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**LIGHTS AND SHADOWS IN THE POST-9/11 AGE. LITERATURE,  
TRAUMA, GEOPOLITICS**

Florian Andrei Vlad, Editura Universitară: București, 2021. pp. 166. ISBN: 978-606-28-1385-7

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Florian Andrei Vlad's work, published two decades after the horrifying 9/11 events that shook not only America but the entire world, triggering countless emotional upheavals and changes in people's perspectives from the social, geopolitical and economic viewpoints, sets off on a critical journey where the glimpsed lights and the shadows lurking in the post 9/11 era coalesce, highlighting the various ways in which the traumas of these events have been dealt with in memorable fictional forms.

There is no coincidence that Florian Andrei Vlad published his work in 2021. The author endeavors to espy whether any sense can be made – exactly two decades later – of these apparently unrepresentable events by scrutinizing several literary texts attempting to cope with them: John Updike's *Terrorist* (2006), Jonathan Safran Foer's *Incredibly Loud and Extremely Close* (2005), and Don DeLillo's *Falling Man* (2007). The author motivates his choice by pinpointing that each of these writers tackled in their aforementioned works, in stirring ways, the predicaments and quandaries generated by this dark event that left deep scars in America's collective memory.

The first text places in the limelight an un-stereotypical character i.e., a would-be terrorist supposed to target a strategically vital New York landmark, while the other two deal with the trauma engendered by the characters' exposure to the 9/11 events. Moreover, having in view the powers of fiction, he notes that these three works represent "possible human experience in the shadow of a terrible event, while at the same time supplying redemptive elements that are likely to revive the human spirit in the face of adversity" (p. 10). The author's arguments for the choice of these three specific works are somewhat subjective and more objective clarifications in this regard might have been useful to the reader.

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Structured in nine chapters, accompanied by acknowledgments, the introduction and the bibliography, Florian Andrei Vlad's work engages with relevant aspects of the historical, geopolitical and social background linked to the post-9/11 fiction.

The first chapter tackles the question whether the 9/11 events marked the end of the American century, emphasizing the key role played by the contemporary perceptions on America's past, present and future in connection with its geopolitical commitments and with the governance of its multicultural and democratic society, on a continuously redefined path. The second chapter briefly presents several hard facts on and around 9/11, in an attempt to outline the context of the fictional ways of dealing with certain American cultural aspects in the aftermath of the terrorist attacks. The next two chapters focus on the responses to the terrifying 9/11 events that shook America and most of the world, such as G. W. Bush's War on Terror Speech (seen by many as a geopolitical landmark in a world of crumbling security and terror), the Patriot Act, the establishment of the Department of Homeland Security and the conspiracy theories fed by people's fears that they would lose some of their rights and liberties. The following two chapters deal with the concept of trauma and contemporary trauma theory (brief presentations of leading theorists and important stages or trends in literary trauma theory and correlated fields), whose understanding would furnish, in the author's perspective, a valuable interpretative foundation as far as the nature of trauma in fictional representations is concerned. These chapters aim at pinpointing concepts and ideas related to people's responses to various traumatic experiences.

The last three chapters represent the substantial core of Florian Andrei Vlad's volume, where the author explores three fictional realms haunted by various shadows of trauma caused by or connected to the 9/11 apparently unrepresentable events. One by one, Updike's *Terrorist*, Foer's *Incredibly Loud and Extremely Close*, and DeLillo's *Falling Man* are placed in the limelight and scrutinized through the lens of the aforementioned theoretical framework. Vlad presents Updike's *Terrorist* as a novel that broke new ground and enriched the fictional engagements with, and contributions to the 9/11 narrative, entailing new viewpoints in America's cultural and (geo)political reassessment and in ordinary people's attempts to deal with the traumas caused by these dark events. He pinpoints some of the ironies concealed in the novel by the authors' creative devices and unravels Updike's un-stereotypical, largely unexpected response to the pointlessness of 9/11, the terrorist featuring as a lucid, sensible young protagonist endowed with the critical lenses through which America is scrutinized. As far as *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* is concerned, Vlad highlights the eccentric representations of the 9/11 traumas in the novel and the diverse perspectives on the ways employed in order to deal with both individual and collective traumatic events. He also draws attention to the symbolical nature of Foer's recreations of the contemporary "intimations of immortality" (104), with a significant and evocative impact, especially when it comes to the ways in which innocence and experience respond to traumatic events. In Vlad's vision, Foer's quest

for creative, positive ways to cope with pointlessness, chaos and terror highlights the importance of coping mechanisms and positive behavior patterns in the fight against melancholia and trauma and notes the role played by this author's novel in engaging with horrifying historical deeds in new ways. In the last chapter, dedicated to DeLillo's *Falling Man*, the author analyzes the ways in which the responses to the 9/11 absurd and traumatic events are artistically represented and dealt with. In Vlad's opinion, the main character's traumatic narrative symbolizes, in fact, the dehumanization triggered by the postmodern condition in America (155).

The thorough documentation undertaken by the author is testified to by the carefully selected bibliography. It reflects the seriousness and soundness of the scholarly approach carried out by the author throughout the entire period dedicated to the conception and then to the actual writing of this volume.

In this volume, Florian Andrei Vlad perceptively reveals Updike, Foer and DeLillo's personal attempts to represent the unrepresentable and to articulate specific literary responses to the 9/11 apocalyptic events, thus enriching the cultural landscape and stimulating ideological debates. One cannot help feeling that the exploration of more post-9/11 American fiction could have broadened the scope of the perspective on the ways in which these traumatic events have been reflected in American literature. Be that as it may, this volume undeniably brings a valuable contribution to the literature dealing with trauma and 9/11 fiction, through the author's fresh perspective, close reading and valuable interpretation. Throughout its pages, the volume invites the reader on a journey aimed at elucidating some of the issues faced by the characters of these novels and the authors' symbolical representations interwoven with the historical, cultural and (geo)political background of the 9/11 events. It notes the overwhelming impact that the 9/11 events had on all aspects of American life and culture at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, while stressing the redemptive power of fiction to cope with the terror and horror of contemporary history.