

James Gourley. 2013. *Terrorism and Temporality in the Works of Thomas Pynchon and Don DeLillo*. London: Bloomsbury Academic. 192 pp. ISBN: 978-1441166890.

ANA RULL SUÁREZ

Universidad Nacional de Educación a Distancia (UNED)

arull@flog.uned.es

James Gourley's book, *Terrorism and Temporality in the Works of Thomas Pynchon and Don DeLillo*, published in 2013, aims at showing how both Pynchon's and DeLillo's conceptualization of time changed after the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 and how both reflect that devastating event in their novels through different means. The author focuses on these two emblematic American writers because both spotlight issues related to North America and the wider context of Western cultures. Taking into account that both are inhabitants of New York City and obviously affected by the September 11 attacks, Gourley shows how their novels responded to the attacks comprising part of what he calls the genre of "September 11 novels."

Gourley organizes his book by devoting the first four chapters to Don DeLillo and the following four to Thomas Pynchon. In chapter one he examines *Mao II*, a text that, since September 11, has been considered as visionary in its anticipation of the rise and spread of fundamentalist terrorism which reached its climax with the events of September 11. He focuses on the idea of the *quicken*ing of time, a concept that DeLillo derives from his reading of George Steiner in *Bluebeard's Castle* (1971). Here Gourley emphasizes the relationship between art and terror and links this idea to the notion of time, asserting that the inexpressible force of art and literature attempts to push back the power of terrorism. Through the process of the speeding up of time brought about by the development of technology he returns to the prophetic nature of the novel and especially to its links with 2001's *Cosmopolis*, the novel he discusses in chapter two.

Considering *Cosmopolis* as the most representative work related to the 9/11 attacks, its prophetic nature is intensified here as it was the first novel DeLillo published after the September attacks (indeed in the same year), although it was in fact written before the event. Gourley analyzes *Cosmopolis* in the light of shifts of temporality, highlighting the presence of elements both from the past and from the future. Again, he particularly focuses on the acceleration of time, here taken to its limits with the past and the future colliding in the present. This phenomenon of past and future impinging on the present

is happening right now in the Western world, claims Gourley, technological advances having created the illusion of living a futuristic present, where the notion of time has been altered. He shows how the terrorist attacks in 2001 symbolically attempt to bring back the past by destroying any hope for the future, and altering once again our notion of both fictional and real-world time.

In chapter three he focuses on DeLillo's September 11 novel, *Falling Man*, where, by using Samuel Beckett's minimalism in style and content, DeLillo addresses three key Beckettian concepts where time, habit and memory are seen to shape his work. Gourley highlights the influence of Beckett, a writer who shares with DeLillo his refusal of the encyclopedic form in order to show how the notion of time has radically changed. Since 9/11 writers like DeLillo show that time can no longer be seen as linear and simple. It could be said that throughout these three first chapters Gourley identifies DeLillo's idea of time as contingent and of great importance for the narrative focus of all three works.

In chapter four he examines DeLillo's latest novel, *Point Omega*, which is full of references to film and film theories, again influenced by Beckett and shaped through two different linear plots. Gourley focuses once more on the idea of time and the conception of time as it is conceived in cinema and how DeLillo's influences after 9/11 can be traced to this new representation of fictional time through a shorter and much more elaborated text that shows how temporality has been altered.

The next part of the book is centered on Pynchon but time is still Gourley's main concern. He begins in chapter five by analyzing Pynchon's most famous work, *Gravity's Rainbow*, suggesting the same reconceptualization of time he identifies in DeLillo's work. He considers the importance of the idea of time travelling faster than the speed of sound and addresses mathematical and philosophical analyses of time to emphasize the importance of temporalization in this novel, taking into account Shawn Smith's *Pynchon and History* (2005).

Gourley devotes the next two chapters to Pynchon's novel *Against the Day*, published in 2006. In chapter six he interprets Pynchon's novel through a series of concepts that show how distorted temporality shape the work: time travel, bilocation, the possibility of the existence of counter worlds, and finally, the use of mathematical analogies. In his allusion to Dante's *Inferno*, according to Gourley, Pynchon makes a clear reference to the September 11 attacks.

In chapter 7 he examines Pynchon's analysis of the visual arts in *Against the Day* focusing particularly on Futurism and Filippo Marinetti's conception of art, where violence and the destruction of mythology are key features. He also reflects on how the idea of the beauty of speed for the futurists has destroyed notions of space and time and are substituted by two concepts, simultaneity and dynamism, which allow Pynchon to reconsider the notion of temporality influenced by the September 11 attacks.

Finally, his last chapter draws on Mikhail Bakhtin's analysis of time in the novel, where remote control of television reflects society's obsession for linear time. He also

compares present time with that of the 1960s, where the latter is depicted as an innocent society that suffered the murders of Charles Manson, which would be an antecedent of the America to come.

As a whole, the work by Gourley deals with two major concerns in the novels by DeLillo and Pynchon that, although very different in style, as Pynchon's encyclopedic style contrasts with DeLillo's minimalism, reflect many themes in common. He first focuses on the pressure upon both authors to come to grips with the 9/11 attacks and his second concern is the resultant demands on the arts in general, and literature in particular, that this event has made since 2001.

Gourley develops the idea that the events surrounding 9/11 allow both Pynchon and DeLillo to reconsider their own work and to propose a new method for literature, showing how they focus on the importance of the arts, and mainly literature, in an effort to try to explain, interpret and to give meaning to the tragedies of 9/11. Both offer a hopeless view of modern literature, and, more than disillusionment with reality, both authors focus on the importance of their interpretation of the world, and particularly of their artistic creations and those of their contemporaries. In this sense, both authors return to the past as it offers a new perspective to judge the events (rather like the Modernists did trying to respond to the horrors of the Great War). He also asserts that DeLillo's "twenty-first-century adoption of modernist style and form is a direct reflection of the changes in culture engendered by the September 11 attacks" (178).

However, Gourley's task becomes a difficult one when he arrives at Pynchon because to talk about a new "reconsideration of time" (4) with respect to this author is questionable given that in most of his works clock time appears to be the invisible force against which his characters fight. Pynchon had already been playing with the idea of time in novels prior to the terrorist attacks of 2001 in works like *V.*, *Mason & Dixon* and *Gravity's Rainbow*. His reading of DeLillo works much better because it is quite obvious that in novels such as *Falling Man* and *Point Omega* he is using a Beckettian minimalist style that he did not use before. He admits, nonetheless, that the concept of terrorism in itself is not the same for Pynchon as for DeLillo. The fact that Pynchon does not consider terrorism as a concrete event but as a permanent situation of history which consists of the powerful, or what he calls the elect, dominating the powerless, explains why there is very little change in temporality within his novels, and, according to Gourley, it is that which justifies Pynchon's "reconsideration of time"; something which is not as obvious as in DeLillo.

For Gourley, what is undeniable is that both authors reject society's obsession for linear, controlled and established time and that both fight for a change in a society that seems to be dominated by apathy brought about by the capitalist system that encourages people to become passive beings surrounded by commodities. That situation of apathy and detachment from reality is the consequence of technological progress but it is also intensified by the act of terrorism suffered against what seemed to be the most powerful and emblematic buildings of the West: the Twin Towers. The symbol of the attacks

that caused such immense trauma in the Western world marks the beginning of a new era where society needs to rethink and express its fears and remember the past, and not to make the same mistakes that led to the disastrous events of 9/11.

Although Pynchon's idiosyncratic and encyclopedic writing seems to be very different from DeLillo's, the two novelists are linked by their narrative focus and their thematic concerns. Gourley has very cleverly highlighted how these writers coincide in representing a world of fear and paranoia brought about after 9/11 and his book broadens the understanding of these two novelists' work. Anachronism is the link Gourley uses to keep Pynchon and DeLillo together as both writers, in different ways, offer a look into the past and recognize the importance of understanding the representations of terror in contemporary artistic practice, something vital in the post-9/11 world. Gourley's book reflects on the issues concerning the contemporary after the terrorist attacks, at the beginning of the twenty-first century. The power of the terrorist can only be blocked when examining and communing with the world, finding meanings and revising the past to avoid situations that could have been avoided as is hinted in the time travels that take place in *Against the Day* or in the prophetic nature of DeLillo's novels. In the end Gourley concludes this remarkable book by showing how the novel remains the key element and tool with which to commune with the world, to consider it and to confront terror. This is what constitutes the challenge found in the novels that Gourley has chosen to interpret in his book.

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Ana Rull Suárez has worked as teacher of Spanish Language for foreigners, as teacher of North-American and English literature in the UNED, and she is about to present her thesis on the North-American author Thomas Pynchon. She is also member of the research group of the Department of English Philology in the UNED. She has published on Edgar Allan Poe and both Thomas Pynchon and Don DeLillo; she has also worked on the relations between Pynchon and Cervantes.

Address: Departamento de Filologías Extranjeras y sus Lingüísticas. Paseo Senda del Rey, 7. 28040, Madrid, Spain. Tel.: +34 913987637.