CHAPTER – 5

REPRESENTATION OF NUCLEAR ATTACKS AND LIFE THEREAFTER IN THE
JOURNALISTIC FICTION OF JOHN HERSEY AND DON DELILLO

The aftermaths of some major nuclear attacks, like on Hiroshima and the World Trade Centre (known widely as 9/11), have been represented through many literary works like John Hersey’s *Hiroshima* (1946), Nevil Shute’s *On the Beach* (1957), Jonathan Schell’s *The Fate of the Earth* (1982), Jonathan Safran Foer’s *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* (2005), and Don DeLillo’s *Falling Man* (2007), each representing the nightmarish event in its own way. Out of these, *Hiroshima* and *Falling Man* can be categorized as journalistic fiction. Most of the authors who wrote on this subject are trying to project, and thus warn of the danger that confronts us.

This chapter examines how writers were quick to register a series of written responses and aftereffects of these events in the form of some major texts dealing with nuclear attacks from modern history. The bombing of Hiroshima in *Hiroshima* (1946) by John Hersey, nuclear weapons and waste in DeLillo’s *Underworld* (1997) and the 9/11 attacks in *Falling Man* (2007), are significant from the point of view of narratology and rhetoric. In this chapter, the techniques of narratology, especially point of view, narrator, characterization, structure, suspense, closure/climax, have been used to study these texts.

Apart from other after effects of nuclear attacks, trauma may last for a few days or may take a lifetime to overcome. The word ‘trauma’ comes from the Greek word ‘wound.’ The consensus is that trauma refers to physical wounds, but it is also used in psychology and the caring professions to refer to a ‘psychological wound’ – that is, the harm done to a person’s psychological well-being by one or more events that cause major levels of distress. According to psychoanalysts J. Laplanche and G.B. Pontalis, trauma can be defined as “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 psychical organization” (465).

Judith Herman, in *Trauma and Recovery*, presents a wide spectrum into which traumatic disorders can be categorized, from “effects of a single overwhelming event to the more complicated effects of prolonged and repeated abuse” (79). Trauma, in the psychological sense, is an invisible emotional shock, the effect of which leads to a long-term neurosis and may or may not be possible to recover from. The term *trauma* has been used to describe a wide variety of experiences all of which share in common the individual’s recognition of her/his own vulnerability resulting in “some kind of internal breach or damage to existing mental structures” (Chris Brewin 2003: 5).

One of the most striking novelistic responses to nuclear violence in literary history is *Hiroshima* by John Hersey, published in 1946. On 6th and 9th August, 1945, the US dropped atomic bombs- first on Hiroshima and then on Nagasaki – in order to bring about an end to the war with Japan. For the first time in history, weapons of such massive destruction were used against civilians. The bombing of Hiroshima was, in several respects, an unprecedented event. It was a novelty, on the most basic level, because the atomic bomb was a new type of weapon, based on new concepts in physics. Its effects as well as the mechanisms were also new. The immediate effects of the bomb and the radiation sickness that plagued survivors in the years that followed were like none that humans had ever experienced.

The bombing of Hiroshima depicted the amount of power released by the atomic bomb, and the scale of harm inflicted on its victims exceeded that of any other single weapon that had been used in human history. The victims, therefore, had to respond not only to devastation and disaster, but also to the newness and unfamiliarity of injuries. Ruth Benedict believed that the
effects were so severe that ‘some Americans have reacted with painful guilt at the thought that they belong to the nation which catapulted this horror into the houses and streets of a city of whose very existence they had previously never heard’ (1997: 300). Only a few paragraphs in *Hiroshima* (116-118) depict the ethical aspects of using the atomic bomb, though one would have to read between the lines to understand this.

Don DeLillo’s *Underworld* has also brilliantly captured the American experience of the Cold War era. It is another attempt in which the novelist puts the events and their soul shuddering consequences into historical perspective convincingly, using the documentary testimony from newspaper articles, television footage, and still photographs. *Underworld* covers a forty year period from 1951 and a crucial moment in Cold War history, through the period following the break-up of the Soviet Union. Its epilogue’s concluding scene of web surfing seems to bring us much nearer to the novel’s date of publication in 1997. Geographically, the novel takes us from New York and Boston through the Midwest of Wisconsin and Minnesota, to the desert Southwest and the west coast (Los Angeles and San Francisco), and finally to Kazakhstan, the weapons test site in the former Soviet Union.

DeLillo’s *Falling Man*, which is a mixture of real-life and fictitious characters, represents the life of a survivor of the 9/11 explosion at the World Trade Centre in Washington D.C. It is less about war and more about the effects of war on society and the people living in the aftermath of a traumatic experience. Like most other literary responses in the US to 9/11 attacks, *Falling Man* focuses on an intimate issue of broken marriage instead of the changes in society at large. The novel’s title refers to a performance artist who suspends himself in midair, mimicking the shocking images of people jumping and falling from the towers. The title also refers to Keith, who is in every sense of the word falling i.e. he is in a state of emotional collapse, as he becomes
more and more distant to his family, and tries to escape from the memory of attacks through poker playing.

The narrative structure of *Hiroshima* traces the experience of six residents who survived the atomic blast of Hiroshima at 8:15 am. Miss Toshiko Sasaki, a personnel clerk; Dr. Masakazu Fuji, a physician; Mrs. Hatsuyo Nakamura, a tailor’s widow with three small children; Father Wilhelm Kleinsorge, a German missionary priest; Dr. Terufumi Sasaki, and the Reverend Kiyoshi Tanimoto are the six survivors Hersey chose from about forty people he interviewed, having different ages, education, financial status, and employment. The book opens with what each person was doing moments before the blast, and follows their next few hours, continuing through the next several days, and then ending with their situation a year later.

Through in-depth research and personal interviews, John Hersey makes *Hiroshima* an invaluable resource for any investigation into the reactions of the survivors. He manages to recreate the trauma of survivors he interviewed while the disaster was occurring and in the days and weeks that followed, capturing the way they struggled to somehow deal with something that at the time was new and inconceivable. Looking into Hersey’s account, it seems that, among the diverse and personal struggles the survivors faced, they were all in some way struck by a feeling of trauma, pain, and helplessness. The survivors responded to this helplessness in multiple ways: some tried to understand what happened to them, as though some scientific theory, or else political theory, would help them handle the situation of which they were victims. Others tried to act as exercising agencies, like cleaning wounds, providing or seeking out religious guidance, and providing medical aid, which could give them some sense of control over the situation. And others still resigned themselves to this helplessness.
In the days following the bombing, most victims knew nothing about the nature of the weapon that caused so much destruction in Hiroshima. And while, as Hersey writes, “most of them were too busy or too weary or too badly hurt to care that they were the objects of the first great experiment in the use of atomic power […]” (49). Victims couldn’t comprehend the nature of this weapon. This resulted in a sense of helplessness that was not material, but intellectual: the inability of survivors to locate causes for the effects they suffered. This kind of primary and secondary experience leads to an understanding that although technology is something that improves human capabilities, yet paradoxically it also sometimes aggravates human feelings of helplessness.

As Hersey writes: “Those victims who were able to worry at all about what had happened thought of it and discussed it in more primitive, childish terms – gasoline sprinkled from an airplane, maybe, or some combustible gas, or a big cluster of incendiaries, or the work of parachutists” (49). Once the news was released, scientists made efforts to understand the radiation levels, the heat of the explosion, and the nature of new radiation sickness. As quoted in Contemporary Literary Criticism, Yavenditti argued that “Hiroshima” was popular, not because Hersey advanced theories about the will to survive, but because he did what no one had accomplished before; he recreated the entire experience of atomic bombing from the victims’ point of view’ (1997: 309). Yavenditti also said: “Hersey chose these six largely because he could bridge the language barrier more easily with them than he could with many other survivors whom he interviewed” (Ibid. 309).

Jamie Poolos, in Atomic Bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, observed that being chosen for its industrial and military value, Hiroshima was an ideal drop location for the first atomic bomb. After Little Boy (term used for the bomb) was loaded into the B-29 bomber known
as the Enola Gay, the crew set off for the Japanese city. The bomb was detonated directly above Hiroshima and created a large, mushroom-shaped cloud above the city (2008: 96). Hersey proves himself successful in presenting more reliable information in as exact a form as possible. For instance, he tells exactly how far each of the survivors were from the centres of the blast at the moment of detonation, and Japanese scientists used “Lauritsen electroscopes” to measure the radioactivity, and have given the results of the test (*Hiroshima* 95). We are able to know the precise centre of the blast and exactly what their findings were: “… the exact centre was a spot a hundred and fifty yards south of the terii and a few yards southest of the pile of ruins that had once been the Shima Hospital” (Ibid. 96).

The narrative structure of *Hiroshima* is a chronological narrative that follows the characters’ lives, from the morning the bomb fell to forty years later. Hersey jumps from one character to other, and then, back again in each chapter, to nurture the reader’s interest in each sub-plot. The opening chapter, “A Noiseless Flash” gives short scenarios of what each was doing moments before and immediately after the blast. This chapter introduces the six main characters and gives details of their location and activity at the time of attack. Hersey in a philosophical tone impresses upon the reader how unpredictable the next moment is, and how life changes after the atom bomb hits. In one instant, the entire city switches from common, every-day tasks to a panicked struggle for survival.

“The Fire,” the second chapter, follows each victim as they begin to assess their surroundings. All face a different sort of horror as they realize their lives have been spared yet the world has changed tremendously. Here, through the eyes of the survivors, the initial horrors of the atomic experience are shown. The uncertainty and fear from the bomb’s devastation is long lasting. Survivors continue to be terrified throughout the day as they wonder what had
happened. Most surviving citizens are badly wounded and nauseated, without adequate food, shelter, or water. This chapter highlights Hersey’s talent both as a narrative storyteller, and as a journalist capable of careful observation and reportage. Hersey includes statistics without taking the focus off his main characters, and as a result we are riveted by these six human stories. The stories appear to proceed simultaneously, as if we are able to follow the progression of events all at once.

The third chapter, “Details Are Being Investigated,” depicts that the inhabitants of Hiroshima are facing rumors about the bomb and eagerly waiting for any official word. Information is scarce and the phrase “details are being investigated” is repeatedly announced throughout the city. This chapter is the longest and gives details about what is happening to the six as the day passes into night. The feeling of despair and apathy is prominent because of the government’s inadequate response to the disaster. People are traumatized and largely left to fend for themselves, at least for the first few days. The government does not provide accurate information about the bomb to the people. Another important scene of moral transformation and humanistic responsibilities of man in this chapter is when Rev. Tanimoto reads a psalm to Mr. Tanaka who is dying, which shows his pastor heart and Christian forgiveness, as well as his recognition that all people deserve help when they are in desperate conditions.

The title of the fourth chapter is “Panic Grass and Feverfew.” The effect of the bomb on the vegetation left the underground organs of plants intact and stimulated growth of wild flowers and plants, like panic grass and feverfew. Hersey concludes the stories with a report of where each victim is at this point in his or her life a year after the detonation of the bomb. The juxtaposition of new life, even plant life with dead buildings and human ashes symbolizes how life has to go on for the survivors of Hiroshima, and how they too quickly return to living even
after such destruction. Dr. Fuji was one of the most well off, but his misfortune reminds the reader that simply because they survived such a monumental trauma does not mean that the characters are blessed with easy lives afterward.

The last chapter “Aftermath” reviews the broad perspective of both the bomb’s societal impact as well as its powerful effect on individuals over an entire lifetime. For example, through Mrs. Nakamura’s story, Hersey puts forth the point that although her quality of life gradually improves over the years, she can never really escape her atom bomb experience, as her body remains weak. Dr. Sasaki is also haunted by his failure to properly attend all the dead at Red Cross Hospital. Likewise Hersey works on the traumatized lives of other characters. All through these chapters, the narrative structure is cinematic, showing a series of brief cuts, focusing on particular activities at particular times, securing reality every time. But at times the narration has been sacrificed for the sake of authenticity because Hersey feels that writing Hiroshima was dealing with “history’s least imaginable event.” He uses elaborate narrative structures not as an aid to comprehension, but rather as unnecessary ornamentation. But overall the plot moves forward in a schematic manner from the day of attack to the settling lives of survivors.

On the other hand, the narrative structure in Falling Man interposes several sub-plots against the major narrative. There are surprising interludes dealing with poker tournaments, writing classes for Alzheimer patients, a performance artist known as the Falling Man, and the machinations of the Al-Qaeda hijackers. DeLillo builds these stories by piling up dozens of small set pieces of three or four pages. His plots move forward through these vignettes, and he constantly shifts the scene in the manner of a film director, never letting any storyline dominate for more than a few pages at a time, it being the trademark of his style. The narrative opens with a strong sense of falling. The imagery on the first page gives a sensation of things coming down:
“... a time and space of falling ash and near night .... They ran and fell ... with debris coming down around them ... the buckling rumble of the fall .... This was their world now. Smoke and ash came rolling down streets ... office paper flashing past ... otherworldly things in the morning pall.” (FM 3)

This is an experience of being trapped in one of the towers and running away from them as they fall apart, and tumble down around the survivors.

The image of falling that we saw from the beginning, is continued throughout the novel and becomes representative of the fact that Keith, the novel’s male protagonist, does not realize and cannot accept that he has survived. His trauma is clearly an example of what Cathy Caruth argues: “trauma consists not only in having confronted death but in having survived, precisely, without knowing it” (Caruth 64).

In order to come to terms with his survival, Keith tries to find Florence, owner of the briefcase he took by accident when escaping the tower. He listens to her experience of the fall:

She tried to recall things and faces, moments that might explain something or reveal something. She believed in the guide dog. The dog would lead them to safety. She was going through it again and he was ready to listen again. He listened carefully, noting every detail, trying to find himself in the crowd. (FM 58-59)

Finding himself in the crowd will prove to Keith that he was actually there, will prove that his presence is more than just a memory. Keith is trying to establish a referential truth to his unclaimed experience of being in the towers, and escaping them. Getting away from the towers, Keith stopped and “tried to tell himself that he was alive but the idea was too obscure to take hold” (FM 6).
DeLillo names the three sections by some person’s name i.e. ‘Bill Lawton,’ ‘Ernst Hechinger,’ ‘David Janiak,’ respectively. But in each case the name is somehow wrong; it is not what the person is known by. Bill Lawton is a child’s corruption of Bin Laden. Ernst Hechinger is the real name of Lianne’s mother’s boyfriend, who was involved with a terrorist organization as a young man. David Janiak is the real name of the performance artist, known as the Falling Man. Lianne thinks that it “could be the name of a trump card in a tarot deck, Falling Man, name in gothic type, the figure twisting down in a stormy night sky” (221). Then there is a short chapter dedicated to Hammad and Amir, the terrorists who will be on board American Airlines Flight 11. The names of these interludes are place names i.e. “On Marienstrasse,” “In Nokomis,” and finally “In the Hudson Corridor,” which set the scene for a glimpse of the terrorists’ training followed by their final minutes of action. These “name chapters” and “place chapters” differ in their structure and their temporal direction.

_Falling Man’s_ core plot is very simple. The first part depicts the days only after the attacks, part two is set some months after, and finally part three is set three years after the catastrophe. The main protagonists, Lianne and Keith, hope that they can be a family again, after the explosions. Initially this seems possible; but later Keith drifts away from Lianne and is attracted to Florence. Then he deserts her too and takes to gambling. The plethora of secondary storylines makes it a fragmented and sometimes bewildering experience. DeLillo writes on the subjects like poker, Alzheimer sufferers, Nina’s paintings, and Justin’s friends. The individual sections are vivid enough seeming to be pieces from different jigsaws letting the narratives circle each other, resisting easy resolution. DeLillo plays daring games with chronology, returning in the final pages, to the moments that take place immediately before the opening of this novel,
when the planes hit the towers. The narrative here demands high drama and intensity, and DeLillo rises to the occasion.

DeLillo’s other literary effort, Underworld, begins with a Prologue, and ends with an Epilogue. The Prologue takes place in 1951 and the Epilogue takes place in the internet age. The Prologue is long and very different from the middle part of the novel, which is further divided into six parts, occurring in reverse chronological order: part 1 - Spring-Summer 1992; part 2 - Mid 1980s - Early 1990s; part 3 - Spring 1978; part 4 - Summer 1974; part 5 - 1950s and 1960s; and part 6 - 1951/1952. After each of the odd numbered parts is a “Manx Martin” section, each set in 1951 and concerned with characters that are only tangentially related to the characters in the main parts, for instance, Manx Martin 1, Manx Martin 2, and Manx Martin 3. The Manx Martin sections depict the baseball fans and students of race relations.

Underworld, Don DeLillo’s masterpiece, is a cinematic novel. Its camera technique has all the qualities of modern camera work from the super shows on commercial TV, being fast, zooming, and with floating movements. The subject of the Prologue entitled “The Triumph of Death,” is the day in 1951 when Thomson hit the home run that won for the New York Giants their playoff game against the Brooklyn Dodgers, and it was the same day on which the Soviet Union successfully tested an atomic bomb. Then the narrative leaps forward in time to the 1990s. DeLillo employs analepsis (going backward) to answer the reader’s questions about Nick and his relationship with Klara, returning again to the 1990s at its conclusion. The chapter entitled “Arrangement in Gray and Black,” answers the reader’s questions and indicates that Nick killed George the Waiter and also indulged in an adulterous affair with Klara. The subjects of Cuban Missile Crisis and Soviet Union’s atomic weapons program (including their testing grounds in
Kazakhstan) have been depicted through Lenny Bruce. The novel’s central metaphor of waste helps us in understanding the connections between characters and events.

The narrative of *Underworld* starts with a kid named Cotter Martin skipping school on Oct. 3, 1951, to attend the final playoff game between the Brooklyn Dodgers and the New York Giants. We also find Jackie Gleason, Frank Sinatra, J. Edgar Hoover, and restaurateur Toots Shor at the scene of game. The score is tied until Bobby Thomson knocks a homer into the stands off a Ralph Branca pitch, and the Giants take the pennant. But it’s Cotter who finally winds up with the prize. The Baseball helps us to understand what really counts in our society at the end of the twentieth century i.e. what we have discarded in the form of mothballed nuclear armaments and still-volatile nuclear waste. Furthermore, J. Edgar Hoover, the FBI director gets information about an atom-bomb being detonated by the Soviets on the same day. As the game ends, he’s worried about the consequence of the news, as pages of *Life* magazine flow down around him from the stadium seats above depicting Pieter Bruegel’s painting “The Triumph of Death.” This painting presages DeLillo’s apocalyptic theme depicted through the rest of the book. DeLillo shows the mental status of Hoover as he is obsessed with death, fear of contamination (physical and ideological), and his own mortality. The paradoxical connection between mass spectator sports (‘people on the field’) and mass nuclear destruction (‘light[ing] the city’) is also bothering Hoover as he looks at the reprint of Bruegal’s *The Triumph of Death*, and then back to the game:

And what is the connection between Us and Them, how many bundled links do we find in the neural labyrinth? It’s not enough to hate your enemy …. The old dead fucking the new. The dead raising coffins from the earth …. He looks up for a moment. He takes the pages from his face … and looks at the people on the
field. Those who are happy and dazed. Those who run around the bases calling out the score …. The fans pressed together at the clubhouse steps chanting the players’ names. The fans having fistfights on the subway going home …. Those who will light the city with their bliss. (Underworld 51)

This baseball becomes the key point of the novel. DeLillo says, “[it] was just so natural, because we all grew up with it. We played it; we listened to it on the radio, and then we went to Yankee stadium. It was a taken-for-granted pleasure” (The Observer). In the novel, its progress through time, its owners, its fate, and their fates is the essential cursor that guides us through the labyrinth of the story. The winning home run, hit by Giants player Bobby Thomson, results into a fight in the stands over who will get the prized baseball.

The novel’s central narrative is about Nick Shay, and other narratives spin off from it, belonging to those whom he knows and loves and hates - family and friends, colleagues, and casual acquaintances. Nick, born in 1935 being of the same age as DeLillo, grows up in Bronx, in poverty and deprivation, a wild unruly kid, heading for trouble. He believes that his missing father, a small-time bookie, who walked out one night to buy some cigarettes and never returned, has been ‘whacked’ by the mob, and his adolescence is violent and darkly troubled. He has an affair with a married woman and at the age of 17, in a meaningless accident, he shoots and kills a friend. He is sentenced for negligent homicide to three years in a juvenile correctional facility and, grimly happy to do his time; he sets about acquiring an education.

This novel has an unusual structure as it juxtaposes backward and forward presentation of time. Because of this double movement, the plot of the novel is paradoxically quite different from the story of the characters’ lives. Since so many things are plotted in reverse chronological order, the things we don’t know about the characters create tensions in the plot. There are many
other stories in *Underworld*, which revolve around the couple involved in the affair. Although this provides a general outline of *Underworld*’s story, the novel itself is crucially framed by a prologue that brilliantly constructs a crucial historical context. The prologue allows us to see how and when the Soviet Union became America’s Cold War other and all Americans became, figuratively speaking, secret agents. About his use of strong cinematic techniques, in an interview with Tom LeClair, DeLillo said that the cinematic qualities which influenced his writing were “the strong image, the short ambiguous scene … the artificiality, the arbitrary choices of some directors, the cutting and editing” (114). These qualities are no doubt evident in *Underworld*. Regarding the collecting of material for his fiction, DeLillo says in an interview with Robert McCrum, “I’m always keeping random notes on scraps of paper,” he replies. “I always carry a pencil and a notebook. Coming on the train today I had an idea for a story I’m writing and jotted it down – on just a little scrap of paper. Then I clip these together. I’ll look at them in, say, three weeks’ time, and see what I’ve got. You know,” he adds defiantly, “I’ve never made an outline for any novel that I’ve written. Never” (Guardian *The Observer*).

In the middle part of the narrative, DeLillo turns to an explicitly political artist, the Russian filmmaker, Eisenstein, and discusses his lost film, *Unterwelt*. The film DeLillo describes is entirely his invention, as no such film exists. *Unterwelt* is doubly contextualized in the novel. Coming at the novel’s midpoint, it mediates the apocalyptic and revelatory aesthetic images of the novel’s prologue and epilogue --the Bruegel painting of the prologue and a billboard advertisement in the epilogue. *Unterwelt* is sandwiched between two other films in Part 4 and here Klara is the focalizer. As Klara attempts to get her artistic bearings in the summer of 1974, she attends the screenings of three films --Robert Franks’s disturbing documentary about the Rolling Stones on tour in America, *Cocksucker Blues* (which serves as the title of Part 4); the
faux Eisenstein film; and an art film that endlessly loops multiple copies of the Zapruder film, capturing the assassination of President Kennedy. All three say something explicit about waste.

The novel’s epilogue, “Das Kapital,” balances the prologue by bringing the reader full circle to an old nuclear test site in Kazakhstan. A Russian entrepreneur has brought Nick to the exact spot of the October 3, 1951 atomic blast that had made the Soviet Union a superpower. Nick is there to witness a test for the potential commercial use of underground nuclear explosions --the elimination of hazardous wastes (including nuclear waste) from first-world countries.

The second and more disturbing view of the former Soviet Union is Nick’s visit to a local clinic for the unacknowledged, and in some instances grotesquely, disfigured victims of nuclear testing. Nick observes here that the victimization is not limited to a single generation, since genetic mutations have increased the cancer rates of this population’s children and grandchildren. This kind of waste cannot be managed, and we are reminded that these people are as much war casualties as were those killed in any war (like Vietnam, Afghanistan) during the period of US-Soviet rivalry. About *Underworld’s* narrative structure, Gardner is of the view that it is a fundamentally serious work which never lapses into incoherence and which displays a tonic humility before the art of fiction (qtd. in *Contemporary Literary Contemporary 2001*: 199).

DeLillo’s technique, here and throughout, is to start a narrative thread, then others, and keep returning to each from time to time, shuttling back and forth, starting new ones, dropping others. This recalls the interruptive mode of Eisenstein’s technique of montage i.e. to allow the effect of juxtaposed elements to carry some of the burden of meaning. This is the first level of self-similarity, with the structure of each section repeating, the larger structure.
DeLillo seems to be repeating this montage at the level of paragraphs, sentences, and words. For example, the ‘Sputnik’ section within Part 5 cuts between various members of the Deming family. This technique is especially noticeable in Part 1, in which the older Nick Shay, in effect, winds himself up for the telling of his own story by touching on subjects, leaving them, returning to them, and so on. This technique is often seen in DeLillo’s books. In the following passage, he talks about the way his wife, Marian, gets on with his mother, who lives with them in Phoenix:

My wife was good with her. They knew how to talk to each other. They found things to talk about. They talked about the things I did not talk about with Marian, the things I shrugged off when Marian asked, early girlfriends maybe or how I got along with my brother. The small shrewd things Marian used to ask me. I broke my arm when I was eight, falling out of a tree. This is what they talked about.

(Underworld 85)

DeLillo here emphasizes the noise of talk by repeating the word; Marian’s talk is in stark contrast with Nick’s silence on certain subjects. Further, Nick spends a paragraph describing his place of work, ‘the shimmering bronze tower’ that, again, repeats and reminds us of the other towers in the larger novel (World Trade Center, Watts Towers, the towers at nuclear test sites). Before returning to the subject of Marian talking with his mother, he talks about Phoenix and his reasons for leaving the East and living and working there, and his wish to move his mother West too.

Nick then meditates upon the things he does in more detail: ‘I drank soy milk and ran the metric mile.’ And then he returns to the subject of the implied shrewishness of Marian: ‘They also talked about my father. That’s the other thing they talked about in the deep lull after dinner.'
It’s the kind of subject Marian seized on, trying to fill in gaps, work out details’ (*Underworld* 86). This passage further introduces the subject of Nick’s father, which has haunted him throughout his life:

> He went out to get a pack of cigarettes and never came back. This is a thing you used to hear about disappearing men. It’s the final family mystery. All the mysteries of the family reach their culmination in the final passion of abandonment. (*Underworld* 87)

The subjects and the way he returns to them plant hooks in our minds, forcing us, to think in terms of the way things connect. Here connections are like hyper-textual anchors, which are the meta-tags that allow internet web links to work. One can click on the blue underlined word and it takes us to an anchor somewhere else. We read Nick’s thoughts about his father, and it takes us backward and forward, to where he has placed anchors concerning his father. This idea is perfectly illustrated by Nick himself when he reports that, before his mother’s arrival in Phoenix, he and Marian, ‘put a plentiful supply of hangers in the closet’ (*Underworld* 87). In fact, each chapter contains a link to the ones preceding and following it throughout the book.

So the narrative of *Underworld* keeps returning to the same subjects again and again, providing all sorts of details about characters and their lives. Near the beginning of the novel, we learn that Nick’s wife Marian is having an affair. At the end, we read of Nick’s brief affair with Klara Sax, who is married to Bronzini, the science teacher. Bronzini and Klara lived for a time with Bronzini’s ailing mother, who dies. Nick and Marian are living with Nick’s mother, who also dies near the end of the book. This book’s ending returns to the nuclear tests. The novel opens with one, in 1951, and ends with the other, in the 1990s, in Kazakhstan.
The narrator in *Hiroshima* is Hersey himself and through the eye of a journalist he moves from one character to another, throwing light on their points of view. Hersey expresses his observations in the third person, focusing on the actions of the six main characters. He also gives the reader a glimpse into what they were thinking and feeling, based on his interviews with them. The point of view of the book is that of an objective observer. The author interviews each main character, and in a journalistic fashion, knits their stories together without adding his own biases or moral judgments. In this way it seems as if the readers hear the stories from the character’s mouth.

In this regard, Zavarzadeh in *Contemporary Literary Criticism* says that Hersey substitutes portrait for incident or situation: the entire book uses the technique of portraiture as narration (1997: 315). He describes the technique of narration in *Hiroshima* as ‘synchronic narration,’ where the flow of time is stopped and the contents of the moment are registered simultaneously (316). Hersey has recorded the experience of the six main persons in Chapter I, and then transcribed their new life in the remaining three chapters showing the reorientation of their new actualities. Though the general narrative point of view is a controlled omniscience, Hersey at times intrudes in the narrative, for instance “These four did not realize it, but they were coming down with the strange, capricious disease which came later to be known as radiation sickness” (*Hiroshima* 90). Hersey narrates the story of the destruction of Hiroshima from the point of view of characters who managed to survive.

In *Falling Man* almost all its characters are allowed representation and the narrative point of view keeps on shifting from one character to another. At the end of *Falling Man* the readers witness the traumatic event directly first through the protagonist’s eyes on board the hijacked plane and then from the terrorist’s point of view. The moment the plane hits the tower and he
dies, the point of view is propelled out of his body and into the protagonist’s physical experience of the explosion.

Keith, the protagonist, is a vaguely notorious fellow who is also a keen poker player. For Lianne’s mother, Nina, Keith was “sheer hell on women” — “living breathing hell.” Lianne had thrown him out of her life just before the attack on the WTC, but now, after his brush with death, she thought he might have changed, and grown up into his role as a “husbandman” (FM 74). In the ensuing days and weeks, they tend to their young son, Justin.

Keith appears to be a pathetic and immature person. His life suffered trauma and shock, and is altered by 9/11 like the lives of thousands of other people who were perhaps more grievously injured than Keith, but they didn’t react by leaving home and work to pursue a mindless round of pain relief games in Vegas. This narrative would have been more appealing if DeLillo had captured the impact of 9/11 on the country, or New York, or a spectrum of survivors, or even a couple of interesting individuals, or had illuminated the zeitgeist in which 9/11 occurred or the shell-shocked world it left in its wake. But instead of all this, DeLillo pays more attention to the two trifling images: one of a performance artist re-enacting the fall of bodies from the burning World Trade Center, and one of a self-absorbed man, who came through the fire and ash of that day, and decided to spend his foreseeable future playing card games.

There are different types of narrators, one of which is the extradigetic narrator, who is not present in the narrative. Hiroshima is one of the comprehensive examples of extradigetic level of narration. We are introduced to different survivors of the atomic bomb and the traumatic representation of their lives.

In verbal fiction “stories are generally told in a present, past or future tense” (Genette 215). Most of the time events are told after “they happen (ulterior narration) to mention a few
texts where this most frequent form of narration is used” (Rimmon-Kenan 89). Genette calls this “subsequent narrating in which the use of past tense is enough to make a narrative subsequent, although without indicating the temporal interval which separates the moment of the narrating from the moment of the story” (Genette 220). So, *Hiroshima* and *Falling Man* both, as journalistic fiction is supposed to be, fall under the above explained category.

From 1992 *Underworld* moves backward through five more parts set in earlier time periods until DeLillo rewinds to Bronx in 1951. While delving into the private lives of Nick and Klara in each part, DeLillo takes the further risk of giving equal or greater time to the voices of their relatives, friends, and contacts, and to historical figures such as Lenny Bruce and J. Edgar Hoover (Tom LeClair in *The Atlantic*). Some of the most effective techniques in DeLillo’s *Underworld* are reverse chronology and multiple perspectives. While excavating the mysteries of the lives of Nick and Klara we encounter prominent exposures of the past decades for instance Watergate and Hoover’s sexual orientation. DeLillo suggests the actual and unnoticed undersides of the times he surveys. For example, Part II set in the mid-1980s and early 1990s, emphasizes the televised tape of a highway murder and a serial killer. Part IV set in 1974, is dominated by subway graffiti and system analysts like Matty who sit in basement bunkers locking politics and economics into coded information.

DeLillo’s unflappable authorial voice suggests detachment from the situations he describes, and he never allows the reader to become involved in them either. He keeps himself at a distance from the world in order to see it in an entirely new light. For instance, in this description of garbage: “Specks and glints, rag tails of color appeared in the stratified mass of covering soil, fabric scraps from the garments center, stirred by the wind” (192). This page shows DeLillo’s keen observation, but the problem here is that too much of detail does not
render a work that vitality which it actually deserves. The themes as well as characters are lost in such descriptions.

The backward chronology becomes a means of moving into the cultural rubbish of history, while the forward movement of the ball suggests a reprocessing of culture. The Giants/Dodgers game and the winning ball symbolize the Cold War era. DeLillo through a link between baseball and nuclear devices suggests that the radioactive core of a nuclear bomb is of the same size as a baseball. Basically, *Underworld* is about the nuclear age, when the administration detonated weapons midair and citizens dug into bomb housings. In *Underworld*, DeLillo deals with the subject of apocalypse by scrutinizing nuclear sickness through a suitable narrative. Klara Sax’s spray-painted B-52s is a symbol of the millennial hope.

Further, characterization is an essential tool used by literary journalists. The major real characters in *Hiroshima* are Miss Toshiko Sasaki, Dr. Masakazu Fujii, Mrs. Hatsuyo Nakamura, Father Wilhelm Kleinsorge, Dr. Terufumi Sasaki, and Rev. Kiyoshi Tanimoto. Of the six persons whose tale Hersey chronicles, two were doctors, and two being Christian clergy members. Hersey chose his subjects so that his American readers could relate to them: “The very qualities that make Hersey’s survivors atypical of Japanese culture make them recognizable and even sympathetic to American readers” (Jones 215). Miss Sasaki is a personnel clerk at the East Asia Tin Works factory who is in her early twenties and lives with her parents and young sibling at the time of the blast. During the attack her left leg is severely injured due to the falling of bookshelves. Dr. Fujii is a middle-aged physician and owns his own private hospital. He is not completely unsympathetic to those around.

Mrs. Nakamura, a widow with three young children, is a tailor by profession. She struggles to make ends meet, both before and after the attack. Father Kleinsorge is a thirty-eight
year-old German missionary priest with the Society of Jesus (Jesuits). He loves the Japanese people and is committed to his work in Hiroshima, but doesn’t like the prejudice of war-time Japan. Dr. Sasaki works at the Hiroshima Red Cross Hospital in the capacity of a surgeon. He is the only intact doctor after the bomb attack and treats thousands of victims from all over the city. Rev. Tanimoto, a considerate pastor, is hard-working and largely safe. He spends the first several days after the attack benevolently caring for the wounded and needy.

Some of the minor characters are Mr. Fukai (a secretary of the Catholic diocese) and other dead and dying masses. Mr. Fukai very generously refuses to escape with Father Kleinsorge. An estimate says that 100,000 died in the atomic bomb blast in Hiroshima, out whom many died instantly, but thousands endured for several hours to a few days before yielding to extreme radiation and graphic wounds. Mainly these six major characters chosen by Hersey are ‘types’ who represent all those who have been afflicted by the atom bomb.

There is a variety of characters in *Falling Man* who try to cope up with the trauma in their own possible ways. Keith, the main character, spends the novel exploring some understanding of the unbearable nature of his survival, in the ruins of his post-traumatic experience. We can hear the search in Keith’s voice when he sneaks back to his apartment near Ground Zero and stands in the empty hallway, “He said, ‘I’m standing here,’ and then, louder, ‘I’m standing here’” (*FM* 27).

His search also includes replacing a lost object to its proper place, which he has unknowingly hidden from Lianne and only now sees for the “first time”:

>The briefcase was smaller than normal and reddish brown with brass hardware, sitting on the closet floor. He’d seen it there before but understood for the first time that it wasn’t his. Wasn’t his wife’s, wasn’t his. He’d seen it, even half
placed it in some long-lost distance as an object in his hand, the right hand, an object pale with ash, but it wasn’t until now that he knew why it was here. (FM 35)

This briefcase is an object formed of ash symbolizing death. He wants to return it to its owner, or to the owner’s family, and mark his attempt to illuminate the threshold between life and death, to come to terms with his survival and the death of so many others.

*Falling Man* begins with smoke and ash coming from the burning towers, and traces the consequences of this global shock in the lives of a few people. Its opening shows the detailed scene of moments after the disastrous explosion in the towers of WTC. Keith cannot believe that he has escaped. The narrative dramatizes his attempt to understand his survival through repetitions of the traumatic experiences. As the trauma is real and public, it allows DeLillo to employ images, characters, and repetitious structures that work on the reader’s individual experience of 9/11. “We find Keith turning up on the doorstep of Lianne, his estranged wife, and she agrees he can live with her and their son Justin indefinitely while he recovers” (Dugdale).

Lianne’s mother Nina, a former college lecturer; Nina’s lover Martin, an art dealer who spends much of his time in Europe; Alzheimer’s patients for whom Lianne, a freelance book editor, organizes story-telling sessions; and other men who take part in Keith’s weekly poker game, are other significant characters.

Another important eponymous character is Falling Man who is a performance artist showing falls in public. He wears a safety harness beneath his suit and reminds those watching of the images of men falling or jumping from the Twin Towers. The purpose of Falling Man is to bring us back to the event. DeLillo writes, “He brought it back, of course, those stark moments in the burning towers when people fell or were forced to jump” (33). Through the Falling Man we
are able to relive the moment of uncertainty, the moment of attack, when the towers were still burning. It is a traumatic re-experiencing in the real sense. Lianne can barely watch: “This was too near and deep, too personal” (163). All the three parts of the novel end with a depiction of (or fallen) man: Hammad, a hijacker first seen as part of an Islamist cell in Hamburg, then in the US, preparing for his mission, and finally heading towards Manhattan in a hijacked plane. People like Hammad, one of the hijackers of American Airlines Flight 11, according to Nina are “virus that reproduces itself outside history” (112-3).

As readers of a traumatic narrative, we share in these repeated attempts to witness retrospectively, alongside Keith and others who “were walking backwards, looking into the core of it all, all those writhing lives back there, and things kept falling, scorched objects trailing lines of fire” (FM 4). DeLillo provides a moving visual image of the internal trauma borne by the victims when Keith sees “with police tape wrapped around her head and face, yellow caution tape that marks the limits of a crime scene” (FM 5). Keith also experiences other, smaller belated reactions that keep returning throughout the novel as he attempts to understand his survival, including the briefcase he unthinkingly takes from the building and the damage done to his arm (FM 5).

In Falling Man, DeLillo provides a view of how unexpectedly calamity can instigate what is known in trauma studies as “secondary trauma.” Figley and Kleber further explain, in their article “Beyond the ‘Victim’: Secondary Traumatic Stress,” how traumatic experience can ‘contaminate’ beyond the reach of a discrete event and ‘infect’ those close to the victim of the event itself. They distinguish “primary stressors” as “confrontation with … an extreme event,” and go on to define a “secondary traumatic [or stressor]” as:
the knowledge of a traumatizing event experienced by a significant other. For people who are in some way close to a victim, the exposure to this knowledge may also be a confrontation with the powerlessness and disruption. *Secondary traumatic stress* refers to the behaviors and emotions resulting from this knowledge. It is the stress resulting from hearing about the event and/or helping or attempting to help a traumatized or suffering person. This conceptualization of primary and secondary traumatic stress describes the distinction between those “in harm’s way” and those who care for them and become impaired in the process.

(78)

Authors conclude the essay by describing secondary trauma as “a form of empathy” (93).

Lianne is also afflicted by secondary trauma, and she is more shocked because of the dispute in her marriage. Keith’s sudden appearance at her door is surprising not only because she knew he worked in the towers and feared for his life, but also because he had been distant from the family for a lengthy time prior to the attacks. She tells her mother Nina that when he arrives it is as an apparition, a thing from the other side, “It was not possible, up from the dead, there he was in the doorway. It was so lucky Justin was here with you. Because it would have been awful for him to see his father like that. Like gray soot head to toe. I don’t know, like smoke, standing there with blood on his face and clothes” (*FM* 8). Smoke and ash serve as emblems of the dead, coming to stand in for the remains of those who didn’t escape the towers as well as those who did.

DeLillo’s characters are the residents of New York, who are shocked, and don’t find any sort of redemption or regeneration in the aftermath of attacks. Though the effects of trauma will be completely unique to each, yet the survivors may judge them based on things like proximity
to the event, number of loved ones lost, or degrees of physical damage sustained. It is also
important to note that Keith is unable to communicate with Lianne the way he does with another
survivor like Florence, precisely because of these factors, and because he feels that Lianne too
‘doesn’t know.’

Each character in DeLillo’s novel deals in a different manner with the incomprehensible
and horrifying happenings of 9/11. Martin, Nina’s mysterious European lover, feels: “One side
has the capital, the labor, the technology, the armies, the agencies, the cities, the laws, the police,
and the prisons. The other side has a few men willing to die.” Nina believes “it’s not the history
of Western interference that pulls down these societies. It’s their own history, their mentality.
They live in a closed world, of choice, of necessity. They haven’t advanced because they haven’t
wanted to or tried to” (118). But DeLillo’s point is that most of us simply don’t want to think too
hard or too long about what happened on that very day. Most of us don’t want to think in
difficult ways about what is difficult to think about. We rather try to escape or repress memories.

*Underworld* is also a combination of primary as well as secondary, real and imaginary
characters. But it has been observed that its number of characters is much larger as compared to
*Hiroshima* and *Falling Man* depending upon the multiple storylines in it. In the opening scene of
the baseball match we meet J. Edgar Hoover, a singer called Frank Sinatra, Cotter Martin, a
young boy who has skipped school to go to the game and goes home with the winning ball, and
Nick Shay, the novel’s protagonist, at the time a wandering adolescent. He is the one who will
later buy the claimed game-winning ball, which he thinks is a symbol of his life. He grew up in
Bronx, and his father disappeared mysteriously when he was a boy. When at 50, he works with a
company called Waste Containment. He is an expert in dealing with excrements of society and
fallout from the Cold War: nuclear waste and chemical waste. He spends much of his life trying
to come to terms with his father’s disappearance. He is also convicted of murder when he is just 17 years old.

Marian Shay is Nick’s wife. She has an affair with Nick’s friend and coworker, Brian Glassic. We meet Rosemary who is Nick’s mother. Jimmy is Nick’s father who disappeared when Nick was 11 years old. Jimmy was a small-time bookie with a poor reputation. It is believed that he went out for some cigarettes and never returned. Nick thinks about an elaborate fantasy in which Jimmy was killed by the mob, but eventually comes to terms with the more probable explanation that he just decided to leave. Further, we meet Matty, who is Nick’s little brother. He was very skilled at chess in his youth, but then gave it up. He served in the military in Vietnam, and then worked for the U. S. government in the development of nuclear weapons.

Klara Sax is an aspiring artist in her 30s. She has an affair with Nick when he is 17 years old, but she is later married to Albert Bronzini and has a young daughter. She and Albert divorce some time later, this being her second marriage. In all, she married three times, but divorced all three men. Nick goes to see Klara in the early 1990s when she’s directing a project to paint decommissioned Cold War era bombers, stalled in the middle of the desert. In a book review Paul Gleason has stated, ‘Klara indicates that the artist working with waste demonstrates his or her individuality and freedom, as well as his or her connection to past artists who were engaged in a similar project.’ Klara’s artistic venture takes on great historical significance when the reader learns that one of the bombers on which she works is the very Long Tall Sally on which Louis T. Bakey, another character in Underworld, has served during the Vietnam War (Underworld 613). For Klara, this piece of American waste on the floor of Arizona desert creates an artwork as well as signifies individual freedom. It builds a monument to people like Bakey, whose identities risk being lost in American history’s master narrative of war. Klara’s artwork
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also transforms the way in which Nick and Marian perceive phenomenological reality. After looking at the bombers, Nick (and Klara) find reality more beautiful, and states, “Everything we saw was ominous and shining, tense with the beauty of things that are normally unseen …” (126).

There are many minor characters like the African-American Manx Martin, father of the boy who first owned the home-run ball; and colorful celebrities such as Jackie Gleason, Lenny Bruce, and Toots Shor. The rest of the novel’s artists, especially Moonman 157 in his subway graffiti, Eisenstein in his film Unterwelt, and Rodia in his Watts Towers, serve a similar purpose of providing a new understanding of their existential and historical experience. DeLillo’s characters are farsighted and visionary, as were the typical artist-heroes of Shelley, Carlyle, and Byron. Marvin Lundy being an eager baseball mementos saver spends his life in obtaining the home run ball hit by Thomson. He was passionate about following the ball all the way back to the game, but in vain. He sells the ball to Nick Shay. We meet Sister Edgar, who, in the mid 90’s, fights a lost war against the decay of the Bronx; a notorious graffiti artist who roams the underground of New York, and has a pregnant girlfriend; a highway serial killer; and countless other characters. DeLillo introduces an abundance of baseball fanatics, conspiracy nuts, hustlers, con men, scientists, businessmen, schoolchildren, graffiti artists, and nurses.

Though we meet the characters, learn a great deal about them when DeLillo takes us “inside the human works, down to dreams and routine rambling thoughts,” (as is done by James Joyce), yet many of them vanish with the page turned over. As qtd. in Contemporary Literary Criticism, Paul Elie states, “the characters seem like themes with bodies and surnames” (2001: 198). The fictional structures creak because of long sentences, stretched metaphors, and hushed incantation, all screaming for significance. Everything seems to be connected, but in the pattern
the author has self-consciously elaborated. Elie also argues that in the end, the reader lacks for interesting characters, a strong story, a whole and radiant design: all the homely things of fiction by which the novelist elicits the reader’s belief, the writer being, in the end, not a priest or a mystic or a fanatic, but only a novelist (Ibid. 199).

In addition to the use of different types of narrators, these authors have tried to make their narratives more factual through their descriptions, making use of “sub-narratives” which, in the case of Hersey, involve the survivor’s efforts to understand what has happened to them. In the beginning he describes the moments before the blast, when all were totally naïve: “At the time, none of them knew anything,” (Hiroshima 4) but immediately after the blast, we find Mr. Tanimoto rising from the debris of the house into which he was moving the belongings of a friend and concluding that “a bomb had fallen directly on it,” (Hiroshima 9). Hersey describes the surprise evident at this moment:

> From the mound, Mr. Tanimoto saw an astonishing panorama. Not just a patch of koi, as he had expected, but as much of Hiroshima as he could see through the clouded air was giving off a thick, dreadful miasma. He wondered how such extensive damage could have been dealt out of a silent sky; even a few planes, far up, would have been audible. (Hiroshima 25)

One by one Hersey describes the expressions and feelings of all the main characters, for instance of Father Kliensorge:

> He found his room in a state of weird and illogical confusion. A first-aid kit was hanging undirected on a hook by the wall, but his clothes, which had been on other hooks nearby, were nowhere to be seen. His desk was in splinters all over the room, but a mere papier-mâché suitcase, which he had hidden under the desk,
stood handle-side up, without a scratch on it, in the doorway of the room, where
he could not miss it. (*Hiroshima* 30)

Like Mr. Tanimoto, Father Kliensorge and the other Jesuits assumed that they were in the center of a “local circle of destruction,” (31) and are overwhelmed when they learn about the extent of damage occurred.

Hersey observed many significant physical changes: a young man whose hair turns white; new x-ray plates in storage in a hospital basement mysteriously exposed; people who die suddenly within hours or days after the blast, plants growing at a luxuriant rate, confounding the human misery around. His concentration on details brings the sense and image of event to the mind of the readers. Here is another example of Hersey’s descriptive power at its peak. Hersey reports the actions of Mr. Tanimoto who views survivors in Asano Park:

He walked to the river bank and began to look for a boat in which he might carry some of the most severely injured across the river from Asano Park, and away from the spreading fire. Soon he found a good-sized pleasure punt drawn up on the bank, but in and around it was an awful tableau five dead men, nearly naked, badly burned, who must have expired more or less all at once, for they were in attitudes which suggested that they had been working together to push the boat down into the river. Mr. Tanimoto lifted them away from the boat, and as he did so, he experienced such horror at disturbing the dead preventing them, he momentarily felt, from launching their craft and going on their ghostly way that he said out loud, “Please forgive me for taking this boat. I must use it for others, who are alive.” (50)
This passage is describing the gruesome and pathetic scene of mercy. Mr. Tanimoto is in search of a boat to carry the survivors to the other side of river and asks the ‘dead’ in the boat to lend the same for those alive. This sort of detailed description arouses pity for those affected and dismay against this horrific inhumane act, and proves to be an indispensible tool of journalistic fiction.

Hersey lets Father Kleinsorge describe the most gruesome scenes in the entire book. In one of the scenes we find Kleinsorge searching for water and he comes across a faucet that still works. Then he comes upon twenty men in uniform, who were all “in exactly the same nightmarish state: their faces were wholly burned, their eye sockets were hollow, the fluid from their melted eyes had run down their cheeks.” He speculates that they must have been antiaircraft personnel and had their faces “upturned when the bomb went off.” He adds, “their mouths were mere swollen, pus-covered wounds, which they could not bear to stretch enough to admit the spout of the teapot (he used to carry the water). Father Kleinsorge searches for and finds a piece of grass and made it into a straw, and “gave them all water to drink” (68). The narration here is a means of directing us towards the most heinous and painful aspect of the advancement of technology and weapons.

Similarly, DeLillo’s descriptive powers are also very appreciable, for instance, when he describes the Falling Man’s performance that stands in for a public traumatic experience. Lianne first encounters him, only days after the attack, hanging from an elevated roadway:

A man was dangling there, above the street, upside down. He wore a business suit, one leg bent up, arms at his sides. A safety harness was barely visible, emerging from his trousers at the straightened leg and fastened to the decorative rail of the viaduct. 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. (*FM* 33)

Falling Man’s generic appearance, shown through the words of DeLillo, depicts him to be a symbol of all victims in the towers who never thought of what approached that September morning. Moreover, the last breathtaking page of the novel describes the plane hitting the first tower, first seen from Hammad’s point of view, which then at the moment of impact is transferred seamlessly to Keith’s point of view. This circular structure of beginning and ending with the disaster seems to be indicating that there is no escape from this tragedy.

DeLillo in *Underworld* mingles fact and legend, while creating the atmosphere of the Polo Grounds, and makes a visit to the men’s room carrying the ritualistic echo of the Roman baths:

Men passing in and out of the toilets, men zipping their flies as they turn from the trough and other men approaching the long receptacle, thinking where they want to stand and next to whom and not next to whom, and the old ballpark’s reek and mold are consolidated here, generational tides of beer and shit and cigarettes and peanut shells and disinfectants and pisses in the untold millions, and they are thinking in the ordinary way that helps a person glide through a life, thinking thoughts unconnected to events, the dusty hum of who you are …. (*Underworld* 36)
DeLillo indulges in highlighting the pettiest affairs of men, which sometimes lose sight of the overall design. Here perfectionism becomes a way of blocking out other, larger, more organic problems. The result is a finely-tuned jumble of big set-pieces.

Themes are the fundamental and often universal ideas explored in a literary work. The coming together of community, at the time of collapse and crisis, is an important theme visible in Hiroshima. Characters take care of victims, as of their own family members. For example, people taking care of one another on the riverbank at Asano Park and in the East Parade Ground, providing water, food, and comfort as though they were a family. Since the bomb destroyed families and homes, the citizens of Hiroshima are forced to come together and make a new kind of family. Father Kleinsorge, whose birth family is otherwise in Germany, generates a family out of his comradeship with his fellow priests and later, with Miss Sasaki, the Nakamuras, the Kataoka children and many other people he encounters in the period following the attack. The disruption of life in Hiroshima and its inhabitants have been put together by Hersey through the narrative collages consisting of individual portraits, general scenes, and discursive passages. To make the account more realistic, Hersey adds many factual details in Hiroshima which consist of speeches and announcements made by President Truman (65), the technical details and investigation of the scientists of Japan (95-97) and real and identifiable persons as characters like six major characters, John D. Montgomery (105), and Prof. Y. Hiraiwa of Hiroshima University of Literature and Science (115).

Survival, both of individuals and the community, is another important theme. The book generalizes people’s reactions in the hour of crisis; how do they deal with this situation morally; how they choose to rebuild their lives; and also how the city of Hiroshima rebuilds itself after the disaster. Dr. Fujii, for example, pours himself into pleasure-seeking activities. He prospers
financially and avoids health problems from the radiation, but sacrifices closeness with his family, and misses the opportunity for a fulfilled life of service. The will to keep on living even in the face of such destruction, when none is left untouched, is a subject of learning.

In *Falling Man* the theme of memory moves through every page like a shadow, along with the unpredictable nature of luck and circumstance. Keith is haunted by the agonizing memories of a weekly poker game enjoyed by a group of men, not all of whom survived that grim day. Lianne works as a freelance editor and volunteers for a senior center, leading a journaling class for a group of newly diagnosed Alzheimer’s patients. She cannot come to terms with her father’s suicide, after receiving a similar diagnosis. Two persons (Keith and Florence) who worked in the towers meet when some personal items are recovered, and share a brief sexual relationship. They feel that only they can discuss the events of that day because nobody else would understand in a better way what they have borne. Eventually Keith starts visiting Las Vegas casinos assuming he can only feel comfortable in an impersonal world where luck and chance rule the day, and where players always lose.

Being a writer who has written obsessively, and insightfully, about the role of mass media in constructing our world of seductive and deceptive images, in novels like *White Noise*, *Mao II*, *Libra*, and *Underworld*, DeLillo rarely comes to this subject in *Falling Man*. Only a few of Keith and Lianne’s son Justin’s images depict them in front of the TV, “staring helplessly into the glow, a victim of alien abduction” (*FM* 117). And later in a scene Keith and Lianne talk about their son and the TV glows mutely in the background: “There was stock footage on the screen of fighter planes lifting off the deck carrier. He waited for her to ask him to hit the sound button” (131). So the role of the media remains almost mute here.
Themes common in *Hiroshima* and *Falling Man*, therefore, are the attempts to create a semblance of order in the new, confused world; to hang onto or to construct some sort of meaning in the chaotic meaninglessness. This has always been an important theme for DeLillo, but in his earlier novels, the longing for order often manifested itself as paranoia. Some more themes common to both the texts are the unpredictability of the next moment and the life of a human being and suffering.

DeLillo’s style of moving forward and backward through the novel introduces characters and situations and progressively shows the interconnectedness of their lives. *Underworld* emphasizes extensively the Cold War, the nuclear threat, the collapse of the Soviet Union, and the other great public news events that feature in the novel. These events, however, are inextricably entwined with the everyday life, the private and personal, so that a counter-reading of the text is possible.

*Underworld* discusses a very important issue, that of wastage and garbage created by modern society, especially the junk of the Cold War, with people’s concerns about where and how to manage this waste. People even “saw products as garbage even when they sat gleaming on store shelves, yet unbought. We didn’t say. What kind of casserole will that make? We said, what kind of garbage will that make? Safe, clean, neat, easily disposed of? Can the package be recycled and come back as a tawny envelope that is difficult to lick closed?”(124) McLaughlin maintains that DeLillo shows us a society that makes strange and unforgivable choices about what to value and what to dispose of (2001: 206), for instance, paying $ 30,000 for the dirty, battered baseball Thompson hit, while on the other hand, raping and throwing away of Esmeralda, a homeless girl in the Bronx like garbage. But later the same girl gains publicity and is valued when a vision of her face is seen on a billboard for Minute Maid Orange juice. There
are many such examples in *Underworld* which depict in contemporary America the means of inspiring desire, along with waste; a kind of wasted hyper reality. It questions how as an individual and as a society, we should live in our time and with our past understanding; what to value and what to dispose of; and also to face the consequences of the decision we have made.

The events that resonate throughout the book are the two shots heard around the world and other major contemporary events. “When I started *Underworld,***” DeLillo says in an interview, “I tried to think of what the relationship might be between that ball game and the fact that the Soviets had exploded an atom bomb on the same day. In a way, that’s why I started the book, to understand what the juxtaposition might be. It occurred to me that the ball game was a unifying and largely joyous event, the kind of event in which people came out of their houses. But with the onset of the bomb, the communal spirit becomes associated with danger and loss rather than celebration” (n. p.). In *Underworld*, as in several of his other novels, Don DeLillo shows how the political and the global invade private lives, and how individual events can shape world history. The novel itself is “an architecture of waste,” (306), a “gorgeous” structure that very seriously and systematically investigates Cold War America by analyzing its waste and demonstrating how artists can help us achieve a deeper understanding of it.

DeLillo’s narrative is intended to convey the schizoid anxieties of the atomic age. Nick Shay, a waste specialist, ponders and apprehends over the significance of the ever-mounting dump piles resulting from the unstoppable consumption. This may be in the form of consumer packaging or hazardous waste. Humans are duping themself in thinking that they have its byproducts under control. We must understand that we are caught up by the materiality of this world. Garbage is one of the novel’s most omnipresent themes which DeLillo finds everywhere,
like in the streets of the Bronx, in the ocean off the Jersey Coast, in the rock salt deposits of coastal Texas, and also in space.

Klara’s and Nick’s careers oddly reflect one another -- both are waste managers. Nick visits the former Soviet Union to observe nuclear waste disposal methods and discusses with his Russian counterpart:

I tell Viktor there is a curious connection between weapons and waste. I don’t know exactly what …. He says maybe one is the mystical twin of the other …. He says waste is the devil twin. Because waste is the secret history, the underhistory, the way archaeologists dig out the history of early cultures, every sort of bone heap and broken tool, literally from under the ground. All those decades, he says, when we thought about weapons all the time and never thought about the dark multiplying byproduct. ‘And in this case,’ I say. ‘In our case, in our age. What we excrete comes back to consume us.’ (884)

So the real history of a civilization is not what will survive in history books but what a civilization will discard, both in the tangible sense -- nuclear waste -- and the intangible values it is perhaps too willing to compromise.

The effects of both consumer and radioactive waste on the lives of people affected have glimpses in literature also. If T. S. Eliot’s *Waste Land* describes the spiritual malaise of post-World War I modernity, DeLillo’s aim is to diagnose through its pre-history the spiritual disconnectedness of post-Cold War post-modernity. Like Eliot, DeLillo uses a literal wasteland so as to symbolize the recurring representation of massive landfills to figure spiritually wasted lives.
Despite the weighty presence of the Cold War, *Underworld* is not a book about war. It highlights the American life in the second half-century, and the ways in which power has diffused into each corner of day to day life. Like Mailer, DeLillo’s portrayal is also apocalyptic, full of prophesies and revelations that cut from the nuclear test wastelands of the America’s Southwestern deserts to a city (New York) on the verge of social and economic chaos. The book ends with a meditation on the internet. “Everything is connected,” DeLillo writes in his epilogue. “All human knowledge gathered and linked, hyperlinked, this site leading to that, this fact referenced to that, a keystroke, a mouse-click, a password—world without end, amen” (923).

For DeLillo history is memory which becomes a piece of evidence, broken into particles, separated but in some way all is interrelated. The fragmented narrative of *Underworld* echoes this mindset. It is machine memory as much as human memory, for the human side of things is virtually swallowed up by the underworld of technological world. DeLillo, through Eric Deming, one of Matt’s ‘bomb head’ colleagues, throws light on the effects of radiations which the government has kept a secret, from local people living downwind from the Nevada aboveground tests. These people have suffered severe disfigurements as a result of radiation exposure.

‘Nobody’s supposed to know this …. Secret. Untalked about. Hushed up ….
Multiple myelomas. Kidney failures. Or you wake up one morning and you’re three inches shorter …. Little farm communities …. Nearly all the kids wear wigs.’ Eric, however, does not believe the stories. He only spreads them ‘[f]or the tone …. The existential burn.’ (*Underworld* 405, 406)

Nick also says, “We built pyramids of waste above and below the earth. The more hazardous the waste, the deeper we tried to sink it. The word plutonium comes from, the god of the dead and ruler of the underworld” (107-108).
In *New Yorker Times Book Review*, Martin Amis, commenting on *Underworld* said, “While *Underworld* may or may not be a great novel there is no doubt that it renders DeLillo a great novelist.” Paul Elie states in, *Contemporary Literary Criticism*, that DeLillo sees a superabundance of meaning in things and wants to identify and figure out how they fit together, unlike many contemporary writers. Like in his works, the suburban super-market, with its profusion of brightly packaged and test-marketed goods, is not just a wasteland of fruitless diversions, but is a world of signs which, if we can decipher it, can tell us who we are (2001: 197).

DeLillo discusses the cyberworld, which deals with providing instant information, infinite media outlets, ubiquitous advertising, where anything can be turned into an object of desire or source of entertainment, and changed into a waste after immediate use. Basically the process is of production, consumption and discarding of a product and the repetition of this process goes on endlessly. The murder of a man driving his car, shot by the Texas Highway Killer and videotaped by a little girl looking out of the back window of the car ahead, is news “because it is on tape,” and the murderer becomes a celebrity. This is the social and cultural picture of present society of intake, throwing away as waste, and entertainment in the era of developing technology every day. Finally, the novel ends in the 1990s with a scene that takes place on a computer screen and includes a URL on the page, transforming the hyperlinks on the internet into a coherent narrative. Critics have compared *Underworld* to “deep-focus cinematography” (Yetter 28), television in its use of repetition (Cowart “Shall” 55), an electronic hypertext (Hayles “Flickering” par. 3), a film montage (Myers 174), and a “literary search engine” (Howard 119) (qtd. in Paul Stewart Hackman 228).
Thus what DeLillo’s *Falling Man* seems to suggest, as done by other 9/11 works, is that the best way to come out of this traumatic experience is to move into the near and the intimate; by moving into this place, we may be able to work through the trauma. There is no naïve return to innocence in *Falling Man* because Keith and Lianne are not reunited. There is, however, a certain nostalgic feeling at the novel’s end. As readers, we are left with this image of Lianne: “She was ready to be alone, in a reliable calm, she and the kid, the way they were before the planes appeared that day, silver crossing blue” (*FM* 236). Lianne is left ready for the rest of her life to recover from the trauma. It may also be read as a nostalgic desire to return to a simpler, better time before the fall. The novel ends with a return to the trauma of the fall depicting the perspective of one of the terrorists aboard the first plane to crash into the World Trade Center. Almost unnoticeably, the perspective shifts to that of Keith, in the tower as the crash occurs. We get a new description of his experience on the tower and his escape from it. The ending ties the novel into a kind of narrative loop, insisting that we are not free from the specter of the fall, as it will continue to haunt us for quite a long time. Even the finishing lines seem to indicate this: “Then he saw a shirt come down out of the sky. He walked and saw it fall, arms waving like nothing in this life” (*FM* 246).

In *Underworld* DeLillo adds in a number of mysteries like the history of Bobby Thomson baseball, the nature of Nick’s secret crime, and the events that transpire between Nick and Klara Sax in 1950s. The narrative of Nick Shay is a means of some suspicious questions like whom did he kill and why; will he tell his wife about his past; will his marriage founder on the rocks of his detachment. These subplots allow DeLillo to scrutinize a broad spectrum of lives that provide us with a critical picture of fifty years of American life. DeLillo uses his keen eye for detail to give a decent structure to his giant jigsaw puzzle. Not only does he give us a vivid sense of how
things have changed and endured in Nick’s old neighborhood in Bronx, but also conveys to us his concern for the surreal weirdness that has infected contemporary life.

DeLillo’s structure quite literally helps the reader get to the bottom of these mysteries. DeLillo violates the rule that, in a good novel, secrets should be enhanced rather than undermined. The unbelievably exciting world of the 1950s, with its indefinable dangers and the ever threatening bomb, is reduced here to the level of the pampered 1990s. In the closing pages of *Falling Man*, DeLillo resolves the confusion by returning full circle to where it started (in this case the morning of the attacks); and in the final paragraphs, Hammad on the hijacked plane suddenly metamorphoses into Keith in the soon-to-be-destroyed towers. DeLillo shows how terrorist and terror-survivor are associated. It is another attempt to give cohesion to a frustratingly disjointed novel. DeLillo is successful in presenting something new in material that the readers have looked at and read about repetitively. The thoughts going on in the mind of the attacker before the attempt of the attack on the towers have been expressed very effectively using certain small sentences like:

‘Recite the sacred words.

Pull your clothes tightly about you.

Fix your gaze.

Carry your soul in your hand.’ (*FM* 238)

The three individual chapters within the novel deal with the movement of the hijacker of American Airlines Flight 11, Hammad, as he progresses towards the attacks. After seeing Hammad at preparation in Hamburg and Florida, the final section begins as he is in the plane flying across the Hudson Corridor. As Hammad sits in his seat, DeLillo writes about the impact,
making an exceptional moment of writing. Description of the scene in the cockpit shifts abruptly to the office where Keith was working:

A bottle fell off the counter in the galley, on the other side of aisle, and he watched it roll way and that, a water bottle, empty, making an arc one way and rolling the other, and he watched it spin more quickly and then skitter across the floor an instant before the aircraft struck the tower, heat, then fuel, then fire, and a blast wave passed through the structure that sent Keith Neudecker out of his chair and into a wall. He found himself walking into a wall. He didn’t stop the telephone until he hit the wall. The floor began to slide beneath him and he lost his balance and eased along the wall to the floor. (FM 239)

This is a lengthy description covering the whole of last chapter ‘In the Hudson Corridor’. It ends when Keith, being lucky, finds himself alive and out of the towers in between the ‘rubble underfoot and there was motion everywhere, people running, things flying past … (FM 246). DeLillo attempts to render the moment of impact in words. We begin with movement, the roll and arc and spin of a bottle on the floor of the aircraft, becoming more agitated as the plane accelerates towards the tower. That movement is transferred to the movement of explosion as the plane rips into the building. We feel the “blast wave” exploding through the building sending Keith flying into a wall. This transference of subject from Hammad to Keith in one sentence is convincing and ferocious. We are made; in as clear a way as literature can allow, to sense the impact of the plane. The text also becomes dislocated and shadowy after the collision, when Keith hits the wall becoming confused and out-of-time. Although DeLillo was not present during the falling of the towers, yet he catches the instant flawlessly and makes it momentous.
So in the end not much is really transformed in the lives of the characters after the 9/11 in *Falling Man*. The outcome is that DeLillo’s characters continue on with their doggy lives. Justin drifts into predictable, laconic, and vaguely annoying teenhood. Keith deserts Florence, stays away from Lianne, and indulges himself in the poker-tournament circuit, to remember his two poker-playing allies who died in the towers’ collapse. Lianne accepts that “she was ready to be alone, in reliable calm, she and the kid, the way they were before the planes appeared that day, silver crossing blue” (236), and finds it impossible, and not quite impossible, both at the same time.

There is an individual outcome in *Hiroshima* for each of the characters. Hersey’s rhetoric depicts them to be sometimes tragic, and sometimes, inspirational. All draw attention to the massive impact that the atomic bomb exposure had on their family lives, careers, and attitude towards life. The protagonists continue struggling against the effects of the bomb. Similarly, in *Falling Man*, Keith, Lianne, Justin, Nina and her boyfriend, Martin, are the protagonists. The intimate close-up of Keith and Lianne, and their increasingly desperate attempt to come to terms with the attack is the nucleus of the novel. The antagonist i.e. the atomic bomb in both the texts caused so much of destruction, pain, and loss for the main characters as well as the entire city of Hiroshima and the World Trade Centre in Washington D.C. Hersey and DeLillo added no judgment of their own but presented the characters’ interpretation of events.

The climax in *Hiroshima* is reached a few days after the bomb has hit, when the main characters are still in doubt whether they will live or die. It can be argued that much of *Hiroshima* and *Falling Man* are in fact the climax. In case of *Hiroshima* only the first chapter, in which the main characters’ everyday lives are described, and the last chapter, when years have passed since the bomb, are not parts of this extended climax. In *Falling Man*, the climax is
reached as soon as the novel starts after the bomb hits the towers of WTC, and the main character Keith is coming out of it after a narrow escape. He pursues a safe shelter and returns to Lianne and their son Justin, and the rest of the novel depicts their attempt to come to terms with each other and with the inconceivable event of September 11. In these texts, both the writers through their research and depiction of facts want to divert the minds of readers towards the ugly face of advancement of technology which led people to bear so much of pain, sufferings, and never ending after-effects.

The structure of *Underworld* is so unwieldy and disjointed that DeLillo has to manufacture an epiphany at the end—ascension into cyberspace, the afterlife perceived as a murky hyperlink of everything ever written, so as to position the themes and characters into some sort of harmonic convergence. He uses rhetoric to wrap everything. DeLillo’s ‘everything is connected’, shows that history has many connections, within America’s ‘underworld.’ DeLillo’s novel concludes with the line:

> And you can glance out the window for a moment … and you try to imagine the word on the screen becoming a thing in the world … a word that spreads a longing through the raw sprawl of the city and out across the dreaming bourns and orchards to the solitary hills. Peace. (*Underworld* 827)

This last sentence in *Underworld* is over half a page long. The ending implies another world is possible, perhaps beyond wars and empires. Eliot offers benediction at the end of *The Waste Land*, DeLillo also blesses his toxic wasteland with a simple word: “Peace.” It is more than a sacred note, it is a cosmic chord. The word gets a paragraph all to itself in the book.

About the length of *Underworld* DeLillo says in an interview, “I was writing a long story about a baseball game,” and “but it refused to end.” Once he decided that it was a novel, he knew
it would be a long book. “I had written a 25,000-word prologue and had yet to introduce a main character. So I was in trouble, so to speak. The book created itself.” Although the main action of *Underworld* ends in 1992, the novel takes us much nearer the present in its final pages, we find Nick surfing the web, starting at a site his son, Jeff, discovers: http://blk.www.dd.com/miaculum (810). In the epilogue, Nick indicates that his and Marian’s relationship is much improved as he has opened up to her about his past – a subject that had always much-interested her, and that he had been unwilling to discuss.

George H. Mead finds the way of ending the book by Hersey to be critical to our better understanding of an event. “Data are isolated elements in a world of things,” he writes; they have no intrinsic significance and do not convey meaning “until the data have taken on the form of things in same sort of ordered whole” (1959: 94). Hersey creates a sense of closure by recapitulating the conditions of each of the survivors:

A year after the bomb was dropped, Miss Sasaki was a cripple; Mrs. Nakamura was destitute; Father Kleinsorge was back in the hospital; Dr. Sasaki was not capable of the work he once de; Dr. Fujii had lost the thirty-room hospital it took him many years to acquire, and had no prospects of rebuilding it; Mr. Tanimoto’s church had been ruined and he no longer had his exceptional vitality. The lives of these six people, who were among the luckiest in Hiroshima, would never be the same. (*Hiroshima* 114)

So if we read within the words we would understand that although Hersey’s narrative has ended, yet the effects of bomb have not. It’s the fate of Japan that it has recently borne another similar tragedy in the form of multiple disasters, especially the nuclear meltdown in Fukishima. It was as if history was repeating itself.
DeLillo is making the reader cognizant and cautious about the inhumane activities being pursued leading to the destruction of the environment and making human existence difficult. He also wants to communicate, through art, the atrocities committed by human beings against one another. “Underworld ends with a transcendent and redemptive act of grace,” veteran leftist, John Leonard writes in The Nation, adding, “While this astonishing novel may have earned it, America certainly hasn’t.”

*Falling Man*’s visionary nature concurrently suggests the suspension of time and considerable action that dispels panic and promotes resolution and recovery. Through *Hiroshima, Falling Man*, and other similar books, readers are encouraged to enter the psychic terrain genuinely, but with a collective reconciliation. Such literature asks us not only to gaze on unspeakable loss, but also interprets the effective and symbolic values that it holds for all. The progression from a Cold War America to an American Wasteland is predominant in *Underworld*, and the novel’s recycling mechanism eventually leads up to a suggestion of hope for a ‘new’ America.

*Underworld* is a big novel like Gass’s *The Tunnel*, Wallace’s *Infinite Jest*, Pynchon’s *Mason & Dixon*, etc. It is big in its cast of characters (some of them purely fictional and others like J. Edgar Hoover, Frank Sinatra, and Jackie Gleason are depicting the same shrewdness as in *Libra*), big in its historical sweep, big in its themes- baseball, the cold war, the uses and abuses of the past, and waste in all its forms. DeLillo puts together these historical events, characters and themes in an amazing and thought-provoking fashion so as to explore the nature of the society we have created and the possibilities for living in it. After re-reading it in 2010, over ten years after its publication, DeLillo commented that re-reading it “… made me wonder whether I would be capable of that kind of writing now — the range and scope of it. There are certain parts
of the book where the exuberance, the extravagance, I don’t know, the overindulgence .... There are city scenes in New York that seem to transcend reality in a certain way” (Caesar).

DeLillo’s novels are not simply meant to convey emotion or tell a story, they are also carefully constructed to critique the contemporary understanding of cultural and societal historical constructions. To quote Peter Boxall: “DeLillo’s novels can be thought of as an extended enactment of the exhaustion of possibility in post-war culture. It is a familiar refrain in his writing that even the most fleeting urge to invention, to fabrication or to dissent, is cancelled by the interpolating power of a culture which has become, in another of DeLillo’s key words, self-referring” (Boxall 4-5). Moreover, it is in the narrative that tries to make sense of a traumatic event itself that we will find the reference needed for the narrative to become a truthful account of what has taken place.

Thus we find that these artists have tried to give some kind of closure to the terrible catastrophes by representing them in the form of narratives. They have conveyed the confusion and trauma of their times covering a large number of characters, sometimes becoming unwieldy also, as in DeLillo’s case (especially Underworld). In an interview, DeLillo explains the fictional aspect of journalistic fiction: “fiction offers patterns and symmetry that we don’t find in the experience of ordinary living. Stories are consoling” (Connolly 31). Although the endings of these narratives depict that life has to go on, yet DeLillo implies that another world is possible beyond wars and empires, and that peace is also possible. Hersey believes that characters achieve growth as a result of their experiences.