

The Peculiarities of Chronotope in Don DeLillo's Novel "Falling Man"

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Don DeLillo is a prominent novelist of American postmodern literature who started his literary career in the 70s of the 20th century, and still creates new works for his audience. His first book, *Americana*, which was published in 1971, was followed by *Names* (1982), *White Noise* (1985), *Mao II* (1991), *Cosmopolis* (2003), *Falling Man* (2007), *Point Omega* (2010) and some other works. Preserving the main traditions of postmodern literature, DeLillo puts forward the essential and actual problems of current times such as the state of an individual in post-war world, the nuclear war, the influence of Mass Media on an individual and manipulation of the society through it, religious wars and terrorism. DeLillo's works reveal the possibilities of development of American society and also give a full image of changes occurring inside the society in the borderline of the 20-21st centuries.

In 2001 the whole world was shocked because of the terroristic attacks that took place in New York on September 11. After these tragic events, when the World Trade Center was completely destroyed and nearly 3000 people were dead, the theme of terrorism obtained a worldwide interest and actuality. Authors of different nationalities dedicated their works to this topic, among them the scandalous contemporary French writer Frederic Beigbeder with his book *Windows on the World*, the Algerian writer Yasmina Khadra with his *Terrorism*, the English writer John Updike with his short-story *Varieties of Religious Experience*, and many other writers. Being an American and having witnessed the events, DeLillo also introduced a book concerning terrorism and its consequences which gives the overall picture of terroristic events of 2001. The book was called *Falling Man*. It was released in 2007. The American press was immediately overwhelmed by critical articles acknowledging *Falling Man* as the best 9/11 novel. In fact, DeLillo has written the first major 9/11 novel which is more than a novel. It is a document of America's progress as a nation, civilization at this particular place in time. It is a well-crafted artistic interpretation of a major event that has, for better or worse, helped shape the nation (Shindler 2007:4).

So *Falling Man* is a 9/11 novel depicting the state of an American family which carries the influence of terroristic events. In this novel the author discloses the problem of terrorism passing from a private point (an American family) to universal point, and stressing the changes that occur in American society's world perception. In *Falling Man* the concept of time/place acquires a new qualitative status and becomes a means that directly influences an individual's life, decides his identity and claims problems existing in today's world. This fact makes the author's work even more significant and provides good material for analyses. The aim of the present study is to give the image of an American society as expressed through literature and to analyze the concept of *chronotope* within the frames of the novel *Falling Man*. During the study the following issues

are to be analyzed: the concept of chronotope, the reflection of the chronotope in the novel, the problem of terrorism, its influence on a whole society, the vision of a new society.

After the events of 9/11 Don DeLillo was called a prophet writer since in his previous books, mainly in *Mao II*, he expresses his anxiety concerning the skyscrapers. The author's prediction, unfortunately, appears on the reality layer. It must be stressed that the horrible events of 9/11 marked the start of a new world. After 9/11 the world was divided into two parts; before and after.

Everything now is measured by after. (DeLillo 2007:138)

So this very thought is carried by the members of American society, the heroes of DeLillo's work among them.

Before turning to the main analyses, it is indispensable to pay attention to the title of the novel. Why did DeLillo call his novel *Falling Man*? The question can be observed from different points of view. First of all, by entitling the novel so, the author could mean the man who fell down from one of the skyscrapers during the terroristic acts, and whose photo appeared on the first pages of all American and non-American magazines. Secondly, the falling man could be the artist who was trying to imitate the people falling down or jumping from the buildings through his art.

She'd heard of him, a performance artist known as Falling Man. He'd appeared several times in the last week, unannounced, in various parts of the city, suspended from one or another structure, always upside down, wearing a suit, a tie and dress shoes. He brought it back, of course, those stark moments in the burning towers when people fell or were forced to jump.
(DeLillo 2007:33)

As a matter of fact, the novel is full of overwhelming numbers of falling men. Each of the heroes of the novel can be regarded as falling man such as Keith, the main hero, who survived the terrorism but preserved his existence carrying inside parts of terror. Another falling man is his wife Lianne, who was not a direct survivor of the events, but who carried its consequences. Falling man are all the people who passed through terrorism, who witnessed it and who make a new society, where terror and fear dominate. It must be stressed that the title includes a deeper interpretation, as the falling man is the USA itself. It is the US fall from grace that occurs when the nation's abuse of moral authority is set against the values on which it claims to be based (Olster 201:119).

The novel consists of three parts. The first part is entitled *Bill Lawton* which is the encoded variant of Bin Laden, the second one is *Ernst Hechinger*, one of the heroes of the novel, ex-member of a terroristic group, who contemplates about religion and the Muslims all the time. Through this character the author claims that the USA is responsible for the tragic events. His contemplations can be summed up in one thought.

We have met the enemy and it is us. (Olster 2011:120)

The last part of the novel is called *David Janiak*. This part concerns the man, the performance artist who appears in different parts of New York and imitates the flying people from the tower during the terroristic acts. The falling man represents art through which he shifts individual's attention to those tragic days, never letting it become past.

There was one thing for them to say, essentially. Someone falling. Falling man. She wondered if this was his intention, to spread the word this way, by cell phone, intimately, as in the towers and in the hijacked planes.
(DeLillo 2007:165)

Though the three parts of the novel concentrate on different problems and issues, this should not confuse the reader, as these parts are inseparably connected to one another, and make one entity having one and the same question in the cornerstone. What should they do *after*? There was collision, there was break and people were to understand its meaning and its influence on each of them and what was going to be *after*?

The whole existence frightens me. She saw herself in this sentence.
(DeLillo 2007:118)

Each member of the *terrorized* society tries to find answers to such questions and find his/her place in the distorted world. All the time the heroes of the novel want to find an answer to the simplest question whether they are already strangers to that new space or not. The world they were living in was already strange and unknown to them.

Even in NEW York – I long for New York.
(DeLillo 2007:34)

In literature the unity of time and space is called *chronotope*. The term was coined by M. Bakhtin to show the way time and space are described by language, and, in particular, how literature represents them. The peculiarities of time become natural for place, and place, in its turn, obtains new meaning through time and is measured by time. According to M. Bakhtin, these two categories constitute a fundamental unity as in the human perception of everyday reality.

In literary artistic chronotope, spatial and temporal indicators are fused into one carefully thought out, concrete whole. Time, as it were, thickens, takes on flesh, becomes artistically visible, likewise, space becomes charged and responsive to the movements of time, plot and history.
(Bakhtin 2004:85)

This gives the idea that narrative texts are not only composed of sequences of events and speech acts, but also of the construction of a particular fictional world or chronotope. The events of the novel theoretically occur in the same place, in New York city, yet

there are temporal and spatial flights from one time layer to the other, which is peculiar to postmodern literature. It is seen from the very first lines of the novel:

*It was not a street anymore but a world, a time and space of falling ash
and near night.* (DeLillo 2007:3)

A qualitative change of space can be observed, passing from the notion *street* to notion *world*. Space ceases to be a private point and becomes a universal one, the carrier of terrorism. So, as a center of terroristic acts, the street turns into a world which carries the features of a terrorized street. Carrying the features of terrorism, space becomes the terrorism itself and all the spatial layers are united into a single one. The author recovers the distorted spatial layer. There is no world outside the terrorism and there is no other choice. There exists only one space which is called terrorism.

*The noise lay everywhere they ran, stratified sound collecting around
them, and he walked away from it and into it at the same time.* (DeLillo 2007:4)

As it can be viewed, leaving the center of events, the main hero is not able to escape it. He is always directed to the skyscrapers as there is already one spatial unity - a new world, a world of terrorism. DeLillo's heroes and all other Americans and foreigners who are already the carriers of a changed and terrorized way of thinking are living exactly in such kind of world.

The concept of time also suffers qualitative changes. In the novel some contradiction comes to the core. On the one hand, time appears as a puzzle. There is no unity of time, instead, one can witness flights from present to past and vice versa and these flights are connected to terrorism. On the other hand, the unity of time is extremely vivid. The terroristic acts took place in the past, yet they are never past, as their influence is undeniably felt in the present and even in the future. So, past is never past, it becomes present and dooms future. This gives birth to a new temporal dimension: present absorbed in past. It is worth mentioning blessed Augustine's famous theses that there is no time distinction into past, present and future: there is only present which contains past, present and future (Pusey 2005:158). The analysis of the novel brings to the light the idea that past has so huge influence on an individual's life that it is fused with present. So, in his novel *Falling Man* Don DeLillo creates a new world, new time which correspond with the concept of terrorism.

It is necessary to mention that in the frames of the unity of time which is expressed by the idea that there is only one time dimension where time and terrorism appear on the same level, the author suggests distinguishing between inner and outer time of human beings. This approach is clearly seen when we analyze the character of the main hero of the novel, Keith, who is a 9/11 survivor.

*Things inside were distant and still, where he was supposed to be. It
happened everywhere around him, a car half buried in debris, windows
smashed and noises coming out, radio voices scratching at the wreckage.*

He saw people shedding water as they ran, clothes and bodies drenched from sprinkler system. There were shoes discarded in the street, handbags and laptops, a man seated on the sidewalk coughing up blood.

(DeLillo 2007:4)

There is a vivid contradiction between the hero's inner and outer time. In inner time nothing exists and everything is stopped, while in the outer time everything moves and something happens which is the result of tragic events. In inner time everything is stopped, while in outer time everything goes on.

The novel *Falling Man* presents a very interesting case, as it is a novel which ends at the point where it starts. The reader appears in a closed circle where the beginning and the end have the same event in their base. The beginning of the novel claims the confused state of people after terroristic events.

There was something else then, outside all this, not belonging to this, aloft. He watched it coming down. A shirt came down out of the high smoke, a shirt lifted and drifting in the scant light and then falling again, down toward the river.

(DeLillo 2007:5)

The ending of the novel again claims the confused state of people after the terroristic events.

He could not find himself in the things he saw and heard. Two men ran by with a stretcher, someone facedown, smoke seeping out of his hair and clothes. That's where everything was, all around him, falling away, street signs, people, things he could not name. Then he saw a shirt come down out of the sky. He walked and saw it fall, arms waving like nothing in this life.

(DeLillo 2007:246)

So, all the events of the novel develop within these events - from terrorism to terrorism, which is the same event. This comes to prove that lives of people who witnessed the tragic events are enclosed in a circle where time has somehow stopped, there is no present, as it has already been mentioned above, but a new temporal dimension - present absorbed in past.

One of the most interesting points of the novel is the case when the author gives parallels between art and terrorism. Art becomes a means through which the real state of terrorized society is observed. Art becomes the carrier of time and space. In the novel Don DeLillo turns to the paintings of the 20th century Italian painter Giorgio Morandi. Morandi's paintings represent the art of Still Life (*Natura Morta*). When observing Morandi's paintings one can see that most of his works are a series of inanimate objects such as jars, vases and bottles. The philosophy of Morandi's art claims that these objects are inanimate, yet they come to satisfy human needs and reflect the possibility of changes in human relations (Schweighauser, Schneck 2010:101). DeLillo transferred these ideas

into a literary area and touched upon the works of this painter since his paintings remind the destroyed skyscrapers.

The painting in question showed seven or eight objects, the taller ones set against a brushy slate background. The other items were handled boxes and biscuit tins, grouped before a darker background. They looked together. Two of the taller items were dark and somber, with smoky marks and smudges, and one of them was partly concealed by a long-necked bottle. The bottle was a bottle, white. "What do you see?" he said. She saw what he saw. She saw the towers. (DeLillo 2007:49)

The art of Still Life, in this case, comes to show that the consequences of terrorism are still alive and they make the present of the American society.

So, the overall analyses of the theme gives us the opportunity to claim that, staying faithful to the main traditions of postmodern literature, Don DeLillo is the best to give the full image of American society after 9/11. In the novel *Falling Man* the concepts of time and space obtain new qualitative features and they come to decide the role of a human being in the world. DeLillo changes all temporal and spatial images, breaks all the borders giving the unity of time and space. This unity is the terrorism itself. Time and space appear on the same level with terrorism. So, literature becomes a means through which we see that 9/11 has become a borderline between the life *before* the events and the life *after* the events. In the life *after* humans try to reestimate their life, find their lost ego, understand their place and role in the distorted world, in the world obsessed with fear and despair. The heroes of DeLillo live in this very world. They represent the model of American society, each member of which is the carrier of terroristic events who do not exclude the possibility of the repetition of 9/11 at any place in the world and at any time.

References:

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**Քրոնոտոպի առանձնահատկությունները Դոն ԴեԼիլոյի
«Ընկնող մարդը» վեպում**

Հոդվածը նվիրված է ժամանակակից ականավոր ամերիկացի գրող Դոն ԴեԼիլոյի «Ընկնող մարդը» ստեղծագործության վերլուծությանը, որը լավագույնս արտացոլում է ամերիկյան հասարակության կարգավիճակը 2001 թվականի սեպտեմբերի 11-ի ահաբեկչական դեպքերից հետո՝ չբացառելով պատահարի կրկնությունը ցանկացած ժամանակ ցանկացած վայրում: 9/11-ի դեպքերը աշխարհը բաժանել են երկու մասի՝ աշխարհ 9/11-ից ԱՌԱՋ և աշխարհ 9/11-ից ՀԵՏՈ: Այս տարբաժանումն էլ ընկած է ստեղծագործության հիմքում և հնարավորություն է տալիս դիտարկել ժամանակ-տարածություն հասկացությունների որակական փոփոխություններն ու փաստել ժամանակային և տարածական բոլոր հարթությունների ամբողջականությունը: