and Libya. It was in Libya that McEwan claims to have developed his first opinions on the power of history and politics. His working-class upbringing was revealed to be an important component in his growth as a writer.[1] From 1967 to 1970 he studied English and French at the University of Sussex. After graduating from Sussex, he began his M.A. degree at the University of East Anglia, which offered him the possibility of submitting short works of fiction, similarly to a creative writing course carried out the universities in the U.S. He was the first student in the course and was taught and mentored by authors Malcolm Bradbury and Angus Wilson.

In 1975, he published his first collection of short stories in *First Love, Last Rites*, which earned him the Somerset Maugham Award in 1976. Another collection, *In between the Sheets* (1978) revealed his interest in shocking and macabre writing. His first novel, *The Cement Garden* (1978), is the story of four orphaned siblings living alone after the death of both parents. To avoid being separated and taken into England's care system, they bury their mother in their basement and cover her in cement. Then, they attempt to carry on as normal a life as possible. It is a tale of lost innocence that focuses on the interiority of its characters. Moreover, it is a fictional work that

1 Head, *Ian McEwan*.

portrays regression rather than growth and gives a commentary on England's society at large.[2] Although McEwan was critically admired, he was condemned for his perverse themes, which gained him the nickname "Ian Macabre".[3] *The Cement Garden* was followed by *The Comfort of Strangers* (1981), shortlisted for the Booker Prize for Fiction; set in Venice it can be seen as "an attempt to rewrite the gothic novel".[4] According to Sebastian Groes, McEwan's early novels "show traces of a dissatisfaction with fiction-writing as a means of representing what seemed an unceasing military, technological and cultural crisis in modernity".[5] In 1983, McEwan along with influential writers such as Martin Amis, Kazuo Ishiguro, and Salman Rushdie was selected as one of the 20 Best Young British Novelists by *Granta*.[6] His next novel, *The Child in Time* (1987), is a story centred on the devastating consequences the abduction of a child produces in the life of two parents. In this novel, McEwan sets the scene in a fictional England controlled by "a conservative extremism".[7] *The Innocent* (1990), a love story set in Cold-War Berlin, anticipates early-twenty-first-century society sharing of images of missing children, which caused a collective but illusory fantasy concerning society's own lost innocence.[8] It was in the 1980s, following his interest in the Women's Movement, that McEwan shaped his writing increasingly focusing on his interest in feminist themes.[9] Indeed, in his play *The Imitation Game* (1980) and oratorio *Or Shall We Die?* (1983) feminist concerns are enhanced.[10] Consequently, McEwan's female characters are frequently portrayed as the strongest characters. Slay considers Julie in *The Cement Garden*, Julie in *The Child in Time*, and Maria in *The Innocent* and highlights how they are portrayed as the dominant figures within their relationships.[11] Moreover, the male-female relationship is frequently the focus of his works; in this early fiction McEwan depicts repulsive characters and their brutal actions. However, there is a deliberate attempt to shock readers by forcing them to look directly into the horrors of contemporary society.[12] Nonetheless, both *The Innocent* and *Black Dogs* (1992) portray abhorrent events although they show a more

2 Malcolm, *Understanding Ian McEwan*.
3 Seaboyer, "Ian McEwan: Contemporary Realism and the Novel of Ideas".
4 Ibid., p. 10.
5 Groes, "Ian McEwan and the Modernist Consciousness of the City in *Saturday*".
6 Slay, *Ian McEwan*.
7 Ibid., p. 8.
8 Groes, *Ian McEwan: Contemporary Critical Perspectives, 2nd Edition*.
9 Malcolm, *Understanding Ian McEwan*.
10 Ibid.
11 Slay, *Ian McEwan*.
12 Ibid.

benevolent vision of the world.[13] *Enduring Love* (1997) and *Amsterdam* (1998), which were awarded the Booker Prize for Fiction, depict McEwan's return to psychological fiction and unsettling worlds. In the early 2000s, McEwan published *Atonement* (2001), shortlisted for the Booker Prize for Fiction and the Whitbread Novel Award, and winner of the W. H. Smith Literary Award; *Saturday* (2005), which is set on 15 February 2003, during the demonstration taking place around the world against the United States' 2003 invasion of Iraq. His novel *On Chesil Beach* (2007), won the British Book Awards Book of the Year and Author of the Year Awards. In the 2010s, several novels were published: *Solar* (2010), a satirical novel which focuses on climate change; *Sweet Tooth* (2012); *The Children Act* (2014); *Nutshell* (2016). Recently, he published *Machines Like Me* (2019) and *Lessons* (2022).

3.1.1 Political Consciousness

With regards to McEwan's fiction critics have consistently appreciated his sharp, imaginative prose and his depictions of contemporary society. McEwan has consistently been, throughout his career, politically conscious and has been vocal in meticulously depicting British society.[14] This political consciousness is said to have stemmed from his experience of the 1956 Suez crisis, which he witnessed while living in Libya and which demonstrated the decline of Great Britain as a world power.[15] Moreover, McEwan's life has been affected by a variety of social and political changes: "fading colonialism; the dissolution of the British class structure; educational reform; the transformation of family life; and the second wave of feminism."[16] Accordingly, these significant changes influenced McEwan's fiction. He is insistent that the novel possesses the capacity to engage with politics.[17] For instance, in *The Child of Time* McEwan offers a denunciation of the Conservative Party and the political ideologies of 1980s Britain. In *The Innocent*, he carefully reconstructs the political and historical frame of the 1950s Cold War world. Likewise, in *Black Dogs* McEwan offers a commentary on the aftermath of the Second World War, Poland in 1981, and the fall of the Berlin Wall. His social and political commentary continues throughout his fiction: *Amsterdam* is a satire on society and *Saturday* a portrayal of twenty-first-century society. Essentially, he is able to capture "the complex political prob-

13 Malcolm, *Understanding Ian McEwan*.
14 Ibid.
15 Head, *Ian McEwan*.
16 Ibid., p. 5.
17 Ibid.

lems in the noughties".[18] In his recent fiction, he has commented on the United Kingdom's Brexit campaign and on the win that led the U.K. to leave the European Union. As he stated in his article for *The Guardian*, "Britain is changed utterly. Unless this summer is just a bad dream".[19] Subsequently, in 2019 McEwan published *Cockroach* a satirical novella on the outcome of Brexit through a Kafka-inspired metamorphosis.[20]

3.1.2 The Representation of Social Classes and the Importance of Relationships

Given McEwan's interest in portraying British society, it is important to mention his habit of including social classes and he frequently portrays class conflicts in his novels. Significantly, his own personal experience allowed him to speak "of a dislocated generation, for whom social change and, in particular, the demise of class as traditionally understood, was happening more rapidly than could be fully registered in the novel".[21] In fact, McEwan's generation had witnessed the decline of the Welfare State and the Thatcherian focus on individualism and self-gain.[22] Therefore, in McEwan's novels social stratification and its consequential conflicts are depicted; for instance, *The Cement Garden* shows a dysfunctional, lower-class family and their lack of engagement with society. *Atonement* depicts class dependency by showing how Robbie Turner, the housekeeper's son, is obtaining his college education at Cambridge through the funding of Jack Tallis, and how it is taken away when the events of the novel unfold. Once again, in *Saturday* McEwan implicitly discusses the problem of class and social inequity through the characters of Baxter and Henry Perowne.

Additionally, critics have observed how one of McEwan's primary concerns are human relationships. McEwan himself explains that he is fascinated by inspecting people's behaviours with their children.[23] Consequently, he examines the interpersonal relationship between brother and sister, father and child, lover and lover, and husband and wife in the majority of his novels.[24] As Slay comments: "in McEwan's fiction, then, relationships are recognized as the necessary refuge in a dehumanizing world."[25] Relationships that at first glance

18 Groes, *Ian McEwan: Contemporary Critical Perspectives, 2nd Edition*, p. 11.
19 McEwan, *Britain is Changed Utterly. Unless this Summer is Just a Bad Dream*.
20 Shrimsley, *The Cockroach by Ian McEwan - Cathartic but Tin-Eared Brexit Satire*.
21 Head, *Ian McEwan*, p. 9.
22 Ibid.
23 Slay, *Ian McEwan*.
24 Ibid.
25 Ibid., p. 6.

seem bizarre and, in several cases, perverse, on closer inspection, become perfectly ordinary responses to the circumstances in which characters are immersed. In representing this "normality-within-the-abnormality"[26], McEwan challenges the precepts of societies in which these circumstances are not halted.[27] Therefore, McEwan tends to deconstruct familial relationships; for example, the violent husband-wife relationship in *The Comfort of Stranger*, the orphaned children in *The Cement Garden*, and Henry Perowne's father-children relationship in *Saturday*.

3.2 *An Analysis of Saturday*

In 2005, Ian McEwan published *Saturday*, a novel that contributed to the debates in the post-9/11 world, marked by global terrorism, cultural trauma, and global anxiety. The novel follows British neurosurgeon Henry Perowne on a day of his life, specifically on 15 February 2003. On this day in London, where Henry lives, there is a large demonstration against the imminent invasion of Iraq, brought about by the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon on 11 September 2001.

Earlier in the morning of February 15th, Henry sees a burning aircraft descending toward Heathrow, and thinks it is another terrorist attack. The episode is revealed to be an accident, not a terrorist attack, but it nonetheless sets the novel's atmosphere, a foreboding of what is going to happen in the life of the Perowne family. In the morning, Henry is on the way to his usual Saturday-morning-squash game when he is involved in a minor car accident with a thug, Baxter. Henry is able to escape without injury by telling Baxter that he can see that he suffers from Huntington's disease. Henry offers his opponent the hope of a non-existent treatment, which shifts the power dynamics of the encounter and brings humiliation to Baxter in front of his friends. Henry then carries on with his day, still feeling uneasy after the encounter with the thugs, plays a game of squash with Jay Strauss, his American colleague, and they discuss the impending war on the Middle East. He buys seafood for the evening's dinner with his children and father-in-law and then goes to the nursing home to visit his mother, who suffers from dementia. He is also able to go see his son's band play, go home and cook dinner. When the family is finally gathered for dinner, Rosalind, Henry's wife, returns from work but she has been followed by Baxter and one of his henchmen who force their way into the house. They threaten the family with knives,

26 Ibid., p. 8.
27 Ibid.

break the father-in-law's nose, and force Henry's daughter, Daisy, to undress, an action that reveals to the family that she is pregnant. The whole situation is extremely distressing and traumatic. Then Daisy recites Matthew Arnold's poem *Dover Beach* which fascinates Baxter enough to distract him. Perowne is able to lure him upstairs with the promise of more information on the treatment for Huntington's disease. Eventually, he and his son, Theo, throw Baxter down the stairs. The latter is taken away in an ambulance, and Henry is asked to operate on his brain. As the novel comes to an end, Perowne, back in his bedroom with his wife, foresees something happening in London and the day ends.

Upon publication *Saturday* was generally appreciated by the public, it won the James Tait Black Memorial Prize and was longlisted for the Booker Prize. Nonetheless, the reviews were contrasting. On the one hand, many reviewers condemned McEwan for recreating the common Western story with the privileged male hero facing violent lower-class opponents, eventually triumphing over them, and restoring order and stability.[28] According to Elizabeth Kowaleski Wallace "[McEwan] successfully captured an essential quality of the bourgeois, consumerist West".[29] On the other hand, other reviews, such as Michiko Kakutani's in *The New York Times*, praised the novel's incisive and critical examination of Western urban life in the early noughties[30], arguing that,

> "Mr. McEwan has not only produced one of the most powerful pieces of post-9/11 fiction yet published, but also fulfilled that very primal mission of the novel: to show how we – a privileged few of us, anyway – live today".[31]

3.2.1 Research and Intertextuality

In order to write the story of a British neurosurgeon, McEwan closely assisted real-life surgeon Neil Kitchen of the National Hospital for Neurology and Neurosurgery, in London. In the acknowledgements section of *Saturday*, McEwan writes that he "watch[ed] this gifted surgeon at work in the theatre over a period of two years, […] [who explained to him] the intricacies of his profession, and the brain, with its countless pathologies."[32] Indeed, to perfectly depict Henry Perowne's role as a neurosurgeon, McEwan carried out meticulous research on the topic of neurosurgery. In addition, he had neuroscientist Raymond Dolan read the typescript of *Saturday* in order to

28 Amiel-Houser, "The Ethics of Otherness in Ian McEwan's *Saturday*".
29 Wallace, "Postcolonial Melancholia in Ian McEwan's *Saturday*", p. 465.
30 Ibid.
31 Kakutani, *A Hero With 9/11 Peripheral Vision*.
32 Ibid.

have neurological suggestions and revisions.[33] McEwan's attention to details is impeccable, as "he vividly conveys craniotomies and laminectomies and discusses convincingly the risks of cerebral air emboli and the symptoms and surgery of pituitary tumours".[34]

Sebastian Groes points out how McEwan employed three different types of intertextual references: "first, direct citation and the borrowing of 'voice'; second, the construction of parallels; and, third, echo and allusion".[35] Thus, the text offers an abundance of intertextual references: to literary personality, Sophocles, Shakespeare, William Blake, Mary Shelley, Jane Austen, Charlotte Brontë, Dicken, Darwin, George Eliot, Kafka, Saul Bellow, Matthew Arnold, James Joyce, and many others. McEwan also references music, citing Wagner, Beethoven, Schubert, Eric Clapton, and John Lee Hooker.

To art by mentioning Howard Hodgkin, Cézanne and Mondrian. Notably, in several reviews, *Saturday* has been equated to Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925). For instance, Kakutani writes,

> The real ghost in this novel's machinery [...] [is] Virginia Woolf, who pioneered the lambent, stream-of-consciousness narrative that Mr. McEwan uses so adroitly in these pages. In fact, *Saturday* reads like an up-to-the-moment, post-9/11 variation on Woolf's classic 1925 novel *Mrs. Dalloway*.[36]

Indeed, both novels follow a day in the life of an upper-middle-class protagonist who lives in London. Moreover, both Woolf and McEwan's works are located in a historical period that was affected by a historical violent event, respectively the First World War and the 9/11 terrorist attacks.[37] Therefore, the novels alike deal with individual and cultural trauma. As Karen DeMeester's interpretation of *Mrs. Dalloway* highlights, that is a text that attempts to represent the loss of the traditional value system following a historical trauma[38], McEwan's *Saturday* appears to perfectly fit such a description. Furthermore, the novels share the unwinding of events happening in a single day, the urban wanderings, the preparations for a party, the unexpected visitor, the threat of mental illness, the imminence of death, and the city of London.[39] For instance, the following passage echoes *Mrs. Dalloway*'s opening, when Clarissa steps out into the June day and recalls some moments in her youth:

> As he steps outside and turns from closing the door, he hears the squeal of seagulls come inland for the city's good pickings. The sun is low and

33 Ibid.
34 Pereira, "Saturday".
35 Groes, "Ian McEwan and the Modernist Consciousness of the City in *Saturday*".
36 Kakutani, *A Hero With 9/11 Peripheral Vision*.
37 Michael Cornier, "Writing Fiction in the Post-9/11 World: Ian McEwan's *Saturday*".
38 Ibid.
39 Starck, "The Matter of Literary Memory: Virginia Woolf's Mrs. *Dalloway* and Ian McEwan's *Saturday*".

> only one half of the square – his half – is in full sunlight. He walks away from the square along blinding moist pavement, surprised by the freshness of the day. The air tastes almost clean. He has an impression of striding along a natural surface, along some coastal wilderness, on a smooth slab of basalt causeway he vaguely recalls from a childhood holiday. It must be the cry of the gulls bringing it back. He can remember the taste of spray off a turbulent blue-green sea, and as he reaches Warren Street he reminds himself that he mustn't forget the fishmonger's.[40]

Additionally, both texts follow a day in the life of a person in order to explore wider social, cultural, and political issues. In *Mrs. Dolloway*, Peter Walsh proclaims his worry about the state of the world.[41] Likewise, in *Saturday* Perowne expresses his own worry: "it is in fact the state of the world that troubled him most" (S, p. 80). Therefore, the interrelation between the private and public sphere in McEwan's novel is arguably, directly, inspired by Woolf's novel. Furthermore, Groes also noticed a homage to Franz Kafka, whose work he describes as "instrumental in shaping McEwan's fiction".[42] Indeed, Kafka's *The Metamorphosis* is gifted to Daisy Perowne by John Grammaticus and Daisy later gives it to Henry Perowne:

> He gave her Kafka's 'Metamorphosis', which he said was ideal for a thirteen-year-old girl. She raced through this domestic fairy story and demanded her parents read it too. […] Perowne, by nature ill-disposed towards a tale of impossible transformation, conceded that by the end he was intrigued – he wouldn't have put it higher than that. He liked the unthinking cruelty of that sister on the final page, riding the tram with her parents to the last stop, stretching her young limbs, ready to begin a sensual life. A transformation he could believe in. (S, p. 113)

Groes emphasises the similarity between *Saturday* and *The Metamorphosis*; in particular, in the description of the act of waking up and going to the window.[43] Lastly, *Saturday* echoes James Joyce's *Ulysses* (1920) as the events take place in a single day, and also in the similarities of the final lines of the novel. The final lines of Joyce's "The Dead" resonates in Perowne's thoughts as he says, "faintly, falling: this day's over" (S, p. 279).

3.2.2 Characters

The protagonist of *Saturday* is Henry Perowne, a 48-year-old neurosurgeon living in Fitzroy Square, London. He is extremely confident, and his description oozes privileged self-esteem:

40 McEwan, *Saturday*; henceforth, all quotations are taken from this edition and will be cited as S.
41 Groes, *Ian McEwan: Contemporary Critical Perspectives, 2nd Edition*.
42 Groes, "Ian McEwan and the Modernist Consciousness of the City in *Saturday*", p. 103.
43 Ibid.

> They are the hands of a tall, sinewy man on whom recent years have added a little weight and poise. […] When he exerts himself to straighten his back, he stands at six feet two. His slight stoop gives him an apologetic look which many patients take as part of his charm. […] He's healthy, more or less […], the muscles – the pecs, the abs – though modest, keep a reasonable definition, especially when the overhead lamp is off and light falls from the side. He is not done yet. His head hair, though thinning, is still reddish brown. (S, p. 20)

Moreover, Henry is talented in his job and loves what he does:

> operating never wearies him – once busy within the enclosed world of his firm, the theatre and its ordered procedures, and absorbed by the vivid foreshortening of the operating microscope as he follows a corridor to a desired site, he experiences a superhuman capacity, more like a craving, for work. (S, p. 11)

He loves his wife, Rosalind, with whom he still has an active sexual life, and has a good relationship with his children, Theo and Daisy. Henry Perowne is "skilled and affluent […] married to a skilled and affluent lawyer and blessed with two accomplished and affectionate children successfully launching themselves in careers as a poet and a jazz musician".[44] Hence, Perowne has everything a man could ask for. In his 2007 interview with David Lynn, McEwan admitted to having modelled Henry off himself, "I gave him my house; I gave him little bits of my children, of my wife. I gave him in its entirety, a relationship with my mother, who also suffered from a neurodegenerative disease".[45]

As he wakes up on the morning of February 15th, he witnesses a burning plane flying towards Heathrow airport. His first reaction is not that of fear, it is of "eagerness and curiosity" (S, 13) thinking it is a meteor flying in the London sky; however, once he realises that it is, in fact, an airplane he is "horrified" (S, 14). Yet, his description of events is not horrified, on the contrary, he calmly describes, almost scientifically, the event with only the interference of personal memories. There is a general impression that he is deeply emotionally detached from the incident.

The Perowne family includes Theo, an eighteen-year-old aspiring musician and talented guitarist, Daisy, who graduated from Oxford and is now a soon-to-be-published poet, and John Grammaticus, Henry's father-in-law who influenced Daisy's literary development. Theo is a talented young man, described as an artsy type who shines on stage:

44 Ferguson, "The Way We Love Now: Ian McEwan, Saturday, and Personal Affection in the Information Age", p. 45.

45 Lynn and McEwan, "A Conversation with Ian McEwan", p. 39.

> Theo is the sort of guitarist who plays in an open-eyed trance, without moving his body or ever glancing down at his hands. […] He carries himself on stage as he does in conversation, quietly, formally, protecting his privacy within a shell of friendly politeness. (S, p. 30)

Daisy, also an artist, writes poetry and is having her first collection of poems published; she is described as "sensuous, intellectual [...], small-boned, pale and correct. […] [the] little girl, slipping away from [Perowne] into efficient Parisian womanhood, [and] expecting her first volume of poems to be published in May" (S, p. 49).

Henry's relationship with his children is arguably positive, he has friendly conversations with Theo, and Daisy introduces him to the literary world by giving him a reading list to go through. Nonetheless, Henry and Daisy take different stances on the matter of the upcoming war against Iraq, which sparks a harsh argument among them. The family dynamics play a vital role in Perowne's life. Their relationship is marked by ritual and familiarity which contrast with the intruders of the novel. For instance, when Daisy arrives at the dinner their greetings are ceremonial:

> As they embrace, he makes a low, sighing, growling noise, the way he used to greet her when she was five. […] [D]uring their embrace she half rubbed, half patted his back, a familiar maternal gesture of hers. Even when she was five she liked to mother him. (S, pp. 182–183)

Eventually, when the family's traumatic encounter with Baxter comes to an end, the familial dynamics gain new strength: the collaboration between Theo and Henry outplays Baxter, the truth about Daisy's pregnancy brings them all closer, and the last the love-making scene between Henry and Rosalind highlights their strong bond.

As his day in London unfolds, Perowne is on his way to play a game of squash with Jay Strauss, his consultant anaesthetist, a physically intimidating American, when he encounters the villain of the story, Baxter, the perfect foil to Henry's upper-middle-class persona. Baxter is a "fidgety, small-faced young man" (S, p. 87) in his mid-twenties and a lower-class thug. The two meet in a minor car accident after Henry has taken a shortcut to avoid the anti-war manifestation. The meeting immediately starts to become intense, as Perowne notices "[Baxter] gives an impression of fretful impatience, of destructive energy waiting to be released" (S, p. 88). Indeed, Baxter and his two thug friends threaten and almost beat Perowne. However, Henry realises that Baxter suffers from Huntington's disease, a neurological condition that causes the brain to deteriorate: "Perowne's attention, his professional regard, settles once again on Baxter's right hand. It isn't simply a tremor, it's a fidgety restlessness implicating practically every muscle" (S, p. 90). He is a dangerous threat due to his mental issues as well as his explosive temper:

> Baxter is acting while he still can, for he must know what's in store for him. Over the coming months and years the athetosis, those involuntary, uncontrolled movements, and the chorea – the helpless jitters, the grimacing, the jerky raising of the shoulders and flexing of fingers and toes – will overwhelm him, render him too absurd for the street. (S, p. 211)

This party of characters is thus varied but also representative and symbolic of the social, cultural, and political context of the novel.

3.2.3 The Structure

The novel is framed by an epigraph from Saul Bellow's *Herzog* (1964) and divided into five sections, each section is subdivided into subchapters marked by spacing. In addition, the sections either begin or end with a spatial movement. Moreover, as previously stated, the novel mirrors *Mrs. Dalloway*'s and follows Henry Perowne on a single Saturday in his life. Accordingly, McEwan created a circular narrative, that opens and ends in extremely similar circumstances in the Perownes household.

Firstly, the novel opens with an epigraph from *Herzog*, a novel which has been considered a riposte to Joyce's *Ulysses*.[46] This epigraph might suggest McEwan's cosmopolitan agenda for the novel.[47]

> Well, for instance, what it means to be a man. In a city. In a century. In transition. In a mass. Transformed by science. Under organized power. Subject to tremendous controls. In a condition caused by mechanization. After the late failure of radical hopes. (S, p. xi)

This passage anticipates what happens in *Saturday*, it contextualises Henry's feeling of uneasiness and dislocation. By including this epigraph, McEwan "is attempting to capture a moment in time, a moment of being and to represent a thinking human mind during that moment".[48] Moreover, both novels deal with the century in which they are set, with its technological advancement and disillusionment with the governments' choices; these themes are explored by both Herzog and Henry as they reflect on the world that surrounds them. Further, similarly to McEwan, Bellow captures the class distinction of the poor and the elite.[49] Finally, Bellow's words not only anticipate Henry Perowne's reflection about himself and his experiences but contributes to the reading *Saturday* as the result of a literary and cultural journey.[50]

46 Groes, "Ian McEwan and the Modernist Consciousness of the City in *Saturday*".
47 Ross, "On a Darkling Planet: Ian McEwan's *Saturday* and the Condition of England".
48 Green, "Consciousness and Ian McEwan's *Saturday*: "What Henry Knows"", p. 60.
49 McEwan, *Master of the Universe*.
50 Green, "Consciousness and Ian McEwan's *Saturday*: "What Henry Knows"".

Given the framing of the epigraph, it is important to explore the division and circular layout of the narrative. The first section begins with Henry Perowne awakening at 3 a.m. in his house, watching the city out of his window and reminiscing about his work as a neurosurgeon. He witnesses the burning plane headed toward Heathrow and consequently thinks it could be a terrorist attack. As the morning comes Henry bids goodbye to his wife who is going to work. The second section opens with Henry waking up once again, ready to start his usual Saturday-morning routine. After he is off in his car to his squash game with Jay Strauss. On his way, he is met with a closed-off street due to the anti-Iraq War manifestation; a policeman lets him go through and at that point, he has the minor car accident with Baxter. Although the encounter is distressing for Henry, once he is able to escape, he carries on with his day. In the second section of the novel, he joins Jay for the game and, still disoriented by the events of the morning, he loses.

In the third section, Henry is driving through London, looking out his car windows and meditating on what he sees. He visits his mother in the nursing home and then goes to the market to buy the ingredients for the family dinner. While home he senses someone following him but carries on, nonetheless. Lastly, he goes to see his son Theo play in an auditorium and is mesmerised by the music. As section four begins, the reader has started to feel the tension building up to an event that is yet unknown. Henry has just arrived home and is ready to cook dinner. Then, Daisy arrives, and they have a swift quarrel about their opinions on the war until John Grammaticus, the grandfather, arrives. Henry is starting to feel calmer, and the narrator states "whatever's been troubling him is benignly resolved" (S, 201). A few moments later, as they open the front door for Rosalind, the climax of the novel unfolds. Indeed, Baxter's arrival at the Perownes' house plunges the family into a hectic situation and the reader is kept on edge. The last paragraph of this fourth section ends with Baxter being taken to the hospital in the ambulance.

The last section of the novel begins with the family questioning Henry on his intention to operate on Baxter. He eventually walks to the hospital and operates on him. After taking care of Baxter's brain, Henry returns home and asks Rosalind not to press charges due to the degenerative disease that plagues their intruder. The novel ends as it began, closing the circle, Henry looks at the city out of his bedroom's window prospecting a terrorist attack on London, remembering that the war on Iraq awaits to begin, and goes to sleep.

3.2.4 The Setting

The novel is set in London, a city that has inspired poetry, urban legends, famous films, and literary fiction. From literary classics such as Dickens' *Oliver Twist* (1837) to iconic films such as *Notting Hill* (1999). Accordingly, in numerous works by McEwan, London has frequently played a significant role, becoming the setting where post-imperial Britain reinvented itself in the newly globalised world ruled by America, on both an economic and cultural level.[51] In *Saturday* the topographical descriptions of London are meticulous and distinct, and McEwan's familiarity with the city is strongly emphasised. As Groes highlights McEwan used his own home as the template for the Perownes' abode.[52] The descriptions of the city are indeed extremely vivid and "a reader who knows London well or who uses a city map can trace the characters' movement in the city traffic, which is so crucially affected by the historic protest campaign against the war in Iraq".[53] Thus, McEwan's London is a distinctive characteristic of the novel; indeed, the novel opens with Henry Perowne admiring the London skyline from his home in Fitzrovia,

> The streetlamp glare hasn't quite obliterated all the stars; above the Regency façade on the other side of the square hang remnants of constellations in the southern sky. That particular façade is a reconstruction, a pastiche – wartime Fitzrovia took some hits from the Luftwaffe – and right behind is the Post Office Tower, municipal and seedy by day, but at night, half-concealed and decently illuminated, a valiant memorial to more optimistic days.[54]

Arguably, Henry is amazed by how adaptable the city is to the events it endured; Fitzroy Square still stands as it did when it was first built, and the only difference is the advancement of technology visible in the skyline. As several analyses seem to point out "London appears to be a dynamic equilibrium, complexly interconnected, barely sustainable, yet nevertheless strangely resilient".[55] Furthermore, to acknowledge the role of the city, McEwan "restores the traditional image of the city as the seat of civilization and culture, and of light and learning, the city also retains its qualities as a place of darkness".[56] The importance of the city is further clear when looking at

51 Groes, "Beyond the Responsibility of Place: Ian McEwan's Londons".
52 Groes, "Ian McEwan and the Modernist Consciousness of the City in *Saturday*", p. 101.
53 Koron, "Narrative Space in Ian McEwan's *Saturday*: A Narratological Perspective".
54 Ibid., p. 4.
55 Root, "A Melodiousness at Odds with Pessimism: Ian McEwan's *Saturday*", p. 66.
56 Groes, "Ian McEwan and the Modernist Consciousness of the City in *Saturday*", pp. 102–103.

the cover of the book which features a house in Fitzrovia, the London neighbourhood where the Perownes live, with the Post Office Tower in the background. What McEwan performs in *Saturday* is setting the narrative in London and interconnecting the city with the metaphors of the novel. In his study of McEwan's portrayal of London, Groes highlights how the author goes back to the image of the "Darkest London"[57] of his earliest works. This Darkest London is "a place whose darkness is generated by the oppression of the city's underclass, and in response they invoke the mythical dimensions of poetry and literature to protest against their plight".[58] Such description is relevant to *Saturday* and its representation of the class conflict between upper-middle-class Henry Perowne and lower-class Baxter. Moreover, the city serves as a projection of the protagonist's own consciousness; in fact, as Henry moves across the city's neighbourhoods, he contemplates his own political and scientific interrogations. Nonetheless, when looking at the city, Henry has always a looming feeling that something awaits to happen. This is evident at the beginning of the novel when he thinks the plane is part of a terrorist attack, and at the end when he returns once again to look out of the window:

> [h]e turns back to the window. London, his small part of it, lies wide open, impossible to defend, waiting for its bomb, like a hundred other cities. Rush hour will be a convenient time. It might resemble the Paddington crash – twisted rails, buckled, upraised commuter coaches, stretchers handed out through broken windows, the hospital's Emergency Plan in action. (S, p. 276)

Therefore, London plays a fundamental role in the novel and creates new meanings and facets to the narrative.

3.2.5 The Genre

Saturday is a rich and profound novel; thus, it is difficult to categorise it in a single genre. It could be stated that it is an example of "neuronarrative" or "neuronovel", according to the definitions given respectively by Gary Johnson and Marco Roth. Indeed, the neuronovel is "a new strain within the Anglo-American novel that transforms the modernist novel of consciousness into a text wherein the mind becomes the brain".[59] Moreover, to some scholars, the novel is coherent with the tradition of the Condition of England novel.

57 Groes, "Ian McEwan and the Modernist Consciousness of the City in *Saturday*", p. 146.
58 Ibid.
59 Starck, "The Matter of Literary Memory: Virginia Woolf's Mrs. *Dalloway* and Ian McEwan's *Saturday*", p. 328.

Michael L. Ross thus identifies *Saturday* as an example of such novels, whose notable instances are found in Elizabeth Gaskell's *North and South* (1855) and Charles Dickens's *Hard Times* (1854), and which are characterised by their focus on the social movements of their time and "their action often involves weighty public events".[60] Indeed, such elements are depicted in McEwan's work, for instance, the traumatic event of 9/11 that looms on the protagonist's mind and, possibly, the conflict of two social classes represented by Perowne and Baxter. Consequently, scholars have equated McEwan's work in *Saturday* to that of late realist writers such as George Gissing.[61]

In the novel, McEwan employs a particular form of realist writing to which he became accustomed to while writing his earlier novels, namely psychological realism.[62] As Seaboyer argues, McEwan's works are concerned both with psychological realism and traditional realism:

> [psychological realism is] […] intensely focused explorations of individuals and relationships within a claustrophobic private sphere […]. But [McEwan] begins a transition towards a traditional realism in which the private sphere is not only mirrored in that of the public but is a way of addressing broader social and political issues.[63]

Both statements can be applied to *Saturday* since it focuses on the private sphere of the Perowne, but simultaneously addresses the social and political atmosphere of the post-9/11 world, by setting the novel on the day of the public anti-Iraq War manifestation. Accordingly, Michiko Kakutani categorised it in the new genre of post-9/11 fiction. Ron Charles describes it as "a chilling representation of what it means to live in an era transformed by 9/11".[64]

3.2.6 The Writing Style

Given the intertwining of genres, it is important to analyse the writing style employed by McEwan which gives the novel its original and inventive quality. An important and crucial element of *Saturday* is its narrator. The novel employs a neutral third-person point of view that relates to Perowne's thoughts and actions.[65] Thus the

60 Ross, "On a Darkling Planet: Ian McEwan's *Saturday* and the Condition of England", p. 75.
61 Ryle, "Anosognosia, or the Political Unconscious: Limits of Vision in Ian McEwan's *Saturday*".
62 Seaboyer, "Ian McEwan: Contemporary Realism and the Novel of Ideas".
63 Ibid., p. 24.
64 Charles, *How 9/11 Altered the Fiction Landscape in 13 Novels*.
65 Ryle, "Anosognosia, or the Political Unconscious: Limits of Vision in Ian McEwan's *Saturday*".

novel is mostly focused on the internal narration, rather than on the conversations between characters. However, the use of the third person could also be perceived as strategic, as it allows one to subtly criticises Perowne's behaviour.[66] According to Molly Clark Hillard, "the entire third-person narration should be re-read ironically".[67] Nonetheless, in *Saturday* the central intelligence is represented by Henry Perowne, whose consciousness is the centre.[68] By following the Woolfian aspect of the novel, McEwan addresses a representation of consciousness, thus as Jane Thrailkill suggests that:

> in the hands of Ian McEwan the psychological novel expands into the neurological novel: a postmodern work of realist fiction that, focalized through an intelligent though at times obtuse character, is concerned with depicting how an embodied, socially embedded, story-loving consciousness shapes everyday human acts of perception.[69]

Additionally, the free indirect speech is able to capture Henry's consciousness and his habit of reflecting on the events of his life. This self-reflexive manner is presented as he calculates his moves, argues, and questions himself on his own motives. For instance, when Baxter breaks into his house he continues to think about his next moves to stop the intruder:

> Perowne needs a plan, and his thoughts are too quick, too profuse […]. Henry hesitates for a moment on the threshold, hoping to see something he might use. The desk lamps have heavy bases, but their tangled wires will restrict him. On a bookshelf is a stone figurine he would have to go on tiptoe to reach. (S, p. 226)

At the same time, as readers follow Perowne's thought process, the third-person narrator reminds them that they are in fact looking and lurking inside of his mind.[70] Hence, the narrator both presents Perowne's consciousness from the inside, but also offers a commentary about him. Accordingly, the reader is made aware that the novel is a "very self-aware work of literature it does not hide that its protagonist is a literary creation, a pawn within the wider concept of the novel".[71] For instance, in the text, the narrator comments:

> A habitual observer of his own moods, he wonders about this sustained, distorting euphoria. Perhaps down at the molecular level there's been a chemical accident while he slept - something like a spilled tray of drinks,

66 Michael Cornier, "Writing Fiction in the Post-9/11 World: Ian McEwan's *Saturday*".
67 Ibid., p. 28.
68 Starck, "The Matter of Literary Memory: Virginia Woolf's Mrs. *Dalloway* and Ian McEwan's *Saturday*".
69 Thrailkill, "Ian McEwan's Neurological Novel", p. 176.
70 Groes, "Beyond the Responsibility of Place: Ian McEwan's Londons".
71 Campana, "Chapter 4. Invasion. Religion, War, and the Politics of Narration: Ian McEwan's *Saturday* (2005)", p. 191.

> prompting dopamine-like receptors to initiate a kindly cascade of intracellular events; or it's the prospect of a Saturday, or the paradoxical consequence of extreme tiredness. (S, p. 5)

Moreover, as the narrator states in the novel, McEwan performs a mode of writing called "mentalese", which is "[h]ardly a language, more a matrix of shifting patterns, consolidating and compressing meaning in fractions of a second, and blending it inseparably with its distinctive emotional hue, which itself is rather like a colour" (S, p. 81). This technique brings the novel close to the genre of the novel of ideas.[72]

Cornier Michael argues that McEwan employs narrative strategies borrowed from the tradition of women's fiction and early twentieth modernism to "explore the traumatic effects of [...] violence on the individual and cultural psyche".[73] The novel is written in the present tense, which in Alexandra Campana's opinion "stresses the actuality of its political context".[74] Furthermore, as Knapp argues, McEwan's sentences are intricate and extremely detailed.[75] They overflow with details of the surroundings and are enriched by Perowne's consciousness:

> The overfull litter baskets suggest abundance rather than squalor; the vacant benches set around the circular gardens look benignly expectant of their daily traffic – cheerful lunchtime office crowds, the solemn, studious boys from the Indian hostel, lovers in quiet raptures or crisis, the crepuscular drug dealers, the ruined old lady with her wild, haunting calls. (S, p. 5)

Such passages are characterised by an abundance of detail, and they enrich the text and are representative of McEwan's artist prose. Similarly, in Henry Perowne's neurosurgery operation McEwan's writing style is meticulous, and almost scientific, describing it for almost ten pages; as the following passage:

> Perowne is about to ask for the periostal elevator, but Emily is already placing it in his hands. He finds an area of exposed but undamaged skull, and with the elevator – a kind of scraper – harvests two long pieces of pericranium, the fibrous membrane that covers the bone. Rodney lifts the swab, and is about to lift also the Surgicel from the tear, but Perowne shakes his head. A clot might be already forming and he doesn't want to disturb it. He gently lays the strip of pericranium over the Surgicel, and adds a second layer of Surgicel and the second strip of pericranium, and places a new swab on top. Then Rodney's finger. Perowne rinses out the

72 Seaboyer, "Ian McEwan: Contemporary Realism and the Novel of Ideas".
73 Michael Cornier, "Writing Fiction in the Post-9/11 World: Ian McEwan's *Saturday*", p. 27.
74 Campana, "Chapter 4. Invasion. Religion, War, and the Politics of Narration: Ian McEwan's *Saturday* (2005)", p. 193.
75 Knapp, "Ian McEwan's *Saturday* and the Aesthetics of Prose".

> area again with saline and waits. The opaque milky bluish dura remains clear. The bleeding has stopped. (S, p. 253)

Neurosurgery is, indeed, one of the exceptionally detailed semantic domains of the novel; equally precise are the London streets, the squash court, the ingredient to the fish stew for the dinner party, and many more.[76] In addition, Knapp argues that the rhythm of the novel is created by the repetitions and internal movements, she states "repetitions […] contribute to the novel's sense of density, compression, and formal coherence".[77] Nevertheless, the rhythm of the novel includes a progressive build-up to the climax, and it is testified by the tension created throughout the narrative up to the moment of Baxter's break-in.

3.3 *Representing the Global Resonance of 9/11*

In the discourse of 9/11 and in the resonance this tremendous event had, it is important to consider the following words of Kristiaan Versluys, "9/11 is not exclusively an American tragedy, but a condition shared by all of the advanced nations".[78] Therefore, it is interesting that among novels of post-9/11 literature one of the most significant was written by a European such as Ian McEwan.[79] Indeed, *Saturday* subtly covers the discourse in the aftermath of September 11 by setting the novel on 15 February 2003, the day of the largest march of British history organised in protest of the imminent war against Iraq. Moreover, the location of the novel, namely London, and its geographical distance from the U.S. allows to unlock a different, in this case British, perspective of the events. Significantly, in *Saturday* McEwan employs strategies to deal with trauma by disguising it in the traumatic experiences of the Perownes.

3.3.1 The Shadows of 9/11

In *Saturday* the Perownes are attacked in the comfort of their house, and the novel conveys sentiments similar to those that were felt in the hours of the attacks: fear, disorientation, and anxiety. Critics such as Magali Cornier Michael have put forward the idea that Henry Perowne is the representative of the West, and Baxter is the representative of the fear of terrorism and terrorists themselves. The parallelism between 9/11 and the events in the Perowne household

76 Knapp, "Ian McEwan's *Saturday* and the Aesthetics of Prose".
77 Ibid., p. 129.
78 Versluys, "9/11 as a European Event: the Novels", p. 75.
79 Ibid.

is conceivably striking. As Cornier Michael asserts, "on the level of the novel, the home invasion functions as a sort of micro version of a large terrorist act".[80]

At the beginning of the novel Henry Perowne is introduced in god-like terms, "standing there in the darkness, he's materialised out of nothing, fully formed, unencumbered" (S, p. 1) and, as he watches the city beneath his London house window, "[two nurses] cross towards the far corner of the square, and with his advantage of height and in his curious mood, he not only watches them, but watches over them, supervising their progress with the remote possessiveness of a god" (S, p. 13). This sense of authority, which might mirror the power of the U.S., is firstly disrupted as Henry notices a burning shape in the sky. Perwone's reaction is subsequently mediated by the memories of the hijacked plane crashing into the twin towers in New York City[81]; he juxtaposes the two events by thinking, "it's already almost eighteen months since half the planet watched, and watched again the unseen captives driven through the sky to the slaughter […]" (S, p. 16). As Henry identifies the two events as similar, he highlights: "everyone agrees, airliners look different in the sky these days, predatory or doomed" (S, p. 13), which indicates the resonance that 9/11 had on people around the world. As the day carries on, the feeling of uneasiness persists, and a series of "9/11-like incidents"[82] occur one after the other. Furthermore, Henry is obviously the representative of a privileged part of society, he drives an expensive car, plays squash in a posh London club, and buys expensive food and champagne for the dinner party. Nonetheless, given these premises, Cornier Michael argues that "the novel as a whole depicts his elitism as symptomatic of the West's inability to understand global terrorism. Most often, Perowne seems content to wallow in the illusion that his elitist status will keep him safe".[83] *Saturday* portrays a member of the elite holding on to his domestic routine in order to feel safe and have some semblance of control over the events.[84] Thus, the novel conveys the feeling that what happened in the U.S. has penetrated the daily lives of everyone around the world, particularly in the West.

Conversely, Baxter, the lower-class, underprivileged character of the novel is set as a foil to Henry Perowne, and it is he who is threat-

80 Michael Cornier, "Writing Fiction in the Post-9/11 World: Ian McEwan's *Saturday*", p. 48.
81 Ibid., p. 37.
82 Versluys, "9/11 as a European Event: the Novels", p. 76.
83 Michael Cornier, "Writing Fiction in the Post-9/11 World: Ian McEwan's *Saturday*", p. 37.
84 Ibid.

ening Henry's world and safety. As previously mentioned, Baxter might represent the global terrorist force that troubled the U.S. The prejudices Perowne has towards Baxter are presented before they even meet as he sees three men "hurrying out of a lap-dancing club" (S, p. 79); thus, positioning Baxter in a category of potential criminals. Then, when the car accident takes place, the unequal social positions are remarked as Perowne dehumanises Baxter by attributing him animal characteristics.[85] Additionally, Henry asserts that "his car will never be the same again. It's ruinously altered, and so is his Saturday. He'll never make his game" (S, p. 82). Conceivably, the idea that Perowne's car, something he owns, will never be the same due to the actions of an unknown "other", might mirror the idea that, after the events of 9/11, and the destruction of one of the symbols of the U.S. hegemonic economic power, namely the World Trade Center, the Western world has been changed irreparably. Indeed, this feeling of change permeated the world after 9/11, for instance, *The Washington Post* cover title read "When Everything Changed" on the 10th anniversary of the attacks on 11 September 2011. Likewise, the *Orlando Sentinel* chose "9-11: A Day We Must Never Forget", which possibly mirrors Perowne's feelings that "that day [Saturday] is bound to be marked out from all the rest".[86] Moreover, it is possible to examine Baxter's invasion of the Perowne house as a facsimile of 9/11, an invading force that enters the apparently safe environment of a Western family. However, these events only superficially mirror the dominant narrative promoted by the Bush administration. As Cornier Michael argues, Perowne does admit to having a role in the home invasion.[87] Indeed, during the car accident, he had exploited his privileged and professional position to humiliate and overtake Baxter by diagnosing him with Huntington's disease:

> Perowne can't convince himself that molecules and faulty genes alone are terrorising his family and have broken his father-in-law's nose. Perowne himself is also responsible. He humiliated Baxter in the street in front of his sidekicks, and did so when he'd already guessed at his condition. Naturally, Baxter is here to rescue his reputation in front of a witness. (S, p. 210)

Possibly, this narrative in which the representative of the West has a role in the events that caused him trouble could explore a line of thought that was absent from the dominant narrative in other instances of post-9/11 literature.

85 Michael Cornier, "Writing Fiction in the Post-9/11 World: Ian McEwan's *Saturday*".
86 Ibid., p. 51.
87 Ibid.

3.3.2 The Media Spectacle

As described in previous chapters the role of the media has been incredibly impactful in the events of 9/11. Consequently, in *Saturday* the media plays a subtle but telling role. From the first very first moments after Henry Perowne sees the burning airplane in the sky he is reminded of the images he saw eighteen months prior, on 11 September 2001. Furthermore, the first thing he does is go downstairs "to turn on the radio" (S, p. 25); then, he turns on the television to see if the newscast is saying anything, but the media is silent. Eventually, Theo asks him if the event might mean something and Perowne replies "I don't know what I think […] Let's wait for the news" (S, p. 34). Subsequently,

> It's time for the news. Once again, the radio pulses, the synthesised bleeps, the sleepless anchor and his dependable jaw. And there it is, made real at last, the plane, askew on the runway, apparently intact, surrounded by firefighters still spraying foam, soldiers, police, flashing lights, and ambulances backed up and ready. (S, p. 35)

The remarkable element in this passage is the idea that the media, the news, was the one who made the event "real". Indeed, taking pictures during the events of 9/11 was "an attempt to make "real" what could barely comprehended".[88]

Groes argues that Henry's encounter with Baxter is mediated by "the narratives and discourses provided by the state, commerce and mass media"[89], which is attributable to Henry's observation that "this, as people like to say, is urban drama. A century of movies and half a century of television have rendered the matter insincere. It is pure artifice" (S, p. 86). Significantly, throughout the novel, there is a sense of the news media penetrating the entirety of Perowne's Saturday. After meeting Baxter, Henry goes to play squash with his colleague Jay Strauss, where a television is present, and he can see that there have been some developments about the burning plane:

> […] the silent TV behind him showing the same old footage of the cargo plane on the runway. But then, briefly, enticingly, two men with coats over their heads – surely the two pilots – in handcuffs being led towards a police van. They've been arrested. Something's happened. (S, p. 107)

At this point, Perwone "shifts position so the screen is no longer in view. Isn't it possible to enjoy an hour's recreation without this invasion, this infection from the public domain?" (S, p. 108); in this

88 Uytterschout, "Visualised Incomprehensibility of Trauma in Jonathan Safran Foer's *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close*", p. 65.

89 Groes, "Ian McEwan and the Modernist Consciousness of the City in *Saturday*", p. 113.

assertion, there is a clear understanding of the "pervasiveness of the media".[90] The whole experience is clearly mediated by the recollection of what happened on September 11, 2001. As Kaplan maintains the events of 9/11 were possibly the prime example of devastation that was experienced globally via digital technologies such as the Internet and mobile cell phones, as well as via television and radio.[91] Accordingly, Perowne reflects on this media influence when, moments after seeing the plane in the sky, he observes how the whole world "watched, and watched again" (S, p. 16) the catastrophe of the World Trade Center. Finally, McEwan masters the mode of mirroring the media coverage of 9/11 in *Saturday* by constantly updating the reader on the news about the burning plane. Hence, the media are wherever he goes: at a television shop next to his car; in the kitchen whilst he prepared dinner for the family party; at his mother's nursing house.

3.3.3 The London March Against the Iraq War

As it has already been established, *Saturday* takes place on 15 February 2003, the day millions of people marched in the streets of London, and around the world, to protest against the war against Iraq. In an interview on Channel 4 in 2013, Ian McEwan reports that the march was:

> a celebration of British eccentricity, it was rather joyous, inappropriately so […]. I remember being both with it […] [but] I was there [also] in bad faith in some respects and I did have some qualms too […]. Remember that a million of people were marching to perused governments not to topple a fascist dictator so it wasn't quite a simple matter.[92]

Furthermore, McEwan points out that the march although extremely heartfelt, with two million participants, was not a unanimous, national choice. According to other commentators, the majority of the people marching were not only against the war but utterly scared that it could lead to new, terrible consequences in their own country.[93] These sentiments are indeed portrayed in *Saturday* when Theo asks: "So their [the pilots of the burning plane] idea was to sort of join in today's demonstration" (S, p. 151), Henry answers "Yeah. They'd be making a point. Make war on an Arab nation and this is the kind of thing that's going to happen" (S, p. 151). Additionally, as Spahr points out, McEwan's novels seem to be extremely aware of the geopolitical

90 Michael Cornier, "Writing Fiction in the Post-9/11 World: Ian McEwan's *Saturday*", p. 31.
91 Ibid.
92 Channel 4 News, *Ian McEwan on the Iraq War, Ten Years On*.
93 StoptheWarCoalition, *We didn't stop the Iraq war, so was 15 February 2003 pointless?*

situation; he includes the paranoia and sense of insecurity that permeated Great Britain. In the novel the words "London, […] lies wide open, impossible to defend, waiting for its bomb, like a hundred other cities" (S, p. 276) were then brought to reality on 7 July 2005, also referred to as 7/7, with the London bombings.

Moreover, McEwan revealed he was present at the protest to collect material for his novel, *Saturday*. In the book, the march serves as a constant and omnipresent background to the plot. The anti-war protestors are presented as an obstacle to Henry's routine as they force him to change route and cause delays. Henry tends to favour the war mainly due to his interactions with his patient Miri Taleb, an Iraqi professor who had suffered several tortures at the hands of the Saddam Hussein regime and confided to Henry that

> Everyone hates it, […] 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. 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. (S, p. 64)

However, when he speaks to his American colleague, Jay Strauss, a strong supporter of the war, he finds himself leaning more towards the anti-war campaign,

> [Jay's] respect for socialised medicine or his love of children do not make him an ally of the peace cause. […] According to Jay, the matter is stark: how open societies deal with the new world situation will determine how open they remain. […] Iraq is a rotten state, a natural ally of terrorists, bound to cause mischief at some point and may as well be taken out now while the US military is feeling perky after Afghanistan. And by taken out, [Jay] insists he means liberated and democratised. The USA has to atone for its previous disastrous policies – at the very least it owes this to the Iraqi people. Whenever he talks to Jay, Henry finds himself tending towards the anti-war camp. (S, p. 100)

The protest creates conflicts in the family's relationships as well. On the one hand, Theo agrees with the protest, but his convictions are mocked[94], "Naturally, Theo is against the war in Iraq. His attitude is as strong and pure as his bones and skin. So strong he doesn't feel much need to go tramping through the streets to make his point." (S, p. 151) On the other hand, Daisy vehemently discusses the protest with her father. She is firmly against the Iraq War and states "[…] it's completely barbaric, what they're about to do" (S, p. 185) to which Henry comments "Everyone knows that. It might be. So might doing nothing. I honestly don't know." (S, p. 185) Henry's indecision infuriates Daisy and the novel shows a new perspective

94 Groes, "Ian McEwan and the Modernist Consciousness of the City in *Saturday*".

of the reasons behind the Iraq War: indeed, at first, the Americans created Saddam and backed him. She asks again if her father is for the war and Henry is still uncertain; hence she criticises Henry urging him to think objectively,

> You're an educated person living in what we like to call a mature democracy, and our government's taking us to war. If you think that's a good idea, fine, say so, make the argument, but don't hedge your bets. Are we sending the troops in or not? It's happening now. And making guesses about the future is what you do sometimes when you make a moral choice. It's called thinking through the consequences. I'm against this war because I think terrible things are going to happen. You seem to think good will come of it, but you won't stand by what you believe. (S, p. 188)

Daisy's words question the dominant narrative that the U.S. government sustained, specifically to engage in a war against Iraq by stating, "So ordinary Iraqis get it from Saddam, and now they have to take it from American missiles, but it's all fine because you'll be glad." (S, p. 189) There is certainly an ethical double standard in supporting this war. Daisy also offers one of the most vehement criticisms of the Bush administration,

> You're saying we're invading Iraq because we haven't got a choice. I'm amazed at the crap you talk, Dad. 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. (S, p. 190)

When Henry tries to prove his point, "Here's a chance to turn one country [Iraq] around, Plant a seed. See if it flourishes and spreads." (S, p. 192), Daisy replies "You don't plant seeds with cruise missiles. They're going to hate the invaders. The religious extremists will get stronger." (S, p. 192) Thereupon, the novel offers a challenging representation of the post-9/11 world, as Cornier Michael highlights, *Saturday* contributes to the global discussion of the political, social, and ethical consequences of a world transformed by global terrorism.[95]

3.3.4 Trauma

There is an implicit narrative of trauma throughout the book. Since the beginning of the novel, Perowne is mediating his experiences through the underlying trauma he sustained by witnessing the events of 9/11. Although indirectly, the experience of the recent terrorist attacks shocked Henry Perowne, and influenced his daily routines. He now lives in fear of new attacks in his own life,

95 Michael Cornier, "Writing Fiction in the Post-9/11 World: Ian McEwan's *Saturday*".

> The world probably has changed fundamentally and the matter is being clumsily handled, particularly by the Americans. There are people around the planet, well-connected and organised, who would like to kill him and his family and friends to make a point. The scale of death contemplated is no longer at issue; there'll be more deaths on a similar scale, probably in this city. Is he so frightened that he can't face the fact? (S, pp. 80–81)

Sebastian Groes suggests that Perwone is shocked to such a level that it results in the inability to express his worries openly and verbally: "McEwan's attention to the relationship between the terror of war and linguistic failure is, again, drawn from *Mrs. Dalloway*".[96]

Furthermore, the events that occur on Saturday 15 February 2003, only enhance his trauma and fear: "it is in fact the state of the world that troubles him most, and the marchers are there to remind him of it" (S, p. 80). The scale of the anti-war protest in London makes him unconformable and thus he avoids it.[97] Echoes of trauma theory are present in the novel; for instance, that of the repetition of trauma in dreams, when Henry states that "the spectacle has the familiarity of a recurrent dream" (S, p. 15). His trauma can also be perceived as he thinks,

> Saturdays he's accustomed to being thoughtlessly content, and here he is for the second time this morning sifting the elements of a darker mood. What's giving him the shivers? Not the lost game, or the scrape with Baxter, or even the broken night, though they all must have some effect. (S, p. 125)

Saturday explores a traumatised subject, namely Henry Perowne, in a changing world thus appropriating the discourse around what Jeffrey C. Alexander identified as cultural trauma. By "simply witnessing or being adjacent to a traumatic event has come to be regarded by many as signifying a traumatic encounter, even if encountered by way of television."[98] Tew was also a pioneer in building the notion of the traumatological, which extends Luckhurst's ideas and "suggest[s] that after September 11, the traumatological combines the individual and collective articulation of traumatic experience in a more pervasive and even universalizing way".[99]

Moreover, as he witnesses the supposed attack, Henry remains calm and emotionally distances himself from the spectacle. Commenting on this episode, Cornier Michael reminds Jacques Derrida's words shortly after the 9/11 attacks, "the repetition of the televised

96 Groes, "Ian McEwan and the Modernist Consciousness of the City in *Saturday*", p. 107.

97 Tew, "Exploring London in Ian McEwan's *Saturday* (2005): Trauma and the Traumatological, Identity Politics and Vicarious Victimhood".

98 Ibid., p. 21.

99 Bentley, "Mind and Brain the Representation of Trauma in Martin Amis' *Yellow Dog* and Ian McEwan's *Saturday*", pp. 116–117.

images [created a] neutralizing, deadening, distancing of traumatism".[100] Eventually, Perowne understands why he keeps on watching the scene, namely "the horror of what he can't see. Catastrophe observed from a safe distance. Watching death on a large scale, but seeing no one die. No blood, no screams, no human figures at all, and into this emptiness, the obliging imagination set free." (S, p. 16) The political and cultural climate is clearly influenced by the 9/11 trauma, and the novel tries to depict how Perowne manages to live his life in this atmosphere. Perowne questions himself "what days are this?", answering "baffled and fearful, you mostly things when it takes time from his weekly round to consider" (S, p. 4). Here the novel is referencing a method employed by Henry to work through his trauma which consists of focusing on routines.[101]

Lastly, it is Baxter who inflicts a new trauma on Perowne and his family, by being extremely aggressive during the car accident and then invading their domestic realm; thus, strengthening "the novel's metaphoric representation of a pervasive sense of threat in the period following September 11."[102] During the car accident, Henry realises that Baxter is not going to be amicable and is instead an aggressive thug: "for the first time, it occurs to [Perowne] that he might be in some kind of danger. […] They're [Baxter and the thugs] walking in silence to the funeral beat of marching drums." (S, p. 84). After Perowne tries to settle by asking for the insurance details, the situation escalates, and

> they [Baxter and his helpers] grab Henry by his elbows and forearms, and as his vision clears he sees that he's being propelled through a gap between two parked cars. Together they cross the pavement at speed. They turn him and slam his back against a chain-locked double door in a recess. (S, p. 92)

At this point, the situation is deeply unsettling, and Henry is able to save himself by employing his intelligence and diagnosing Baxter with Huntington's disease. Once he arrives at the sports club to play with Jay Strauss "his long fingers are still trembling, fumbling with the miniature keys" (S, p. 99) It is clear that the encounter has shaken him as he continues to reminisce about the event:

> […] unwanted thoughts are shaking at this concentration. He sees the pathetic figure of Baxter in the rear-view mirror. […] Perowne feels himself moving through a mental fog […]. [As] Jay's serve is on him […] trailing memories of the night as well as the morning, fragments into a dozen

100 Michael Cornier, "Writing Fiction in the Post-9/11 World: Ian McEwan's *Saturday*", p. 32.
101 Ibid.
102 Bentley, "Mind and Brain the Representation of Trauma in Martin Amis' *Yellow Dog* and Ian McEwan's *Saturday*".

> associations. Everything that's happened to him recently occurs to him at once. He's no longer in the present. The deserted icy square, the plane and its pinprick of fire, his son in the kitchen, his wife in bed, his daughter on her way from Paris, the three men in the street – he occupies the wrong time coordinates, or is in them all at once. (S, pp. 104–105)

This disruption of time is consistent with the trauma he sustained during the car accident with Baxter. As seen in chapter one, Cathy Caruth argues that a temporal rapture occurs after a traumatic experience[103]; thus, Perowne's mind intertwines past, present, and future. The connection between time and trauma is then corroborated after the break-in by Rosalind Perowne as she says,

> I was trying to work out just how long it was he [Baxter] held that knife to me. In my memory, it's no time at all – and I don't mean that it seems brief. It's no time, not in time, not a minute or an hour. Just a fact." (S, p. 268)

Indeed, Baxter's invasion of the Perownes' household is extremely traumatic for the whole family. Daisy Perowne, in particular, is one of the most abused characters as she is asked to strip in front of her family and threatened of sexual harassment by Baxter's accomplice:

> '[…] You listen carefully. Take your clothes off. Go on. All of them.' […] Baxter is addressing not Theo but Daisy. She stares at him in disbelief, trembling, shaking her head faintly. Her fear is exciting him, his whole body dips and shudders. Daisy manages to say in a whisper, 'I can't. Please. I can't.' […] With the tip of his knife, Baxter slices open a foot-long gash in the leather sofa, just above Rosalind's head. They stare at a wound, an ugly welt, swelling along its length as the ancient, yellowish-white stuffing oozes up like subcutaneous fat. (S, p. 217)

The undressing reveals Daisy's pregnant body and the idea of sexually harassing a pregnant woman is further shown to be a gruesome and appalling act. In the aftermath of the encounter, when Baxter is long gone to the hospital, it is Rosalind who speaks about the traumatic experience they all endured,

> 'I felt myself floating away', she says. 'It was as if I was watching all of us, myself included, from a corner of the room right up by the ceiling. And I thought, if it's going to happen, I won't feel a thing, I won't care.' 'Well, we might have', Theo says, and they laugh loudly, too loudly. (S, p. 229)

Daisy, too, explains how she disconnected from her physical body, pretending to be elsewhere in order to cope with the traumatic experience she was undergoing. Conversely, Henry is not able to fully relax until the moment he enters the hospital to operate on Baxter,

103 Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History*.

> As soon as he steps out into the broad area that gives onto the double doors of the neurosurgical suite, he feels better. […] Though things sometimes go wrong, he can control outcomes here, he has resources, controlled conditions (S, p. 246).

He has finally regained control of his life, which had been disrupted by the traumatic events of the day. Even the granddad, Grammaticus, shows his symptoms as he gets drunk to manage his feelings towards the situation. Ultimately, the novel depicts different instances of trauma management and evokes the traumatic resonance of 9/11 on the world.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this thesis has analysed two instances of post-9/11 literature and trauma fiction, namely *Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close* and *Saturday*. The first chapter has argued how trauma studies have had a substantial role in the history of psychology, psychiatry, and literature: from the theories of Sir John Eric Erichsen and the "railway spine" condition, through Jean Martin Charcot and Sigmund Freud's pioneering theories on the relationship between trauma and hysteria. Through the terrible consequences of the First World War, the "shell-shock" condition, explored by Freud in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, trauma studies have continued to progress through history. With the occurrence of the Second World War, these studies further developed; the Holocaust had scholars shift their attention toward the horrors that took place in concentration camps, intending to help survivors. Another crucial milestone was achieved after the Vietnam War and, in the 1980s, with the inclusion of PTSD by the American Psychiatric Association (APA) in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM). Subsequently, in the 1990s, the exceptional theories of scholars such as Cathy Caruth defined the traumatic experience as an event that defies linguistic representation and permanently damages the traumatised person's mind.

As previously stated, trauma also influenced literature. The relationship between narrative and trauma has always been a focus of trauma theories, starting with Freud and Breuer's talking cure, followed by the Holocaust and its survivors' testimonies. However, the narrativisation of trauma has been the centre of several debates that covered the incommunicability of the traumatic experience. Further, in the 1980s, Vietnam veterans' "rap groups" strengthened the relationship between the two spheres. Additionally, several debates on the most suitable narrative form to be employed to recount trauma have appeared on the horizon of trauma studies. Questions on whether the narrative form should have been objective or literary were raised. These debates seem to conclude that, although trauma

theorists consider trauma unrepresentable, the narrative form offers the best method to portray the horrors of the traumatised mind and traumatic experience.

On 11 September 2001, a new traumatic event shocked the whole world, the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon. The large scale of the attacks led to a terror spectacle that monopolised the news media for days, creating one of the greatest cultural traumas of the twentieth-first century. The events of this day became the focus of a substantial body of fiction later defined as "9/11 literature"; these texts, including novels and short stories, covered directly or indirectly the terrorist attacks and their consequences. Concerns were raised on the narrative modes most suitable to convey the impact of events. Thus, some authors such as Jonathan Safran Foer chose an unconventional, postmodern narrative, whereas Ian McEwan employed more apparently traditional modes. However, what these two texts are representatives of is the difference between the first wave and the second wave of post-9/11 literature. The former is influenced by the expectations of the shocked and traumatised public; the latter is more politically engaged and, in particular for *Saturday*, conscious of the global resonance of the trauma of 9/11.

The second chapter has provided a thorough analysis of *Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close*. As previously stated, Foer departed from the realist literary tradition and employed images and symbols to convey the repercussion of the events of 11 September 2001 on the lives and psyche of the victims' families. Additionally, the postmodern narrative techniques of fragmentation and pastiche of media are extremely useful in portraying the trauma which Oskar Schell has to work through to continue living his life in his father's absence. The novel's pastiche of genres further creates a heartfelt as well as engaging narrative.

The novel portrays the traumatic experiences of Oskar Schell and his paternal grandparents. The trauma of 9/11 and the Dresden bombings are juxtaposed to disrupt the logical and chronological linearity that is similarly missing in recounting traumatic events during psychotherapy. Moreover, the first-person narration enables the reader to empathise with Oskar's trauma. Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder is also represented in the novel, both in Oskar's characterisation and that of his grandparents. Oskar is afraid of heights, suffers from insomnia and panic attacks, and self-harms. Throughout the narrative, Oskar's mind is possessed by the memories of the attacks in the form of images and his father's voice messages. Although he could be analysed as the embodiment of Freud's melancholia, he is on the right path to work through his trauma and overcome it. The quest he undergoes around New York City is a psychological journey

to overcome his trauma and grief. Similarly, his grandparents suffer from their past experiences of the Dresden bombings and the loss of their only son. Grandma Schell suffers from survivor guilt, a direct consequence of PTSD. She frequently belittles herself, is suicidal, and suffers from the idea of having survived her family in Dresden and her son on 9/11. Moreover, her trauma manifests through passivity, detachment, and emotional numbness. Grandpa Schell is the third main character of the novel, his trauma is the most physically visible of the three as he suffers from aphasia. Throughout the novel, the reader comes to know that Thomas Schell Sr's inability to speak asserts his rejection of the possibility of coping and overcoming the loss of his pregnant fiancée in the Dresden air raids. He cannot escape his past and is unable to express his traumatic experiences.

The visual component is an important element in post-9/11 literature. Foer has included photographs and imagery that constitute a juxtaposition to the visual spectacle that was produced by the media and the public during the events of 11 September. In addition, the Internet played an important role since thousands of people around the world were reached and traumatised by these images.

Lastly, the third chapter has provided an analysis of *Saturday*. As discussed earlier, McEwan's erudite novel is characterised by an abundance of intertextual references, meticulous descriptions of neurosurgery, and a veiled, but meaningful depiction of cultural trauma. Drawing on Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway*, McEwan represents a man of the early twentieth-first century in a day of his life, disillusioned by the catastrophic events he witnessed on 11 September 2001, as well as uncertain of the consequences the Iraq War might generate. Important social, cultural, and political issues are explored through the depiction of this day in the life of Henry Perowne. McEwan depicts a member of the elite meeting a lower-class thug, Baxter. Consequently, McEwan represented the debates of the post-9/11 world, namely that of the legitimacy of an Iraq War and a departure from the previous texts which belonged to the dominant narration of the events.

Moreover, McEwan explores the events of 9/11 by juxtaposing them with the events in the Perownes' household. Henry Perowne may be seen as a representative of the West and Baxter as that of terrorism. Accordingly, Perowne is introduced in god-like terms, privileged, and authoritarian, mirroring the U.S. political and economic power. Conversely, Baxter is the underprivileged, uneducated villain and the one who disrupts the tranquillity of the Perwones' lives. The unequal social standing is clearly at the base of the disparity between the two, and Henry's profession as a neurosurgeon allows him to overtake Baxter by diagnosing him with a neurode-

generative disease. The divergent power dynamics between these two characters, and thus what they represent, support the criticism that the novel rejects the dominant narrative advocated by previous examples of 9/11 literature and by the Bush administration.

As with *Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close*, *Saturday* also deals with the spectacle created by the media during the terrorist attacks of 9/11. In *Saturday* the references are subtle but constant and intrusive; they loom over the narrative as they had imposed on the public in the aftermath of the attacks. The images shown by the media during and in the immediate moments after the attacks pervade the narrative and Henry's mind. They mediate the way Henry thinks and sees his reality, as is shown when he notices the burning plane in the London sky. Finally, McEwan emphasises this invasive presence of the media by keeping Henry immersed in the spectacle they created, by adding a media outlet, such as a television or a radio, wherever he goes.

McEwan has always been politically conscious; accordingly, *Saturday* explores the politics behind the Iraq War. Although posed in the background, the London march against the war influences greatly Henry's day. Henry favours the war because he stands for what his Iraqi patient has told him about the Saddam Hussein regime. Nonetheless, when his American colleague, Jay Strauss, supports the war Henry becomes hesitant. The novel, then, asserts, through Daisy Perowne, the real possible consequences of a war against the Middle East and heavily criticises the U.S. government's war campaign. Indeed, this novel, like others by McEwan, is extremely aware of the geopolitics of the West and offers a challenging representation of the post-9/11 world.

Trauma is another subtle but compelling element of *Saturday*. The horror of the 9/11 terrorist attacks traumatised the whole world, especially the West. The spreading of images and videos of the attacks by the media meant that those who watched were not mere standbys, but also deeply involved in what they were witnessing. This same trauma permeates *Saturday* as Henry mediates what he witnesses with the events of 9/11. The setting of the novel, 15 February 2003, the day when a large manifestation is occurring, also enhances his trauma and fear of a new terrorist attack in his city. Subsequently, Henry Perowne undergoes another traumatic experience when Baxter invades his house and threatens his family. The themes of trauma fiction are renewed in the temporal rupture that Rosalind Perowne recalls and in the intrusive thought that this fearful event is the first of many and could be followed by new terrorist attacks, for instance, in London.

Ultimately, the two novels in their uniqueness of narrative, writing style, and representation of trauma are meaningful instances of

9/11 literature and trauma fiction. They both masterfully convey the debate that sprung in the aftermath of 9/11. *Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close* focuses on the domestic consequences of the events in the lives of the victims' families. Whereas *Saturday* is more politically aware and offers a critical point of view on the dominant narrative of the events.

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