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A Survey of the Symbolic Order and the Eruption of the Real Order in Don DeLillo's *Falling Man*: A Žižekian Reading

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Extended ABSTRACT

The present article surveys the process of symbolization in the Symbolic Order and the eruption of the Real in reading Don DeLillo's *Falling Man*. The questions that the present research raises are: How does DeLillo represent the Symbolic Order and the eruption of the Real in *Falling Man*? How does the subject appear in a space between the Symbolic and the Real? What part does art take in the eruption of the Real and the appearance of the subject in the space between the Symbolic and the Real?

Priyadarshini Gupta explains how Muslims were classified as "good," "bad," or "moderate" in the wake of the 9/11 attacks. Gupta deems these categories as "reductive when it comes to understanding complex Muslim formations in a post-9/11 world as they impose a politicized ideal of what it means to be a Muslim" (2025, 116). Henry Veggian tends to regard *Falling Man* as a mirror image of DeLillo's earlier novel *White Noise* (1985). He argues that *Falling Man* is a "melodrama about a post-nuclear family set in the aftermath of a disaster" (2007, 101).

This article uses the descriptive-analytical method to examine DeLillo's novel through the lens of the theories of the distinguished present-day philosopher Slavoj Žižek. Žižek attaches great significance to the concepts of the Symbolic and Real. He determines the locus of the subject at the interface of the Symbolic order and the Real order. According to Žižek, the Real order corresponds to the experiences or the areas of life that are unknown to us. He contends that individuals cannot know anything directly and that they perceive the world through the medium of language. From this perspective, Žižek finds the Real in the world before it is fragmented by language. A traumatic event, for Žižek, is the moment when the Real disrupts the Symbolic. "The ambiguity of the Lacanian real is not merely a nonsymbolized kernel that makes a sudden appearance in the symbolic order, in the form of traumatic 'returns' and 'answers.'" (Žižek 1991 B, 35). Thus, considering an event, the Real remains the same, and it is the Symbolic which sets out to modify and interpret the event.

It seems that what happens on September 11th is a meaningless thing in itself, and the various narratives and interpretations that followed are attempts to fragment it into the Symbolic Order. Finally, it is concluded that in *Falling Man*, the narrative of art (including DeLillo's novel itself as a work of art), triggers the eruption of the Real and, contrary to the rules and regulations of the Symbolic, makes the audience confront the Real by depicting men and women who jumped to their deaths from the burning towers of the World Trade Center.

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