



M.A. Dissertation:  
*L'11 settembre nella letteratura: Safran Foer,  
DeLillo, McEwan e McGrath*

by Alessandra Toja

SUPERVISORS: Prof.ssa Nicoletta Vallorani, Prof.ssa Simona Bertacco

M.A. DEGREE: M.A. in Languages, Literatures and International Communication

ACADEMIC INSTITUTION: University of Milan

ACADEMIC YEAR: 2008/2009

My dissertation, through the analysis of *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* by Safran Foer, *Falling Man* by DeLillo, *Saturday* by McEwan and "Ground Zero" by McGrath, aims at showing the 9/11 events from an unusual point of view. The literary response to terrorism, which tried to unveil the private and intimate consequences that the 2001 attacks had on our society, is the starting point of my research. The rhetorical discourse of Western governments and of mass media is set aside, because the focus is not on political or military issues, but on individuals' reaction. Beside the account that newspapers and televisions offered to us, there is a "counternarrative" embodied by writers who found innovative ways to express their grief and shock for an event that was beyond human imagination. After the New York attacks artists were supposed to find a proper narrative to describe a historical moment in front of which many people lost their words.

The novels I examined belong to this so called "counternarrative" about 9/11, because, unlike the media that revealed only the most obvious side of the tragedy, they try to show the less sensational and spectacular features of that day. Paradoxically, in order to discover true account, we have to rely on fictional works. In fact, the texts I have chosen offer a complete and exhaustive overview on the Twin Towers attacks. Moreover, every author provides the reader with original points of view from which examine the



private side of the fact. In particular, *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close*, written with the vivid and creative style of Safran Foer, renders the sense of the tragedy through the eyes of his child narrator, Oskar Schell, who gives voice to the private consequences of a collective catastrophe. This is the only text which tells the story through the words of a child: Safran Foer has been able to narrate a tragedy, almost impossible to describe, with the directness and authenticity typical of children. Oskar guides us in a painful reality without the stereotypes of the adulthood.

The other authors I have chosen, on the contrary, show the perspective of adults. For example, DeLillo in *Falling Man* takes the survivors' trauma into consideration: his characters, devastated by the impact of the attacks on their everyday life, move in a world which seems to have lost all its feelings and emotions. The striking peculiarity of the book is the fact that DeLillo dedicates three chapters to the account of 9/11 hijackers' life, because he wants to show their humanity. *Saturday* by McEwan explores the problems connected to global and private security after 9/11. The book is the only one between the novels I have analysed which is set in a city that is not New York: the main characters offer an insight of the London response to the challenge of terrorism. "Ground Zero" by McGrath investigates the psychological effects of 9/11 attacks, associating them to irrational forces that enter the life of a psychiatrist and her patient.

To support my analysis I did not exploit the categories of "West" and "Islam" which have been too often abused by governments and media in the period that followed the destruction of the WTC. I tried to use sources that study the fact from an unconventional perspective. Obviously, the effects of 9/11 are examined in the Western context, since the authors I have chosen belong to the Anglo-Saxon and the American tradition. They did not take the Arab and Muslim society into consideration because they are not familiar with it.

In conclusion, the official discourse is not the best point of view from which to observe the event of 9/11: there is a wide range of alternative perspectives which offer the possibility to look at the 2001 terrorist attacks in a different way. The aim of this work is to investigate these perspectives in order to find the peculiar answer that the intellectuals' community gave to the tragedy.

---

Alessandra Toja  
Università degli Studi di Milano  
[alessandra.toja@studenti.unimi.it](mailto:alessandra.toja@studenti.unimi.it)