

The mechanisms of trauma in post-9/11 literature

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Abstract

The terrorist attack of 11 September 2001 was a momentous event that marked contemporary history. For many people it was the ultimate traumatic event, and as such it was able to arouse representation, in addition to bring to mind memories and fears, which were believed to be forgotten or related to distant moments of our history.

During the following decade, the account of the events of *Ground Zero* was such an emotional literary *topos* for many Anglo-American writers that critics coined the term post-9/11 literature to indicate a series of novels that, directly or indirectly, describe the feeling of loss, terror and catastrophe ascribable to the event. Taken as a whole, as a single narrative *corpus*, in the progression of works that make up this new literary genre one can identify an analogy with the reactions that gradually manifest themselves in a person who has suffered a trauma or a loss. The narrative representations of the destruction of the Twin Towers seem to follow the same phases of the reactions to trauma identified in various areas by psychologists such as Kübler-Ross, Drotar and Moses.

The purpose of this study is to show how, during the decade following the events of 9/11, Anglo-American writers reacted, writing their works, with the same mechanisms with which common folks react upon being given tragic news.

Key words: *Ground Zero, literature, mourning; object-relations; trauma; September 11, 2001.*

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Introduction

The attack to the World Trade Center of New York City is the “quintessential cultural trauma” (Smelser, 2004, p. 264). It provided the background for a type of narrative known as post-9/11 that explore the experience. It provided the background for a type of narrative known as post-9/11 that talks about the event. The definition is by now used unanimously by critics to refer to approximately fifty books of Anglo-American literature produced by renowned writers that has sparked heated and controversial debates. Due to their characteristics, these novels were able to describe the importance of the historic moment.

America had never really suffered an attack like 9/11. The traumatic event of Pearl Harbour, which may appear to many as a precedent, actually involved the military base on the islands of Hawaii, so the attack was not perceived by the American citizens as having happened in the motherland. The Twin Towers, on the other hand, were in New York, the financial and cultural heart of the United States. In the words of the philosopher Jean Baudrillard, the attack against the Towers was “a symbolic act” (Baudrillard, 2002, p. 25). As such, it was able to arouse, above all, reactions of revenge, anger and shock; the critical comments on the facts were instead rarer.

Trauma and its account

Trauma is any event which a person finds difficult to deal with. It has been defined as something with proportions such as to be overpowering, like a war, a natural catastrophe, an incident of major proportions. More recent studies have underscored how other situations as well, not only ascribable to the person’s social sphere, but also the strictly personal one, such as the communication of an inauspicious diagnosis for oneself or for one’s loved ones, follow the same reactions of the trauma and loss historically defined in the psychological and psychoanalytical sphere.

The Freudian theory on trauma

According to psychoanalysis, 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.

In economic terms, the trauma is characterized by an influx of excitations that is excessive by the standard of the subject’s tolerance and capacity to master such excitations and work them out psychically” (Laplanche, Pontalis, 1967, p. 465).

In 1915, in his work *Thoughts for the Times on War and Death* Freud wrote:

We cannot but feel that no event has ever destroyed so much that is precious in the common possessions of humanity, confused so many of the clearest intelligences, or so thoroughly debased what is highest. Science herself has lost her passionless impartiality; her deeply embittered servants seek for weapons from her with which to contribute towards the struggle with the enemy. Anthropologists feel driven to declare that enemy inferior and degenerate, psychiatrists issue a diagnosis of his disease of mind or spirit. Probably, however, our sense of these immediate evils is disproportionately strong, and we are not entitled to compare them with the evils of other times which we have not experienced (1915b, p. 275).

These words, written about World War I, inspired the scientist to describe a new type of condition, war neurosis. In *Introduction to Psycho-Analysis and the War Neuroses* (1919), Freud updated the definition by writing that war neuroses are traumatic neuroses that also manifest themselves in times of peace following scary experiences or serious accidents, with no relationship whatsoever with a conflict in the Ego. World War I was a conflict without precedents, terrifying due to

both the violence and the barbarity that was unleashed. The men of that time would have never believed so many atrocities would be possible. In *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920) Freud added that:

When the dreams of patients suffering from traumatic neuroses so regularly take them back to the situation of the disaster they do not thereby, it is true, serve the purpose of wish-fulfilment, the hallucinatory conjuring up of which has, under the domination of the pleasure-principle, become the function of dreams. But we may assume that they thereby subserve another purpose, which must be fulfilled before the pleasure-principle can begin its sway. These dreams are attempts at restoring control of the stimuli by developing apprehension, the pretermission of which caused the traumatic neurosis (p. 32).

The Kleinian theory of trauma

In "Mourning and its Relation to Manic-Depressive States" (1940), Melanie Klein wrote that the ability to grieve depends on the balance between love and trust on the one hand, and hate and persecution on the other. Grieving occurs through the recognition of the otherness of one's own internal objects and the failure to identify with them: "the ego is driven by depressive anxieties (anxiety lest the loved objects as well as itself should be destroyed) to build up omnipotent and violent phantasies, partly for the purpose of controlling and mastering the 'bad', dangerous objects, partly in order to save and restore the loved ones" (Klein, 1940, p. 151). When grieving, one not only suffers for the loss, but also for the difficulty of having to rebuild an inner world which seemed to be on the brink of collapse. Klein acknowledged that we experience a feeling of hate for the loved one that we have lost, in addition to a feeling of guilt triggered by having survived the tragic event.

According to the Object-Relations theory, every individual is driven by a desire to relate, but since no individual will ever see all their needs met, this lack will cause frustra-

tion. In order to counteract it, all human beings build inside themselves representations which are used to meet their tangible needs. Hence, "external objects" are "interiorized". In the presence of a trauma, the internal objects tend to represent themselves as being distressing. In other words, they become "bad objects". These negative representations create an (internal) mental conflict that manifests itself in the person folding in upon themselves and in the desire for isolation.

As regards Melanie Klein's theory, the psychologist Linda Young wrote that all events,

felt to be *caused* either by good or bad objects, dependent on the nature of the event. One can think then that the internal experience of a traumatic event is an experience of being abandoned by loving good internal objects which protect and contain, and instead left to the mercy of hateful and hating objects, felt to have *caused* the trauma. This is especially the case when there has been a real external disaster, since it is to be protected from these extreme experiences, involving the death of someone and/or the possibility of dying oneself, that one *most* expects from one's good object (1998, p. 64).

William R. D. Fairbairn, who in his work "The Repression and the Return of Bad Objects (with special reference to the 'War Neuroses')" (1943) discussed at great lengths Object-Relations with bad objects in connection with traumatic war situations, drew on what Freud had written in *Introduction to Psycho-Analysis and the War Neuroses* (1919), and wrote that "an unconscious situation involving internalized bad objects is liable to be activated by any situation in outer reality conforming to a pattern which renders it emotionally significant in the light of the unconscious situation. Such precipitating situations on outer reality must be regarded in the light of traumatic situations" (1943, p. 76). Hence, trauma occurs because the situation evokes memories and pre-existing meanings that are particularly distressing for the person. Fairbairn called this mechanism the return of bad

objects, which generate an aversion and an anger already identified by Freud. The return of good objects, on the other hand, in other words the return to normality, as Freud said,

are carried out bit by bit, at great expense of time and cathectic energy, and in the meantime the existence of the lost object is psychically prolonged. Each single one of the memories and expectations in which the libido is bound to the object is brought up and hyper-catheted, and detachment of the libido is accomplished in respect of it. Why this compromise by which the command of reality is carried out piecemeal should be so extraordinarily painful is not at all easy to explain in terms of economics. It is remarkable that this painful unpleasure is taken as a matter of course by us. The fact is, however, that when the work of mourning is completed the ego becomes free and uninhibited again (Freud, 1915a, pp. 243-244).

The modern models of reaction to trauma

The defence mechanisms described by Freud and Klein form the basis of modern psychological models. The most important study on the grieving is *On death and dying* (1969), conducted by Elisabeth Kübler-Ross with terminally-ill patients at the end of the 1960s. The Swiss psychiatrist subdivided the patients' reaction to the diagnosis into five phases: the denial and isolation phase, which "functions as a buffer after unexpected shocking news, allows the patient to collect himself and, with time, mobilize other, less radical defenses. [...] Denial is usually a temporary defense and will soon be replaced by partial acceptance" (Kübler-Ross, 1969, p.38). The following phase, the second one, is the anger phase: "When the first stage of denial cannot be maintained any longer, it is replaced by feelings of anger, rage, envy, and resentment" (Kübler-Ross, 1969, p. 49); contrary to the denial phase, the anger phase is very difficult to deal with. Afterwards, the patients come to terms with the event (bar-

gaining); this is the compromise and bargaining phase, and represents an attempt to postpone the inevitable. The fourth phase is the depression phase, and starts when it is no longer possible to deny the disease; it is a way to prepare oneself for the imminent loss. And finally, there is the acceptance phase, a condition in which the patient "he will reach a stage during which he is neither depressed nor angry about his 'fate.'" (Kübler-Ross, 1969, p. 109).

The studies conducted by Kübler-Ross paved the way for various similar research aimed at exploring the reactions of someone who receives a communication that may be the cause of a trauma. There are many models of the Kübler-Ross type (only some of them will be mentioned herein), and they all start from the concept of assimilation and processing of a piece of news (which is, like literature, a story) relative an event perceived as traumatic by the person. Dennis Drotar (1975) proposed a model aimed at interpreting the emotional reactions experienced by parents when a congenital anomaly is diagnosed at the birth of their child. The adaptation process that the parents face starting from the diagnosis includes the initial shock, denial (they try to temporarily hide the reality), anger (aimed at those who are seen as being more fortunate, or at the medical team), pain (a feeling of generalised sadness) and adaptation to reality, which makes it possible to arrive at the reorganisation of their interior status (Drotar, Baskiewicz, et al., 1975).

Ken Moses (1983) conducted a series of studies similar to those carried out by Drotar that allowed him to develop a seven-phase model. It included the initial shock phase, denial, depression, feeling of guilt, the shame and embarrassment phase with subsequent isolation, the "miracle" phase and, lastly adaptation and acceptance. Afterwards, he proposed six states, rather than stages, that included denial, anxiety, fear, sense of guilt, depression and rage. The term "state" emphasised the sense of affliction which is not considered a set of self-ending stages, but rather a continuous process (Moses, 1987).

Literature of mourning

Thomas Ogden wrote that mourning is a process that entails the experience of doing something, one “the individual’s effort to meet, to be equal to, to do justice to, the fullness and complexity of his or her relationship to what has been lost, and to the experience of loss itself” (Ogden, 2001, p. 96). Writing is *doing something*. During the decade that followed the attack against the Twin Towers, a period identified herein as a time of trauma and morning, several novels were written that, for some of their aspects, represent the specific phases of denial, anger, bargaining, depression and acceptance described above.

Literature of denial and isolation

In December 2001, the essay by Don DeLillo entitled *In the Ruins of the Future: Reflections on Terror and Loss in the Shadow of September* (2001) was published. The essay showed the author’s startled attitude towards the event. His trust in the American ideals seemed to falter but did not break. He rejected the idea that the United States could be in any way responsible for the attack, and offered considerations that were revisited in a different manner during the following years even by other novelists. He wrote that the American tradition of freedom of expression and the regulations of the American legal system aimed at safeguarding the rights of the accused can only seem to be an outrage to men dedicated to the strategy of suicide terror. DeLillo refused to acknowledge that the attack was not against democracy, but rather against the imperialistic policy of the North American country which, besides, had flaunted those same ideals to cover up its own expansion policy, as suggested by other intellectuals such as Noam Chomsky during observations and interviews which were then brought together in *Power and Terror. Post-9/11 Talks and Interviews* (2003).

As regards the fiction, one of the first significant books to describe the reactions to the

events of 9/11 was *Dead Air* (2002) written by the English Iain Banks. Although the writer lived on the other side of the Atlantic, he fully managed to describe the feeling that many Americans experienced while watching the images of the attack on television. The novel, which does not have an actual plot, describes the days of the deejay Kenneth Nott, right after the attack against the Twin Towers, engaged in discussions that reflect an attitude of denial of the event. For example, at a party he overhears these statements:

«I can’t believe this. I just can’t believe I’m seeing this.» «Where’s Superman? Where’s Batman? Where’s Spiderman?» «Where’s Bruce Willis, or Tom Cruise, or Arnie, or Stallone?» «The barbarians have seized the narrative.» «Fuck, the bad guys are re-writing the scripts...!» «Challenger and Chernobyl were SF, Aum Shinrikyo and the Tokyo Underground was manga; this is a disaster movie directed by Satan» (p. 33).

Literature of anger

The book by Mark Steyn, *America Alone: The End of the World as We Know*, which became a best-seller in 2006, is a typical example of an angry reaction to the traumatic event. The author is a famous American journalist and columnist, and his book rode the triumphalism, the patriotic *rodontade* and the revanchist rhetoric of the moment (DeRosa, 2011). He theorises that in the near future the so-called Western civilisation will be an endangered “species”. The original populations of Italy, Spain and the former Soviet Union will be gradually replaced by foreign workers, almost all of them Muslims: “by 2050, 60 percent of Italians will have no brothers, no sisters, no cousins, no aunts, no uncles. The big Italian family, with papa pouring the vino and mama spooning out the pasta down an endless table of grandparents and nieces and nephews, will be gone, no more, dead as the dinosaurs” (Steyn, 2006, p. 13). The United States will be the only Christian country left, whilst the rest of the world

is destined to become completely Muslim, also advantaged by the low birth rate of “western” populations. America will maintain a good birth rate and will not age like Italy and Spain will do instead. According to Steyn, this will happen because America, unlike Europe, is not managed like a giant welfare office where the population can settle in their own wealth and lose the drive to procreate¹. The journalist’s considerations continue by pointing out that the Muslim population prefers observing the sharia rather than the national laws, with the indulgence of local governments, which see in immigration an aid due to the economic and an inevitable aspect of multi-culturalism.

Literature of bargaining

The negotiation phase is the first attempt to find balance after the extreme phase of isolation (withdrawal) and anger (attack). In its narrative representation, this phase is described by static characters who are not able to change their lives if not in minimum terms². An example of this is the book *The Good Life* (2006) by Jay McInerney. This novel focuses on the life of the well-off inhabitants of Manhattan, and 9/11 becomes the background for the marriages and affairs of the those who were already co-leading characters in the novel *Brightness Falls* (1992). The “good life” of the title refers to the life that originates from the ruins when the two protagonists, Corrine Calloway and Luke McGavock, both marries, meet and fall in love. Aside from the sentimental plot, at the

end of the novel the reader discovers that the only function which the collapse of the Twin Towers had was to change their interpersonal relationships. As the critics John N. Duvall and Robert P. Marzec point out, while the firemen were running inside the WTC, the two lovers should have thought at bit more about their own children and spouses, rather than their new relationships. (Duvall, Marzec, 2011). The two couples react to the disaster by expressing astonishment (first phase), without asking themselves what could have been the real reasons for the attack. Afterwards, they give their contribution to the community, but the reaction stops there, in a bargaining situation. After the catastrophe, Luke cannot imagine going to the office that day or the following days; however, aside from the pain, there is nothing else. There is no reaction: “but then again, I can’t imagine what I should be doing. What are we supposed to do now?” (McInerney, 2006, p. 78).

During the same year, Claire Messud described the life of New York City’s cultural elite after 9/11 in her long novel *The Emperor’s Children* (2006). In this work, there also seems to only be room for pain and astonishment when faced with the unthinkable (denial phase). The editorial operations of the great Murray Thwaite (the emperor in the title) are interrupted, and inaction seems to envelop all things. It is only the finale, where the young Frederick ‘Bootie’ Tubb decides to change his name and life, brings to novel to the more advanced bargaining phase del bargaining.

The Novel *Falling Man* (2007) by Don DeLillo is equally static. Aside from describing the days of the tragic event, it fails to add much of anything new to understanding the trauma. It appears to be an unfolding upon oneself, as already done in the article written by the author in 2001. The article brings together fiction which, in some way, shows some progress in understanding the event: xenophobia appears in the sub-plot that describes the idiosyncrasy felt by Lianna for the neighbour of Greek origin who listens to

¹ This vision seems to follow the thoughts which were expressed in Italy by Oriana Fallaci in her books *La rabbia e l’orgoglio* (2001), *La forza della ragione* (2004), *Oriana Fallaci intervista sé stessa. L’apocalisse* (2004).

² There is also a literary representation parallel to this, which mainly consists of accounts that talk about objects that belonged to the victims of the Twin Towers attacks. These objects are found or appear as ghosts, sparking shock and fear. *Only Partly Here* (2003) by Lucius Shepard, *The Things They Left Behind*, (2005) by Stephen King, *Until Forgiveness Comes* (2008) by K. Tempest Bradford are just some of the many. These stories are the narrative representation of Fairbairn’s theory of the return of bad objects (Gramantieri, 2015).

Middle-Eastern music, but it is actually just a hint of a reaction. DeLillo is not interested in the socio-political analysis, focusing instead on the citizens of New York, first and foremost on the leading character Keith Neudecker who, during the tragic event, instinctively goes back to his ex-wife's home. But this action does not have a reconstructive function for Keith, and so DeLillo commits the same "sin" as McInerney, reducing the post-9/11 to a scenario of final adultery of its protagonists. In fact, Manhattan's apocalypse has the effect of reconciling Keith and Lianne, but then drives the man into Florence's arms. There are no differences between the pre and post-9/11 Keith. Those things which Keith perceived as threatening stayed the same with respect to the attack against the Twin Towers, and his life is just as poor as it was before 9/11 (Sumner, 2014).

Literature of depression

Although it has a specific clinical effect, the term depression can also be intended in the Kleinian sense. It coincides with the inability to place the good object inside the Ego. This is from where an initial feeling of rage arises, followed by sadness. The depressive position theorised by Klein during babies around four months old, in the adult materialises in depression. This "position" coincides with the moment in which "a sense of inner reality is developed and in its wake a sense of outer reality as well" (Segal, 1952, p. 187). According to Klein, the reconstruction of the object takes place during the depression phase. As regards post-9/11 literature, we can include in this phase those novels featuring science fiction elements. This literary genre (science fiction) implies an additional creative invention compared to the simple plot (Gramantieri, 2016). The novel by Cormac McCarthy *The Road* (2006) describes an apocalypse the cause of which is not specified. The flatlands of the United States are burned by a heat so intense that the road tarmac has melted, trapping the escapees who were travelling along those roads and reduc-

ing them to mummified remains. In this devastated and unnamed land, the protagonists of the book are a man and a little boy who drag a supermarket cart down grey roads among hills and plains. The boy was born after the catastrophe so has never known the previous world, if not through his father's memories. While walking towards the coast in search of a community that could take them in, during the trip the two are the victims of cannibalistic aggressions that show the reader how there is no residue of humanity left. The world as we know it today has disappeared and the feeling of impotence and abandonment is clear in every page. But the father does not get discouraged. The *quest* towards the coast continues despite all adversities, and this is what makes McCarthy's novel different from those written by McInerney and DeLillo. The hope of a future during a catastrophe is stronger than any other feeling. In this view, the book by McCarthy presents itself as the classical frontier novel. At the end of the nineteenth century, the frontier was represented by the lands of the west and by Texas; today, half of the frontier is no longer geographical but time-related. McCarthy's new Americans must reach a new spiritual and human dimension in order to survive.

Another dystopic novel that describes the climate of malaise following the attack against the Twin Towers is *Harm* (2007) by Brian W. Aldiss. The title's acronym means *Hostile Activities Research Ministry*, a sort of service assigned to homeland security which replaced the regular law enforcement agencies under emergency conditions. But *harm* also means "pain" or "damage"; and the "*to harm*" means "to cause hurt" or "to damage". And harm is that which is suffered by the protagonist Paul Fadhil Abbas Ali, simply called prisoner B by its persecutors, soldiers who are also his fellow countrymen, who arrest him since his origins and culture represent "the hidden enemy among us" (p. 3). Paul Fadhil is a writer and an English citizen. He is born in London, fully integrated in British society; he is laic, in fact, even an atheist, although his father who emigrated from

Uganda was a Muslim. In one of his novels, entitled *Pied Piper of Hamnet*, the writer has the protagonist jokingly say, while he is drunk, that he would like to kill the Prime Minister. This quip taken out of context is taken by the military branch of HARM as a clue to the existence of a terrorist plan that the man is presumed to have organised when, as a tourist, he visited Saudi Arabia and the Muslim City of Qem³. In prison, the man is tortured and driven to confess never-imagined terrorist attacks. During his imprisonment, Paul suddenly finds himself on planet Stygia. His name is Fremant and he is a soldier enlisted under the dictator Astarot. Paul, who is English and a Muslim, in other words a man with a double nature, is described by Aldiss as being affected by a dissociative psychological disorder that allows him to live in two worlds. We know that dissociation is one of the opportunities used by the human mind to deal with trauma (Anderson, Gold, 2003; Roland, 2010); it is the escape when there is no way out (Putnam, 1992). Paul finds himself living on a distant plane, though we do not know how much of it is real or created by the imagination of the mind subjected to the trauma of forced detention. His may be “a defence against trauma, which, unlike defences against internal conflict, does not simply deny the self-access to potentially threatening feelings, thoughts, and memories; it effectively obliterates, at least temporarily, the *existence* of that self to whom the trauma could occur, and it is in that sense like a ‘quasi-death’” (Bromberg, 1998, p. 173). But the reinventing of a world, which could be mistaken for a disease, is in fact the first step towards healing. For this reason, Aldiss’ book can be included in the depression phase. The vision of the extra-terrestrial world serves to reconstruct the real world which, following the trauma caused by the imprisonment, was no longer recognisable. This reinventing of reality, which pre-

supposes a process of understanding the same, is also a characteristic of *The Execution Channel* (2007) by Ken MacLeod, a harsh and distressing novel. The author describes an Orwellian-type Great Britain, and the “execution channel” is the name of an tv channel which broadcasts non-stop images of violence and torture inflicted by unidentified military men on just as unidentified prisoners. The reference to the shocking images of Guantanamo, associate with the idea of the *reality show*, is clear. In MacLeod’s novel, the war against terrorism has been lost, and Russia and China are taking on a prominent role in global politics. In everyday life, terrorists act despite the fact that they are never visible. They never appear directly in the novel. Only their actions do. As if to say that their nationality is uncertain and that the torturers of the execution channel may very well be Western. Here too, the reflection on a Police State in a possible future represents a moment of reflection on the political and social consequences of Al-Qaeda. The description of a strong and absolutist state is not, in this case, a reaction of anger, but rather a critical consideration on a possible future.

The Pesthouse (2007) by Jim Crace also reprocesses trauma through the fictional reinvention of the idea of anti-modernity that, generally speaking, the American population, as well as many of the European populations (Crace is English) has in reference to Islam. Religious fundamentalism is allegorically represented by the Monastic order of the *Finger Baptists*, which welcomes Margaret during a stage of her journey. This community asks her to give up all metal objects since, after the tragic events of 9/11, even hair pins became a symbol of a past to be forgotten, dominated as it was by the use of metal, in other words of weapons. The return to a Medieval future is what the writer fears. This regression, however, is not the result of a possible Muslim conquest (an element that would place the book in the anger phase), but of an isolationist policy which is the result of Bush’s politics.

³ Here, one cannot but notice a parallelism with the fatwa inflicted against Salman Rushdie upon the publication of the *Satanic Verses* (1988)

Literature of acceptance

The novel by Amy Waldman entitled *The Submission* (2011) is a balanced representation of the feelings of hate and rancour (first reaction phases to trauma) and the need to understand that even Muslims can be, first of all, citizens of the United States (the Kleinian Depressive Position). As such, it can be included among the novels of the acceptance phase. The story described the outcome of an architecture contest (hence the title) to build a Memorial to the fallen of 9/11. The two finalist projects are the Garden, chosen by the representative of the victims' families Claire Burwell, and the Vacuum, chosen by the artists' spokesperson, Ariana Montagu: the winning project is the Garden, by the architect Mohammad Khan. He was born in Virginia, his parents are Indian and he practices no religion. The novel revolves around the question of whether Khan, in light of his ethnicity, should win or not. The *acceptance* phase is clear at the end of the novel, where the most progressive member of the jury panel (that which reveals to have reached the Depressive Position, as Melanie Klein would say) turns out to be Ariana Montagu, which at first favoured the Vacuum, whilst now wishes for Khan's right to win the contest to be respected, affirming the priority of the fairness principle. Claire Burwell, at first siding with the Garden, discovers herself being too recalcitrant due to her excessively close bond with the victims. Even if the ending chosen by Waldman is based on real politik (the project is withdrawn), the novel offers ample consideration on what happened on 9/11. These reflections how the trauma/grief has been overcome by now, and how it is

possible for people to now relate to one another in a balanced fashion.

Conclusions

The characteristics of the attack against the Twin Towers in 2001 are such that such event can be associated with the reactions tied to communications of tragic news. After 9/11, a literary genre came into being that not only describes the attack to the United States' nerve centre (through the novels written by Banks, McInerney, and DeLillo), and its possible consequences (Steyn's pamphlet), but also presents all the suggestions that a catastrophe entails, and from here the creation of apocalyptic stories (the novels written by McCarthy, Crace, Aldiss and MacLeod). In this literary production (post-9/11 novels) one can identify the reactions to communications of tragic news. Figure 1 shows how, albeit in a rather simplified way, during the decade following Al-Qaeda's attack, there was a succession of phases corresponding to the publication of novels that, individually, constitute a type of reaction to trauma. These phases, which vary in terms of number and characteristics depending on the various models drawn up by different scholars from Freud until today, can be traced back to the five-stage diagram of Elizabeth Kübler-Ross' model (denial and isolation, anger, bargaining, depression and acceptance). By following this diagram, it was possible to verify how, comparing the decade following 2001 to the time frame needed to accept a traumatic piece of news, we can state that certain novels belong to a specific phase of the grieving process.

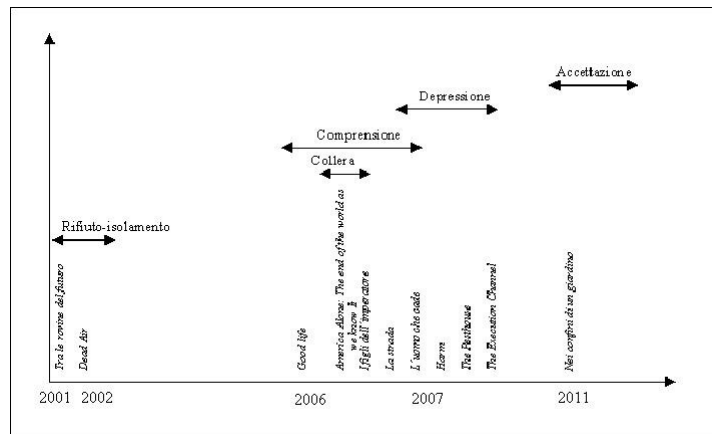


Figura 1: Timeline of the stages of mourning and of the novels post-9/11.

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