The Erosion of Characters' Identity in DeLillo's *White Noise:* A Postmodern Study of the Artful Reality of Simulacra

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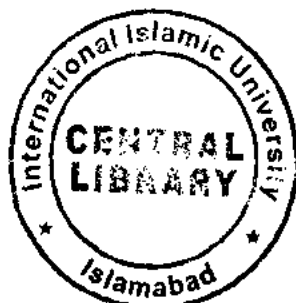
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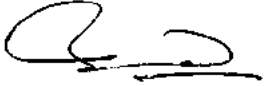
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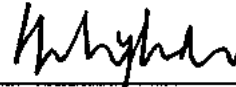**Name of Student:**   Muhammad Tayyab

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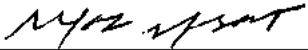
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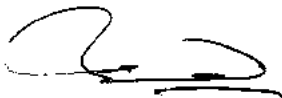
I, <u>Muhammad Tayyab</u> Son of <u>Altaf Hussain</u> Registration No: 228-FLL/MSENG/F11 candidate of <u>Master of Philosophy (English)</u> at the International Islamic University, Islamabad, do hereby declare that the thesis, <u>The Erosion of Characters' Identity in DeLillo's *White Noise*: A Postmodern Study of the Artful Reality of Simulacra,</u> submitted by me in partial fulfillment of the requirement for M. Phil degree in the Department of English, is my original work and has not been submitted or published earlier. I also solemnly declare that it shall not, in future, be submitted by me for obtaining any other degree from this or any other university or institution.

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Muhammad Tayyab

DEDICATION

To my beloved parents

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

First of all, all praise and glory to Almighty Allah, who in His infinite mercy has guided me to complete this work.

I am greatly indebted to my Research Supervisor, Prof. Dr. Munawar Iqbal Ahmad, for the persistent guidance, encouragement and advice he has provided throughout my time as his student. I have been extremely lucky to have a supervisor who cared so much about my work, and who responded to my questions and queries so promptly.

Finally, I extend my acknowledgement and heartfelt love to my Grandfather, parents, brothers and wife, who have been with me all the time to spur my spirits.

Abstract

This study discusses the negative effects of media and consumerism on characters living in the postmodern age as depicted by DeLillo in his novel *White Noise*. Employing postmodern theory of simulacra and simulation as described by Jean Baudrillard, it examines the threat of media and consumerism to human identity. It argues that the two have far reaching effects on the postmodern consumers leading them towards distorted perceptions, also known as a consumerist type of schizophrenia. The postmodern schizophrenics have been deprived of the ability to find clear distinctions between signifier and signified, and therefore lack personal identity. They are continuously bombarded with advertised information powerfully persuading them to purchase products and feel that the products they buy are responsible for determining their identity. DeLillo in his novel, *White Noise* offers a clear picture of the postmodern world marked with uncertainty, providing people with a fear of death and fatal diseases. In this world people's identity, their minds and their actions all are influenced by the logic provided by media and consumerism.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

What is Postmodernism?

According to the historical perspective, the term 'postmodern' refers to the period that follows modern age, in the same way that modernity followed the Middle Ages (Best, 1991, p. 02). Toynbee was one of the first British historians who coined the term 'postmodernity', and to him this period starts at the conclusion of the nineteenth century and is marked by social trouble, conflict and change.

> [Toynbee] characterized the previous modern period as a middle- class bourgeois era marked by social stability, rationalism, and progress - a typical bourgeois middle-class conception of an era marked by cycles of crisis, war and revolution. The postmodern age, by contrast, is a 'Time of Troubles' marked by the collapse of rationalism and the ethos of the Enlightenment. (Best, 1991, p. 06)

Philosophically, the term 'postmodern' is used as a critique of traditional values and ideologies. The characteristics associated with the term 'postmodern' in its philosophical sense are as many as the writers who are considered to be postmodern. Some notable writers include Derrida, Foucault, Lyotard, Barthes and Baudrillard. I will concentrate mainly on the critique of Baudrillard which he termed as 'simulacra and simulation' because his concept stands in a very close relation to the literary concept of 'postmodernism' and is closely related to our everyday life situations.

On the literary level, 'postmodernism' refers to a literary theory and practice which criticizes and overcomes both traditional narrative forms and methods of analysis. Whereas modernism is based on methodological unity as it is preoccupied with the form of presentation,

postmodernism is known for its diversity - a diversity that often does not permit the creation of a structured impression. Undeniably, the literary concept of postmodernism is closely linked with the historical term 'postmodernism': several authors have pointed out that the genesis of the term 'postmodernity' is related to the major catastrophic events in the twentieth century: World War II and the annihilation of cultural, ethnic, and social minorities in the Nazi's concentration camps. Lyotard, one of the postmodern theorists, contends that these two events are responsible for uprooting the contemporary unquestionable belief in rationality as the source of both humanism and morality (Best, 1991, p. 12). So while rationality as a standard had remained unquestionably accepted before, it is by no means an acceptable concept in the postmodern age - and this is what the critique of reality and simulation, as discussed by Jean Baudrillard, is all about.

Baudrillard's Concept of Postmodernism

One of the most prominent proponents of postmodern critique is Jean Baudrillard, who believes there is a clear connection between postmodernity as a historical era and a change of the relation between signs and actual things in the outward world. He defines postmodernity as being distinguished by an increasing importance of signs of all kinds – a new development that coincides with the end of Second World War and the beginning of what we call "consumer society". Consequently, a major shift was observed with regard to the respective importance of the signs and the things they represent: whereas modernity, as an era of production, considered signs as secondary to the actual things they represent, the postmodern era assigns more value to the signs, and this is why the era is called as one of simulation (Best, 1991, p. 118).

The main reason that paved the way to this development is the perfection of our sing systems, which paradoxically blurred not only the boundaries of different systems of representation but also the boundaries between signs and the reality they are supposed to represent. A radical role within this process is allotted to the mass media, which produce the simulacrum (the signs that are 'taken for' reality).

> Baudrillard argued that today the mass media have neutralized reality by stages: first they reflected it; then they masked and perverted it; next they had to mask its absence; and finally they produced instead the simulacrum of the real, the destruction of meaning and of all relation to reality (Hutcheon, 1989, p. 33).

Another significant feature of postmodernism, according to Baudrillard, is the mixing of formerly distinct categories of representation, resulting both in an anesthetization of everyday life and in an ongoing popularization of so-called consumerism. His most important example is television, which is repeatedly diluting the distinction among categories like 'information', 'advertisement', and 'entertainment', and establishing the currently popular concept 'infotainment'. This loss of formerly distinct genres, accompanied by a constant bombardment of the public with repetitive signs, results in a different attitude towards both the systems of signs and the things they represent, which might be described as being characterized by boredom, indifference, and passivity (Baudrillard, 1994, p. 20).

Baudrillard's Theory: Simulacra and Simulation

Simulacrum: etymology.

Though the word 'simulacrum' has been in vogue to describe postmodernism, it has its roots in the Latin word 'simulare', which means to imitate or to copy, and is, thus, related to the word 'similes' that denotes similarity, resemblance and likeness. (simulacrum, Def. 1a).

the legitimacy and validity of its original model. Thus in this context, the term 'simulacrum' can be called a privileged form of an idea or product through which postmodern experiences can be imagined (Durham, 1998, p. 3).

An overview of Baudrillard's theory.

With the collapse of known distinctions between reality and simulation in the post-modern age, the principles and structures that once gave order to cultures have now been subject to suspicion and question. Jean Baudrillard, in his book *Simulacra and Simulations*, contends that the post-modern world is marked by simulations, which stand on their own, without referring to the real things they actually represented in the past. Thus Baudrillard lays out his famous theory of sign system that displaces and masks the reality of facts and objects.

Baudrillard starts his book by bringing up an example of Borges fable, which depicts that the territory (reality) remains, but the map (simulation), on which the foundation of the territory was based, decays. To him, the reverse of this story is happening in the post-modern world, with the maps becoming "real" and territories "imaginary". Hence, the sign systems have lost all connection with the external reality that they purport to represent – a situation in which the liquidation of all referentials is the norm of the day.

In other words, the postmodern culture relies so heavily on maps and models having no connections with the real world. Today reality only imitates the model, which not only precedes but also determines the real world – this is what Baudrillard called the *precession of simulacra*. While referring to the simulation and simulacra of the postmodern age, he stipulates, "It is no longer a question of imitation, nor duplication, nor even parody. It is a question of substituting the signs of the real for the real." (Baudrillard, 1994, p.3)

In order to explain his point further, Baudrillard comes up with three "orders of simulacra": in the first, the sign or model is just a simulation of the real; therefore, the status of sign system is no more than a mere indicator for the real; in the second order, the distinction between reality and its simulation begins to dilute further down, mainly on account of mass production and excessive proliferation of copies. Such production is responsible for misrepresenting an underlying reality, even to the extent of occupying its place (e.g. in photography); however, the hidden reality is yet accessible through effective critique; in the third order of simulacra, we are living in a world marked by the 'precession of simulacra', which means the simulation not only precedes but also determines the real. Hence no longer remains any bifurcation between what is real and what is its imitation; what exists then is only the simulacrum.

Baudrillard further explains his three orders in a different way. To him, the sign, in the first order, is good because it is just representing the real in a rational manner. The second order is evil as it does maleficence by erasing the distinguishing line between reality and its copy. The last order has the power of sorcery for it replaces the real with its simulacra. In another essay entitled *Simulacra and Science Fiction*, Baudrillard categorizes these orders of simulacra in yet another fashion. The first order of simulation, prevalent in the age of renaissance, was 'natural' because simulacra were based on reality. In this era, though the traditional reference system had started becoming weak due to social mobilitywith people improving their lifestyle after the advent of science and better health and education facilities, but still signs represented something that existed in reality. The second order of simulation was 'productive' because in this era changes like industrial revolution made artificial things

(products) come into existence in large quantities, thus allowing signs to become products rather than a mere reference or representation of something else. Finally, in the postmodern age, the third order known as 'simulation' comes into existence in which neither a specific product nor its producer exists; what exists is only a collection of codes and signs (Baudrillard, 1994, p. 121-122).

Simulation and imitation.

It is worth mentioning here that simulation is not to be confused with imitation as both are entirely different concepts in the postmodern context. Baudrillard states: "Whoever fakes an illness can simply stay in bed and makes everyone believe he is ill; whoever simulates an illness produces in himself some symptoms" (Baudrillard, 1994, p.3). As is apparent from the quotation, Baudrillard believes that imitation is entirely different from simulation. In imitation, the principle of reality has its existence. For example, if a person claims to be ill, it can be objectively decided through his medical examination whether he is ill or only imitating to be ill. For being ill, he must have some symptoms of illness, no matter physical or psychological. However, he cannot be termed as ill and imitating to be ill at the same time because then it would be a hyperbolic or paradoxical situation. It is so because though symptoms can be imitated but cannot be produced in an artificial manner; otherwise, they can no longer be considered facts of nature and medicine will also lose its authenticity.

Baudrillard also gave an example of iconoclasts, the destroyers of images used in religious worship. Iconoclasts were the people who understood simulacra in its essence because it is "forever radiant in their own fascination" ((Baudrillard, 1994, p.5). Their keen interest in destroying images was based on their fear that the divine could also be represented

through images. They believed that if God were simulated, it would "efface God from the consciousness of men" (4). He further argues saying that had the Iconoclasts really believed that images were nothing but useless attempts at representing someone who cannot be represented then they would not have been so eager in destroying such images. If compared with the relationship of simulated symptoms with the truth of medicine, the fascination of images for God would also make it clear that there is no existence for God and that he is nothing but his own simulacrum. It is so because images are the murders of the real for when we unmask them, they reveal the fact that there is nothing behind them; in other words it can be said that images murder their own model.

To wind up, the present study is aimed at studying *White Noise*, a famous novel by Don DeLillo, as a post-modern piece of writing, in the light of Baudrillard's theory of simulacra and simulation. In this novel, DeLillo produces a series of characters that face life in a post-modern, post-industrial and televisual culture. Although he does not make a comment to express his political stance about the contemporary American culture, he does observe human beings directly, and critically evaluates what he observes in a resolute style. His characters often struggle in a world influenced by indecipherable and decentered systems. DeLillo's America can best be explained in Yeats' terms as a place where things seems to have fallen apart; the center could not remain intact, and it is only anarchy that has been loosed upon it.

A Brief Overview of *White Noise*

White Noise follows a year in the life of Jack Gladney, the protagonist, who is a professor by profession having earned his name in the field of Hitler Studies. Married to four women at different times, Jack brings up his four children namely Heinrich, Wilder,Steffie, and

Denise. He and his current wife Babette are much afraid of death, always wondering who among them will die first. "Waves and Radiation" is the first part of the novel that consists of a brief record of family life coupled with academic satire. The first chapter contributes little for plot development; what purpose then it serves is that it introduces major characters and the themes dominating the rest of the novel.

The second section, "The Airborne Toxic Event," depicts a chemical spill event that occurs in a rail car and causes the release of noxious, black cloud to hover over Jack's hometown, and calls for evacuation. Jack senses his death closer to him as he is much frightened by his exposure to the toxic gas. This part also introduces an organization known as SIMUVAC, a short form of simulated evacuation, as an indication of substituting simulations for reality.

In the third part of novel, "Dylarama," Gladney finds that his wife has been secretly consuming "Dylar", a fictional drug and experimental treatment for the fear of death. Here the novelist highlights the plight of the postmodern people with regard to their fear of death that makes them obsessive of chemical methods of treatment. Gladney has been shown to impatiently seek and consume his own supply of black market Dylar. But the medicine does not prove effective as Babette, instead of getting rid of death's fear, contracts such side effects as losing the ability to "distinguish words from things, so that if someone said aloud the words "speeding bullet", I would fall to the floor to take cover." (DeLillo, 1985, p. 39)

On the other hand, Jack's obsession with death continues. While talking about mortality, Murray tells him that murdering someone may probably alleviate his fear. Jack makes his mind to test Murray's hypothesis by locating and killing the person who had been providing Babette

with Dylar in return of sex. In a black comedy scene, Jack is seen driving his car and rehearsing imaginatively his encounter with the person. He then successfully tracks down and shoots Willie Mink, the drug-pusher, who at the time of shooting is under the influence of Dylar addiction. Jack puts his gun into the Willie's hand to make his murder look like a suicide, but all of a sudden Willie reacts and shoots Jack in the arm. Regretting his brutal act and sensing the needless loss of life, Jack takes Willie to a nearby hospital run by German nuns. Thereafter, Jack goes back to his home and watches his children sleep.

The last chapter of the novel describes how Jack's youngest son, Wilder rides a tricycle across the super highway and survives miraculously.

Statement of the Problem

This study aims at analyzing the influence of post-modern culture, mainly that highlighted by Baudrillard in his book entitled as *Simulacra and Simulation*, on *White Noise*, a novel by Don DeLillo. The primary focus of the study will be to explore such postmodern traits as erosion of identity, hyper-reality, negativity and erosion of established culture processes in DeLillo's novel.

Research Questions

The present study aims at analyzing the followings questions:

1. How does the postmodern culture eliminate the relationship between reality and its representation?

2. How reality has been simulated in DeLillo's novel *White Noise* in line with Baudrillard's concept of "Precession of Simulacra"?

Thesis Statement

People living in the postmodern culture are influenced by consumerism and mass media, which causes them to lose their individual identity.

Theoretical Framework and Methodology

The qualitative research method will be used in this study as the data for analysis is qualitative in nature i.e, the characters of *White Noise*, their dialogues and behaviours. The analysis of data will be done in the light of Jean Baudrillard's theory of simulation and simulacra. The reason for the selection of this particular theory is that Baudrillard has adequately given the underlying causes of the erosion of identity in his theory of simulation and simulacra. To further delimit the theoretical framework, the simulacra of media and capitalism will be given primary emphasis while exploring *White Noise* to establish how human identity has been redefined in the postmodern era.

Chapter Division

Chapter 1: introduction.

This chapter will introduce the topic in length, establishing the background of the study, statement of the problem, research questions and methodology adopted for the research project.

Chapter 2: literature review.

The second chapter will review the available literature on postmodern approach towards real identity and its simulation.

Chapter 3: influence of Baudrillard's theory of "Simulacra and Simulation" on English literature.

A brief thematic analysis will be presented with reference to some three pieces of postmodern literary works.

Chapter 4: erosion of characters' identity: A Baudrillardian reading of DeLillo's *White Noise*

The influence of Baudrillard's famous theory of Simulacra and Simulation will be explored in Don DeLillo's *White Noise*. It will discuss in length the developments leading to the erosion of identity for such characters as are born in a postindustrial, post-modern and televisual culture.

Chapter 5: conclusion.

This chapter will sum up and conclude the discussion on the selected novel to reach the sound and justifiable answer to the research questions posed in the first chapter.

Significance of the Study

The present research is significant for it intends to analyze how postmodern writers develop their characters, while undermining their real identity and substituting it with artful realities. The study answers to the widening confusion faced by today's common people when it comes to identifying distinctions between reality and hyperreality, and literature students will particularly benefit from the study for understanding how various postmodern techniques are at work to disguise reality with illusions.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Identity is a very strong reality for an individual, and yet in another sense it is no more a reality at all but only a simulation. A multitude of factors like internal drives, social and cultural contexts, far-reaching effects of media and politics are responsible for shaking the foundations of real identity. In the postmodern age that takes every objective truth into question, identity has been displaced by simulation that stands on its own and has no connection with the actual reality, thanks to media and consumerism.

The classical notion of identity is associated with Erikson, a German born American developmental psychologist, who defined identity as:

> A subjective sense as well as an observable quality of personal sameness and continuity, paired with some belief in the sameness and continuity of some shared world image. As a quality of self-conscious living, this can be gloriously obvious in a young person who has found himself as he has found his communality. In his personality is a unique unification of what is irreversibly given--that is, body type and temperament, giftedness and vulnerability, infantile models and acquired ideals—along with the open choices offered to him by occupational possibilities, available roles in society, friendships made, mentors met, values offered and first sexual encounters (Erikson, 1980,p. 260).

In contrast to the existing models of human development that are based on a linear ladder which an individual has to follow during his life, Erikson came up with the metaphor of a wall bar, which, at every stage, consists of a wide variety of issues that should be worked out and addressed accordingly. In a similar way, Erikson laid emphasis on adolescence as the decisive stage in human development, whereas pure psychological approaches had been considering early childhood as the most important stage. In short, Erikson's view about identity

deals with the achievements of a person who maintains them in a uniform, a-historical, and stage-driven process.

Regarding identity, psychologists argue that unconscious desires have also been the most powerful agents that bring about a change in the very basic form of identity. According to this view, the formation of identity is an ongoing process because an individual's unconscious desires and drives do not remain the same but keep on changing. Therefore, when identity is always in the process of construction and reconstruction, it can never be considered final (Rattansi, 1997, p. 105-106).

After establishing the multiplicity of identity, Rattansi, in his article *Rethinking Youth Identities: Modernist and Postmodernist Frameworks,* argues that every individual reflects different social and personal identities that vary in prominence by interactive context. This is to say that people, when they are out of interaction, may be called as de-centered in the sense that they don't possess complete self-control as well as total self-knowledge. Through interaction, they establish, and reestablish, their individual and social identities in order to gain a more constructive sense of meaning in life and to more successfully adapt to life with others (Rattansi, 1997, p. 108).

While internal factors do affect the nature of identity, external or sensory (social) elements have also been proved by researchers to change the long-lasting concept of unified reality. In Gergen's*The Saturated Self: Dilemmas of Identity in Contemporary Life,* the term "social saturation" has been used for postmodern people experiencing constant change, bombarded by mass media, and open to a broad range of relationships. He states that under the influence of this sensory assault, the identity as an established reality has broken down with

the effect that the post-modern generation, left adrift into a world of limitless possibilities, is advancing to the "pastiche identity" (Gergen, 1998, p. 85).

Gergen went into detail about how pastiche identity is being developed by the influx of mass media. The main role of media or the technologies of social saturation is:

> To connect people with what is happening out in the world; however, it also overpopulates their "self" with multiple, disparate and even competing potentials for expression and connection. These potentials reflexively provoke a pastiche identity because every person exhibits an ever-increasing multiplicity of others, or voices, which do not essentially harmonize (Gergen, 1998, p.195).

Another significant work about the effects of social and cultural context on the construction of identity is by Fokkema under the title of his famous book *Postmodern Characters: A Study of Characterization in British and American Postmodern Fiction.* Investigating the problematic status of characters in the postmodern fiction, he agrees to the critics in that characters demonstrate multiplicity of identity superseding the established, unified and well coherent "old stable identity" that had already been denounced by D. H Lawrance in 1914 (Fokkema, 1991, p. 198).

What distinguishes Fokemma's analysis from that of Gergen in regard to societal effects on the construction of 'self' is that the former gives importance to the role of language as the constituent of 'self'. It is through language that a character manifests a particular layer of his identity choosing from a whole structure available to him from his social or cultural context. Choosing an identity is therefore akin to "picking a robe which implies that character acts as an active agent of constructing his identity" (Fokemma, 1991, p.70).

McHale explores the distorted identity in the postmodern age from the perspective of ontology. He states today "the focus is less on questions about the world which can be

answered; instead, the world itself comes into question" (McHale, 1987, p. 97). By linking his ontological view with science fiction, he stipulates that the reliability of the world reality around is not a major problem. Thus, according to McHale, an ontological scholar, it is not an issue if a story takes place in a really bizarre setting, or it is told by a different type of narrator.

Backing up his stance with examples from science fiction, he quotes that in *Fight Club*, a 1996 novel by Chuck Palahniuk, the narrator exists in two different worlds. His identity is severely blurred between himself and Tyler, a major character of the novel. The second instance of the same phenomenon is *Galatea*, a 1995 pseudo-autobiographical novel by Richard Powers in which the author is also represented as a main character in the text. It brings the fictional world inhabited by the character with the real world that the author lives in. As a result, his world as well as his identity becomes greatly distorted, destabilized and incoherent.

George Herbert Mead, a famous American philosopher, laid the groundwork for modern concepts of identity which is socially embedded while Erving Goffman addressed the fundamental meaning of self-expression for identity-construction. Both failed to grasp the full range of identity concerning the foundation of expressions. The missing link I shall introduce here is the concept of simulation of reality developed in the context of postmodernity.

Sociological concepts of identity are rooted in the last decade of the nineteenth century. However, they got theorized during the next century when Mead presented individual identity as a "socially constructed" component of self (Burkitt, 1991, p.19). His work on social origins stimulated the development of a distinct discipline of sociological psychology as well as sociological research on the subject of identity. Mead stated that an individual adopts an

attitude within an organized community to unify himself as a member of the society (Burkitt, 1991, p. 60). His contribution to the sociological aspect of identity gives us an insight into the fact that the self (as a paraphrase for identity) is greatly social - not only in the sense that it gets developed due to social experiences, but also in the sense that it is a profoundly social process.

Like Mead, Goffman also maintained that identity is socially constructed. The opinion of Mead about identity as a social construct differs from that of Goffman in that the former puts significant emphasis upon the process of role-taking in a given community as a determining factor for identity construction while the latter is mainly preoccupied with the social construction and definition of the public self. In other words Goffman takes into consideration the relevance of the other for the construction of self: "I know who I am through the way I am treated by society" (Goffman, 1981, p.30). Unlike Mead, Goffman does not believe in the individual's subjective concept of identity as reflected by his inner conversations. Instead, he is interested in the construction of the public identity as a result of social interaction. As a result, identity is determined by each and every occasion a person gets into social interaction.

Goffman introduced the term 'face-work' as a basic point to explain his concept of identity. By face-work he intends "to designate the actions taken by a person to make whatever he is doing consistent with face" (Goffman, 1981, p.10). He is of the opinion that individuals can effectively achieve positive 'face' or social value by the roles they perform during interaction. An important aspect of his social concept of identity is that individuals are also emotionally charged when it comes to claiming and especially maintaining face.

Goffman's approach regarding the involvement of emotions in identity-work can be criticized from at least two angles, namely modern and postmodern.

From a modern perspective, Goffman's approach ignores the concept of time - he misses this fundamental issue that has a strong say in streamlining individuals' identity-making actions in a particular society. Time restraints and time pressure are extremely important features of modern life (Degele, 1998, p. 07). Individuals are forced to display different presentations of self-identity as they are involved in a number of public roles and tasks at a time. Since a great deal of time-budget is consumed to discharge social roles as per their requirements, less time is left for biographically-oriented reflections of self (Degele, p. 08). Thus due to today's far reaching continuity of average life spans, individuals perform more or less predictably in an organized style that meets the requirements of gainful employment. Resultantly, life course offers a friction of continuity to meet individuals' needs for organizing their lives. According to this consideration of time, identity can be defined as a purely temporalized process which is definitely far different from Erikson's classical concept of coherence and continuity.

Second, postmodern researchers such as Richard Rorty, Kenneth Gergen and Walter Truett Anderson put significant emphasis on the dissolution of the identity which Goffman has not adequately taken into consideration. With identities post-modernized and viewed as dissolved, liquid, short-time-oriented and are never quite able to a shape seriously, the modern concepts of unifying identity have become less and less appropriate. Current modes of communication bring people into contact with often inconsistent attitudes of other individuals and communities. They require everyone to have good relationships, in spite of their physical diversity, and to take part in communities spread over great distances. In this regard, the main role is played by increasingly developing media: television and movies, not to

mention print media and the internet. They expose individuals to a variety of both real and fictional people and communities. This is what Kenneth Gergen calls 'social saturation', which 'furnishes us with a multiplicity of incoherent and unrelated languages of the self' (Gergen, 1998, p. 06). Such a saturating of self can be equated to the condition of postmodernity.

As the adoption of the numerous attitudes does not unite selves but breaks them apart, Gergen calls this new pattern of self-identification as ' multiphrenia', which literally means 'many minds' (Gergen, 1998, p. 07). A single person has different minds to deal with many different people and to even himself. As a result, the hitherto acceptable concept that he possesses a single true or real self begins to lose its significance. Today people are more aware than the past; it is their connections with others that determine their true self. They no longer ask themselves 'Who we are?' instead, they ask others "Who we are in terms of our relations with you?" Put tersely: We know consciously that our true identity is not the result of our "personality essence" (deep beliefs, real feelings and the like), but it is determined by how we are constructed in different social groups (Gergen, 1998, p. 170). This is what Gergen calls postmodern being - a new kind of human being living a new kind of social life.

In an age that is skeptical of all objective realities and established values, Jean Baudrillard does not seem strange when he goes one step further by claiming that realities and values have no more existence; instead, everything around is a mere simulation that stands on its own and has no connection with the 'actual reality'. While explaining his stance, he introduces the term 'precession of simulacra' according to which today, unlike what used to be in the past, it is the simulation (not simulacra) that comes first and determines reality. To him

this change is dedicated to a number of factors including consumerism, mass media, globalization, multi-nationalism, nuclearization and the like (Baudrillard, 1994, p. 56).

The present research work aims at exploring the postmodern concept of identity as propounded by Baudrillard. This new dimension of identity is distinct from what was discussed in length by classical and modern psychologists and sociologists. In the postmodern age, identity is primarily a simulation of personality devoid of any relation with social situations. However, there are many factors that determine the form of simulation; these include mass media, consumerism, multi-nationalism, globalization and nuclearization. Among these, the role of the first two i.e media and consumerism will be explored to analyze how and to which extent they have contributed in the erosion of reality, which is delimited here to 'post-modernized identity'.

CHAPTER 3

INFLUENCE OF BAUDRILLARD'S THEORY OF SIMULACRA AND SIMULATION ON

ENGLISH LITERATURE

This chapter aims at exploring how much the concept of "simulacra and simulation", as propounded by Jean Baudrillard, has influenced the literary works, particularly those produced in the postmodern period. There is no denying of the fact that postmodern literature is characterized by a practice that not only criticizes but also overcomes both traditional narrative forms and methods of analysis. Consequently, from a comparative perspective, it may be assumed that while modernism shared a methodological unity because of the fact that it puts a lot of emphasis on the way or the form of presentation, postmodernism is distinguished by diversity - a diversity that often does not even attempt to create a structured impression. Of different manifestations of this diversity, replacement of signs for the reality is the one given by Jean Baudrillard in his famous treatise *Simulacra and Simulation.*

Simulacra and Simulation

Simulacra and Simulation, a philosophical treatise by Jean Baudrillard published in 1981, aims at determining the nature of relationship among reality, its symbols and society. Simulacra are the copies that represent the things that either had no reality to begin with or that no longer have any connection with their originals. Simulation, on the other hand, refers to the process of imitating a real-world system over time.

The book explains intensively the system of signs and symbols and how they are relevant to the concept of contemporaneity i.e. simultaneous existence. Baudrillard is of the

view that the present society has associated the concepts of reality and meaning to mere signs and symbols, and that all human experienceshave become just a simulation of reality. Furthermore, these simulacra neither enjoy the status of being mediations of realitynor the artificial or fake mediations of reality; since they are not reality-based, they simply imply that anything resembling reality has no relevance to our contemporary understanding of life. In fact, to Baudrillard, the simulacra are the significations and symbolism of reality. Thus simulacrum of everything is what comes first and the bifurcation between reality and its representation through sign system dies out. And this is how reality has come down to the level of simulacrum, and originality becomes an obsolete and meaningless concept.

Baudrillard's theory stipulates that the absence of distinction between reality and simulacra is due to many factors. Media in the form of television, internet, film and newspapers is the most powerful tool responsible for eroding the line between the products that we really need to lead a life and those for which an artificial need is deliberately created through commercial images. Exchange value is the second factor in this context. It determines the value of products on the basis of money rather than their actual usefulness, and makes the concept of usefulness quantified and defined in monetary terms for the purpose of making exchange process easy. Multinational capitalism is the third factor which has separated processed goods from their original sources like minerals, plants and other ingredients used to create them. Last but not the least, languages and ideologies have been producing power relations among social groups, especially when these groups organize themselves, though partly, in monetary terms.

In brief, the shift from reality to sign proved to be a decisive turning point. From theology to social constructs to literature, every part of life has been dominated by the concept

of simulacra and simulation. Therefore, religions don't believe in the existence of God; societies are deprived of truth; and literature hardly values objectivity. God, truth and objectivity that were hitherto the symbols of reality have been replaced by subjectivity - that is going to rule the world. Moreover, it is also worth-mentioning here that when Baudrillard talks about "precession of simulacra", he actually wants to refer to the way the current simulacra come before the real in the same sense as mentioned above, rather than to any succession of historical phases of the image. While quoting his famous example of map and territory, he argues that just as in the contemporary society the simulated copy has come to precede the original object, so, too, the map superseded the geographic territory. For the purpose of further demonstration, he uses an example of the first Gulf War in which it was its image that came before real war. To him, war does not occur when two or more nations stand head to head in the battle field, nor even when shots are fired; instead, war starts when general public is convinced that it is soon coming. Henceforth, when we apply the concept of "precession of simulacra" on the image of map, it becomes clear that map precedes the territory and again it is something that endangers the territory. If we recall the map-fable today, it would be the territory whose snippets are gradually rotting across the map. (Baudrillard, 1994, p.26)

Interestingly, this phenomenon has been referred to in different terms such as "erosion of reality", "death of identity", "multiplicity of self" and the like. Whatever the term may be used, the crux of the matter is that foundations of reality seem to be at risk while its simulations are rapidly claiming the status of "originality". To analyze the impact of this concept on English literature, one modern and three postmodern novels have been chosen for brief analysis in which readers can easily identify the existence of simulated reality. These

novels include *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland, The Painted Bird, Solaris and Aura.*For the

sake of readers' convenience, the discussion on each novel is preceded by its plot summary.

Alice's Adventures in Wonderland

Plot summary.

Sitting beside her sister, Alice gets a sight of a White Rabbit which was holding a pocket

watch. Amazed by this fantastic scene, she chases the rabbit down to the hole. After a long fall,

she is in a big hallway crowded with a number of doors. On a table there is a key which unlocks

a small door that leads to a beautiful garden. She develops a desire to reach there but the too

small door does not allow her to do so. Soon, she sees a drink and a cake with separate notes

on them asking her to consume them; she uses them, but still finds it hard to get a control on

things because she either becomes too bulky to be able to pass through the door or too small

to grab the key.

When tiny, Alice slips into a water pool where she comes to know that the water is

actually made of the tears she shed while being a giant. Then, while swimming back to the

shore, she sees a variety of animals, including noticeably a very sensitive mouse. Here she tries

to embarrass all by praising her cat for its ability to hunt mice and birds. When all animals are

gone and she is all alone, she starts walking once again through the woods and running after

the White Rabbit. The rabbit mistakenly considers her his maid and orders her to fetch him

some important things from his house. When Alice reaches the White Rabbit's home, she

consumes a different liquid and once again becomes too big and bulky to cross the door.

Eventually, she locates a little cake on consumption of which she becomes small again and

reaches the woods once again.

Now she meets a Caterpillar sitting on a mushroom. She receives from him some valuable pieces of advice in addition to a precious tool: the two sides of the mushroom, which have the power to make Alice grow larger or smaller as per her wish. On using the mushroom for the first time, she immensely stretches her body out so that she may be able to reach the tree branches. In this position, she pokes her nose into the branches of a tall tree hosting a Pigeon. Seeing her enormously large, the Pigeon becomes assured of her being a serpent, and, despite her repeated reasoning, asks her to get lost.

Alice uses the other part of mushroom and brings herself to normal proportions. Continuing her walk through the woods, she reaches a clearing where she finds a little house and gets inside. Actually, this house belongs to the Duchess who is quarreling with the Cook quite aggressively forgetting about the safety of the baby nursed by her. Alice picks up the baby to take him with her but it instantly becomes a pig and disappears in the woods. After that Alice comes across the Cheshire cat which helps her find the way out of the woods but at the same time warns her as well saying that everyone she might happen to meet in the woods will be insane.

Alice, then, reaches the Hare's house, in which a Mad Tea Party is going on. Along with the March Hare, the Dormouse was also present. Alice comes to know that it has always been six o' clock for the Hatter since time stopped working for him. So teatime is the time for him. The creatures present at the Mad Tea Party are some of the most argumentative in the entire Wonderland. After leaving the Tea Party, she sees a tree with a door attached: on peeping through the cracks of door, she finds the same hallway-leading-to-the-garden which she has spied in the beginning of her adventure. Now she prepares herself carefully and gets to the

beautiful garden. She goes on walking through, and finally reaches the garden owned by the Queen of Hearts. In the garden were three gardeners busy in painting the white roses with red colour because the Queen does not like white roses and has ordered that if she found any white rose, they would be beheaded. Soon the Queen arrives and issues orders for their execution but Alice rescues them by hiding them in a large flowerpot.

The Queen asks Alice to play croquet, one of the most difficult games in Wonderland, because the balls mallets consist of living. While they are busy playing the game, the Cheshire cat appears and interrupts them. This is the same cat that the King of Hearts dislikes severely. The Queen accompanies Alice and takes her to the Gryphon, who then takes Alice to the Mock Turtle. Both of them narrate some bizarre stories related to their school which is located under the sea. Then, the Mock Turtle sings song about his soup in a melancholic tone, and soon afterwards the Gryphon drags her off to see the trial proceeding taking place at the court of the king.

The Knave of Hearts is facing the charges of theft because he has been blamed for stealing the Queen's tarts. In the proceedings, Alice finds that the evidence against the accused is very ridiculous. She is appalled observing the absurdity of proceedings. There she again starts growing larger. Soon she is called to the witness stand to record her statement. By that time, she has become a gigantic giant. She is firm and ready to resist the bad logic of the court as well as the wrath of the King. Within no time, all courtiers stand up and attack her, which makes her wake up. All her adventures in the Wonderland prove to be a fascinating dream.

Analysis.

Though a modern novel, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* is a fine example of simulation as propounded by Baudrillard, mainly because its narrative course, characters and imagery have largely been based on fantasy, which plays significant role in detaching a person from the real world. The novel deals with a world that is becoming steadily "curiouser and curiouser" with the result that real identity is lost and imaginary world is struggling to become real. Many instances in the novel can be traced to show how reality is being superseded by mere signs and simulations.

The scene of rabbit hole, in the first chapter, is significant because the simulacrum can be easily traced in it. The language used to depict this scene is marked by symbols denoting reality. For instance, the bottle labeled as "drink me" represents the reflective part of Alice's journey. She exclaims, "if you drink much from a bottle marked "poison", it is almost certain to disagree with you, sooner or later" (Carroll, 1992, p. 6). However, if the bottle does not have a label like "poison", it will be free of poison. It means by merely being labeled poison, a drink becomes deadly and vice versa.

According to Baudrillard's terms this indicates the presence of a simulacrum, as the word "poison" is simulating the effect. Here the label "poison" is perverting reality because this symbol system exists within its own space, bearing no external input. It is so because as long as the bottle reads "poison", whatever the content it has becomes poisonous, and whatever is placed into a bottle marked "Drink Me" must be eventually consumed. Thus a hyperreal situation with no bearing to reality has been created. Hence a pure simulacrum comes into being in which an abstract influences the concrete.

Then, the encounter between Alice and Cheshire cat is another example of simulacrum, artful reality. The dialogue between them goes like:

> Would you tell me, please, which way I ought to go from here?"
> That depends a good deal on where you want to get to? Said the cat
> I don't much care where—said Alice
> Then it doesn't matter which way you go, said the cat
> --so long as I get SOMEWHERE added Alice as an explanation
> Oh you are sure to do that, said the cat, if you only walk long enough. (Carroll, 1992, p. 32)

The dialogue shows Alice is lost and as for her destination, what she is looking for is a name to attach to a place so that she can feel that she has got somewhere to get to: she is trying to create location by naming only. Giving a name to a place is a form of simulacrum as the name represents a symbol. Without this, Alice's wandering will apparently lead her nowhere. The Cheshire cat, by producing a name can create for Alice a reality, her destination, with its own history and meaning.

The wonderland explored by Alice is a continuous simulacrum with Alice journeying into an imaginary world filled with symbols and words having no bases in reality. These symbols are playing their role to abolish the identity of Alice as she is lost in a world where reality has been obscured and the real life masked by the created wonderland. This constant cycle of creation and recreation ultimately causes it to collapse in on itself due to the lack of deeper meaning beyond the symbols. This is seen largely in the trial scene at the end of the tale.

In a world that founds its society on meaningless tradition and ritual the hyper-reality is unable to sustain its own weight as it grows on itself. As the trial scene is unfolded, Alice seems to grasp the essence of reality based on its abstract modes of manners, but is surely going to become increasingly confused. The symbolism used in the description of "the King and Queen...

seated on their thrones" and "the knave... standing before them in chains" (Carroll, 1992, p. 60)

evokes in the mind of Alice as well as readers the image of a trial. Without the supporting

knowledge as to what knave has done to become a criminal, we have nothing in real to see him

as the convicted; however, his appearance "in chains" makes us believe he is the criminal. This

can be termed as a simulacrum of trial; a replication of the symbols of a trial without a real

basis for what is happening. Alice, like readers, is in the same position because she "had never

been in a court of justice before, but she had read about them in books" (Carroll, 1992, p. 60). It

is due to the symbols, induced by prior knowledge that Alice realizes where she is.

The judge in the trial scene has also been simulated through this appearance. Alice

thinks to herself "he must be the judge...because of his great wig" (Carroll, 1992, p. 60). In

reality, the person in the wig must not necessarily be a judge only because he is wearing a wig;

however, as it is the only relation we have to a judge, he instantly becomes a judge in the story.

This holds true with Baudrillard's discussion about reality that: "illusion is no longer possible

because the real is no longer possible" (Baudrillard, 1994, p.15). This situation takes place when

symbols themselves become reality outside the physical real. The lack of "objective difference"

(p. 15), as Baudrillard names it, between the simulated appearance and the reality underlying it

means that these symbols, whether real or not, are "always of the order of the real" (p. 15) as

far as established codes go. Therefore, it does not matter whether the character in the wig is a

judge or just someone pretending to be one, that he is recognized as a judge from his

appearance, he has the same prerogatives of one.

The Painted Bird

Plot Summary.

The Painted Bird is a story centered upon a young boy who suffers to a great extent during World War II. During this turbulent period, he struggles for his life which is put at risk by the Nazis. Kosinski starts the story by giving a brief introduction of war and linking it with the boy. The parents of this young boy are hiding from the Nazis and he lives in a small village with an elderly woman. When the woman passes away, he is left all alone to take care of himself. Now he moves to another village where the inhabitants hand him over to the Germans. He makes an escape and reaches another village, where he finds a crowd of Jews as well as Gypsies heading towards concentration camps. At this point, the writer comes up with some social commentary, pointing out the boy's belief that in order to be favored by god, one has to be in possession of fair hair and blue eyes. Kosinski depicts a world having disturbance of all types in significant magnitude.The writer describes with detail the boy's encounters with peasantry class involved in many types of social and sexual deviance including violence, lust, incest, bestiality and rape. The title of the novel is based on an incident discussed in the story. The boy, also remains for some time in the company of a professional bird catcher, and observes how the man caught many birds and then picked one among them and painted it with different colors. Later, he released the bird and it flew off in search of its kin but a tragic incident took place. The bird came upon its flock and was taken as an intruder by its own kin and thereafter got viciously attacked until it fell dead from the sky. Throughout the Eastern Europe, he wanders from one village to another in his quest for shelter, security and peace but meets only violence and cruelty. Finally he is changed into an altar boy, exposed to father-daughter incest. He becomes

mute when thrown into a manure pit. Only at the end of the novel does the boy get reunited with his parents and regain his speech.

Analysis.

The painted Bird is a postmodern novel which illustrates the world during the Second World War as seen by a young boy, who wanders about different small towns across Eastern Europe. The writer describes with detail the boy's encounters with peasantry class involved in many types of social and sexual deviance including violence, lust, incest, bestiality and rape. The title of the novel is based on an incident discussed in the story. The boy, in the company of a professional bird catcher, observes how the man caught many birds and then picked one among them and painted it with different colors. Later, he released the bird and it flew off in search of its kin but a tragic incident took place. The bird came upon its flock and was taken as an intruder by its own kin and thereafter got viciously attacked until it fell dead from the sky (Kosinski, 1965, p. 05).

The central symbol of the novel is Lekh, a professional bird-catcher, who, since his childhood, is attracted towards forests due to his passion for birds. But the irony is that the same birds that are the source of inspiration and livelihood for Lekh become the object of his abnormal anger and envy. Whenever angry or sad, Lekh chooses a bird as a scapegoat and persecutes it to take revenge. He selects one of the strongest of his captured birds and paints it on his breast, head and feathers using bright colors, and on seeing a big flock of the same species of birds hovering over the sky he releases the confined bird so that it may join its fellows. But what happens is that other birds become confused of the bright colored feathers of

the painted bird, and within no time turn against it. Because they are unable to identify the colored bird as their own fellow, they kill it in a brutal manner (Kosinski, 1965, p. 05).

The painted bird is alienated and attacked due to his "otherness". The writer presents the painted bird as an analogy to his protagonist, Lekh who is escaping from Nazis and hiding through the landscape occupied by Nazis in the Eastern Europe. He provokes hatred and fear among the people inhabiting in the suburb areas. As, like the painted bird, he has got a different complexion with strange features, he is almost killed by the "human flock" surrounding him in different guises such as militant, superstitious, ideological or religious. Here "painted bird" performs its role as a symbol for dissolving the distinction between essence and imitation. Once Lekh paints the bird, other birds become unable to bifurcate between the original identity of bird and its painted one. The same is true, as Kosinski's novel proceeds to illustrate, when it comes to human beings — especially in the form of a group— they become unable to distinguish between a human identity constructed by his culture and that which is true, original and genuine.

The boy, who remains alien in the society and faces different forms of violence, is so much accustomed to violence that when the war comes to an end, he feels a deep sense of loss and regret. He loses his real identity as an oppressed and exults in his newfound power. Thus more disturbing than the entire acts of torture, murder and rape mentioned in the novel is the revelation that victim, Lekh, throws off his real identity and assumes that of a persecutor's. His plight as an innate innocent and a faultless victim is crushed by the intensity of his identification and association with Nazi oppressors:

> I recalled the trains carrying people to the gas chambers and crematories. The men who
> had ordered and organized all that probably enjoyed a similar feeling of complete power

over their uncomprehending victims [...] All they had to do was issue orders and in countless towns and villages trained squads of troops and police would start rounding up people destined for ghettos and death camps [...] To be capable of deciding the fate of many people whom one did not even know was a magnificent sensation (Kosinski, 1965, p. 18)

In sum, the novel written in the post-war age reflects human beings' strong alienation from their originality. It shows, as the author himself states in his notes on the same novel, "the author's awareness, perhaps unconscious, of his break with the wholeness of self" (kosinski, 1965, p. 210). First orphaned and then victimized by the society, Kosinski's protagonist Lekh remains alien in a world that can easily make him a helpless "painted bird," destined to death in the hands of his own people only because of his "otherness."

Solaris

Plot summary.

Solaris gives a detailed account of the futility of those attempts made so far that aim at communicating with extraterrestrial life on a far-distant planet. The planet Solaris is mostly covered with an ocean that has been proved to be a single, planet-encompassing organism, with whom scientists are trying communication. The waves appearing on the surface are later proven to be somewhat equivalent to muscle contraction.

Kris Kelvin, a psychologist by profession, comes on board in "Solaris Station", which is basically a scientific research station, powered by anti-gravity generators and hovering around the oceanic surface of Solaris. For many decades, scientists have been studying the planet with special focus on its ocean. Their study has acquired the status of being a scientific discipline termed as Solaristics, which unfortunately has become limited to mere observation, record-making and categorization of the complex phenomena that occur on the oceanic surface. So far they have developed just a formal classification and an elaborated nomenclature of the

phenomena— they are still unable to answer what these activities mean in a strictly scientific sense. Shortly before the arrival of Kris Kelvin, the crew on Solaris station conducts an aggressive and rather unauthorized experiment on the ocean by exposing it a high-energy X-ray bombardment. This yields unexpected results and becomes a psychological trauma for them as they start considering themselves individually flawed humans.

Instead of revealing something about the nature of ocean, the experiment exposes the hidden and deeper aspects of human personalities. The extent to which ocean's actions can be understood, it seems that it is the ocean that has embarked upon testing scientists' minds by making them recall their most painful and repressed thoughts and memories. The ocean does this by introducing physical human simulacra. For example, Kelvin is confronted with the memories of his dead lover and the feelings of guilt about her suicide. While Kelvin's experience has been discussed in detail, the ordeals of the other researchers are just alluded to in a brief manner but they also seem to be even worse than Kelvin's personal torment.

The ocean exposes its intelligence of physical phenomena in such ways as are difficult to explain from the perspective of limited earth science, which certainly upsets the scientists a great deal. The extraterrestrial mind of Solaris is so thoroughly distinct from the human mind that attempts at inter-species communications and ends up with a dismal failure.

Analysis

In this postmodern novel, the simulation of being is a central concern because it is grappled with the implications caused by the dilution of boundaries between reality and artifice. Simulation, which "is the prominent schema in the current code-governed phase" refers to the presence of a model without an original reality" (Baudrillard, 1994, p.50). In the

present age of advanced technology, this process of simulation has been eroding reality and presenting simulation without allusion to something real thus giving existence to hyperreal. The hyperreal situation in *Solaris* – in which major characters are visitors and guests who act in reaction to the thoughts of the disorganized staff present on the space station revolving around the planet, Solaris – challenges human identity because it is vacillated by the existence of a simulated identity.

The ghost guests or visitors, brought into existence by some mysterious power of the planet, are actually the products of the models existing in the memory of the crew of space station, particularly through the sign system offered by the individuals' minds. For instance, Rheya, the dead lover of Kelvin, is the creation of his memory following his first sleep at night on Solaris. The hyperreal representation of a character in the form of unlimited creations is the main problem faced by the characters in the novel who are perplexed at the variety of simulated manifestations with no reference at all to the real. As a result, it becomes difficult to distinguish between the imaginary and the real, and this proved the statement of Friedrich Nietzsche's in which he said: "We have no categories at all that permit us to distinguish a "world in itself" from a "world of appearance" (Malcolm, 1978, p. 41).

The hyperreal world of Solaris highlights that the connection between reality and its simulations is rapidly going to be blurred. This fact evidently appears when the authenticity of the existing guests is questioned, in fact simulations brought forth by a variety of memories. In *The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility*, Walter Benjamin says:

> It might be stated as a general formula that the technology of reproduction detaches the reproduced object from the sphere of tradition. By replicating the work many times over, it substitutes a mass existence for a unique existence.

And in permitting the reproduction to reach the recipient in his or her own situation, it actualizes that which is reproduced (Benjamin, 2008, p. 22).

The concept of unique human identity has been undermined by the replacement of a multiple existence for a single being, as it is evident from many versions of the guests. For example, a second simulated copy of Rheya comes into existence when Kelvin eliminates the first one and thinks of the next one. Every copy of Rheya exists and makes her consciously aware of her existence in the beginning, but soon she is haunted by the idea that she is not the real Rheya. This confusion is evident in her words spoken to Chris, "she is Rheya and she is not" (Lem, 1987, p. 35).

This brings us to the apparently unauthentic guests who visit the crew of the space station orbiting round Solaris and erase the dividing line between the human and inhuman while rejecting the concept that the real origin is a must condition for the existence of a being. This is what Baudrillard refers to in "Clone Story":

> There is a precession of reproduction over production, a precession of the genetic model over all possible bodies. It is the eruption of technology that controls this reversal, of a technology that Benjamin was already describing, in its total consequences, as a total medium, but one still of the industrial age - a gigantic prosthesis that controlled the generation of objects and identical images, in which nothing could be differentiated any longer from anything else - but still without imagining the current sophistication of this technology, which renders the generation of identical beings possible, though there is no possibility of a return to an original being. (Baudrillard, 1994, p. 69)

The multiple existence of guests, as a precession of identical beings, makes the crew confused because this undermines their concept of a unique and original being who exists in a particular place and time and does not return after death or annihilation. More accurately, by their repeated appearance on the Solaris station, the seemingly ghost guests redefine the possible

concept of being, giving it a possibility that rules out its return to the original being. Just as the conceptual problems exist in cloning technologies, as discussed by Baudrillard both directly and metaphorically, the ghost guests here in the novel also serve as examples of a being that stands in opposition to the traditionally accepted definitions of human being.

Aura

Plot summary.

A young historian, Felipe Montero is reading a newspaper when he catches the sight of a job advertisement. A woman was looking for a young, passionate, French-speaker, having a knack for history and ability to perform secretarial duties. The suitable candidate would work as a live-in assistant for the lady and help her finish and organize the memories of her dead husband, General Llorante. Montero is very much attracted to this posting thinking it has described everything about him, with the exception of his name. In the beginning, Montero tries to ignore the posting while assuming that someone might already have taken the job, but the newspaper posting keeps on haunting his mind so much so that eventually he cannot avoid it anymore. The address given in the post is "Donceles 815", which is a street having new and old houses, side by side. On his arrival at the address, he finds a house filled with darkness, with its door ajar, as though the owner were waiting for him. He enters the house and hears a voice directing him to come upstairs in a room where Consuelo, an old widow, is lying in her bed. When he goes to the room, he finds the woman who seems to be anxiously waiting for him and immediately starts telling him about his duties, i.e. to finish, organize and publish the journals of her husband as soon as possible. When she is explaining these tasks, Aura, a young niece of the widow, enters the room. Montero is stunned by her amazing beauty, particularly her bright

green eyes. Then, Consuelo sends Montero to a room where he will be staying. Montero spends the night in the slightly-lit room.

On the next morning, when Montero gets up, he finds Aura preparing breakfast in the kitchen, while the old widow is still in her bed in the room. Montero and Aura take breakfast together, though Montero does not like the breakfast considering it awkward and long because Aura hardly speaks. Thereafter, Montero goes to the office to kick off his work on the journals and memories of late General Llorante. As he goes through the writings of the General, he comes to know about Counsuelo's infertility, her desire to have a child and strong obsession with youth. Here another development in the plot of novel gives it a new twist. Montero is head over heels in love with Aura, always recalling her beautiful figure in mind. His love grows stronger and more often than not his fascination towards Aura takes over his rest of the thoughts. Then, Montero feels as if there is some strange connection between Aura and her old aunt – often, Aura's lips move simultaneously with Consuelo's and their motions also reflect coherence. However, Montero shakes off this confusion when he visualizes Aura and her beauty. One day, he enters her room and finds her lying in the bed. He goes towards her and holds her in bed, when all of a sudden the young Aura turns into the old widow in his arms, while he himself is transformed into the old General Llorante.

The entire story is centered upon the youth of Aura and Montero, who in turn reflect the once younger lives of Consuelo and General Llorante. This is why Montero can easily comprehend and connect with the General through his writings whereas Aura copies the talks and actions of the old widow. Eventually, Montero is completely transformed into the General and Aura into her old aunt.

Analysis.

The postmodern novel, *Aura*, revolves around hyperreality, which in its theoretical perspective, refers to the inability of the consciousness to draw a dividing line between reality and fantasy. About this concept, Baudrillard's example from Borges is famous according to which there was an empire in which the cartographers designed a well-detailed map that it covered the exact things it was originally meant to represent. But with the decline of the empire, the map faded into the landscape and thereafter neither the real nor the representation remained but hyperreal. Likewise, the protagonist of the novel, Montero finds it difficult to distinguish reality from fantasy throughout the novel.

His story begins with the advertisement in a newspaper that is seemed "to be addressed to you and nobody else....and the advertisement should have two more words, in bigger, blacker type: Felipe Montero" (Fuentes, 1986, p. 03). Then the setting and the surroundings at his employer Consuelo's house are very gloomy. The environment is very dark and suffocated all throughout the story. The darkness at house is so immense that characters move around by listening and touching. Consuelo's room is described not as dark but filled with "perpetual shadows" (Fuentes, 1986, p.13). Darkness, thus, is the symbol of characters' inability to think clearly using all of the senses; in other words darkness in this case erases the boundary between real and supernatural, therefore it can be called as hyperreal.

He soon develops passion for Aura and starts dreaming about her all the time. He goes to Aura's bed and imagines he is sleeping with her but his dream is so unreal that he can hardly come out of his confused fantasy. He faces problems in sleeping; feels lack of satisfaction in his sleep. "In your dreams you had already felt the same vague melancholy, the weight on your

diaphragm, sadness that won't stop oppressing imagination. Although you're sleeping in Aura's room, you're sleeping all alone, far from the body you believe you've possessed" (Fuentes, 1986, p. 115). Fuentes further elaborates Montero's state saying, "You put your hands on your forehead, trying to calm your disordered senses .... And you stop thinking because there are things stronger than the imagination" (Fuentes 117). From these quotations, it appears he is finding difficulty in keeping his perception aligned and distinguishing between reality and fantasy. As mentioned above, hyperreality is the hypothetical helplessness to distinguish real from the imaginary. So this is the precise state of hyperreality Montero is going through.

Moreover, his development of love relationship with Aura and his coming to know the real connection between the beautiful and young Aura and her old, widow aunt bring about astonishing or rather fantastic revelation. As he keeps working on the book desired by his employer, Consuelo, he figures out that Aura is in fact a "simulation" of her old widow, who is many times older than she. When he tries to embrace Aura, she changes into the figure of her old aunt, Consuelo. This makes Montero feel awestruck because he finds himself assuming the role of the General, together with Consuelo, the 'simulation' of youth and the delusion of life. Therefore he unearths the writings of the General only to discover his own state as a re-embodiment of the war hero.

Another dimension of simulated reality can be traced out in the episode in which the actions of Aura and Consuelo seem to be much coordinated. When Montero sees Aura butchering a kid and then visits her aunt Consuelo in her room, he finds her cutting the air as if she were skinning some animal in the same manner as Aura is beheading the kid outside. (Fuentes, 1986, p. 87) And in the end, it is disclosed that Aura is not a different character;

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instead, she is a simulation of Consuelo's youth, "Now you know why Aura is living in this house: to perpetuate the illusion of youth and beauty in that poor crazed old lady" (Fuentes, 1986, p. 89). The connection between Aura and her aunt is so secret that only those people who are inside the house, like Montero, know about. It is hard to comprehend what is happening between the two women.

To sum up, the confusions between reality and fantasy, simulation of Aura and Montero are like a collapse of the reality into hyperrealism. Fuentes through his main character, Montero is trying to depict what happens when the thin line between reality and reality and fantasy disappears and the hypothetical situation of hyperreality comes into play. Hyperreal is the announced topic of Jean Baudrillard in his book Simulation and Simulacra. The simulation in Aura is the fourth order simulation. This means that according to Fuentes the simulation of Aura is the pure simulation; the simulacrum has no relationship with any kind of reality. Aura was just a projection created by Consuelo and had no real counterpart. While Montero could be considered as a first order simulation which is a faithful copy of General Llorente except that he did not know that he was a simulation of the General and he was destined to reunite with Consuelo.

CHAPTER 4

EROSION OF CHARACTERS' IDENTITY: A BAUDRILLARDIAN READING OF

DELILLO'S *WHITE NOISE*

In the postmodern world, the threats that we are exposed to are not as tangible as the nuclear bomb that caused massive destruction in Hiroshima and Nagasaki during the Second World War. The contemporary world is facing a different kind of threat, referred to as "white noise" by David B. Morris (1996)in his *Editor's Introduction—Environment: The White Noise of Health*:

> The new danger from environmental degradation is less alien than total nuclear war. We live with its damage every day. We cannot demonize an all-purpose villain—like the bomb—to serve as the target for our protest and frustration. The enemies are everywhere and include us, especially in our social roles as hapless, but far from innocent, consumers. Environment is the unnoticed, inescapable *White Noise* that surrounds and interpenetrates human health. (p. 11)

In its normal connotation, white noise means a special type of noise produced by unifying sounds of all ranges of frequencies together. But according to Morris, it refers to those environmental threats that are rooted in the consumer culture. To him, we are living with these threats all the time, knowingly and unknowingly, and that the enemies are ourselves, the relentless consumers. It seems those affected by man-made disasters are not innocent victims of unforeseen tragedies, but instigators themselves who must be held responsible for their relentless action of joining the consumerist cycle.

White Noise, Don DeLillo's 1985 novel, presents the unavoidable toxic environment as *white noise*. In this novel, environmental threats have been portrayed as an offshoot of the postmodern consumerist condition which can be defined in two ways: firstly, describing the

toxicity of the postmodern consumerist environment from which no one can escape; and secondly referring to the logic of consumerism that penetrates all beings and all places. This kind of white noise exists everywhere and in everything, manipulating people's minds and behavior. The postmodern consumerist society has been shown in this novel as being full of toxic threats through the lives of the major characters of the novel: Jack Gladney, a college professor in the small town of Blacksmith; Babette Gladney, the mother of the family; and four of their children from previous marriages including Heinrich, Steffie, Denise, and Wilder. The novel revolves around two major incidents: an airborne toxic event and Jack's discovery that Babette has been participating in the trial of a new drug called Dylar.

Interestingly, critics have examined *White Noise* from various perspectives reaching different interpretations and conclusions. For example, Scott Rettberg (1999) in *American Simulacra: DeLillo's Fiction in Light of Postmodernism* maintains that "the novel is purely postmodern because it portrays characters who face life in a post-modern, post-industrial and televisual culture" (p. 01), and finds different aspects of postmodernity as defined by Jean Baudrillard. On the contrary, Michelle Rene (2005) in *Dissenters Are Never Superheroes*, asserts that the novel is not completely postmodern, but instead attempts to unravel archetypal issues of human beings including danger, love, and fear of death (p. 89). Furthermore, there are some critics who focused on highlighting environmental issues in *White Noise*. For instance, in *Toxins, Drugs, and Global System: Risk and Narrative in the Contemporary Novel*, Ursula K. Heise (2002) focuses on eco-criticism and risk theory, and therefore attempts at exploring a special type of risk: exposure to harmful chemical substances. To him, the story of *White Noise* centers upon a society that is technologically at risk. In addition, in *The Environmental Unconscious in the*

Fiction of Don DeLillo, Elise Martucci (2009) employs eco-critical theories, particularly highlighting the discussion by Leo Marx on the conflict between traditional American culture and the contemporary technology, in an attempt to find how technology affects perceptions and mediates reality. Similarly, Nadine Murray (2007) in *Don DeLillo & Diane Ackerman: White Noise & A Natural History of the Senses* studies the theme of environment in the novel and argues that our environment is being largely affected by advanced technology because the latter determines various aspects of human lives, such as holographic scanners at the supermarket, computers, stereo sets, and radios.

This study focuses on the effects of consumerism on consumer health and the ways in which the consumers in *White Noise* respond to these new kinds of threats: the unavoidable toxicity in the postmodern consumerist society and the logic of consumerism which manipulates consumers. It argues that the consumer's ignorant act of turning towards consumerist ecstasy contributes to increasing environmental hazards, which in turn inevitably harm physical and mental health resulting in physical death and the death of identity too. Furthermore, this study examines the vicious cycle of consumerism. Firstly, people are enticed into believing that the products they consume determine their identities. As a result, they perpetually buy and surround themselves with many commodities generating suffering from the toxicity of those products. They are thus inextricably enmeshed in this vicious circle. The interesting question raised here is whether this kind of response is really effective and if there isn't any other more appropriate way of coping with the situation.

The study also aims at exploring the effects of media on people's physical and mental health as portrayed by Don DeLillo in *White Noise*. It defines a new form of postmodern threat

referred to as white noise by DeLillo in two ways: as the toxicity of the postmodern consumerist environment; and the logic of consumerism. The first meaning of *White Noise* is the inevitable toxicity that is present in the postmodern consumerist condition. This toxicity is vividly found in daily products, within society, and yet it is unidentifiable. Consequently, people of postmodern age are facing this threat and suffering both physically and mentally.

Besides toxicity, *White Noise* also conveys an additional meaning: the logic of consumerism and its mesmerizing power. This logic of consumerism can lead people to serious mental problems, such as faulty perceptions, a type of consumerist schizophrenia. In its clinical sense, the term Schizophrenia is used for a psychotic disorder characterized by severely damaged emotions, thinking and behavior patterns causing a patient to have little or no touch with reality. However, in the postmodern theory, schizophrenia has a different meaning. Its many characteristics can be categorized into two main aspects. Firstly, Jameson (1996) in *Postmodernism, or, Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, states that it is a state of mind in which a person lacks ability to identify the proper boundaries between meanings, or in Jean Baudrillard's words, between signifier and signified (p. 119).

As for the second aspect, Mark Currie (1998) in his essay, *Culture and Schizophrenia* explains that schizophrenia is a linguistic disorder that causes disunity within the personality, making the person unable to unify his different states of mind in the single pronoun "I". When the relationship between signified and signifier is disturbed, the schizophrenic will be deprived of personal identity. In other words, a person's original identity is based on a certain sequential union of the past and the future with the present, one in which the process of signification can take place. However, due to the breakdown of the signifying chain, he is unable to unify the

past, present, and future of sentences in the language, and thereby, lacks the ability to unite the past, present, and future of his own psychic life or biographical experiences. Hence, a schizophrenic's identity is minimized to an experience of only material signifiers, a series of unrelated present moments. Likewise, according to consumerist practices, consumerism along with media brainwash people in order to make them believe that their identity is an ever changing phenomenon; one can change it in accordance with his will by consuming the products. This belief persuades consumers to engage themselves in the unending process of consumerist ecstasy. This is why the postmodern consumers are believed to possess a disunified identity.

The inability to bifurcate between signifier and signified, which is the first characteristic of schizophrenia, can be traced out in the form of Dylar's effects. Dylar was primarily an experimental medicine supposed to reduce the fear of death. However, it only offered an illusion to reckless consumers such as Babette and her husband Jack Gladney. DeLillo (1985) highlights the main impact of this drug saying that it confused "words with the things they referred to" (p. 39) or in other words it caused inability to understand the difference between reality and its simulation. The same point has also been illustrated by Willie Mink, the project manager of this drug. While suffering from the same schizophrenia, he sits in front of the television, consumes Dylar, and sees no difference between language and reality. In the same position, Mink keeps on fixing his eyes on the flickering screen of the TV and makes no sound. The way in which Mink acts unconsciously in response to what Jack says can be related to the reaction of consumers who blindly believe what media tells them. When Jack says, "fusillade," and "hail of bullets," Mink behaves as if he were being shot in reality. "He hit the floor, began

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crawling toward the bathroom . . . showing real terror. . . . he tried to wriggle behind the bowl, both arms over his head, his legs tight together" (DeLillo, 1985, p. 39). Here Mink believes what others say without confirming it from his senses and logic.

Similarly, postmodern consumers believe unquestioningly more in media than their own perception. So reality is no longer in existence while media has become a form of strong simulation. It is the influential media that makes people believe everything entrusted to them to the extent that they can ignore their own senses, the original and the real source. For example, Steffie exhibits his schizophrenic symptom by insisting that "we have to boil our water" only because "it is said on the radio" (DeLillo, 1985, p. 34). In reality, there is no need of boiling water at all, but since she watches TV and listens to the radio, she is always trying to follow what the media guides her to do. These characters are schizophrenics and cannot differentiate between the signifier and the signified; therefore, they turn blindly to the floating and meaningless signifiers presented by the media. Even though media as the meaningless signifier presents senseless information and signifies nothing, they totally believe it. They are akin to Willie Mink, who blindly believes all that Jack says and becomes obsessed with the flickering TV, a metaphor for meaningless media information.

Consumerism results in distorted, disunified personality. In simple words, it deprives people of their real identity. Media's conditioning power is so strong that their identity is completely based on the image of the products they consume. This is why Jack shops various products, and intends to fill himself with desirable images. He himself says: "I began to grow in value and self-regard. I filled myself out, found new aspects of myself, located a person I

forgotten existed. . . . our images appeared on mirrored columns, in glassware and chrome, on TV monitors in security rooms" (DeLillo, 1985, p. 17).

Jack believes that he possesses no real identity and that in order to find his personality he must purchase certain products to dress himself with the images that he wants to wear. In *White Noise*, there is no way of getting identity in the postmodern consumerist society but to shop products and display them as a representation of one's own image. Nigel Watson states in *Postmodernism and Lifestyles*: "People actively wish to join in and actively desire the opportunities for self-expression and display which are provided by the choices of the pink shopping malls. . . . We like to identify with the style that best represents the way that we wish to be seen" (Watson, 2000, p. 55- 56).

This description proves true with regard to the personality of Jack Gladney, father of the Gladney children and a university professor. He is always trying to boost his confidence level and increase his authority by means of consuming products and changing his appearance. He admits this by saying, "I am the false character that follows the name around" (DeLillo, 1985, p. 04). The characters in *White Noise*, or at least Jack Gladney, realize that the products they shop are leading them to the imminent death, causing both physical and mental suffering. Yet they shun from this fact and are mesmerized by the illusive comfort provided by consumerism.

In *White Noise*, the characters turn to consumerism as a way of evading their fear of death and environmental threats. Consumerism offers different products that promise comfort and a solution to toxic problems to those desperate consumers who are trapped by the toxic and consumerist environment. They believe that the products they buy will relieve them from hopeless and fearful situation. The drug Dylar is a clear example to prove this point. As a

consumer product, it is believed to do away with the fear of death. Though it does not prove

effective to Babette, Jack is eager to take it to get rid of his fear and anxiety. Thus Dylar is just

like other consumer products that make illusive promises to fulfill consumers' needs. Despite

their promise being illusive, people are ready to consume them in the postmodern world. This

is what happens with Jack; he anticipates that Dylar will help him get over the fear of death, no

matter how strong or weak Dylar is. He tells his daughter, Denise, that "the power of suggestion

could be more important than side effects" (DeLillo, 1985, p. 33). Denise considers this opinion

to be foolish, Jack still says, "I am eager to be humored, to be fooled. . . . This is what happens .

. . to desperate people" (DeLillo, p. 33). It appears that the postmodern people are so desperate

that they are willing to be fooled. They are ready to believe anything blindly and indulge

themselves in consumerist ecstasy.

Furthermore, consumerism distorts the idea of death. This way, postmodern consumers

are trapped to forget their true human identity and consider themselves as superhuman beings.

In fact, death, just like life, is a natural phenomenon that one cannot avoid. However, in the

consumerist society people can reject death and escape from it by purchasing brand products.

Murray, Jack's friend, says, "Here we don't die, we shop" (DeLillo, 1985, p. 09). Death in this

society becomes unnatural and therefore people cannot accept it easily. As Jack says, "There's

something artificial about my death. It's shallow, unfulfilling. I don't belong to the earth or sky"

(DeLillo, P. 37). DeLillo presents this point in another way: Jack's death is unnatural because he

is exposed to human-made deadly toxic substances. He can die any time due to his toxic

environment. Besides, it creates fearful feelings for it can target any person in a premature

manner. This reality shows that death for the consumerist society is an artificial phenomenon, not a natural one; it happens to consumers through their own act of relentless buying.

Apart from death, consumerism also distorts the consumers' ideas of existence. People are brainwashed to such an extent that they believe their existence is dependent on consumer products. It should be noted that soon after the occurrence of toxic event at the school and one caused by a leak of a Nyodene D tank, the Gladney family scrambles to go on shopping. Dellilo juxtaposes the supermarket scenes and these toxic scenes; this implies that after being exposed to fatal incidents and having their lives put at the risk of death, Jack's family gropes for the sense of existence and through consumerism. Jack's own reflection on this consumerist trend further explains this point:

> It seemed to me that Babette and I, in the mass and variety of our purchases, in the sheer plentitude those crowded bags suggested, the weight and size and number, the familiar package designs and vivid lettering, the giant sizes, the family bargain packs with Day-Glo sale stickers, in the sense of replenishment we felt, the sense of well-being, the security and contentment these products brought to some snug home in our souls—it seemed we had achieved a fullness of being that is not known to people who need less, expect less, who plan their lives around lonely walks in the evening. (DeLillo, 1985, p. 05)

Though some critics, such as B. R. Myers (2002), term this supermarket scene as nonsensical and attack DeLillo for presenting the American supermarket as "a haven of womblike contentment, a place where people go to satisfy deep emotional needs," this study argues that the depiction of this scene vividly illustrates that postmodern consumers rely so heavily on consumerism that they believe they are existing only due to the products provided by the supermarket. For Jack, the sense of existence and security emanates only from purchasing; moreover, he thinks that those who neither need nor afford these products are

deprived of this kind of feeling. Ironically, the truth is the exact opposite. According to DeLillo, the fact is that consumption of products, in real sense, does not provide Jack and his family any sense of security or well-being. The most suitable interpretation is that people "who need less, expect less, who plan their lives around lonely walks in the evening are likely to have a better chance of simple contentment" (DeLillo, 1985, p. 05). The reason is they are neither subject to harmful threats originating from consumer products nor trapped by what is generally known as consumerist ecstasy.

DeLillo has perfectly handled different aspects of postmodern life; he skillfully illustrates how the electronic and technological effects change the meaning of reality in the postmodern age. The novel portrays TV as an indispensable part of this era. Characters are presented to be leading their lives, behaviors, beliefs and even delusions in complete consonance to what is simulated on the TV.

TV, being a most effective technological device in the postmodern age, plays an important role in the life of people, changing the established criteria of truth and reality. It has itself become a new reality – rather more real than reality. A close study of the novel shows that TV is equally important and influential as Jack Gladney, the protagonist, is for the novel. TV's fragments and buzzes frequently spring up in the novel to interrupt the line of actions. It seems TV is the controlling force making all people believe nothing but what is shown on it. As Leonard Wilcox in his essay, *Baudrillard, DeLillo's White Noise and the end of Heroic Narrative*, states, "*White Noise* is bathed in the eerie glow of television" (Wilcox, 2003, p. 355). Jack's friend and colleague, Murray Siskind, who is also a lecturer at College-on-the Hill, is greatly

influenced by TV and accepts it as the new source of knowledge and a generator of new life. He depicts his personal experience in the following words:

> You have to learn how to look. You have to open yourself to the data. TV offers incredible amounts of psychic data. It opens ancient memories of world birth. It welcomes us into the grid, the network of little buzzing dots that make up the picture pattern. There is light, there is sound...look at the wealth of data concealed in the grid, in the bright packaging, the jingles...the medium practically overflows with sacred formulas if we can remember how to respond innocently. (DeLillo, 1985, p. 11)

His illustration clearly explains how viewers have to surrender their senses to this source of information and how the simulation of TV, created by "the network of little buzzing dots," despite being unreal, is believed to be hyperreal, or in simple words, more real than the reality. But the question is why masses succumb to the TV simulation? And does a recipient play his active role in this process?

According to Baudrillard, responding "innocently" means the recipients are only receiving information, not the meaning. He terms this strategy as "non-reception." While calling it "the strategy of the masses" he says it, "is equivalent to returning to the system its own logic by doubling it, to reflecting meaning, like a mirror, without absorbing it" (Baudrillard, 1994, p.59). His argument is that the main role of media is to privatize individuals, and this takes place by making the receivers of information live in the simulacrum of TV. This way, they will end up having no choice except refusing meanings and accepting images as signifiers. And this makes it clear that meanings are devoured and imploded by the media. The same idea of the implosion of meaning was also propounded by Marshall McLuhan (1964), a Canadian theorist, who believed that media are not a source of socialization in which we have interaction between the medium and the subject. Instead, media have absorbed all contents of meaning, creating a

situation in which only form is something that matters and the background content does not hold any value. As a result, every medium has become the message itself.

Following Baudrillard and McLuhan, DeLillo also believes that TV itself is the medium and the message, thanks to the process of copying (simulating) images from such models that refer to nothing in real life. In his novel, Murray Siskind is the character who considers TV as a fetishistic object; he explains how his life becomes prone to change when this device enters it: "I've been sitting in this room for more than two months, watching TV into the early hours, listening, taking notes" (DeLillo, 1985, p. 11). Murray doesn't deny that TV is a hyperreal simulation, and that it doesn't go beyond the picture pattern of its screen. Though he describes the experience as "close to mystical," he knows, deep inside, that it is, "sealed-off, timeless, self-contained, (and) self-referring" (DeLillo, 1985, p. 11).

In changing the identity of real things, TV further transforms horrible scenes into attractive scenes. It is more striking to note that *White Noise* clearly depicts how TV presents death and catastrophes as spectacles. Instead of being afraid of horror and devastation, people watch these elements on TV and feel thrilled and excited. The members of Gladney family sit around the TV set to watch disasters. At this they are so excited that they call out for each other to come and enjoy. They feel intrigued when they watch volcanic destructions and plane crashes. Jack questions about the "ecstasy" they feel while watching disasters aired on the TV; he says, "Why is it, that decent, well-meaning, and responsible people find themselves intrigued by a catastrophe when they see it on TV" (DeLillo, 1985, p. 14)? DeLillo comments by calling these feelings as natural and attributes this attitude to the viewers' desire for a break-up with "the incessant bombardment of information" (p. 66).

It is also worth mentioning here that the narrative style of the novel, *White Noise*, is somehow similar to narrative style of TV. Like TV, the novel in general and the dialogues between Gladneys in particular, offer an assortment of information with imploded meanings. Most of the times, these dialogues seem out of context, unnecessarily prolonged; they don't aim at giving or exchanging some meaning; instead, they are misleading and self-reflective. One of the examples is a dialogue between Gladneys on "Dylar" and an experimental drug which jack's wife Babette consumes to forget about her fear of death:

> "What do you know about Dylar?"
> "Is that the black girl who's staying with the Stovers?"
> "That's Dakar," Steffie said.
> "Dakar isn't her name, it's where she's from," Denise said. "It's a country on the Ivory Coast of Africa."
> "The capital is Lagos," Babette said. "I know that because of a surfer movie I saw once where they travel all over the world."
> "The Perfect Wave" Heinrich said. "I saw it on TV."
> "But what's the girl's name?" Steffie said.
> "I don't know," Babette said, "but the movie wasn't called The Perfect Wave. The perfect wave is what they were looking for."
> "They go to Hawaii," Denise told Steffie, "and wait for these tidal waves to come from Japan. They're called origamis." (DeLillo, 1985, p. 17)

The dialogue does not end here but goes on to include other irrelevant topics. It matches switching between different TV channels, where a person receives a host of signifiers without reaching the real meaning. Just like the way media reflect the implosion of meaning, the above dialogue is empty of meaning. Is there meaning in the above-quoted dialogue? Does anyone answer the first question about "Dylar"? Jack comments on this loss of meaning saying, "the family is the cradle of misinformation" (DeLillo, 1985, p. 17). This clearly demonstrates that TV - as an essential part of every house - has significantly disintegrated families like the Gladneys and individuals like Babette and Jack. All the dialogues and exchanges of information

among the family members have started to be similar to that of TV, where meaning is always "imploded."

In *White Noise* the narrative technique is also similar to TV in that just as TV ads that appear frequently, various fragments in the novel too appear every now and then. The novel contains a bulk of fragments loaded with abandoned meanings that, like TV ads, interrupt the course of actions. Instances are numerous of such fragments filled throughout the novel. Some originate from TV to interrupt the actions. Others appear as advertisement-like phrases, uttered by characters (Jack) with no context whatsoever to accommodate them. Murray terms such phrases as "chants" and "mantras", and in today's consumer culture they not only affect conscious mind of consumers but unconscious too. DeLillo shows how different characters like Jack are haunted by "media speech" and advertisements, so much so that they even utter them unconsciously. For instance, Jack once says for no reason at all "MasterCard, Visa, American Express" (DeLillo, 1985, p.20). Though spoken out of context, this phrase explicitly expresses how consumer signifiers float in a chain of signification that has no actual signifieds.

Another example is Steffie's uttering of some brand names in her sleep; she says "Toyota Corolla, Toyota Celica, Toyota Creddia" (DeLillo, 1985, p.21). This example also proves that consumer objects affect consumers' mind and unconscious to a great extent. A third example is those phrases uttered by Jack: "Random Access Memory, Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome, Mutual Assured Destruction" (p. 38).Jack utters these out of context phrases when he experiences the other face of America, characterized by sheer chaos, while he is on his way to murder Mink, the scientist who created Dylar and manipulated Babette.

It is pertinent to mention here that these out-of-context narratives or fragments introduced by DeLillo are equivalents of TV commercials. According to McLuhan, the essential role of media is to implode the message and the meaning it tries to convey. He is of the opinion that "these seconds sandwiched between the hours of viewing" don't allow the narrative to take its form (McLuhan, 1964, p. 126). For this very reason – the interruptions of TV commercials - TV has been widely criticized. McLuhan asserts that this criticism is mainly due to people's failure to understand that TV is a different reality – hyperreality in fact "which demands different sensory responses" (McLuhan, p. 128). John Fiske, in his book *Television Culture*, also comments on the reality of TV narrative. To him, advertisements are moments that not only implode the meaning but also interrupt the narrative. He states that "the inevitable sequence of cause and effect that marks the progression of traditional narrative to its point of resolution is constantly interrupted in television by advertisements, promos, spot announcements, and so on" (Fiske, 1987, p. 145).

The process of simulation has tremendously impacted on the contemporary life making it superficial and depthless. Like TV, other technological devices like computers have been prioritizing hyper-reality and presenting it to be something more real than reality itself. The event of "SIMUVAC" in the novel seconds this idea. When Jack along with his family evacuates his home after the "Airborne Toxic Event," a team of technicians tested them in a process called "SIMUVAC," –a short form for "simulated evacuation." Jack determines later on that though the toxic accident and evacuation were real, the technicians were doing the real evacuation "in order to rehearse the simulation" (DeLillo, 1985, P. 21). The use of reality as a secondary testing for hyper-reality means that hyper-reality is more important, and that it is the new order of

reality, viz. more real than the reality itself. Here the real evacuation that is caused by the horrible "Airborne Toxic Event" is dealt with as a mere rehearsal for something more important, which is the simulated evacuation. Interestingly, the real evacuation is characterized by chaos and disorganization, whereas, later in the novel, the team carries out the simulated evacuation in an organized and very orderly manner.

The team explains this simulation process as a new rescue measure that aims at preventing future disasters. Simply, it is the fear of the real that makes people desire for simulations to take over their daily life. Exactly this is what a team member says as "The more we rehearse disaster, the safer we'll be from the real thing" (DeLillo, 1985, p. 27). He also explains this by using an example of people's day to day worries and suggesting that simulating hyperreality would be the solution. "Life seems to work that way doesn't it? You take your umbrella to the office seventeen straight days, not a drop of rain. The first day you leave it at home, record-breaking down pour" (DeLillo, p. 217). Baudrillard went in length to explain how the process of simulation works and how simulacra are born of codes and models and become hyperreality:

> Simulation is characterized by a precession of the model, of all models around the merest fact —the models come first, and their orbital (like the bomb) circulation constitutes the genuine magnetic field of events. Facts no longer have any trajectory of their own, they arise at the intersection of the models; a single fact may even be engendered by all the models at once. This anticipation, this precession, this short circuit (no more divergence of meaning, no more dialectic polarity, no more negative electricity or implosion of poles) is what each time allows for all the possible interpretations, even the most contradictory —all are true, in the sense that their truth is exchangeable, in the image of models from which they proceed in a generalized cycle. (Baudrillard, 1994, p. 32)

Simulacrum often becomes so real that people believe them more than their own senses and rely on them to explain everything in their life. In *White Noise*, the Gladneys

interpret their daily life events by referring to what they see on TV hear on the radio. Heinrich does not trust his own senses when observing the weather and instead chooses to believe that what is broadcast on radio is true. He says:

"It's going to rain tonight."
"It's raining now," I said.
"The radio said tonight." (DeLillo, 1985, p. 06)

Here, it appears strange enough that he believes what is broadcast by radio to be truer than the reality that is actually raining at the moment. The dialogue also depicts Jack's dilemma as a late modernist (dis)placed in a postmodernist society. He struggles hard to keep his belief in meta-narratives of science and common sense, but his beliefs come into clash with the world of Heinrich dominated by simulacrum; a (postmodern) world characterized by Lyotard as "the incredulity towards metanarratives" (Lyotard, 1984, p. 25). This is the central idea of postmodernism. Jack tries to defend his beliefs on the ground of empirical evidence of his senses that the rainfall is real, and to him it is unacceptable and not commonsensical that "just because it's said on the radio... we have to suspend belief in the evidence of our senses" (DeLillo, p. 06). But, on the other hand, Heinrich, who holds a postmodernist perspective, replies that the contemporary world of simulacra considers human senses wrong most of the times; it is the broadcast, the image and the computer that we have to believe. He concludes this by saying, "Our senses are wrong a lot more often than they're right and this has been proved in the laboratory" (DeLillo, p. 06).

Although he is a late modernist, it is difficult for him to escape the effects of simulacrum. There is a significant change in his beliefs after he undergoes a computerized checkup by the "SIMUVAC" team during the "Airborne Toxic Event". He is a changed person

thanks to the data on the screen that reveals that he has come into contact with the poisonous gas, "Nyodene Derivative," and that his death is imminent. Seeing Jack confused about how this can happen, the technician says to him, "I didn't say it. The computer did. The whole system says it" (DeLillo, 1985, p. 21). Now here the bearing of technician presents him as if he was referring to something that is all-knowing and all-true: it is the simulacrum. To Jack, this is really something hard to believe, and it makes him feel anxious but, deep down, he is convinced that this hyperreality "just means you are the sum total of your data. No man escapes that" (DeLillo, p. 21).

Simulacrum, a dominant feature of contemporary world, can also be traced in people's feeling of illness. They believe simulacra more than their direct experience of the symptoms of disease. Steffie and Denise both suffer from déjà vu after the "Airborne Toxic Event", and Babette tells them that the solution to this is to keep the radio turned off,

> "So the girls can't hear. They haven't got beyond déjà vu. I want to keep it that way."
> "What if the symptoms are real?"
> "How could they be real?"
> "Why couldn't they be real?"
> "They get them only when they are broadcast," she whispered. (DeLillo, 1985, p. 21)

At this point, we may reinforce what Baudrillard has discussed in the three orders of simulacrum. This event is an example of the third order of simulacrum in which the image precedes the reality or effaces it. While discussing the three orders, he draws a bifurcation between "feigning" and "simulating"; to him the former belongs to the first order of simulacrum while the latter belongs to the third one. He also gives an example of illnesses in his *Simulacrum and Simulations* saying, "whoever fakes an illness can simply stay in bed and make everybody believe he is ill. Whoever simulates an illness produces in himself some of the

symptoms" (Baudrillard, 1994, p. 04). This means feigning is just masking a reality whereas simulation erodes reality making it rather impossible to know what is false and what is true. He further says, that "psychology and medicine stop at this point, forestalled by the illness's henceforth undiscoverable truth" (Baudrillard, 1994, p. 04). Psychology and medicine are effective only when some real problem exists; they don't work for simulated symptoms of diseases since they only know how to treat the real and true illnesses.

This means that disease symptoms can not only be simulated but also be linked to the realm of hyperreality; as a result, they cannot be demurred. Going back to déjà vu and SIMUVAC, both are simulated and appear more real than the real. Déjà vu, a simulacrum, is a mental image that precedes the original event which resembles it. We realize how much this resemblance is real according to the pre-generated simulacrum, which appears to be more real. In the example of "SIMUVAC," the real holds less value when compared with the simulation, because the real is just a rehearsal to the simulated which, in turn, becomes more real. Likewise, déjà vu is a simulacrum produced in the brain long before the real illness happens; when the real illness happens later on, we determine its reality in accordance with the simulacrum: déjà vu.

One of the most important aspects of postmodernity is the failure of signification, i.e there is an open-ended chain of signifiers but they lack corresponding signifieds or final meanings. DeLillo, in the episode of déjà vu in *White Noise*, depicts a significant image of floating signs and an endless chain of signifiers. It is not uncommon that people have déjà vu about different things in their daily lives, but here DeLillo comes up with a wonderful example

apposite to be termed as "the déjà vu-ing of déjà vu." This is true with Jack and his wife Babette

who are talking of the déjà vu their kids have. At this moment, Babette remarks:

> "This happened before," she said finally.
> "What happened before?"
> "Eating yogurt, sitting here, talking about déjà vu." (DeLillo, 1985, p. 21)

Here she is having a déjà vu of déjà vu, just like having a dream of having a dream. Images

representing images stand for nothing but the hollowness of postmodernity.

In the postmodern atmosphere, plethora of images and codes can be traced, but

locating originality is out of question. For another instance, when Murray and Jack visit a place

commonly known as "THE MOST PHOTOGRAPHED BARN IN AMERICA," they experience no real

existence of any barn, and it seems the actual barn has been replaced by its signs. This is what

Murray tries to explain to Jack when he says, "no one sees the barn...once you've seen the signs

about the barn, it becomes impossible to see the barn" (DeLillo, 1985, p. 03). According to

Baudrillard, one of the major characteristics of the postmodern era is that in it an image enjoys

triumph over reality. This process, according to him, is "the murderous capacity of images:

murderers of the real" (Baudrillard, 1994, p. 05 - 06). He believes that in the past, before the

images could acquire their "murderous capacity", they were preceded by a capacity of

representations as a mediation to the real, and in that capacity "a sign could refer to the depth

of meaning, and a sign could exchange for meaning and that something could guarantee this

exchange," but in the postmodern age, the whole system of signification has broken down and

become weightless, "it is no longer anything but a gigantic simulacrum" (Baudrillard, p. 06).

Baudrillard's view proves true in the episode of the barn in which sign and image not

only triumph over reality but also affect it. Therefore, DeLillo, while describing the barn scene,

gives more attention to signs, images, photographs, cameras and photographers than the real

barn itself. He further explains how people themselves are more interested in capturing images

than experiencing the real barn. Tourists are fancied by the mere images of the barn to such an

extent that they take pictures of people taking pictures, and this exactly supports the idea of

the floating images and signifiers that don't represent something beyond the surface and that

only refer to other images.

Roland Barthes comments on postmodern art of photography in his book *S/Z* (1975)

that it is significantly marked by the absence of originality. He is of the opinion that in this era

every art has lost its originality; it is just a copying process. He argues that even the copying

process does not mean copying the real but copying what is already a copy. The following

words by Murray second the view of Barthes:

> What was the barn like before it was photographed? he said. What did it look like, how
> was it different from other barns, how was it similar to other barns? We can't answer
> these questions because we've read the signs, seen the whole people snapping the
> pictures we can't get outside the aura. We're here, we're now. (DeLillo, 1985, p. 03)

Here his final words "we're here, we're now" can be taken as the main effect of simulation on

daily life which has blurred the sense of past and future tenses. Baudrillard, in his famous book,

America (1986) says that people live in "a perpetual present...in a perpetual simulation, in a

perpetual present of signs" (Baudrillard, 1986, p. 18).

White Noise also illustrates the simulated consumer culture in the postmodern age.

Consumption in this age has acquired a new meaning. Now people don't purchase goods

because they are in need of them; instead, they buy because they develop an ecstasy caused by

the attractive goods and their captivating arrangement. Supermarkets, big malls, and stores have become a paradise for consumers in the postmodern age.

In this new consumer culture, goods have lost their real value and their reality is struggling to death. In fact, supermarkets offering open spaces, bright colors, meticulous designs, goods of all kinds create a special spectacle that persuades consumers to buy them at any cost, even if they are not in a mood to buy. Baudrillard comments on this role of supermarket as "it goes far beyond consumption, and the objects no longer have a specific reality there: what is primary is their serial, circular, spectacular arrangement" (Baudrillard, 1994, p. 53). In the opening pages of *White Noise*, Steffie and Denise argue about Babette's habit of shopping things she neither needs nor eats. Denise opines, "She thinks if she keeps buying it, she'll have to eat it just to get rid of it. It's like she's trying to trick herself" (DeLillo, 1985, p. 02). This is known as shopping for the sake of shopping. Jack agrees to this point. When he buys things at a mall for his family, he feels very much "expansive" only because he is a shopper. He says, "I shopped for its sake, looking and touching, inspecting merchandize I had no intention of buying, then buying it" (DeLillo, 1985, p. 17).

So just like the TV screen, consumerism in general and the supermarket particularly render the image and simulacra more weightage than reality. Buyers are attracted to colorful goods coming in different colors, styles and packing; in fact it is the simulacra of goods that grabs their attention and stimulate their desires to purchase them, irrespective of their need. Murray remarks while he is in the supermarket:

> Everything is concealed in symbolism, hidden by veils of mystery and layers of cultural material. But it's psychic data, absolutely...All the letters and numbers are here, all the colors of the spectrum, all the voices and sounds, all the code words and ceremonial

phrases. It's just a question of deciphering, rearranging, peeling off the layers of unspeakablity. (DeLillo, 1985, p. 09)

The consumer culture of the postmodern era is characterized by endless varieties of goods, advertisements, and consumption. In supermarkets, the reality of goods has been effaced by their spectacle – which seems to be more real than reality itself. This state of hyperreality brings consumers in a delirious state. They feel ecstatic when purchasing goods and feel themselves to be different people, losing their real identity. Jack Gladney describes this state when he shops, as "the sense of well-being, the security and the contentment these products brought...it seemed we had achieved a fullness of being" (DeLillo, 1985, p. 05).

So it is the goods that determine the identity of consumers telling them who they are. Shoppers also find answers to their daily life questions in the goods they buy. Steffie, the daughter of Jack, concludes that they are in search of identity: the new consumerist identity. In an essay entitled *Living for Ethics: Responsible Consumption in Everyday Life*, Nil Ozcaglar-Toulouse observes:

> It seems difficult for a responsible consumer to develop and maintain a coherent sense of being in a consuming society. The consuming society has gradually turned out to be a constraint, a moral or an institution imposed upon the consumer. In this societal model, individuals seem to be or feel uniformed. The search for uniqueness and "self" becomes difficult because of the anguish and awkwardness related to the risk of marginality. In the consuming society, consumers express their extended self through their purchases. (Ozcaglar-Toulouse, 2007, p. 423-24)

In the postmodern age, media and consumer culture are indispensable. Multinational companies manipulate media in order to turn the world into a consumer globe. As shown in *White Noise*, advertisements affect consumers' behavior to a large extent. According to Christopher Lindner, "This shows consumer objects hijacking the thoughts and driving the

imaginations of a mesmerized spectator. It speaks of a mind turned into consumer practices and desires." (Lindner, 2003, p. 139) In fact, advertisements have distorted consumer consciousness and turned it into commodity-saturated one. In DeLillo's novel, Steffie is the epitome of the internalization of the whole consumer culture, to the extent that her unconsciousness has been colonized by commodity. She manifests this while watching TV quite attentively and moving her lips, "attempting to match the words as they were spoken" (DeLillo, 1985, p. 17).

White Noise is a novel that takes the readers into the postmodern world. DeLillo has successfully created a piece of literature that presents a full-fledged postmodern culture in which characters have become devoid of their original identity due to the intrusion of the mass media, especially of TV and radio. These fruits of technology are responsible for distorting human identity and replacing it with something artificial and simulated. TV and its glowing images affect almost every aspect of human life. Media has played its role in developing a consumer culture that makes people feel dazzled by the delirium and the simulacrum of vast shopping malls and supermarkets. People are embarked upon associating themselves to this virtual reality which allows them to have different perceptions of everything. The moment they leave this hyperreal world, they start feeling sad. They feel estranged from reality. This is why Jack says on his return from a shopping mall, "We went to our respective rooms, wishing to be alone" (DeLillo, 1985, p. 17). He believes this hyperreality based on codes, images, signals and simulations is still unexplainable for it has no corresponding origin or reality. Because of this, he is forced to express his annoyance when he says: "What good is knowledge if it just floats in the

air? It goes from computer to computer. It changes and grows every second. But nobody actually knows anything" (DeLillo, 1985, p. 21).

To conclude, technology provides people with a chance to float frantically in a hyperreal simulation forgetting the horror and violence of death. Murray terms the supermarket as a place that recharges people spiritually; he says, "It prepares us, it's a getaway or pathway" (DeLillo, 1985, p. 09). Thus the supermarket is a "getaway" from the real. They shun their real identity and take refuge in a simulated world wherein the horror of death can be eliminated by means of shopping and consuming. They are ecstatic while doing excessive shopping. Deep down, they are aware of the superficiality of this ecstasy, and know that as soon as they are through with the delirium of TV and the supermarket, they return to the real, which is, for them, dreadful.

CONCLUSION

Identity, which has been a very strong reality for an individual, is no more a reality in the postmodern world. Whereas most of objective truths and established socio-cultural values are now being called into question, identity is no exception too. According to Jean Baudrillard, realities and values have no existence today; instead, everything around is a mere simulation that stands on its own and has no connection with the 'actual reality'. He terms this upside down change as the 'precession of simulacra' according to which today, unlike what used to be in the past, it is the simulation or sign system that comes first and determines reality. The factors responsible for this change include mainly consumerism, multinational capitalism, mass media and globalization (Baudrillard, 1994, p. 56).

Consumerism, a byproduct of postmodernism, has erased the line between the products that we really need to lead a life and those for which an artificial need is deliberately created through advertised images. Today, the value of things is determined on the basis of their price, not on the basis of their actual usefulness. Consumers are consciously and unconsciously attracted towards consumerist ecstasy, believing that the products they consume will determine their identities. As a result, they perpetually buy and surround themselves with many commodities generating suffering from the toxicity of those products. Their consumerist ecstasy has double-folded consequences: on one hand, they contribute to the increasing environmental hazards; and on the other hand, their attitude brings about harmful effects on their physical and mental health ending up with their physical death and the death of identity too.

The role of media to propagate consumerist practices in the postmodern culture is undeniable. As a most powerful too, media brainwash people, with regard to their lifestyle embellished with products, to such an extent that they start believing unquestioningly more in what they see in media than their own perception. Multinational capitalists utilize media and promote their products through simulated, hyperreal images, namely advertisements, to make consumers believe that their identity is an ever changing phenomenon subject to their consuming habits. They can change it in accordance with their will by consuming as many products as possible. This belief persuades consumers to engage themselves in the endless process of consumerist ecstasy. Consumers, in the postmodern world, therefore possess a dis-unified identity.

The shift from reality to images or sign system, thanks to the influential role of media and consumerism, proved to be a decisive turning point. From theology to social constructs to literature, in every part of life the era of simulacra and simulation has been introduced. In this age, there is no existence of God, truth is non-existent, reality is inaccessible and subjectivity is all that is going to rule in the world.

To talk about the postmodern literature particularly, it can be safely claimed that it is characterized by a practice that not only criticizes but also overcomes both traditional narrative forms and methods of analysis. Consequently, from a comparative perspective, it may be assumed that while modernism shared a methodological unity because of the fact that it puts a lot of emphasis on the way or the form of presentation, postmodernism is distinguished by diversity - a diversity that often does not even attempt to create a structured impression. Of different manifestations of this diversity, replacement of signs for the reality, with special

reference to the influences of media and consumerist practices, is the one that can be easily traced in a number of postmodern literary works.

White Noise is a novel that takes the readers into the postmodern world. DeLillo has successfully created a piece of literature that presents a full-fledged postmodern culture in which characters have become devoid of their original identity due to the intrusion of the mass media, especially of TV and radio. These fruits of technology are responsible for distorting human identity and replacing it with something artificial and simulated. TV and its glowing images affect almost every aspect of human life. Media has played its role in developing a consumer culture that makes people feel dazzled by the delirium and the simulacrum of vast shopping malls and supermarkets. People are embarked upon associating themselves to this virtual reality which allows them to have different perceptions of everything. The moment they leave this hyperreal world, they start feeling sad. They feel estranged from reality. This is why Jack says on his return from a shopping mall, "We went to our respective rooms, wishing to be alone" (DeLillo, 1985, p. 17). He believes this hyperreality based on codes, images, signals and simulations is still unexplainable for it has no corresponding origin or reality. Because of this, he is forced to express his annoyance when he says: "What good is knowledge if it just floats in the air? It goes from computer to computer. It changes and grows every second. But nobody actually knows anything" (DeLillo, 1985, p. 21).

Right from the beginning of novel, major characters including Jack Gladney; his wife, Babette; and their children, Heinrich, Denise, Steffie and Wilder are shown to have lost their self-identity somewhere in the world heavily influenced by globalization, technology advancement and toxic environment. Their acts, beliefs and talks reflect they are the creatures

of images and simulations they come into contact with through media. Their conditioning to media is so strong that their identity is completely based on the image of the products they consume. This is why Jack shops various products, and intends to fill himself with desirable images. He himself says: "I began to grow in value and self-regard. I filled myself out, found new aspects of myself, located a person I forgotten existed. . . . our images appeared on mirrored columns, in glassware and chrome, on TV monitors in security rooms" (DeLillo, 1985, p. 17).

The plot of *White Noise* centers around five major episodes: Airborne Toxic Event; Dylar, a medicine to defeat the fear of death; simulated evacuation; famous barn in America; and Déjà vu. All these are simulated realities but appear to be more real than the real. With the exception of the airborne toxic event, these episodes originate from mental images that precede the original events and determine the realities that share some resemblance with them. We realize how much this resemblance is real according to the pre-generated simulacrum, which appears to be more real. The existence of simulated realities prior to the actual ones is what Baudrillard referred to as "precession of simulacra".

As for personal identities, the characters of *White Noise* believe that they possess no real identity and that in order to find their personality they must purchase certain products to dress themselves with the images that they want to wear. In *White Noise*, there is no way of getting identity in the postmodern consumerist society but to shop products and display them as a representation of one's own image. Nigel Watson states in *Postmodernism and Lifestyles*: "People actively wish to join in and actively desire the opportunities for self-expression and display which are provided by the choices of the pink shopping malls. . . . We like to identify with the style that best represents the way that we wish to be seen" (Watson, 2000, p. 55-

56).The same has been depicted with regard to the characters of *White Noise*, who float frantically in a hyperreal simulation in order to escape the horror and violence of death, a reality. Murray takes refuge in the supermarket and considers it a place that recharges people spiritually; he says, "It prepares us, it's a getaway or pathway" (DeLillo, 1985, p. 09). Thus their act of shopping is a "getaway" from the real. They shun their real identity and take refuge in a simulated world wherein the horror of death can be eliminated by means of shopping and consuming. They are ecstatic while doing excessive shopping. Deep down, they are aware of the superficiality of this ecstasy, and know that as soon as they are through with the delirium of TV and the supermarket, they return to the real, which is, for them, dreadful.

To sum up, Baudrillard claims that one of the major characteristics of the postmodern era is that in it an image enjoys triumph over reality. This process, according to him, is "the murderous capacity of images: murderers of the real" (Baudrillard, 1994, p. 05 - 06). He believes that in the past, before the images could acquire their "murderous capacity", they were preceded by a capacity of representations as a mediation to the real, and in that capacity "a sign could refer to the depth of meaning, and a sign could exchange for meaning and that something could guarantee this exchange," but in the postmodern age, the whole system of signification has broken down and become weightless, "it is no longer anything but a gigantic simulacrum" (Baudrillard, 1994, p. 06).

Employing the postmodern theory of simulacra and simulation as described by Jean Baudrillard, DeLillo has examined the threat of media and consumerism to human identity. His novel, *White Noise* shows that the two have far reaching effects on the postmodern consumers leading them towards distorted perceptions, also known as a consumerist type of schizophrenia

as described by Fredric Jameson. The postmodern schizophrenics have been deprived of the ability to find clear distinctions between signifier and signified, and therefore lack personal identity. They are continuously bombarded with advertised information powerfully persuading them to purchase products and feel that the products they buy are responsible for determining their identity. *White Noise* offers a clear picture of the postmodern world marked with uncertainty, providing people with a fear of death and fatal diseases. In this world people's identity, their minds and their actions all are influenced by the logic provided by media and consumerism.

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