In just sixteen words, Hernán Poza III (a former volunteer firefighter and, at the time of 9/11, a social worker in New York City) encapsulates the central tropes that have framed reactions to September 11 across multiple discursive realms: firstly, in media coverage and political rhetoric immediately following the attacks; secondly, in early critical theory; thirdly, and must enduringly, in the corpus of 9/11 trauma fiction, which forms the main focus of this chapter. Poza writes:

this is for history
this is overwhelming
this is not real
this is the new world
(Poza 2003, 19)

In his emphasis on the overwhelming nature of the attacks, Poza places the events in the territory of the incomprehensible and unrepresentable. Describing the ‘unreal’ spectacle that unfolded, he recalls the likeness between the images of September 11 and apocalyptic scenes from Hollywood blockbusters. In his suggestion that the attacks heralded the dawn of a new world, Poza reinforces the notion that 9/11 manifested a historical divide so trenchant that there could be no negotiation, no dialogue, between ‘before’ and ‘after’. Poza’s short stanza thus consolidates a representational template premised upon incomprehension, unreality, and rupture. However, it is my contention that the predominance of these concepts has prevented the realisation of his primary impression: the sense that 9/11 was ‘for history’.

L. Bond, Frames of Memory after 9/11
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Taking literary representations of September 11 as its starting point, this chapter argues that much of the popular fiction relating to 9/11 exhibits a dehistoricising bent that eschews concentration on the geopolitical context and consequences of the attacks in favour of portrayals of disrupted domesticity. Whilst a number of critics have commented upon this over-personalisation of the attacks, I extend this analysis to interrogate the ways in which many of the most prominent 9/11 novels manifest an uncritical recycling of paradigms inherited from orthodox trauma theory. Critiquing the pervasiveness of trauma as a frame of memory, I examine how the concept has been framed and narrativised in the years since 2001, attending to its leakage between discursive realms and highlighting its political instrumentality. I suggest that, by failing to distinguish between different levels of traumatisation, or acknowledge alternative modes of response, memorial practitioners and theorists have unwittingly reinforced the impression of a collective, ‘American’, reaction to 9/11. This normative paradigm masks experiential differences, threatening to nationalise loss in problematic – and potentially appropriative – ways by collapsing diverse modes of response into an undifferentiated trauma culture.

1.1 Literature, memory, and trauma

Astrid Erll contends that literature might well be seen as the archetypal medium for the signification of memory – its ‘symbol system’, to be precise (Erll 2011a, 144). Literature is central to the study of memory for two key reasons: firstly, because literary texts do much to constitute the content of a culture’s memory (reflecting upon and negotiating between differing interpretations of historic events); secondly, because, as it functions at a cultural level, the process of remembrance appears to mimic the form of literary texts in its attention to narrativisation, temporality, and genre. The meaning-making qualities of literature and memory are imbued with the ability to conjoin disparate times and places in a more-or-less coherent narrative. Accordingly, Hayden White suggests that our approach to the past is premised on the ‘fantasy that real events are properly represented when they can be shown to display the formal coherency of a story’ (White 1980, 8).

Literature and memory thus appear as entwined entities, dependent upon the organising qualities of narrative to structure and explicate lived experience, however reductively or imperfectly. As Paul Ricoeur (2004) has argued, temporality (or rather, the ability to structure time) is fundamental to the formal qualities of narrative, which assigns causality to historical