In an article entitled “Art and Atrocity in a Post-9/11 World” the Jewish-American author Thane Rosenbaum asks himself: “Is there a proper role for the artist, and specifically the novelist, at this time in our nation’s history? Can we make art in a time of atrocity? Does the imagination have anything to say when it has to compete with the actual horror of collapsing skyscrapers […]?” He himself has a categorical answer to these questions. “As a novelist,” he writes, “I wouldn’t touch the World Trade Center, and the looming tragedy around it, as a centerpiece for a new book […]. I’m not ready to write, or talk, about it yet.” According to him, in the aftermath of September 11, “[s]ilence might be the loudest sound of all.”

Rosenbaum’s plea for a “collective numbness” as the only proper response to “the horror of what happened” has gone fairly unheeded, however. In the wake of the terrorist attacks on New York and Washington, D.C., more than 30 novels have come out to date. This substantial body of 9/11 fiction, which is growing by the day, ranges from the absolutely inane to the interesting and probing. Many of the novels deal with the events of 9/11 only tangentially: as a tragic moment that punctuates other, more mainstream (mostly love) interests. There is also no shortage of novels, which express raw outrage and revanchist feelings. These novels—often patriotic or Christian-revival novels—sell in large numbers but have little or no literary merit. In their treatment of 9/11, they are characterized

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by what, in a totally different context, Eric Santner has termed “narrative fetishism.” “Far from providing a symbolic space for the recuperation of anxiety,” Santner writes, “narrative fetishism directly or indirectly offers reassurances that there was no need for anxiety in the first place.”\(^4\) The formulaic plots of the narratively fetishized 9/11 novels are always the same. The attack on the homeland is the occasion for a conversion: from a sinful or worldly attitude to a religious and pious one and/or from lukewarm citizenship to flag-waving patriotism. The terrorist attacks, in other words, are shamelessly recuperated for ideological and propaganda purposes. The ultimate aim is to suppress the trauma of 9/11. Tragedy is turned into triumphalism without proper mourning or working-through.\(^5\)

Finally, there is a small group of novels that succeed in engaging the full range of the imagination. Through formal means they suggest the impact of shock—the immediate shock that causes panic or the slower realization that things have been altered beyond repair. These works testify to the shattering of certainties and the laborious recovery of balance. In a gesture that is familiar to therapists and writers alike, these novels affirm and counteract the impact of trauma. At one level, they register the moment of anamorphosis, the moment the subject loses its foothold in a world of objects, the moment the everyday sense of security and mastery is shattered, objects reveal a malign intention of their own and the human subject—deprived of its superiority vis-à-vis the world outside—is revealed in its utter vulnerability.\(^6\) But at another level, the novels also provide a context for what seems to be without context. They contain what seems uncontainable, and reconfigure the symbolic networks that the terrorist attacks destroyed. In transcending jingoistic discourse or media insipidities, the full engagement of the imagination reveals how, at the moment of traumatic impact, the known world dissolves in a flash and all that remains is bafflement and pain. By the same token, the plot is informed by the mental mechanism of recovery and repair. Language is the first healer. Expression counters obsession. Telling the tale is the first step in getting on with life, integrating what happened into a meaningful narrative.

In Don DeLillo’s *Falling Man*, however, no such discursive redemption takes place.\(^7\) Of all the 9/11 narratives, Don DeLillo’s *Falling Man* is the darkest and the starkest. In psychoanalytical terms, it is a portrait of pure melancholia without the possibility of working-through or mourning. *Falling Man* is the account of an endless re-enactment or acting-out of a traumatic experience that allows for no accommodation or (symbolic) resolution. One of the ways in which the polysemous title reverberates, is that *Falling Man* has the ambition of being an updated, early twenty-first century version of the fall of man. The (post)modern condition, evoked in the novel, is one of drift. The aspirational culture, the characteristic