

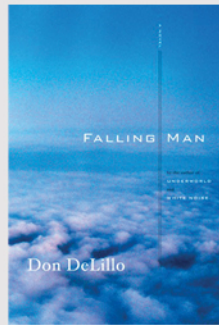


Book Review of *Falling Man* by Don DeLillo

Samantha Leong

While most books or movies portray a direct loss of a loved one due to the 9-11 attack, the family in *Falling Man* did not lose anyone. However, they all did suffer a loss that every American felt that day—a loss of their own selves, of innocence, and of safety within their country. *Falling Man* is divided into three main parts with each part named after a character found in the book: Bill Lawton, Ernst Hechinger and David Janiak. The book starts off with Keith, a lawyer who had worked in the North Tower for a decade. He had just escaped and was running through smoke and debris with an unknown briefcase in his hand. Even though he was injured, he refused to go to hospital, but instead arrived in the house of his ex-wife, Lianne, and their son, Justin. Keith decided to make an attempt at reconciliation with his estranged wife, who was in charge of a support group for people with Alzheimer's to help them remember, even though she had her own problems, which included the fact that her mother's lover used to be a terrorist. By attending Masses regularly, Lianne managed to find a point of stability in her life.

Similarly, Keith was undoubtedly affected by the 9-11 attack. While he was stuck in limbo with no way out, his decision to return the unknown briefcase to its owner resulted in a meeting with Florence, who worked in the South Tower. Due to their undergoing a certain



experience together, a connection was woven between them. It is obvious that this connection was not a relationship in the romantic sense. Florence wanted someone to witness her recuperation, while Keith saw his relationship with Florence as a means of coping instead of healing, just like his later obsession with playing poker in the casinos.

Just as the *Falling Man*, David Janiak, is a performance artist who re-enacts falling from the towers all over buildings in New York, DeLillo manages to re-enact the traumatic effects of the events in his narrative. On the whole, *Falling Man* gives shape to the 9-11 trauma rather than providing a way out. Trauma is something that we do not want to know, let alone actually see. Unfortunately, the 9-11 attack has penetrated everything so deeply that everywhere we look, even in art, we see the crumbling twin towers.

Just like the performance artist, I consider the book *Falling Man* an embodiment of remembrance. The book begins when the towers were hit and ends with Keith returning where he first started – in front of the towers. Is it ever possible for us to move on after trauma? Or are we fated to remain haunted by the trauma for the rest of our lives and end up in a world of towers with all the staircases leading down?