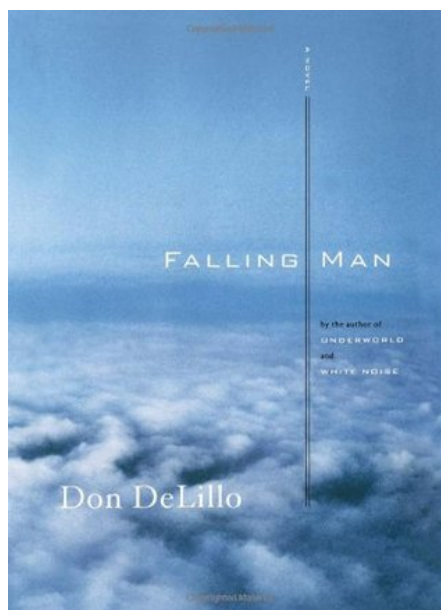




Falling Man

Don DeLillo

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Falling Man

Don DeLillo

Falling Man Don DeLillo

There is September 11 and then there are the days after, and finally the years.

Falling Man is a magnificent, essential novel about the event that defines turn-of-the-century America. It begins in the smoke and ash of the burning towers and tracks the aftermath of this global tremor in the intimate lives of a few people.

First there is Keith, walking out of the rubble into a life that he'd always imagined belonged to everyone but him. Then Lianne, his estranged wife, memory-haunted, trying to reconcile two versions of the same shadowy man. And their small son Justin, standing at the window, scanning the sky for more planes.

These are lives choreographed by loss, grief and the enormous force of history.

Falling Man Details

Date : Published May 15th 2007 by Scribner (first published 2007)

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From Reader Review Falling Man for online ebook

Jonfaith says

I did not care for Falling Man. I found the characters undeveloped and the assembly indifferent. I do care a great deal for Beth Orton's recent album Sugaring Season. My listening of such has been serial, in fact, my wife remains somewhat incredulous that there is "popular" music by someone other than Regina Spektor or Yo La Tengo which entrances for me hours on end. Central Reservation was one of Ms. Orton's previous albums. It haunted the late 1990s for me, as did DeLillo's Underworld. I can't substantiate this cross-purpose, this tethered association. Such intuition afflicts me sweetly. I ache.

Pitched akimbo overnight, I dreamt I attended an El Clasico, I awoke thinking about Falling Man. I may be nearer to simply hating it. DeLillo does continue his thesis from his Harper's article, situating the jihadis in a utopian/ millenarian context, finding examples in the Red Brigades and even in the WTO Protest. It is a line of inquiry.

Peter says

Don DeLillo's novel *Falling Man* has more unspecified pronouns than I care to read.

It's written in that postmodern style that calls for rapidly changing vignettes; the reader bounces from one scene to another to another in just four pages, and as if to drive us mad, DeLillo hardly ever tells us who is speaking or acting. The sections begin with sentences like: "He missed the kid" or "She missed those nights with friends when you talk about everything." We're left in the dark, and the characters, as a result, feel far, far away.

Maybe this is the point. Maybe. This is, after all, a novel about a dysfunctional family (father, mother, son) and the impact of 9/11 on their lives. The novel begins in the cloudy streets after the attack, and it jumps around through the preceding events and the aftermath until it finally returns to the husband's experience inside the towers when the planes hit. The characters are already estranged from each other before they suffer this trauma, and the events that follow only further estrange them.

And so, it seems, nobody really knows anybody, and hardly anyone really wants to talk to anyone else about anything, and DeLillo, it seems, wants us to feel this emptiness and helplessness. Conversations between characters are abstract and oblique. They repeat lines often, as if in a trance. Their sentences fall short. They all fade away from each other. Sometimes they even talk about fading away from each other.

Maybe this is an accurate portrayal of the shock and confusion of what happened, but it doesn't make good reading.

The question it raises, though, is what DeLillo's intention is. Reading this was maddening; there's very little to grab onto. If his goal is for us to experience the same aimless wandering as the people who walked away from the rubble, then he has succeeded. We're confused, we don't know where we're going, but we keep turning the pages.

Unfortunately, doing so is a burden. I wanted again and again to abandon this book, but forced myself through it. The ending, however, did offer some reward. In the final pages DeLillo recreates what it was like to be in the towers when the planes struck. It offered something solid and new, and it helped explain the

frustrating mood of the rest of the novel.

Could DeLillo have started with the crash? It might have explained the tone better in my mind, but he'd have been left without a clear ending. As it is, the attack does serve as a kind of climax.

Even so, I realize that some of my distaste also came from being unwilling to let myself into the novel. Already, I was skeptical of the sensationalism of the event. 9/11 still reeks of press and politics, and making a film or writing a book about it seems like a path to an easy buck, even if it is Don DeLillo.

As a treatment of 9/11, I appreciated Foer's *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* more. It gives us the distance from the attacks that time has allowed most readers. It takes us away from the immediacy of being in the towers and in the rubble, which most of us will never quite be able to relate to, and explores how that experience has become a part of our lives rather than the entirety of our lives.

Do I recommend it? No. Maybe for someone who wants to know what it feels like to be lost.

Would I teach it? No.

Lasting Impression: Reading this is like walking through fog. There are shapes that look like people moving around you, but you never really know who they are.

Franco Santos says

"These were the days after and now the years, a thousand heaving dreams, the trapped man, the fixed limbs, the dream of paralysis, the gasping man, the dream of asphyxiation, the dream of helplessness."

El 11 de septiembre del 2001 es una fecha que no solo tiene su marca en la Historia, sino que viene acompañada de imágenes de aviones que se estrellan, cenizas, lágrimas, gritos desesperados, personas cayendo y dos torres solitarias, al borde de una fantasía empírea que no pudo continuar. Las Torres, ahora invisibles, son el síndrome del miembro fantasma de la humanidad: todavía las sentimos, todavía nos duelen, están ahí, tan cerca de nosotros pero a la vez inalcanzables, como un sueño apunto de ser recordado en la mañana.

El 11 de septiembre del 2001 el mundo murió un poco más; fue una fecha de gritos desatados que dejaron silencios compartidos, la incapacidad de entender por qué nos pasó esto y qué fue lo que hicimos mal. ¿Por qué recibimos este castigo? DeLillo no intenta encontrarle una respuesta a esa pregunta. DeLillo nos acompaña, nos retrata en un montón de palabras, para decirnos que estamos aquí, seguimos aquí, con vida, heridos pero más sabios, más fuertes, y nos hace recordar que somos humanos, y que no debemos ignorar la muerte, porque sin la muerte no sabríamos cómo vivir.

Es cierto, en momentos DeLillo falla. El autor toca con demasiada sutileza las vidas de sus personajes, y eso hace que sean casi caricaturescos. Están muy mal desarrollados, no tienen valor, no lograron transmitirme mucho. Existe una sensación de soledad y de vacío a lo largo de toda la novela, sin embargo, no va más allá de eso. Asimismo, la interpretación de los terroristas, para mí, estuvo completamente de más. A pesar de lo dicho, es un libro que vale muchísimo la pena, que nos da consuelo cuando hemos caído en un foso imposible de llenar.

Ingrid says

Primo libro che leggo di Don DeLillo, dopo averne apprezzato il film *Cosmopolis*, ero molto curiosa di avvicinarmi a questo scrittore. Sono letteralmente rimasta di stucco dalla profondità e, nello stesso tempo, dal distacco emotivo necessario per raccontare una storia ambientata (o meglio, successiva) ai fatti dell'undici settembre 2001. Necessario e, a mio avviso, fondamentale, perché in tanti film e romanzi si è raccontato con estremo trasporto di famiglie divise, mariti morti, parenti che erano sugli aerei o nelle torri che sono spariti per sempre. Qui no, qui si cerca di raccontare una storia come un'altra, dove però il crollo delle TT ha necessariamente e irrimediabilmente influito: Keith lavorava nelle torri ed è riuscito ad uscire in tempo salvandosi; deciderà poi di tornare dalla moglie dopo un periodo di separazione e dal figlio, che passa le sue giornate con gli amici a guardare col binocolo in cielo, nella "speranza" di vedere gli aerei di Bin Laden.

Nessuna posizione in merito ai fatti di politica internazionale o a quello che verrà successivamente all'attacco; nessun riferimento ai morti né alla loro commemorazione che ancora persiste nell'immaginario mediatico americano: dove tutto prima rimandava al Vietnam, adesso tutto rimanda a quelle due torri, al primo vero attacco nel cuore degli Stati Uniti.

Un libro totale, bellissimo, che ci insegna veramente a trattare una tragedia così forte nel modo più rispettoso e vero possibile.

Ben says

The thing with DeLillo is the what. The conversations. The sentence fragments. The writing style.

Of any list of candidates to write about the horrors of 9/11, DeLillo must have shown up. *Underworld* of course has the famous photo of the towers by Andre Kertesz. (*Falling Man* has another photo on its cover by Katie Day Weisberger. It is taken from the sky, where one sees a cyclopean vista of clouds but for the two towers peeking out, dwarfed. It's as breathtaking and emotive as the first, but with our renewed perspective in the post-9/11 world.) His novel *The Names* focuses on a blind search for terrorists, or a group of politically motivated abductors in *Mao II*. Likewise, *Libra* places the reader into Lee Harvey Oswald's mindset. Adding in his New York experiences places DeLillo into the cast of authors who come to this subject matter with some creative authority.

Falling Man seems at first to follow some regular DeLillo fare: a couple (Lianne and Keith) who had gone through a separation, and the clipped visuals of freeze-frame action. But as the novel bears down on the reader, they show greater depth and deeper pain. It's not about the day after. It follows them for what feels like the rest of their lives with 9/11 wrapped around their torsos. It captures the chronic trauma of it, and it leaves behind an emotional rift for an engaged reader.

We've all got jobs that we'd have to get back to--even after a tragic event--pacing around carpeted cubicles or sitting behind desks and carrels. For me, through the din I could hear the rattling in his characters' souls. DeLillo doesn't break his own conventions or introduce brand-new style switches in the literature, but he'll jerk your stride and remind you of what some of us must live with.

Rebecca McNutt says

The story of a dysfunctional family brought together by death and loss, *Falling Man* is emotional and

gripping, and ultimately very inspirational.

Bart says

Being clever, that's how DeLillo does it.

Falling Man, a sparse work that is better than *The Body Artist* and much much better than *Cosmopolis*, does about as much as it can hope to do. Don DeLillo's powers simply aren't up to the task of making a new statement about a national tragedy like 9/11. He is an assembler of words and sentences and paragraphs and - at times - chapters, but he is not a thinker. What, then, has made him considered such an important voice in American letters?

Being clever, that's how DeLillo does it.

Americana and *White Noise*, much more than the oddly over-praised *Libra* and *Underworld*, are when DeLillo is at his very best. When he is able to write interesting sentences about unimportant things, when he is able to lend unserious topics the full focus of his rich prose, in other words, DeLillo is doing what he was called to do.

But when he tries to use character-less personages to show us how important 9/11 was to New York's literary set, frankly, he's way beyond his talent's reach. Fundamentally, DeLillo is unable to lend gravity to a grave happening because such gravity would require characters that, in some way, resemble human beings.

DeLillo doesn't seem to know any persons in real life, and so he assembles collections of phrases and limbs and quirky qualities - like a character who speaks only in monosyllabic words - and then subjects them to detailed scenery. DeLillo's characters belong to science fiction more than literary fiction - and in this way DeLillo seems to have become a lightweight Thomas Pynchon (which is fine; Pynchon can't be taken in more than small doses).

Being clever, that's how DeLillo does it.

In the last 10 pages of this 246-page book, there's a sentence that goes like this:

She was arguing with herself but it wasn't argument, just the noise the brain makes.

This sentence more than any other may act as metaphor for DeLillo's recent works. Standing alone in its own paragraph, this sentence seems to say something important. But once a reader stops and looks at it from 360 degrees (what any artist should want), the reader realizes there's nothing there at all.

Better put, *DeLillo is telling us a story but it isn't a story, just the noise a writer makes.*

When this unseriousness is married to DeLillo's usual tricks of repeating one clever phrase in stand-alone paragraphs throughout a chapter, what is left is a meaningless work by an artist whose fundamental lack of gravity has finally outrun his ample talent.

Being annoying, that's how DeLillo did it.

sologdin says

This is as severe as it gets, insofar as it opens with “figures in windows a thousand feet up, dropping into free space” (4), jumping to avoid death, ruled nevertheless homicide, from the burning WTC.

Confirmed that trauma is transformative to the extent that narrator “began to see things, somehow, differently” after the “second fall” (5). As with the narrator, so with the setting: “Everything was gray, it was limp and failed, storefronts behind corrugated steel shutters, a city *somewhere else*, under permanent siege” (emphasis added) (25). We are in a different place, after the event. Confirmed, the decentering of the setting by partial quotation of a Basho haiku: “Even in Kyoto—I long for Kyoto” (32).

As is normal for a Delillo novel, horrific trauma is juxtaposed with “the eventual extended grimness called their marriage” (7). Despite this, “she liked the spaces he made” (18). He is an “ex-husband who was never technically ex, the stranger you married in another lifetime” (35); “It was a mark of the distance between them that she listened so eagerly” (41). Dude is “a model of dependability to his male friends, all the things a friend should be, an ally and confidant, lends money, gives advice, loyal and so on, but sheer hell on women” (59).

She works with persons afflicted with Alzheimer’s Disease:

Sometimes it scared her, the first signs of halting response, the losses and failings, the grim prefigurings that issued now and then from a mind beginning to slide away from the adhesive friction that makes an individual possible. (30)

NB: etymology for latinic translations of *slide*:

from Middle French laps “lapse,” from Latin lapsus “a slipping and falling, flight (of time), falling into error,” from labi “to slip, slide, sink, fall; decline, go to ruin.” Meaning “moral transgression, sin” is c. 1500; that of “slip of the memory” is 1520s; that of “a falling away from one’s faith” is from 1650s.

(I think that means the patient is a ‘falling man.’) One of wife’s patients is “not so much lost as falling, growing fainter” (94). Even as the patient is falling, so too the patient’s condition is ready to fall: “They approached that was impending” (id.): *impend* as in in- “into, in, on, upon” + *pendere* “hang.” Loss of memory is therefore a mutually falling together, a gravitation of sorts between afflicted and affliction.

All somewhat self-reflexive in the analysis of the ‘Falling Man,’ a performance artist who recreates the famous non-fictional photograph of the same name, who’d “appeared several times in the last week, unannounced, in various parts of the city, always upside down, wearing a suit, a tie and dress shoes” (33); some were “shouting at him, outraged by the spectacle, the puppetry of human desperation, a body’s last fleet breath and what it held”: “the gaze of the world,” which nevertheless had an “awful openness” to it (id.). Wife “wished she could believe this was some kind of antic street theater, an absurdist drama that provokes onlookers to share a comic understanding of what is irrational in the great scheme of being” (163) when confronted with the Falling Man. In interpreting his act, she wonders “if this was his intention, to spread the word this way, by cell phone, intimately, as in the towers and in the hijacked planes” (165)—“or she was dreaming his intentions. She was making it up, stretched so tight across the moment that she could not think her own thoughts” (id.), which is a beautiful little summation of the position of all reading and how the intentional fallacy/death of the author arguments are omnipresent. (Nice joke here, as next paragraph is dude telling her “what I’m trying to do” (id.), which is “I’m trying to read her mind”—so doubly the intentional fallacy.)

‘Falling’ itself is an oddity, contingent upon the movement from one place to another, which is, as the title might plausibly suggest, the master figure of thought here. It’s probably worth recalling Zeno’s paradoxes in these circumstances:

Zeno makes a mistake in reasoning. For if, he says, everything is always at rest when it occupies a space equal to itself, and what is moving is always ‘in the now,’ the moving arrow is motionless. [...] the arrow is stopped while it is moving. This follows from assuming that time is composed of ‘nows.’ If this is not conceded, the deduction will not go through. (Aristotle, *Physics*, 6.9239b)

Similarly, Simplicius reports Zeno as arguing “If place exists, where is it? For everything that exists is in a place. Therefore, place is in a place. This goes on to infinity. Therefore place does not exist” (*Commentary on Aristotle’s Physics* 562.3-6). Good stuff. Silly, but fun. Thing is, we might locate (!) an aporetic in the notion of *position* itself. *Position* etymology:

late 14c., as a term in logic and philosophy, from Old French *posicion* “position, supposition” (Modern French *position*), from Latin *positionem* (nominative *positio*) “act or fact of placing, situation, position, affirmation,” noun of state from past participle stem of *ponere* “put, place,” from PIE **po-s(i)nere*, **from *apo-** “off, away” (see **apo-**) + ***sinere** “to leave, let”.
[emphasis added]

We should note the diremptive effect of this etymology: a ‘leaving’ ‘away’—i.e., *position* is linguistically always already away from itself, always already a *falling*, i.e., place as already a thing in motion—ergo, the contrapositive of Zeno’s paradox, which denies the possibility of motion in extended space? So this would be a double double-bind: the master figure of the text is simultaneously contingent upon two statements that contradict each other, that are themselves internally aporetic—*stasis* is both necessary and impossible; *kinesis* is likewise both necessary and impossible. It’s fuckin’ crazy, yo.

Fine debate between wife’s mother and the mother’s lover, which boils down respectively to the positions (heh) of “they think the world is a disease” v. “They strike a blow to this country’s dominance” (46). Three sections detail the internal monologue of one of the 9/11 hijackers, whose own opinion is more or less all that is solid melts into air: “A feeling of lost history. They were too long in isolation. This is what they talked about, being crowded out by other cultures, other futures, the all-enfolding will of capital markets and foreign policies” (80), which mediates somewhat between the two positions aforesaid. (NB: wife’s patients await reassurance from her “where what is solid does not melt” (127).) Lover’s position is similar to mine:

It went on for a time and Lianne listened, disturbed by the fervor in their voices. Martin sat wrapped in argument, one hand gripping the other, and he spoke about lost lands, failed states, foreign intervention, money, empire, oil, the narcissistic heart of the West. (113)

Mother’s point is by contrast “It’s a misplaced [!] grievance” (112). Hijacker believes that “what they hold so precious we see as empty space” (177).

Not uninvolved in this connection is wife’s understanding that “religion makes people compliant [...] to return people to a childlike state” (62). Significant, then, that her Alzheimer’s patients develop elaborate mythologies regarding 9/11, such as “I don’t forgive God for what He did” (63) and so on. As it happens, her own kid participates in an elaborate mythology of how one “Bill Lawton” “flies jet planes and speaks thirteen languages but not English except to his wives. What else? He has the power to poison what we eat but only certain foods” (74). The tragic and the traumatic must invite childish mythologies, and it’s fair to say that the state’s official narrative about 9/11 is likely to be a self-serving mythology only believable by political children (just as the truthers’ counter-mythology also flatters those immature mythopoeists’ political preferences, which are not worthy of a serious leftist’s attention).

The Hegelian interest, as always: hijacker “had to fight against the need to be normal. He had to struggle against himself” (83). Wife notes at one point that “I could hear myself speaking. My voice was like it was coming from somebody else” (124) (as we have otherwise noted, of course, ‘voice’ is always already “from elsewhere thrown,” the same aporia as in the etymology of *position*). One of wife’s patients is “two women simultaneously” (125); her mother has “thoughts I can’t identify, thoughts I can’t claim as mine” (id.). Of course, “everybody has two brains” (126). In developing a post-apocalyptic affair, dude decides to tell his wife about it, “a way to stop being double in himself, trailing the taut shadow of what is unsaid” (161), which is probably the primary significance of Poe’s “William Wilson.” (Wife similarly “was doubled over, like there were two of her” (169).) Hijacker is similarly “not here, it was not him” (175).

Some involvement with dude’s poker game, which passes from liberal at its inception to a rigorously regimented affair, a display of “how disciplined can we be” (97): “no food [...] no gin, no vodka, no wan liqueurs [...] they agreed to limit themselves to one game only, five card stud.” (98); “The fact of self-imposed restriction, all the more unyielding for being ordered from within” correlates well with the increasingly “large sums they bet” (id.), if one considers it all from the perspective of Geertz’s “Deep Play: Notes on the Balinese Cockfight”:

Bentham’s concept of ‘deep play’ is found in his *The Theory of Legislation*. By it he means play in which the stakes are so high that it is, from his utilitarian standpoint, irrational for men to engage in it at all.

The card players “banned sports talk”; “Rules are good, they replied, and the stupider the better” (99). This *stupid is good* is placed (ha) into juxtaposition (!) with hijacker, who “spent time at the mirror looking at his beard, knowing he was not supposed to trim it” (82); Indeed, “the beard would look better if he trimmed it. But there were rules now and he was determined to follow them” (83). Later, hijacker is “looking past the face in the mirror, which is not his” (178). Is this mutually satirizing? Are the poker rules preface to the hijacker rules, or the converse? Which the tragedy, which the farce?

The wrinkle with mother’s lover is that he may have been some sort of Red Brigades bomber himself in his youth (146), and now operates legitimately under a different name; “Maybe I don’t know his real name” (145). “He’s somewhere. I’m somewhere else” (id.). Dude regrettably “thinks these people, these jihadists, he thinks they have something in common with the radicals of the sixties and seventies. He thinks they’re all part of the same classical pattern. They have their theorists. They have their visions of world brotherhood” (147). This is kinda gross, I think; there shall be little ideological overlap between medievalists and marxists.

The hijacker’s lacanian mirror stage is itself satirized by a discussion of wife’s mother’s lover’s face:

“Who is that man? You think you see yourself in the mirror. But that’s not you. That’s not what you look like. That’s not the literal face, if there is such a thing, ever. That’s the composite face. That’s the face in transition.”

“Don’t tell me this.”

“What you see is not what we see. What you see is distracted by memory, by being who you are, all the time, for all these years.”

“I don’t want to hear this,” he said.

“What we see is the living truth. The mirror softens the effect by submerging the actual face. Your face is your life. But your face is also submerged in your life. That’s why you don’t see it. Only other people see it. And the camera of course.”

He smiled into his glass. Nina put out her cigarette, barely smoked, waving away a trail of smeary mist.

“Then there’s the beard,” Lianne said.

“The beard helps bury the face. (114-15)

So, by simple mathematical reasoning: hijacker beard buries hijacker face, which is also the hijacker life. The Falling Man also has a “blankness in his face, but deep, a kind of lost gaze” (167); wife “thought the bare space he stared into must be his own, not some grim vision of others falling”; “he turns his head and looks into it (into his death by fire) and then brings his head back around and jumps” (id.). Falling Man is accordingly absent, not here, in the manner of other dislocated persons in the novel, and emblematic of same. Wife in seeing this “could have spoken to him but that was another plane of being, beyond reach” (168) (i.e., not here); she saw “no sign” of another witness previously present (id.); a third witness, “attached to this spot for half a lifetime,” “was seeing something elaborately different from what he encountered step by step in the ordinary run of hours,” as he had learned “how to see it correctly, find a crack in the world where it might fit” (id.) (something out of place, then?). As she fled, she thought of Falling Man, “back there, suspended, body set in place, and she could not think beyond this” (169). Falling Man is otherwise likened to a “Brechtian dwarf” (223), a reference perhaps to *Life of Galileo*:

I, as a scientist, had a unique opportunity. In my days astronomy reached the market-places. In these quite exceptional circumstances, the steadfastness of one man could have shaken the world. If only I had resisted, if only the natural scientists had been able to evolve something like the Hippocratic oath of the doctors, the vow to devote their knowledge wholly to the benefit of mankind! As things now stand, the best one can hope for is for a race of inventive dwarfs who can be hired for anything.

Not sure if the thesis is that Falling Man was market driven rather than principled, or if the reference is more generally to Brechtian *verfremdungseffekt*. Whichever way, is the Falling Man forming the counter-narrative of 9/11 that DeLillo describes in his well-known 9/11 essay (“In the Ruins of the Future,” *Harper’s*, December 2001 at 35)? Is it true, as in the same essay (loc. cit. at 34) that “the terrorists want to bring back the past”? If so, is the counter-narrative of the Bush regime aptly described by Benjamin’s sixth thesis, insofar as “even the dead will not be safe from the enemy if he wins, and this enemy has not ceased to be victorious”?

Punchline of the entire text is granted to mother’s lover, who explains at length how “we’re all sick of America and Americans” (191), “America is going to become irrelevant,” “It is losing its center” (id.). As if this radical decentering were insufficient to make the point (Jingo rejoinder: “If we occupy the center, it’s because you put us there” (192)), lover ties it back, perhaps too tidily:

“I don’t know this America anymore. I don’t recognize it,” he said. “There’s an empty space where America used to be.” (193)

The United States is according the Falling Man, no? (“God is the voice that says, ‘I am not here’” (236).) The US as indispensable impossibility, *stasis*, *kinesis*--but also lapsed, fallen into amnesia, its own crimes forgotten even as it itself is victim of crimes in unlawful response thereto.

Develops otherwise the interest from *Mao II* and other loci the misanthropic notion of “being a crowd, this was a religion in itself” (185). Marks out this ugly *topos*, however, as specifically “a white person’s thoughts, the processing of white panic data” (id.). Probably a bit more severe than *Bleeding Edge*.

Recommended for those who develop bumps caused by small fragments of the suicide bomber’s body

('organic shrapnel'), readers for whom God would be a presence that remained unimaginable, and white persons, white their fundamental meaning, their state of being.

Oh, best cover art ever on the first edition.

Michael Finocchiaro says

There are good DeLillo books and there are poor ones. I have to put *Falling Man* in this second category. I know, it is about 9/11 and about the reaction of folks in Manhattan to the trauma afterwards. But I was not particularly moved by the plot (found it a bit derivative and pedestrian) and found the imagination did not exceed that of *Underworld* which I really adored. I could not muster much affinity to the characters. I would definitely not take this one on a desert island. If you want to read EVERYTHING by DeLillo than you will read this one. Otherwise stick to what most consider he wrote best: *Underworld*, *Libra*, *Mao II* and *White Noise*.

Paolo says

Giustamente in una recensione di un lettore qui su Goodreads si diceva che se c'era una autore titolato a scrivere dell' 11 settembre questo era DeLillo, visto che la costruzione delle due torri aveva fatto da sfondo a larghi brani di *Underworld*.

Peccato che il risultato sia molto inferiore alle attese: De Lillo, che ha saputo trarre un' epopea da una palla da baseball, qui sembra come soverchiato dall'immanità dell'evento, nonostante gli fornisca in abbondanza il "materiale" prediletto (detriti & complotti), producendo un'opera pudica e ripiegata su se stessa. Apprezzabile, ma siamo lontani da *Rumore Bianco* e ad anni luce da *Underworld*.

K.D. Absolutely says

You pick up a book. You read the blurbs. Those in front, at the back and perhaps those in the first few pages. Then you form an impression. Maybe this book is good. Maybe this is about this and about that. Then you pay for the book and start reading at home.

We all know about *The Falling Man*. On September 11, 2001, a man was photograph falling, or some people say flying, from the north tower. He appeared to have, in his last instants of life, embraced his fate. He departed from this earth like an downward arrow. Five years after the attack, he was identified as **Jonathan Briley**, a a 43-year-old employee of the *Windows on the World* restaurant.

This 2007 novel, *Falling Man* by the master storyteller **Don DeLillo**, is not about him.

That may disappoint some people. I, too, was disappointed. I was already on the page 30 of this 246-page book waiting for that character to show up. The main male protagonist, **Keith** who works in the poker house in one of the towers, is seen in the opening scene walking - bleeding and scared and confused - aimlessly around the North Tower before it collapsed. So, where is the falling man? There is **a** falling man in the story but he was used by Mr. DeLillo as a symbol and not an active character. That falling man works in a circus

or doing bungee jumps along the streets of New York.

I also thought that Mr. DeLillo would dwell on another dysfunctional American family: Keith, Lianne and Justin as described in the blurbs. That was another disappointment. This is no *Home* by Marilynne Robinson, nor *Cost* by Roxana Robinson, nor any other Robinsons, not even funny like the movie *Meet the Robinsons*. And that is where the magic of DeLillo's writing is anchored upon: being unpredictable. He brings you to a place you are not expecting to go or to accept a reasoning that you are not expecting or not ready to believe. He seems to know what you are thinking as a reader and he hates to be double-guessed.

As usual, writing is flawless. The characters, at times, felt like caricatures but I guess that it is the intention. Mr. DeLillo does not what the readers to focus on the family members. The story is about somethings bigger and looming above all of us: global terrorism, racial and religious beliefs and even the purpose of one's life.

I learned something new though gruesome: **organic shrapnels** - human flesh that got driven into the skin of the survivor; it only shows up months later after the bombing.

HEAVEN FORBID THAT YOU DIE WITHOUT READING THIS.

Kaylin (The Re-Read Queen) says

For-school-read that I may or may not have procrastinated ???

Josh says

"These are the days after. Everything is now measured by after."

As I write this, on the 13th anniversary of 9/11 -- one of the most tragic and revered days in American History -- I reflect back on Delillo's "Falling Man" and what I got from this fictional text based on a time and place that is still fresh in many minds and hearts as if it happened, in a figurative sense, yesterday.

Outside of the death of loved ones and grief-stricken friends and family, "Falling Man" tells of a time after the tragedy. How a family that was once broken becomes closer; an anonymous briefcase given back to its owner and a healing ensues between two people; the question of 'why?' and the reminiscence of a time prior to the incident; the symbolism of the street artist 'The Falling Man' disparate from who was labeled 'Falling Man'; the point of view from both sides, enemy vs. foe.

To be honest and literal, all of these thoughts, while being engrained in our minds at the time, slowly recede, grains of sand by hourglass, from our memory as we age and get older, looking at death in the mirror as it closely arrives to its destination, like Pearl Harbor is no longer on many minds until the anniversary.

Delillo's story fails, at times, to share the emotional side of these people, but brings forth the emotion in the read itself. This is my fifth book in two years by Delillo and it might be my last for awhile. I'm sure there's been better stories written about this topic, yet I can only recount what I've read from this one.

Giving it a 3, but would give it a 2.5 if possible.

Natalie Monroe says

On September 11th, 2001, two planes crashed into the World Trade Center. Meg Cabot was living several streets away at the time and wrote a first-person account of the entire horrific incident.

I recommend you read her story rather than this artsy, detached piece of crap.

Joselito Honestly and Brilliantly says

This novel has a great backdrop: the 9-11 and how it affected the lives of several interesting characters (even two of the 9-11 terrorists are here). But this was overwhelmed by a lot of tricks which didn't work (for me):

- a. sparse dialogues, words and phrases used instead of complete sentences. Instead, for example, of one character (Keith) telling his estrange wife (Lianne) that she did something stupid quarreling with a neighbor with the latter's vicious dog beside her, he would just utter: "That dog" (no ellipsis even, just a final period: "That dog.", making it sound as if robots, not humans, were conversing);
- b. vague philosophical musings that could either be, take a guess, profound or nonsensical ("God would consume her. God would de-create her."); and
- c. sudden change in time and characters so that the reader seems to be constantly being flogged while trying to read. The author has no respect for the reader. With an abrupt change of character in the narration, for example, he could have very well lessened the reader's difficulty by naming the character suddenly in the scene. Instead, however, he uses mere PRONOUNS so the reader has to take the extra effort figuring out first who this "he" or "she" now is.

Some novels would have stories so vivid, and characters so alive, that it's as if you are experiencing everything yourself (e.g., "Dangling Man" by Saul Bellow). This one by Don DeLillo, in contrast, is just like watching an old, poorly-directed film, in a black-and-white TV with a grainy screen and a very bad audio.

What a torture!

tim says

In some ways, DeLillo seemed the perfect candidate to write a novel about 9/11. In *White Noise* there was the idea of terrorists flying a hijacked passenger jet into the White House. In *Underworld*, the construction of the twin towers lumed large in the background for a good part of the book. The cover photo itself focuses on the twin towers rising into clouds (smoke?), with a bird (a plane?) flying close by. It may be a stretch to read a connection with 9/11 into *Underworld's* cover (not to mention it has nothing to do with DeLillo's writing), but it was hard not to imagine these connections while in the middle of reading *Underworld* when 9/11/01 happened. Moreover, many aspects of DeLillo's writing deal with major world-changing events such as 9/11. How drastically the world changed after JFK's assassination is a topic that threads through several of his books (most magnificently in *Libra*).

And so maybe not unsurprisingly, immediately following 9/11 DeLillo was accosted by people who thought, for some reason, he would have answers to why 9/11 happened. He responded by writing *Cosmopolis*, a book which passed over the topic of 9/11 altogether and instead tells the story of a billionaire stock market genius engaged in the intentional sabotage of his personal assets as well as those of his clients--all of which

occurs over the course of one day in the year 2000 (how quickly everything can change in a day). It is a story of our own undoing from the inside, as opposed to our undoing by outsiders (bringing into question our role as the unprovoked victims of foreign terrorism).

Letting a few more years pass, DeLillo finally took on what many thought he eventually would, despite high expectations difficult for anyone to live up to.

To be fair, I didn't want to give in to these expectations. I wanted and tried to read *Falling Man* because it is DeLillo, not because it's a novel about 9/11. Yet after reading *Falling Man*, I felt something missing in the fragments of the super-charged dialog, vivid settings, and empty characters tossing about in my head--because like the sooty, scattered tons of paper from the fallen World Trade Center, DeLillo's fictional fragments were nearly devoid of emotion. This may very well have been DeLillo's intention, however, that the reader walk away just as vacant and lost as the shells of his characters living on after 9/11.

For me, the incredible dialog DeLillo often creates as well as the way he writes about art and history are reasons enough to read any of his books. Yet these reasons will not be enough for everyone. Ultimately, if you feel compelled to read *Falling Man*--whether because it is a book by DeLillo, or simply because it is about 9/11--you should. Although, I will recommend that it not be the only book you read written by DeLillo.

Phrynne says

This book opens with the events of 9/11 and follows the experiences of one survivor who walks out of one of the twin towers as they topple. It goes on to describe his life in the aftermath. This is a sad and serious book written in De Lillo's typical style with short, choppy sentences and quick changes from one character's perspective to another. Sometimes I had to reread bits to be sure who was speaking but that's De Lillo! An interesting read.

Julia says

Although I understood that the writing style was fractured to reflect the fractured lives of the characters, I found the style annoying and frustrating. Though the topic was interesting, the author would switch from character to character and it was hard to figure out what was going on. In the beginning I would keep going back and looking for clues in the text so I could figure out which character's story I was on, but it became so annoying that I gave up and just would read, not always knowing which character we were on. I got that it was probably a reflection of the mindset after 9/11, that it all blended together and felt empty, but I just felt that this could have been communicated in a better fashion for the reader. The story is depressing and fractured. An interesting topic and manner of handling it, but just not to my taste. I think if the writing had been clearer or more engaging for the reader, I might have loved this book. Others might really enjoy it, particularly the more intellectual types - the english lit majors. (Yes, Katy Lain, I am talking to you)

Ilenia Zodiaco says

C'è qualcosa di opaco ne "L'uomo che cade". Il lettore è investito da un senso di disorientamento, di ottundimento, come dopo un grande trauma. La ferita dell'America, post 11 Settembre, è esposta. Meno in

rilievo risultano molti dei tratti distintivi dell'autore: i dialoghi cerebrali, la riflessione sui media. Più respiro alla sofferta intimità dei personaggi. Credo che sia il più triste, il più dolente dei romanzi di DeLillo (tra quelli letti). Forse non è nemmeno un romanzo, sono dei frammenti di un immaginario distrutto. La crepa che minaccia le vite dei personaggi stavolta sembra troppo profonda per portare ad un nuovo equilibrio. Più onestamente, come il protagonista, ci convertiamo al gioco d'azzardo, ci rassegniamo a situazioni temporanee, ogni stabilità distrutta, ogni armonia da ricostruire.

Ali Nazifpour says

This book reads like 250 pages of great poetry. The prose is beautiful, moving, and breathtaking. The tragedy and trauma is felt poetically. The complex issues are dealt with all their complexity, and the tragedy is presented with all its force and yet subtly. The book never falls into sentimentality, reducing the touchy subject of 9/11 to a simple tear-jerker, it doesn't act "inspirational". It would be very easy for this book to suck, but it doesn't. It is a masterpiece. It is a worthy ode to 9/11, its victims, and the aftermath of that tragedy, and it makes you live the tragedy yourself. No better elegy is needed. It is like Yeats's "Easter 1916", heartfelt, moving, sublime, and yet not glorifying in a stupefying manner. To me, it is one of the best novels ever written.
