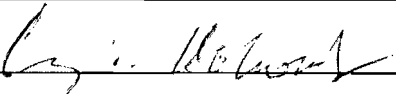


AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF

\_\_\_\_\_Paula S. Prisacaru\_\_\_\_ for the \_\_\_\_\_Master of Arts\_\_\_\_\_

in \_\_\_\_\_English\_\_\_\_\_ presented on \_\_\_\_\_April 21, 2006\_\_\_\_\_

Title: \_\_\_\_\_Confessions of Justified Postmoderns in A. L. Kennedy's *So I Am Glad* and Don DeLillo's *White Noise*\_\_\_\_\_

Abstract approved: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Postmodernist literature has been too often and too sternly excoriated because of its contradictory forms and its sense of disruption and indeterminacy. Many scholars tend to consider it an empty commodity and a humble social practice, unable to convey a unified moral message. Yet, refusing to be decried as gratuitous fiction that fails to transcend social, political, and aesthetic debates, contemporary literature has conscientiously strived to learn its lesson and do more than play the sick joke of cultural virtues.

Thus, with works such as A. L. Kennedy's *So I Am Glad* and Don DeLillo's *White Noise*, Postmodernist fiction assumes on its part the task of becoming a critical tool, mediating aesthetics to social and cultural practices, to literary styles, and to political discourses as well. In dealing with these two novels, I am attempting to expose and discuss the moral force of literature today, its revolutionary aspect, and its laudatory innovations in terms of literary tradition. Lastly, I am illustrating the unending importance of contemporary fiction, fostered through its concern for individuality and for history alike, through its ethical commitment to the reader, through its engagement to solve social injustices, and last but not least, through its fondness for art.

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CONFESSIONS OF JUSTIFIED POSTMODERNS IN A. L. KENNEDY'S *SO I AM*

*GLAD* AND DON DELILLO'S *WHITE NOISE*

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A Thesis

Presented to

The Department of English

Emporia State University

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In Partial Fulfillment

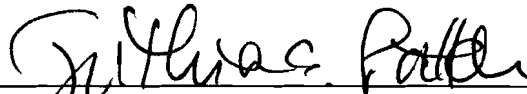
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Master of Arts

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by Paula Prisacaru

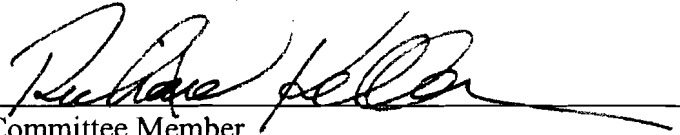
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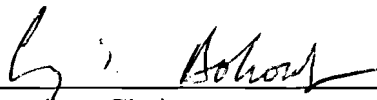
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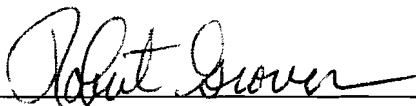
Committee Member



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Dean of Graduate Studies and Research

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

For showing unending love and understanding, I express my gratitude and hereby dedicate this thesis to my family. They have offered me unconditional support and have encouraged me through my toughest moments away from home.

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I owe many thanks to Dr. Mel Storm, my graduate advisor, for imparting with his humble students precious pieces of his expertise in human languages, for warning me that “hopefully” makes the tides move high, and for unveiling linguistic mysteries with a smile on his face. My thankfulness goes to Dr. Richard Keller for his prompt assistance, for his gift as a storyteller, and for his indulgence in Senior GTA frivolities. I have learned from him that to err is always human. Countless thanks go to Dr. Cynthia Patton for assisting me with treasured resources in Scottish literature and for shaping my interest in a miracle called art.

Last but not least, I feel forever grateful for having wonderful friends, drifting like me on countless continents. They are friends who rarely fail and whose love and concern made possible my smile, my sanity, and my will to write.

If your name is not here, it is not because your kindness has been forgotten, but because it is part of a catalog that doesn't seem to end. Thank you.

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## Chapter I

### Hinc Manifesto: This Craft of the Postmodern

*This is a place I am in now, where I look back and  
look ahead, and dream and wonder*

*There is the next place –*

*And he took a look out of a window*

*At a sunken morning moon*

*between two pines,*

*between lost gold and lingering green.*

Carl Sandburg, *Between Worlds*

Among the most inscrutable literary trends of all time, one that theorists never cease to explore, define, and redefine, is the esoteric Postmodernism. For decades now, since its rise in the late 1960s, Postmodernist thought has been nothing but a capricious celebration of contradictions and fragmentations both in art and in social life, a blend of forms and beliefs, and an unfolding of open endings. Emerging once with the new theories on knowledge promoted by the French sociolinguists and philosophers Jean-François Lyotard, Michel Foucault, and Roland Barthes, to name only a few, Postmodernism is essentially oriented toward the contemporary social and political context in which we breathe, create, and act. Indeed, as we can witness with many works coming during the past decades from diverse corners of the world,<sup>1</sup> writers today have been guiding us into reading their fiction mainly to think about the world, to question social conformity and identity politics, and last but not least, to interrogate narrative conventions that readers have obeyed without questioning for centuries. Moreover, even though it has been around for almost half a century and has diverged into a multitude of interpretations and classifications, Postmodernism has pursued the perspicuous task of elucidating the foundations and the structures of knowledge and of emphasizing questions of ontology (Geyh et al. xx).

Postmodernism as “postmodernity” (the historical period since 1960 to the present) encompasses issues and phenomena such as “upheavals in the international economic system, the Cold War and its decline ..., the growth of the suburbs as a cultural force, the predominance of television as a cultural medium, and the rise of the computer” (Geyh et al. x). Converging with all these, Postmodernism as an aesthetic movement became the plunging force into a warehouse of forms, commanded by pastiches, collages,



and bricolages, by interpenetrations and fragmentations, by temporal enjambments, and most conspicuously, by an undaunted *jouissance*.<sup>2</sup> Finally, as a critical and philosophical tool, Postmodernism embraces a tissue of theories such as deconstruction, new historicism, reader response, and magical realism, and an endless set of debates over binary oppositions such as truth-history, real-symbolic/imaginary, and subjectivity-identity.

Due to the numerous perspectives it has endlessly interwoven, Postmodernism has been qualified as a discontinuous period with no temporal sequence. It is indeed the only trend that brings together cultures, literary conventions, and traditions by questioning history, by responding to the pressures of the past, and by defying the boundaries of the chronological order of history. In *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (1978), Lyotard notes,

The postmodern would be that which, in the modern, puts forward the unrepresentable in presentation itself, that which denies itself the solace of good forms, the consensus of taste which would make it possible to share collectively the nostalgia of the unattainable; that which searches for new presentations, not in order to enjoy them but in order to impart a stronger sense of the unrepresentable. (81)

Subversive in form and anarchic in its cultural spirit, as Ihab Hassan contended,<sup>3</sup> Postmodernism insists on its own excess in order to break the spell of the past and to reach the “unrepresentable”; this means, Lyotard suggests, new language combinations and a new structure of narratives that could solve the inconsistencies of many of the previous social and literary traditions. A clarification that requires emphasis here is that

Postmodernism struggles mainly against the ideology of Modernism whose incongruities it has always interrogated.

For many observers, Modernism is a trend of fragmentation and alienation because of its conventional expectations in regard to the unity and coherence of plot and character. At the same time, critics have recognized that the fundamental principle on which Postmodernism is constructed is the Modernist dutiful confidence in organic forms, by means of which formal conventions are shattered as the expression of disintegrated traditional values. Embracing a straightforward Postmodernist stance, Donald Barthelme said and repeated in "See the Moon?" (1964), "Fragments are the only form I trust" (31). A few decades back, Modernist writers like Vladimir Nabokov or James Joyce followed the same organic tendency and made a centripetal effort to resort to the aesthetics of fragmentation and discontinuity in the benefit of the imaginative creation, while also attempting to disintegrate the self and the experience of their characters so that a new ethical harmony and a unified artifact could burst forth. Yet, if Modernists have always seemed to carry a resolute conviction that imagination can lead aesthetic coherence into a vital psychological, moral, and political foundation capable of making life possible, Postmodernist writers find the best coherence in blending the works of the imagination with a total immersion into the social life. We can concede, therefore, that both Modernism and Postmodernism view the world and its awful reality as inescapable, but whereas Modernists strived endlessly to escape from it, Postmodernists have become ever more involved in it. This is the brittle contradiction between one and the other, but also the reason why, today, we are not authenticating a Late Modernism, but rather a Post-Modernism (Jameson 354).

In what concerns critical theorists' interpretation of the postmodern turn, the connection between Modernism and Postmodernism lies on even more hardened premises. Detecting the Modernist onerous sympathy for the protopolitical, Utopian, and anti-middle class stances and passions, many of the contemporary critics pursued Fredric Jameson's theory in attempting to rearticulate the repudiation of the progressive Modernist force in terms of an essentially positive impact that the modern still carries on the postmodern. For, recognizing the failure of language to fully ever communicate meaning or to work in the service of a reactionary cultural politics (a failure that once brought along a burdensome harangue against both of them for abandoning the social world in favor of a narcissistic interest in language), both the Modernist and the Postmodernist almost always relapse into opposing inveterate moralities such as the Victorian taboos and social life, the Modernist separation of culture from politics, the alienated and reified commodification of art, and the like. Almost unwittingly, Fredric Jameson remarks, Modernism has left behind a populist impulse that Postmodernism now uses to turn its face from culture to politics, and from politics back to culture. In this respect, Don DeLillo's *Libra* (1988) or John Barth's *Giles Goat-Boy* (1966) are perfect examples of how the language machine creates and recreates the political, the cultural, and the ironic of the present times. With such works, we can certify that, from the metaphysical mystery and the abysmal exploration of the traditional art, to the elitism and the abstraction of Modernism, and eventually to the mystical positivism of Postmodernity, literature has painstakingly learned its lesson, and it now introduces us into a world that calls into question its cultural and political usefulness and that can be seen "as the promise of the return and the reinvention, the triumphant reappearance, of

some new high modernism endowed with all its older power and with fresh life”  
(Jameson 355).

Contrary to Hassan’s argument that today’s literary practices aspire to silence, and that “whatever is truly new in literature evades the social, historical, and aesthetic criteria that gave identity to the avant-garde in other periods” (3), much of Postmodern fiction works more and more responsibly towards an exploration of the political of public art, towards a progressive line of thought, and towards an overt commitment to the values of a revolutionary aesthetic. Such efforts are noticeable, for instance, in Toni Morrison’s *Beloved* (1987), a novel that investigates race issues by consciously bringing together black and white cultures, or in a novel such as Virginia Woolf’s *Orlando* (1928), which explores gender transgression as a result of both social practices and bio-technology. Furthermore, we can name works such as DeLillo’s *Cosmopolis* (2003), which examines the impact of the political and the economic on individuals and on the ways they construct their identity, or Arundhati Roy’s *The God of Small Things* (1997), which is a journey through social and political realities in India. These are novels that exemplify primarily the ethical necessity on the part of their authors to maintain an aesthetic, a critical, and also a political stance. Moreover, whatever stylistic approach their fiction takes, these writers create literature that intertwines the workings of history with the workings of mythology, so that the contemporary malaise of the artist can reach new forms and new interpretations.

As suggested above, the journey into the house of history is an essentially Postmodernist theme, and it is a persistent return in time that contemporary writers use in order to bridge different linguistic and literary traditions, to experiment with social

realism, to question narratives from the past, and above all, to retell history while keeping a close eye on the ways our past builds both our own experience and today's ideologies. As Gayatri Spivak notes in her "Translator's Preface" to Mahasweta Devi's *Imaginary Maps* (1995), such writers deal with the problem of ethics (257), and make an alternate history that doesn't give one identity as such, but a whole field of representations within which "something like *identity* can be represented as basis for agency" (26). What Postmodernism largely emphasizes through its insistence and its re-workings therefore, are mainly questions of epistemology, as I intend to argue with Don DeLillo's *White Noise* (1984) and A. L. Kennedy's *So I Am Glad* (2001). Similarly, I will attempt to show that what Postmodernism strives to achieve is a combination of formal innovation with shifts in tone and context, meant to create a type of fiction that may never again be told as though it is the only one, but that will always be read anew.

In the newly developed structures of Postmodernism, one may recognize that its plunge into realism and its battle for the right to individuality is neither an entirely accurate nor an utterly innovative preoccupation. Keeping in mind the notorious Postmodernist appetite for interwoven modes and discourses, critics such as Ayn Rand, Diane Elam, and Fredric Jameson, alongside with proponents of magical realism such as Robert Scholes and Jorge Luis Borges, have constantly delved into the relationships between the present and the archaic or the allegorical and the real, and confirmed the solid relationship between Postmodernist art and romance, a magical form that Postmodernists seem to nurture more than any other literary variety. Defined by M. H. Abrams as an aesthetic term that uses and abuses conventional categories of genre (136), romance carries along a generic uncertainty regarding form or conventions, and

transcends as a magical narrative that, together with the Postmodernist contamination with historical discourse, represents a way of persistently interrogating history. As Elam notes, “the relationship between Postmodern and romance becomes a way in which to rethink narrative and its relationship to the legitimation of historical knowledge. Both attempt to be flagrantly anachronistic, upsetting our ability to recognize the past as past, challenging the way we ‘know’ history” (14).

Regarded by Northrop Frye as a utopian fantasy, a wish fulfillment, or as a nostalgia for a lost Eden, romance signals the perpetual return to history and persists as a mode unbound to the conventions of any given age. In addition, because they both function as literary discourses meant to revolutionize reality and to break down practices and forms, neither romance nor Postmodernist art can exist outside historical realities. However, in its revolutionary form and in its overwhelming sense of intellectual freedom and depth, the romance, perpetuated until the nineteenth century by the great rebels of Romanticism such as Coleridge, Keats, and Blake, has suffered from its own mysticism, and thus, its moral expression failed to be recognized and identified properly. It became the task of Modernism and, more recently, Postmodernism to strip the beauty of romance of its random and highly mystified aspect, and to question the epistemology of art, attempting to find its function in the human life. Accordingly, through novels such as *So I Am Glad* and *White Noise*, the reader no longer espouses art as a dark mystery, but rather, as Rand notes, as a tool that reveals the troubles of our social, political, and philosophical existence, and as a working of social energy, taking part in the creation of life itself.

Romance, Jameson claims, depends on historical realities because its main function as a literary mode of discourse is to revolutionize reality and to dispel the conventions of a particular age:

A history of romance as a mode becomes possible, in other words, when we project it as a history of the various codes, which in the increasingly secularized and rational world that emerges from the collapse of feudalism, are called upon to assume the literary function of those older codes which have now become so many dead languages. Or, to put it the other way round, the fate of romance as a form is dependent on the availability of elements more acceptable to the reader than those older magical categories for which some adequate substitute must be invented.

(142-3)

Embracing the reactionary coat of romance and its denunciation of the prosaic capitalism that cuts off any respect for man, Jameson argues that by reviving the laws of romance writers today can become agents of a true avant-garde literature and can generate knowledge as part of a social project (160).

The organic structure of Postmodernist art always starts from an imitation of life and its implications, reflecting the struggle of contemporary individuals for their right to freedom and for their need of a new dimension in which new meanings and new representations perpetually flourish. In *Living by Fiction* (1982), Annie Dillard asserts, “Odd voices and viewpoints deepen our involvement in the teller’s tale. They make the deep parts shallow and the shallow parts deep and thus bring to the work an interesting and powerful set of tensions, like the Cubist intersecting planes” (43). Thus, the crossing

planes and the mixed forms of the Postmodernist fiction that Dillard praises in the above lines refer to that plurality of worlds and multiplicity of discourses that Postmodernists embrace, sometimes diverging towards a mutual incompatibility and seeming to bring nothing but trouble to our rarefied comprehension and simple faith in literary interpretation. Yet, most of the critics today, Lyotard and Jameson primarily, believe that it is this contradiction of form and content that explain the world better and that show the indefinite possibilities of art, claiming that in their excess and persistence, Postmodernist forms interrogate the notions of temporality and art in order to lead us into a rethinking of history and culture and into a redefinition of our identity.

Thus, the same organic structure governs the postmodern condition itself, a condition that strives, under the principle of indeterminacy and the logic of difference, not towards silence or exhaustion, as Hassan argues, but towards newer presentations. The Postmodernist is stripped of the nihilistic view on life, and his or her literature, however fragmented, is not disruption and outrage, but a search for new meanings and understandings; moreover, the experience it provides is no longer private and elitist like the Modernist one, but deeply embedded in history and society:

We know perfectly well that the power of the prince is largely a collective invention, the symbolic embodiment of the desire, pleasure, and violence of thousands of subjects, the instrumental expression of complex networks of dependency and fear, the agent rather than the maker of the social will. Yet we can scarcely write of prince and poet without accepting the fiction that power emanates from him and that society draws upon this power.

(Greenblatt 498)



Writing, Greenblatt tells us, can only be a form of social contingency that reflects cultural codes and modifies them, and in this respect, Postmodernism seems to have acknowledged its task (451): its writing will never escape history because it now consciously depends on community forces and social practices. When we read *So I Am Glad* or *White Noise*, it becomes clear that the author's mission is to take into account the social, political, and sexual circumstances that shape fiction, and that the reader must grasp the meaning of his or her art. For the author, Borges says, is engaged all the time:

The problem for the writer is not to represent his own time. This he cannot help but do. The problem is to be like the apostle, all things to all men. To reach beyond reality, to truth, beyond the immediate and contemporary, to those aspects of the real which will endure and recur. (*Borges on Writing* 15)

Thus, by generating literary work as a dynamic outcome of the relationship between them and society, authors are not *dead*, as we sometimes tend to misread Barthes,<sup>4</sup> but rather, to use Derridean terms, historical traces. It could very well be that “*who speaks* is not *who writes*, and *who writes* is not *who is*,” as Barthes paraphrased Lacan (111 ), but the unseen allegation here is that the text an author leaves behind is part of a collection of many voices and codes, and as author, he does become “a paper being,” but he always transcends time as a model for other writers:

It would seem that the author's name, unlike other proper names, does not pass from the interior of a discourse to the real and exterior individual who produced it; instead, the name seems always to be present, marking off the edges of the text, revealing, or at least characterizing, its mode of

discourse. The author's name manifests the appearance of a certain discursive set and indicates the status of this discourse within a society and a culture. It has no legal status, nor is it located in the fiction of the work; rather, it is located in the break that founds a certain discursive construct and its very particular mode of being. As a result, we could say that in a civilization like our own there is a certain number of discourses that are endowed with the 'author-function,' while others are deprived of it .... The author-function is therefore characteristic of the mode of existence, circulation, and functioning of certain discourses within a society.

(Foucault 179)

The author cannot stand alone and hence, he defines the identity of his work both on the level of discourse, determining its function as a social tool, and also through his own agency, through free will, and according to Julia Kristeva, through *jouissance*. The notion of metafiction springs out from this very affirmation: although *So I Am Glad* emphasizes this more than *White Noise*, both novels probe the fundamental problem of narrative, trying to answer the question of how discourse reaches expression in the postmodern world and how exactly it can become literature with an unprecedented intensity. In a language weighted with referents, DeLillo's and Kennedy's works epitomize fiction that talks about art and thus reiterate both the Modernist and the Postmodernist attention to the relationship between a tale and its teller.

The text of *So I Am Glad* and the one of *White Noise* become a weaving of codes, breaking down into images of languages and connected to one another and to the author via the dialogic relationship they have. Moreover, the discourse in both of them seems to

shatter its identity, but as the author and his or her language always reappear at its center, the levels of creation intersect, and in the end, the work gains unity. The problem of language needs to be addressed here as well, because, for decades now, it has inspired many acrimonious debates, emerging as a vulnerable matter both for fiction writers and for critics. Moving away from the formalist perspective of sociolinguists such as Jakobson and Todorov – as influenced by Saussure – who view language as a self-referential and self-sufficient tool for formulating meaning, Postmodernists, Kennedy and DeLillo among them, deal with the unbridgeable gap between language and reality. Contending that reality is not verbal, and moreover, that language cuts man off from authentic experience because of its evasion and artificiality, writers and critics such as Borges and Jameson concede that it is fiction that bridges words and reality, and especially, to quote Scholes, that fiction moves more towards reality than away from it (11). Regarding writing as a responsibility and as a continuous regaining of vocation with every book they finish, today's authors become more and more involved in exploring the elements necessary to the composition of their work, such as dedication, sacrifice, and skill. Thus, as in a Romantic manifesto, DeLillo and Kennedy create fiction in an attempt to resurrect Postmodernism from a painful metaphysical downfall and reclaim, in the end, the glory of writing by forgetting themselves and completing the work of art.

The structural analysis that pertains to fictional creations applies in the Postmodern era to all the historical individuals who struggle with the concepts of consciousness and production, and who resort to a multitude of discourses in order to create cultural meanings. We live, as Lyotard contended, in a crisis of narratives, with an identity for which every conceptual system has lost its authority, and for which the

interpretations of meaning rely no longer on totality, but plurality. Specifically, Lyotard claims, “Postmodern knowledge is not simply a tool of the authority; it refines our sensitivity to differences and reinforces our ability to tolerate the incommensurable. Its principle is not the expert’s homology, but the inventor’s paralogy” (xxv). Refusing to rely solely on grand narratives dictated by the past, the postmodern searches for a wider array of ideologies that could supply its epistemological quest and construction of identity through the act of *performativity*, and not through a system of technocratic power.

As I will show especially in the analysis of *White Noise*, the grand narratives of the past, Enlightenment, religion, Marxism, imperialism, technology, and the like, are systems that can no longer account for our possibility to grasp knowledge and formulate meaning. The characters in both novels are symbols of today’s individuals who live in a crisis of metaphysical doubt because they are at the intersection of many narratives, feeling compelled to make choices on their own and needing their right to individuality and social energy to bolster their existence. Their *savoir*, as Lyotard says, is never reduced to science or learning but determined by a performative principle according to which they question, validate, or negate the premises of their existence, and their *pouvoir* is always legitimized and regulated by social energy (11). Faced with this new metaphysical order, the writers who deal with the condition of confused postmodern characters must find the language that could take them out of the massive stillness of contemporary society and become, as Arundhati Roy says, their “midwife for understanding” (qtd. in Kumar xx).

Moreover, to respond to the postmodern quest for coherence and unity, today's writers turn their face to history in an attempt to learn from it, and as specialists in narrative integrity, they enrich literary history with a mature and crafted treatment of genre theory. Both in Kennedy's and in DeLillo's works, this concern surfaces through the authors' deliberate efforts to make theory permeate our thinking: *So I Am Glad* plays with Baudrillard's concepts of hyperreality and simulacrum, and leans more and more towards the territory of magic realism; *White Noise*, on the other hand, rests on the eloquent notions of discourse and storytelling, and, like *So I Am Glad*, takes the concept of simulacrum to its limit. Both novels are bold enterprises into magic and the metaphor, but they never cease to pulse with reality and to carry a conscious moral purpose, emerging as vehicles both for our consciousness and for narrative imperatives.

This paper will address the connection between present and past, between literary genre theory and social and political theory, and finally, between individual and society. In dealing with this set of issues, one of the notions that I will approach and discuss more than others perhaps is the postmodern nostalgia for the past on which both Kennedy and DeLillo focus, however different their methodologies might be. I mention their divergent methodologies here because, on the one hand, Kennedy's *So I Am Glad* is a wild and romantic book, showing interest mainly in art and attempting to revolutionize modern fiction in the tradition of John Fowles, Jorge Luis Borges, or John Barth. *White Noise*, on the other hand, is focused on life more than art – paradoxically if one thinks of DeLillo's interest in narrative symmetries and parallel devices – and attempts to portray and criticize mainly the echoes of the many ideologies that govern postmodern society. However discordant Kennedy's and DeLillo's approaches may seem, their discourses

intersect both through the critique they bring against contemporary culture and through the inner architecture of the novels, revealing thus the painstaking nostalgia for past forms and ideologies existing in the postmodern condition. As we shall see in the next chapters, their work rests extensively on the concept of modern fabulation or magic realism, a flourishing literary mode that they uphold through a deferential revival of romance – the literary form that maps the contemporary literary tradition most appropriately – and also on the notions of narrative and metafiction.

As stated in the previous paragraphs, Postmodernist literature is deeply immersed in a universe troubled by disruptions: historiography, identity, realism, tradition, and representation. Thus, in its fundamental endeavor to achieve the supreme fulfillment of art, Postmodernism has become highly experimental in form and utterly stern in its ethics, and in its articulation of a transcendent literary tradition, it has become the midwife of fiction from Ancient Greece to the modern era. My aim in the following pages is to show the relationship that Postmodernism shares with magic realism, storytelling, and romance in A. L. Kennedy's *So I Am Glad* and in Don DeLillo's *White Noise*. In particular, I will attempt to show that one of the concerns of contemporary fiction writers is to reveal and undo the persistent nostalgia for the past, described by Lyotard in terms of lost narratives, by creating and perpetuating fiction that remembers the past and its history. This process of bringing back the dead, I will argue, always works in antagonistic ways: on the one hand, it is meant to teach us how to learn and find inspiration in the mythic and the archetypal, always returning to them for guidance and fulfillment; on the other hand, it points to the imperious necessity to forget the past by

remembering it and by insisting on it, essentially because the past is a blend of both treasures and bad promises that we need to explore before engaging in reality.

One of the aspirations of Postmodernism is to provide the reader with spiritual freedom, a liberation that can only come, we shall see both in *So I Am Glad* and in *White Noise*, with the acceptance of a universe in which no one is watching and keeping score. And therein lies another truth: dealing with the unfathomable mystery of history and helping us assume place in the human family, Postmodernist literature plans to disguise both the hero and the villain in the story so that, with a touch of magic, it can break the spell and restore us to reality. As in most romances where the hero is called upon to struggle with the villain or demon, both in *White Noise* and in *So I am Glad*, the duality good - evil is rendered in the relationship that the protagonists of both novels impart with their visitors from the past. My contention in this case is that, under this conceptual opposition bolstered both by romance and by Postmodernism, other types of attributes such as light and darkness, high and low, trespasser and trespassed become apparent, and that the archetypal figures that proliferate postmodern fiction proliferate postmodern society equally. Their role in *White Noise* and *So I Am Glad* is not to cancel our incredulity towards their story, but to restore us to ourselves through their storytelling, and to teach us how to be mature through their magic.

To conclude, one of my primary attempts in working with these two novels is to illustrate the close connection among allegory, realism, and fiction by proving that art and life are deliberately confused for an ethical purpose. Also, I will show that romance is resuscitated and it is made to represent a return to story for renewed vigor, and that only blended into the present, can it be both sensational and meaningful. Lastly, the

following chapters will insist on the idea that art can still endure, so that like Borges, one can continue saying,

*Time is the substance I am made of. Time is a river which sweeps me along, but I am the river; it is a tiger which destroys me, but I am the tiger; it is a fire which consumes me, but I am the fire. The world, alas, is real; I, alas, am Borges. (Labyrinths)*



Notes:

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<sup>1</sup> Thomas Pynchon's *Gravity's Rainbow* (1965), Umberto Eco's *The Name of the Rose* (1980), Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* (1981), Chris Abani's *Graceland* (2005), or Toni Morrison's *Beloved* (1986) are but a few Postmodernist novels worth mentioning here.

<sup>2</sup> *jouissance* is the French for pleasure and is used by Julia Kristeva in her critical work to denote the dynamic situation of the writing subject and his language. In "The Ethics of Linguistics," she attempts to rescue the possibilities and innovations of linguistics from the danger of being solidified and concealed into a science, and also to emphasize the sublimating potential of literature. Like Bakhtin, Jakobson, and Lacan, Kristeva believes that the subject defines its identity on the level of discourse, and that the stability and the order of language arise from the successful attempt of the poet to recreate a code that he previously fragmented. Through his own agency, through free will, and *jouissance*, the poet reaches the unrepresentable and frees language from systematizations and scientific constraints: "The poet is put to death because he wants to turn rhythm into a dominant element; because he wants to make language perceive what it doesn't want to say, provide it with its matter independently of the sign, and free it from denotation." Fiction, in Kristeva's view, is an indispensable way to keep the conscious open, and the poet's agency bridges the theoretical discourse with language and meaning. Also, because the human subject is lost in the scientific method of rationalism, it is time for him to realize that truth can only be found in poetic language. See "The Ethics of Linguistics."

<sup>3</sup> See *The Postmodern Turn*. Ihab Hassan argues that Postmodernism shows an increasing sense of disruption and its governing principle is indeterminacy, making it more and more difficult for us to know what response is adequate to reality. Literature on its part turns against itself, and aspires to silence, exhaustion, evasion, and absence, leaving us “with the uneasy intimation of outrage and apocalypse.” Thus, Hassan’s longing for an avant-garde literature does not find consolation in the Postmodernist fiction, since, he argues, contemporary literature bears no ethical purpose and does not transcend politico-aesthetic debates.

<sup>4</sup> Ronald Barthes’s critical principles in his “Death of the Author” attack the social and political aspects of authorship. His work is centered on the idea that the text holds complete primacy over the signifying system and his contention that “it is language which speaks, not the author” is a presence in many other critics such as Derrida or Foucault, although no one has formulated it with so much obstinacy and straightforwardness: “as soon as a fact is narrated ... the voice loses its origin, the author enters into his own death, writing begins” (Barthes 142). However, in proclaiming that the author is dead, Barthes only intends to free the text for the sake of the reader. The interpreter is a locus reserved for the reader and only he can claim authority over a text once it is written. Moreover, the author’s role is reduced to that of a copyist who only collages a text and then disappears. The death of the author is reflected in the birth of the reader through the body that dies (Foucault defines them better as individual characteristics) to make possible the inscription of the body and the intellect of the reader to whom the hermeneutic process belongs entirely, and also to show that writing is not an individual act, but the product of the collective will.

## Chapter 2

The Muses, the Holy Ghost, and the Subliminal Unconscious.

The Magical Narrative in A. L. Kennedy's *So I Am Glad*

*Thou wast not born for death, immortal Bird!  
No hungry generations tread thee down;  
The voice I hear this passing night was heard  
In ancient days by emperor and clown:  
Perhaps the self-same song that found a path  
Through the sad heart of Ruth, when, sick for home,  
She stood in tears amid the alien corn.*

John Keats, *Ode to a Nightingale*

*Jennifer,*

*Y a-t'il sur toy un atome de chair, qui ne soit coupable de ma  
mort? Parce que je t'aime trop. Je me meurs depuis que je vous ay  
veuë, je brusle, je tremble, mon poux est dérégulé; c'est donc la  
fièvre! Hélas! C'est ne l'est point. C'est la Mort. C'est l'amour.  
Brusler d'amour, cette flemme si douce, personne, n'en est jamais  
mort.<sup>1</sup>*

Cyrano in *So I Am Glad*

Few contemporary writers have worked more assiduously and more passionately than A. L. Kennedy in creating a postmodern romance in which love and the right to individuality remain the central focus. In all her novels, from *So I Am Glad* (1995) to *Paradise* (2004), and in all her short-story collections, from *Night Geometry and the Garscadden Trains* (1990) to *Inedible Acts* (2002), Kennedy never ceases to investigate love, experience, and identity in all their aspects, sometimes placing them against the oppressive reality of the contemporary world, and other times liberating them from the conventional views on reality of present-day society. Because of her visionary work and wide spectrum of interpretations, Kennedy has emerged as one of the most prolific and energetic writers that Scotland has produced so far. Constantly acclaimed by readers and by critics because of her original and crafted writing style, Kennedy introduces the reader to a universe of controversial literary themes and intricate narrative techniques.

With the composition of love and the infinite possibilities of fiction at its center, Kennedy's literary universe embraces eclectic themes, most of them evolving around heroes that live in an austere world of granite realism, forced to confront both their own torments and the multiple adversaries of social life. Their story is told in a blunt but precise language that creates a fluid context of intertwined lies and truths, symbols and facts. Summarizing Kennedy's work, *The Dictionary of Literary Biography* writes,

Depression, loneliness, paranoia, prostitution, child abuse, infidelity, wife beating, sadism, sexual fetishism, and mental breakdown are constant themes throughout Kennedy's published fiction and nonfiction.

Furthermore, the narrative voice often undercuts the intense suffering that Kennedy describes with odd flashes of humor and irony. (Moseley)

What makes Kennedy a Postmodernist writer is, primarily, the way she examines reality in order to think about things differently and make them what they are not. Thus, her work is an extensive catalogue of concerns about social horrors such as the injuries of poverty, the abuse of children, the mire of pollution, and the like. Moreover, if inside this topography of social and personal ostracism her concerns are equaled by “odd flashes of humor and irony,” then Kennedy, like other Postmodernist writers such as Don DeLillo and Donald Barthelme, generates a type of fiction that is, above all, a social mirror. In her bizarre but entirely humane fashion, the author often detaches herself through an exquisite use of the narrative voice to achieve both a new form of art and a refined critique of the contemporary way of life.

In this respect, *So I Am Glad* is one of her finest examples, because here, Kennedy mixes her acute sense of realism with a strong belief in the wonderful works of one’s imagination in order to speak mainly about love and writing in a new and stimulating context. In a lecture delivered at the Edinburgh Book Festival in 2003, Kennedy said,

I take monstrous delight in making things up, in trying to reach beyond the reach: to the touch of a certain sunset over a certain view and the sound of geese going somewhere that I can’t be. Words are what I have to carry all my wants and pleasures with me, to give them to other people, because that’s how words grow; two heads being larger than one. (“On Being a Writer”)

Thus, *So I Am Glad* becomes both the expression of her literary beliefs, through what she defines as a solitary vice and a blessing, and an intricate articulation of the relationship between the real and the unreal as negotiated by language itself. The ultimate goal of the

novel is to strengthen the belief that anything is possible within the confines of a story, and that fiction means, first of all, crafting a narrative that provides an entirely credible space for its characters by making practical use of the mixture of realism and fantasy as a new way of responding to the enigmas of reality.

*So I Am Glad* is a magical narrative that encourages us to delve into the expansion of the possible into the impossible and to reach beyond the limits of the knowable. As I will discuss in the next paragraphs, the novel is, at the same time, a form of experience that fuses the present and the past for didactic purposes. Instead of dwelling solely on the principle of fantasy for the sake of its imaginative possibilities, or on art for art's sake only, the novel is a bond between past and present, between the social and the traditional, and between art and life. Lastly, it is a hypnotizing attempt to show that in the ordinary and the uncertain that pervade the postmodern condition, there is still room for scenes of the extraordinary and for hopes of a social order outside the emerging capitalism.

Following the rich context in which her fiction is set and the intertextuality that pervades *So I Am Glad*, two of Kennedy's main concerns are the careful examination of the much-derided nostalgia for the past that characterizes postmodern culture and the extent to which human beings are drawn to the idea of remoteness and to the sense of timelessness. Generally defined by critics such as Jean Baudrillard and Terry Eagleton as an alienated and hysterical pursuit through which our knowledge becomes artificially constructed and inside which meanings persistently dissipate and lose value, the nostalgia in *So I Am Glad* functions as an example of instructive hyperreality, wherein the present can only be redeemed through the past, and whereby we reinvent ourselves as individuals and, in Kennedy's case, as writers:

I want to reverse or at least to arrest the passage of time. I am standing in the face of nature which is as pointless as trying to pin back a waterfall. Silly and maybe even harmful. But I want to live again in minutes and hours which are gone and to forego my present because it is less satisfactory. In writing, I can do this, but very reasonably here is where I also discover the unavoidable price. At the end of a page, a chapter, a day of work, I have to stop. I have to come back. Just when I'm tired, when I've allowed myself a certain sensitivity to events, I have to come back and leave everything behind. (*So I Am Glad* 183)

Keeping her lack of understanding “in the present tense” (3), the narrator of *So I Am Glad* is a postmodern subject who plunges into the mire of experience and who exists in order to mediate through her language the world of living beings with the world of fiction. The novel introduces M. Jennifer Wilson, with M. standing for Mercy, a prisoner strained in the Age of Stupid Lies and a postmodern individual emptied of all the “tireless moles” inside that could exercise her feelings. Caught up in a crisis of artistic and personal apathy, she is a narrator who attempts to unfold her own catalogue of suffering and degradation. Like many other characters in Kennedy’s fiction (Nathan Staples in *Everything You Need* or Hannah in *Paradise*, for instance), Jennifer is a de-socialized narrator brawling with metaphysical complexity and searching for a new narrative and a new representation of being and love that could boost her exuberance for life and inspiration for art.

Apparently detached due to the malaise of the quotidian and sickened by the political institutions in Scotland, Jennifer gradually evolves toward a rediscovery of

herself and a revival of love through the bridge she creates between herself and the past. Accordingly, her jaded and miserable life becomes brutally disrupted by a glowing-in-the-dark figure, Martin, who ends up living in her rooming house, and who, later on, reveals himself to be Savinien Cyrano de Bergerac, the seventeenth-century lover, writer, and duelist. Building on the postmodern passion for the mythical and the mimetic, Kennedy drops him carelessly into late twentieth-century Scotland and makes obvious his own malady and his own denunciation of the baleful present times by portraying him as a drug addict who wanders aimlessly the streets of Glasgow. Here is how Jennifer tries to discover the truth about him:

I distributed my weight across the faultlessly engineered springs and imagined Martin with amnesia caused by accidents, chemicals, radiation, experimental gas. I imagined Martin as an experimenter, as an experiment, as an accident that happened on his way here, a random misfortune with delayed effects. I imagined Martin afraid of the dark and of sleeping. I thought of Martin struck by lightning, as an illusionist, a circus performer, a natural phenomenon. (25)

To a certain extent, the novel makes conscious use of Baudrillard's concepts of simulacrum and hyperreality, because it creates a new dimension that breaks down the boundaries between the real and the unreal, making the virtual and the factual unite. Through this daring infringement of past and present images, Jennifer's conceptual system validates Lacan and Baudrillard's shared belief that the *real* is not a *sensus communis*, a knowable collective condition pertaining to the social order, but an autonomous entity belonging to an indescribable locus or a discursive product exiled



from our consciousness. What we essentially perceive as *real* – and here Kennedy’s craft is extremely visible – is a concept pertaining to the symbolic order, to use Lacan’s terms. *Cyrano de Bergerac* is an artifice that both Kennedy and Jennifer use in order to create a new dimension, one that avoids a static and exclusive vision of reality and that untangles reality by trying to discover what is mysterious in life, in writing, in love, albeit in an allegorical and sporadically absurd mode of representation.

Distinguishing between the real, the symbolic, and the imaginary in Lacan’s theory, Baudrillard argues that reality has become prey to a virtual world induced by natural predators such as illusion, dreams, madness, drugs, artifice, and the like, which have led to the great instability of meanings today. In this newly developed context, language itself has become void of meaning because it is nothing else but an impecunious system of signs and empty images, whose proliferation in the technological world and in the neo-imperialist culture entails the “death of the real”:

The world is the way it is. Once transcendence is gone, things are nothing but what they are and, as they are, they are unbearable. They have lost every illusion and have become immediately and entirely real, shadowless, without commentary. At the same time this unsurpassable reality does not exist anymore. It has no reason to exist for it cannot be exchanged for anything. It has no exchange value. (Baudrillard 145)

Thus dominated by simulations, objects, and discourses that lack origin or referent, our contemporary mass culture has become indifferent and lethargic, and now inhabits a weightless and artificial system where representation can only mark the absence and the nonexistence of objects. In his theory, Baudrillard decries the condition of the

postmodern and claims that when truth and its appearance are lost, reality becomes entangled into an endless banality, where no redemption is possible. This is the distinction that Kennedy makes as well, as the book aims to oppose Jennifer to the surrounding world, a world that is governed by an abiding alienation and loaded with self-inflicted social cripples.

Despite Baudrillard's argument, however, *So I Am Glad* does not aim to doom the entire civilization to a fall into a virtual system of representation that puts an end to reality. For, whereas Baudrillard excoriates the postmodern world for killing the real and the symbolic together, Kennedy argues that in today's dehistoricized and styleless postmodernism, there is still room for revised art forms to recreate and hold on to an ethical code. Thus, Jennifer becomes a creator of meaning by responding to the world's confusion, and by using historical heritage, she emerges as the midwife for our understanding of meaning. The polarity between truth and lie, and fiction and reality in *So I Am Glad* finds the best explanation not in the perpetuation of simulated humble practices but, instead, in the creation of a new representation of life. Thus, to quote one of Alasdair Gray's heroes, Kennedy can reasonably claim, "my details is fiction, only my meaning is true" ("Prometheus" 367). Consequently, Jennifer's sense of the *real* is her own individual articulation of what is *real*, and she works it through the dimension of her own psyche: "My mind is open. We all have it in us to be an opium for every conceivable mass" (5). Jennifer needs the fantasy and she uses it to sort out the past as a sorting out of life itself, to ward off denial, and to accept the great risks of her imagination. Thus, we can concede that her journey into the hyperbolic is, in fact, a sortie into a deeper *real*.

Despite the rhetoric against the annihilation of reality and illusion together coming from social critics such as Baudrillard, Žižek, and Eagleton, Jennifer's encounter with Cyrano as a bond with the past is a fundamentally positive one. He does not invade and disrupt Jennifer's universe in order to aggravate her orgy of meaning; on the contrary, he transgresses time and space and becomes a dysfunction in a presumably ordered system in order to boost Jennifer's will to freedom and inspiration. For this to happen, he seduces her on two levels, one artistic and the other personal, and represents, as Walter Benjamin would say, a Messianic Event in her Dialectic at a standstill. Without his transgression, Jennifer could never defy her own social and artistic stasis, and so the reader can acknowledge that Savinien, however hypnotic and artificial, emerges as a positive revolutionary event.

Finally, Jennifer's Other, her voice at work, and her alibi, Savinien has to disappear in the end, because he functions only as an exnomination. In *Mythologies and Other Essays*, Roland Barthes argues that myths arrest history and give it only the appearance of an unchanging nature. Hence, using the abstraction of Barthes's analysis, one can argue that Savinien materializes so that Jennifer can undergo stages of conflict and be tested by crisis, and subsequently, that he vanishes so that she can affirm sovereignty over her own existence. In this sense, the beginning sentence of the novel, marking the point when Jennifer is unable to construct her own story of enlightenment, suggests complete abandon and disillusion: "I don't understand things sometimes. I always end up asking for answers I can't have" (3). Yet, the closing sentence reveals defiant optimism, invoking possibility rather than hopelessness: "So there's no one here but me and you and this. I will miss this and I will miss Savinien and I will be glad"

(276). Resembling other final sentences in Kennedy's work (e.g. "I don't know what to do" in the non-fiction book *On Bullfighting*, or "He didn't know what should happen after that" in a short story in *Inedible Acts*), these concluding statements validate the postmodern devotion to open forms as a way of differing the creation of meaning. Consequently, they substantiate both the hypothesis that postmodern fiction is still in the making and the need to reconsider the confines of temporality and the responsibility for one's identity.

Through Savinien, the spell of the growing inertia in her social, personal, and artistic being is broken, and finally, she is restored to an actual context, stripped of paralytic anguish and chaos. Therefore, Jennifer uses fantasy in order to arrive gloriously at the stage where she can confront reality in its full symbolism and become an active part of it. Lacan calls this process "traversing the fantasy," and Kennedy offers us the perfect interpretation for it: once Jennifer fully identifies with the fantasy that structures her excess, she returns to reality, because now she can perceive the difference between herself and an archetypal Other and can assume her place in the world. To reinforce this process, it is worth mentioning here Shelling's *Treatise on Human Freedom*, which claims that the principle of existence relies on the very insistence upon the thing we want to forsake: "In order to account for this paradox [remembering the past in order to control it], we should bear in mind that the opposite of *existence* is not *nonexistence*, but *insistence*; that which does not *exist*, continues to *insist*, striving towards *existence*" (qtd. in Žižek 22). Indeed, as we witness during Jennifer's transgression, the fantasy is not a pacifying and disarming escape, but an insisting and disturbing scandal, crucial in shattering her consciousness, stirring her emotions, and redeeming her art. No longer able

to see herself in her own language, worn by her loss of visionary work, and haunted by an erratic past, Jennifer chooses Savinien as a different type of history and a different type of language through which she can learn how writing, living, and loving can soak up her loneliness and pain.

Randomly projected into this unbroken illusion that she refuses to abandon, Jennifer is ultimately concerned with her own being and struggles to understand her existence through the medium of the Other. Thus she is a victim of seduction and desire, and becomes part of a sharp and effective description of the postmodern system of signs. Baudrillard argues:

The flight from one signifier to another is no more than the surface reality of a desire, which is insatiable because it is found on a lack. And this desire, which can never be satisfied, signifies itself locally in a succession of objects and needs .... Pleasure ... appears as the individual rationalization of a process whose objectives lie elsewhere.... (163)

Addicted to an orgy of representation, Jennifer is absorbed by Savinien's image, falls in love with him, loses him, and in the end, is both glad for having known him and sad for losing him and the treasure of his world. Like Jack in DeLillo's *White Noise*, she is a victim in the hands of a storyteller who seduces her with his linguistic and philosophical games. In both cases, the authors attempt to show that the experience of postmodern individuals finds ultimate fulfillment in their learning how to think in contradictions by assembling and disassembling history, and by looking for a new voice that can both harmonize and contradict theirs. In this respect, the experience in *So I Am Glad* and *White Noise* becomes visible through the binary opposition between the protagonists and

the agents from the past, launched in both novels as collectors of knowledge and human interpreters of meanings. Savinien in *So I Am Glad* and Murray in *White Noise* are appearances notwithstanding, but they turn out to be supernatural beings capable of subverting the laws by which we live and the processes by which we comprehend the world.

In the process of illustrating the hybridity between present and past, and in the attempt to create a deeper reality by surpassing conventional views and techniques of representation, Kennedy assimilates not only the Poststructuralist interpretations of the system of objects, as shown in the discussion on simulacra, but also the most notable Postmodernist anxiety, translated in the search for new presentations. Thus, Kennedy joins the efforts of a good number of Postmodernist writers, some of them experts in postmodern romances, like Don DeLillo and Umberto Eco, others in magical realism, like Gabriel Garcia Marquez and Salman Rushdie, and contributes extensively to the creation of a new literary tradition. Paying her tribute to genre criticism by emphasizing the importance of intertextuality, historical context, and the work itself, she articulates her own artistic form by adopting a hybrid mode of magical realism and the distinguishable genre of romance.

As I discussed in the introduction, Postmodernist writers are inherent components of history, and as such, they reflect history sometimes even without acknowledging it. Hence, through their relationship with the times they depict, they also become participants in the creation of genre criticism, which is an important element in understanding Postmodernism as a literary trend. In “Magical Narratives: Romance as Genre,” Fredric Jameson emphasizes the importance of genre criticism by arguing that it

is an essential factor in the construction of literary history and in the representation of historical realities because of its reliance on three variable terms: the individual work of an author, the intertextual sequence into which the work of an author is inserted through a progression of form, and the series of historical situations wherein the individual work was accomplished (157). What I am attempting to argue by adding this to the analysis of *So I Am Glad* is the importance that the interaction of these factors has in the understanding of the novel as a postmodern romance. This is evident not only in the playfulness of intertextuality within it or in the emphasis on the postmodern setting for the work, but mainly in Kennedy's choice of romance as a genre that is inherent to historical realities and that transgresses the distinction of form and content.

Considered a bridge between past and present, between history and man, and between language and reality, romance reappears as a mode of discourse that "projects an overwhelming sense of intellectual freedom," and it exposes both the textuality of history and the fictionality of cultural reality (Rand 9). It is, moreover, the representation of a disengaged experience, as Diane Elam suggested, which, together with its excesses and ironic coexistence of temporalities, ties romance to Postmodernism and, hence, to Kennedy's *So I Am Glad*. In his "Preface to *The American*," Henry James argues,

The general attribute of romance is the kind of experience with which it deals – experience liberated, so to speak; experience disengaged, disembroiled, disencumbered, exempt from the conditions that we usually know to attach to it and, if we wish so to put the matter, drag upon it, and operating it in a medium which relieves it, in a particular interest, of the

convenience of a related, a measurable state, a state subject to all our vulgar communities. (33)

Accordingly, only by adopting the premises of romance and the Postmodernist sense of ethics can contemporary fiction fulfill this freedom of form and content. A postmodern romance that seems dislocated from history, *So I Am Glad* is, nonetheless, conscious of time, history, and society, and by means of its disparaging attitude towards contemporary society, described variously in the novel as “the world of lunatics,” or “the community of the mad,” it becomes a narrative that questions the epistemology of art and finds its function in human life and in the contemporary world.

The above-mentioned characteristics would label *So I Am Glad* as a postmodern romance most appropriately. As stated before, Jennifer’s plunge into fantasy has a rather didactic function and as a form of art, it negates Baudrillard’s consideration of art as a self-referential fetish, being instead a form of art that offers multiple possibilities for innovation and that adopts a reactionary attitude towards social realities in contemporary Scotland. Savinien Cyrano de Bergerac as a drug addict in the contemporary world is remote from our imagination, and he is, without question, a mythological model becoming a dominant element in Jennifer’s perception of reality. Yet, Kennedy’s playing with the absurd and the irrational and her reinforcing such powerful contradictions have, above all, an allegorical connotation. This is why the meaning of the novel can only be fully revealed by means of a clear understanding of the narrative choices that Kennedy has made.

The alteration of reality with an emphasis on the relationship between present and past, the intensity of love between Jennifer and Cyrano, the use of conceptual oppositions



such as real and unreal, high and low, good and evil, are elements that pertain to romance and to magical realism equally, and combined together in Kennedy's fashion, they create a postmodern romantic fabulation or a magical postmodern romance. As such, *So I Am Glad* relies on several polarities that are distinguishable characteristics of romance, and the one that defines most accurately the novel as a romance is the code of good and evil. The opposition between Jennifer and Savinien and the one between present and past are closely connected with the duality good versus evil, a dichotomy that Kennedy puts to use in a magical way by constantly shifting the real and the fantastic and by merging the known with the unknown and the certain with the unexpected. Welcomed as her alibi and her Other, as I noticed earlier, Savinien emerges as a seducer and an uncanny Other, who bolsters Jennifer's faith in the possibility of love and artistry. He is a magical element in the novel and has a double function, being both an artifice for a new presentation of art and life and a magician, whose role is to confuse art and life for an ethical purpose.

Modern fabulation (or magical realism, because the terms vary) relies extensively on the concept of reality and draws on the interpretation of the symbolic and the real that Lacan left legacy to psychoanalysis. In the works of major fabulators such as Jorge Luis Borges, John Barth, Gabriel Garcia Marquez, or John Fowles, the *real* is approached as a product of imagination that becomes real at least in the sense that one – the writer, his hero, or his reader – can really imagine it, as Scholes said. Most importantly, though, fabulation opens a new way toward the understanding of reality, and despite its allegorical nature, it becomes a magic map of the world's knowledge. In its intrinsic relationship both to reality and to social life, "modern fabulation, like the ancient fabling of Aesop, tends away from direct representation of the surface of reality, but returns

toward actual human life by way of ethically controlled fantasy” (Scholes 3). Thus, because of its hyperbolic and carnivalesque representation of life, *So I Am Glad* gets very close to the fiction of Garcia Marquez, as in *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, where the tone of the story, Marquez claims, is based on the way his grandmother used to tell stories. More importantly, though, *So I Am Glad* resembles Garcia Marquez’s fiction and other modern fabulations such as John Fowles’s *The Magus*, Italo Calvino’s *Numbers in the Dark*, Herman Hesse’s *Magister Ludi*, and many others, because it is a magical narrative that gives birth to titans and because it deals with things that sound fantastic using a complete naturalness. Thus, the charm of magical realism, as Garcia Marquez said, is to tell a story believing in it: “I discovered that what I had to do was believe in them [the stories] myself and write them with the same expression with which my grandmother told them: with a brick face” (“The Way”).

Yet, apart from its naturalness in narrating and celebrating the magic, the fabulative movement has a recognizable subversive aspect. Considered a space for interaction and diversity, magical realism succeeds in maintaining a strong contemporary relevance, solving injustices through historical metaphors. In this respect, *So I Am Glad* stands as clear evidence of the revolutionary force and of the sense of moral certitude that a novel should convey, and gives an identity to the genre of postmodern romance that is neither limiting nor unserious. The concerns to which Kennedy gives voice in this novel and in many other works make up a counter-hegemonic manifesto against the culture of consumerism and distorted democracy in the world today, very much the same way DeLillo depicts the American contemporary society in *White Noise*, as I will show in the next chapter. Moreover, these social and political concerns take on a reactionary form

and place the novel into the midst of historical realities, where they join other pervading elements, both fantastic and philosophical in content, one of the most important being the archetype of love.

Looking for a type of fiction in a new literary fashion, it seems that Kennedy has found the ideal literary practice in the mixture of the real and the allegorical, the spiritual and the physical, adding her share to the literature of love – the literature of the mind for the mind. The revival of Savinien and the role he performs in sustaining Jennifer's existence are the most appropriate premises for an acceptance of this literary tradition. He is not merely a mythological figure, but the most notorious lover and duelist of the seventeenth-century France, a romantic character who arrives in Jennifer's world in order to rid her of the "moles" inside and to build together with her the realm of a neo-romantic allegory of love. Kennedy's interest in love and its fulfillment is a beautiful perpetuation of love in art, from its portrayal in the literature of Alexandria to today's magic in the fiction of Lawrence Durrell, John Fowles, and Gabriel Garcia Marquez. As Jennifer confuses art and life, she lives both of them with equal intensity, and makes one parallel and embrace the other: "We had the brightest bed in the world. I remember how quickly I caught his fire and the two of us burning and gleaming between electric sheets. We were enough to read and write by. We were altogether enough" (246). Hence, the tormented memoirs of her past life, the sex games with her former lover, and her parents' orgiastic relationship are paralleled by her terrible pains as an artist and her anguish as a writer. Above all, however, *So I Am Glad* seems to emerge as a sophisticated form of fiction in which, as in the sophisticated practice of sex, the art consists mainly in constantly

exploring the framework of seduction and desire, and in delaying the climax in order to prolong the pleasure of the act.

This is, perhaps, another explanation for the open ending of each of Kennedy's novels, where the interest in extending the erotic intrigue of love is understood as an interest in delaying and keeping alive the artistic creation. Likewise, as the sexual act itself takes two, the act of fiction becomes, in its turn, a reciprocal relationship, be it outside the text, between the author and the reader, or inside it, between the mutual forces meant to caress each other's imagination with passionate virtuosity, as Fowles once said. Among his other roles, therefore, Cyrano's part in his relationship with Jennifer as a lover is to share with her emotional drives and sexual transgressions that equal their artistic urges, and hence, to create a space that rejects the immediate events of the ordered world and the emptiness of the actual.

So far, Cyrano's appearance in the novel has been justified as a Baudrillardian semblance of the real, a Lacanian Other, and a Kierkegaardian seducer, all of them viable and adequate descriptions. Yet his most important function, one that unifies all the above attributes, is his role as a storyteller and tutor. Like Fowles's *The Magus* or Hesse's *Magister Ludi*, *So I Am Glad* explores the dynamics of storytelling by projecting a magical figure whose powers portray philosophical and artistic education. Savinien Cyrano de Bergerac, a magical poet in his own times, bursts into Jennifer's life as a Prospero, a magus, and a Don Juan, to interpolate her tale with his own and, ultimately, to make Jennifer hungry for reality. He is indeed Fowles's visionary Conchis and Kierkegaard's seducer, whose dead and nauseating world is partially revived in order to render Jennifer's own world alive and invigorating. Likewise, the same as Nicholas Urfe

in *The Magus*, Jennifer is both the protagonist, striving to learn the difference between fiction and life, and the narrator of the novel, attempting to build the story of her education. Misreading life as if it were art, she is able to find in Savinien both the ailment and the cure for her existence, because, in fact, both she and Savinien speak of the same torments. If Jennifer is void of feelings and is trapped in a sordid world, Savinien is in the same place, “drifting, annoyed and lost, somewhere in the mind of an amnesiac Creator” (17). His ills are Jennifer’s own ills in a modern time; his life, rough and traumatic, his trouble with society, and the isolated and confused world of his writing are Jennifer’s own confrontations. Similarly, *L’Autre Monde* is not only the daring work Cyrano de Bergerac left behind, a fantasy about alchemical magic and Copernican science, but also Jennifer’s inspiration and Kennedy’s aesthetic model.

Because of their mutual artistic drives and aspirations, they are conceived as saints and sinners, representing, as Susan Sontag says, the artists of the modern consciousness: “The artist (replacing the saint) is the exemplary sufferer. And among artists, the writer, the man of words, is the person to whom we look to be able best to express his suffering” (42). Trapped as they are in a neutral but fantastic universe and “sharing an identical dream” (249), Savinien and Jennifer act as messengers and spokesmen for each other’s world of perished illusions and emotional dislocations, and are able to find comfort only at the level of their united narrative. Thus, satirizing “the supremacy of the demented,” both of them have grown wary of a proper shape of life. Both Savinien and Jennifer are authors in search of an identity and the words to express their inner conflict, and they are also both sinners and martyrs, justifying their sins to a world unable to understand them. Inspired from James Hogg’s *Confessions of a Justified*

*Sinner* among others, *So I Am Glad* takes from it both the form of memoir and the image of the defenseless creatures who live in a broken world, atoning for sins they have not committed and struggling not to fail. Like the skaters she watches “sliding up and down some water” and whose “wonderfully awful fall” is always paralleled by a struggle to “catch on a balance again,” Jennifer struggles to regain her composure on a battleground that resembles life itself (164).

Yet, in *So I Am Glad*, Jennifer symbolizes modern consciousness in its full representation whereas Savinien fails to do so. He constantly feels unwelcome in a postmodern world where Jennifer strives to understand her contemporaries and to be of help, and as such, he fails to find place outside his own times. Being both, as Jennifer said, “two unfictional people speaking in the emptiness of a small room” (56), they depart from each other because of their contradictory roles in the novel. A true postmodern romantic character, Jennifer fights for her right to individuality as if fighting for any human being’s right to it. Her aspirations are collectively constructed through the interest she manifests in the social and the political, and, unlike Savinien’s, her participation in the world is stripped of selfishness and egocentrism. The main difference between them lies in their perception of humanity and reality; for Savinien has a lost identity, lost illusions, lost enthusiasm, and subsequently, a harsh view on human condition. Unlike his, Jennifer’s own account of depression displays a defiant optimism, as I said before, which she manifests by constantly satirizing society, but also by accepting and understanding the condition of her postmodern generation.

Thus, Savinien is accommodated into the novel with pragmatism, proving useful in Jennifer’s discourse on political and social matters. Yet, despite his baroque charm, his

discourse is a vilified one because he represents a disturbed and disturbing past. As they conjure up their ironic coexistence of temporalities, both Jennifer and Savinien acknowledge that their trick is ephemeral. Jennifer, in fact, kills Savinien (keeping in mind that he is her fiction and her magic, she commits a metaphorical murder nonetheless) in order to adjust herself to her times and to develop a voice of her own, the same way Jack in *White Noise* will try to get rid of a narrative that suffocates his own representation of reality and meaning. Toward the end of the novel, when she attempts to untangle her extraordinary journey into the magic, Jennifer says: “If I consider those weeks now, I know that I spent them forgetting the difference between being with another person and being more of myself” (99). Therefore, with the help of his magic tricks, Savinien has to leave, remaining an outsider to her world, unable to speak the language that would really mean something to her: “If I could, I would write his voice so that you could feel it the way I did, dark and simple. Also good, very pleasant to hear – except for the chill of confusion under it that left him speaking from somewhere I couldn’t touch” (56).

Forced to remain in her world and to grasp the complexity of the actual, Jennifer is contrasted with today’s individuals who experience a feeling of despair that becomes their way of thinking and acting. As such, she forgoes the present for being less satisfactory, but admits that she can do so only in writing and only by dealing in fiction: “It’s something to do, to write, isn’t it? When life has baffled an author and hidden its possibilities, then he can always write” (173). Through a magic journey that eventually leads to a recovery of self and her art, she represents Kennedy’s attempt to redeem the postmodern from the fall into a hollow universe where the sign is all there is, and to make

possible a venture of signifiers and a transfer of meanings. Discerning the unbridgeable gap between language and reality, she chooses allegory as a way of thinking in images, and of being intuitive and open to truth. Moreover, the trick of living and loving, the novel suggests, is a merging of contradictions, a blend and a total collapse of dream possibilities with the infinite prospects of life. Like Borges or H. G. Wells, she recognizes that when reality is too subtle for realism to catch it, invention, fabulation, and magic can open the way “toward a reality that will come, as close to it as human ingenuity can” (Scholes 13). Thus, the novel functions both as some unattainable reality and as an emblem of the human struggle to imagine that reality.

Refusing to pay tribute to the dull virtues of realism, Kennedy, like James Hogg, Don DeLillo, and Salman Rushdie, resorts to a pastiche of contexts and to a system of multiple voices in order to create a magical, but solid and actual text that calls respect for its capacity to mean. Thus, the social realities in Europe, De Bergerac’s epic narrative of the past, and Jennifer’s creation of magical realism make up Kennedy’s own text as a joined artistic framework. Ultimately, this realm of intertextual discourses, past and present, real and magical, is created entirely in a coherent intellectual, literary, and aesthetic manner and is the perfect indication of Kennedy’s attempt to show that her art does more than dazzle and that the reader must judge it on its integrity and moral virtue.



*Notes:*

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<sup>1</sup> (fr.) Is there an atom of your flesh I couldn't die of? Because I love you so. I have been dying since I saw you first, burning, trembling. Is it fever? Not at all. This is death. This is love. To burn by love, the flame so sweet none ever dies of it.

## Chapter 3

### Storytellers in Dark Times.

#### Don DeLillo's *White Noise* and the Postmodern Condition

*I can contemplate nothing but parts, and parts are all little!  
My mind feels as if ached to behold something great,  
something one and indivisible. And it is only in the faith of  
that, that rocks or waterfalls, mountains or caverns, give  
me the sense of sublimity or majesty!*

Samuel Taylor Coleridge, 1797

*There must be something, somewhere, large and grand and  
redoubtable enough to justify this shining reliance and  
implicit belief. A feeling of desperate piety swept over me.  
It was cosmic in nature, full of yearnings and reachings. It  
spoke of vast distances, awesome, but subtle forces.*

Don DeLillo, *White Noise* (1985)

Don DeLillo asserted in many interviews that *White Noise* (1985) is not an apocalyptic novel, and that he never intended it to be so. However, like many other novels by DeLillo such as *Players* (1977), *Mao II* (1991), and *Cosmopolis* (2003), *White Noise* emerges as a literary, semiological, and critical reaction against postmodern culture. The novel is a journey from Jean Baudrillard to Terry Eagleton, mediated by other cultural critics and philosophers such as Jacques Lacan, Walter Benjamin, and Jean-François Lyotard, who investigate primarily the notion of authority in postmodern American culture. As one can easily assume, *White Noise* is not only a thorough investigation of the contemporary society, but also a fundamental endeavor on the part of its author to work through the discourses that create and dictate group identity in the modern world. As such, *White Noise* exhibits a multitude of narratives, some of them divergent, some interwoven in a miscellany of ideas, but all of them components within a tissue of critical approaches, serving as a set of values that today's individuals can use to grasp the meaning of their existence.

Although the novel eludes full explanation, it does bestow a small space that we need in order to describe the pervading themes within it. As such, *White Noise* is a novel about one's disillusionment and struggle to escape the terror of oblivion, the horrors of a meaningless existence, and the lethargy of hyperreality. Seen through the eyes of a first-person narrator, the terrorized-by-the-American-way-of-life Jack Gladney, DeLillo's book is, in the first place, a study of mystery: the mystery of mass culture in today's America, the mystery of today's way of dying, the mystery of a haunting past, and finally, the mystery of all "the abandoned meanings in the world" (184).

Thus, university professor Jack Gladney, expert in Hitler studies at College-on-the-Hill, narrates the story of his walking in the dark in a contemporary society fueled by hegemonic forces: the ubiquitous and protofascist voice of television, the compulsive consumerism regarded as a way of life, the proliferation of dangerous by-products of technology and science, the lost sense of the *real*, the mystery of religion, the self-reflexive cherishing of the past, and the like. Designed for the unconventional and the marginal of a culture, the novel creates an oblique cartography of the contemporary American life, ranging, for instance, from the cynical descriptions of the Airborne Toxic Event or the Dylar to the comic portrayal of Friday evenings in a typical American family or the nonchalant conversations at the College-on-the-Hill cafeteria. Intertwined with such images, DeLillo's scrutiny further disguises questions of belief, philosophy, and history as notable concerns that sporadically stir our interest and shape our understanding of the novel's inner archeology.

*White Noise* plunges into Baudrillard's concepts of evil and terror, simulacrum and hyperreality, and into Benjamin's notions of aura and storytelling, and fuses all of them with Lyotard's critique of grand narratives. With its unity thus constructed, the novel proceeds to confirm that postmodern fiction stands for a type of language that writers use almost exclusively to interpret society and to analyze the circulation of social and political energy in the creation of their discourses. Visible and highly active, these social forces come from within a particular system, the American society in our case, under the guise of a diversity of agents whose role is to interpret and legitimate the knowledge of their culture. Focused mainly on discussing authenticity in a world crowded with hollow images, these agents create a universe in which storytelling relates

to the ideas of power, authority, and unconscious desires. Thus, the collaged discourses in *White Noise* emphasize Lyotard's postmodern incredulity towards the totalitarian grand narratives of the previous eras, falsely presumed, until and during Modernity, to govern human knowledge, and its storytellers validate the existence and the importance of micronarratives born out of social bonds and social contradictions.

The power of image, the postmodern alienation, and the consumerism that characterize postmodern society are looked at, mocked, or satirized tirelessly, as they loom in *White Noise* both through the precision and the beauty of DeLillo's language and through his desire to create a realm of social and psychological forces that endorse knowledge from a postmodern perspective. Many of the characters in the novel fit the storytelling pattern mainly because they are bearers of a cultural critique, but also because they interrupt the silence by becoming active participants in the dialectical aspect of their discourses. Within this dialogic universe, the postmodern seems to have surpassed the exhaustion and the silencing of the mystical modern. As the lack of communication is widely believed to be a modern symptom, the conflicting and loquacious characters in *White Noise* have quelled the feeling of miscommunication or metaphysical abandon, and have led instead toward more acute dilemmas such as power, faith, and disillusion.

Murray, Babette, Heinrich, or Winnie Richards make up the canvas of characters in *White Noise* and many of them frame the storytelling pastiche as they promptly respond to the contemporary world's blooming confusion. By implication, intention, or paradox, they also attempt to shape Jack Gladney's identity; they are, in fact, Jack's storytellers, acting as human interpreters of the age of technological information and

attempting to elucidate the situation of crisis in the “American environments” both to Jack and to the reader. A rare art, as Benjamin refers to it, storytelling attempts to create a language and a normative knowledge that subserve social exchange:

For storytelling is always the art of repeating stories, and this art is lost when the stories are no longer retained. It is lost because there is no more weaving and spinning to go on while they are being listened to. The more self-forgetful the listener is, the more deeply is what he listens to impressed upon his memory. When the rhythm of work has seized him, he listens to the tales in such a way that the gift of retelling them comes to him all by itself. This, then, is the nature of the web in which the gift of storytelling is crafted. (Benjamin 17)

In the case of *White Noise*, like in the case of *So I Am Glad*, storytelling has a rather complicated role, because it subserves two antagonistic conditions. On the one hand, it entices both Jack and the reader into thinking, finding meanings, and providing interpretations for the depthless postmodernity in which they live; on the other hand, it acts as a voice from the past, attempting to recycle pedagogical narratives that no longer seem to appeal to the postmodern.

A true and faithful gatherer of stories and a searcher for meanings, Jack Gladney is the postmodern man who questions the times he lives in and who condemns and resists the artificial manifestations of his culture together with the highly technological information of his era. Much of the time Jack shares with the reader is spent in conversations: Jack and Murray walking on the campus alley; Jack and Babette sharing matrimonial time in bed or in the kitchen; Jack undergoing illumination by his son,

Heinrich, and so on. Even in his own world, isolated from the social context, Jack is an obedient listener of stories, and a lifelike deconstructionist, despite Hitler's aura floating enduringly in the universe of his thoughts.

Lytard argues that being postmodern means being overwhelmingly skeptical towards narratives (xxiv); in this respect, we find that Jack is the first character of *White Noise* to embody this condition. As protagonist of the novel, Jack is "responsible" for the homological and totalitarian role of storytelling. Indeed, in a grand narrative, he would be the sole force at work, the authority, the finder of the Holy Grail, and the hero of the day. According to this, the absence of sustained action in the novel and the reason why everybody is confused and behaves as if driven by an outer force are interrelated with the instinctive need for plots and with the alienated nature of all the characters in the novel:

Jack: All plots tend to move deathward. This is the nature of plots.

Political plots, terrorist plots, lovers' plots, narrative plots, plots that are part of children's games. We edge nearer death every time we plot. It is like a contract that all must sign, the plotters as well as those who are the targets of the plot. (26)

A postmodern Jack, thus, is a reduced hero with a reductive narrative role, a protagonist with no Aristotelian aura and no dramatic device at hand. This then would explain Lyotard's "nostalgia for the unattainable" and the postmodern desire for new presentation: it all resides in the creation of a space in which new forms could shatter the silence and the exhaustion of previous literature, and a plunge into what lies behind our hearing, into the untellable and the numinous that so well characterize DeLillo's entire work. The implosion of plots also explains why Jack is, indeed, a *postmodern* Jack, for

he, paradoxically, narrates the action, but he narrates it in a persistently detached, alienated manner, always seeming to contemplate his life rather than living it. For the greater part of the novel, he is the unlikely hero with nothing but the shadow of a narrative power; emerging dimly as an apprentice who struggles to complete his own identity, Jack seems to remain a dumbfounded, skeptical, and fearful individual, caught up in a dialectics of spirit.

Yet, this obstinate inquiring is, at the same time, a force that boosts him as the embodiment of a repressed grand narrative and technocratic discourse. After finishing his short lecture on the death of the plot, Jack once again ends in a note of skepticism: “Is this true? Why did I say it? What does it mean?” (26). In his isolation of spirit and unbearable incredulity towards the world around him, Jack becomes an ironic Bildungsroman character, a pupil who needs a tutor to initiate him in the engulfing and devastating mystery around him, a tutor that could guide him, through good or bad means, towards a confirmation of his doubts and a strengthening of his beliefs.

As stated before, the novel embraces an assortment of secondary characters who bolster Jack’s grueling mission. They make up a conglomeration of heterogeneous agents and their task is to create a system of languages that, as Mikhail Bakhtin describes it, “mutually and ideologically interanimate each other” (107) in order to shape both Jack’s and the reader’s knowledge. Made up as a dialogized system of languages, styles, and consciousnesses, the novel focuses primarily on the necessity of social energy and on the importance of language in creating experience. The novel thus carries a moral force that flatters neither Jack’s nor the reader’s prejudices, but a force that adopts the formal harmonies of intertextuality and paralogic micronarratives to show the necessity for the



postmodern to efface the technocratic power of grand narratives such as religion, media, and politics (Bakhtin 107). Finally, the advent of micronarratives attempts to insert discourse as “the ultimate weapon against the theory of the stable system” (Lyotard 66), or as a scandal that could arrest history and redeem contemporary society from its utopian representations and mechanized existence. In the attempt to give voice to a language that represents society appropriately, *White Noise* teaches us, the micronarratives enable us not only to illustrate society, but also to find our own honest and rational voice.

One of the key binaries of the novel, therefore, inheres in the relationship between metanarratives and micronarratives. Hitler, Elvis, the Airborne Toxic Event, and the Dylar are inserted into the consciousnesses of the novel and emerge as opposing forces in the interwoven narrative discourses of Jack, Murray, or Babette. The fascist ideology, through the Hitler class that Jack teaches, tries to inflict itself on Jack but without much success, and the Dylar – Babette’s death-postponing practical device – functions as a metanarrative of consumerism, but vanishes the moment Babette regains her composure. As for Elvis and his self-aggrandizing cultural mythology into which Murray delves by teaching the Elvis class, they remain a tarnished background narrative, lost in the brooding of better postmodern images. Finally, the Airborne Toxic Event is used by the author as a representation of today’s sense of the real, the *hyperreal* as Baudrillard describes it, an event that breaks into reality and becomes the most important site for the creation of cultural meanings.

Strengthening Baudrillard’s argument that Western society has lost complete reference to the *real*, DeLillo constructs a universe wherein the distinctions between artificial and real, thing and idea, truth and lie, fiction and nonfiction are no longer valid.

Therefore, by introducing an event that confuses and frightens everybody, such as the Airborne Toxic Event, DeLillo intends to show how meanings collapse and dissipate once we take the sign for the real as real. The same happens with the image of the most photographed barn in America that appears in the beginning of the novel. Part of our simulated reality, the barn is our perception of past values, a model that acts like a simulacrum and that dictates all our definitions of what is real, seducing and transforming us into lethargic and indifferent individuals. The most photographed barn in America symbolizes the malign collective perception that postmodern individuals have on the past: former images capable of making one formulate truths about them become, with the passing of time, mere signs carrying a manipulating aura or artificial signs perpetuated throughout time and amongst cultures blurry and void of meaning. As Murray describes it, "Once you've seen the signs about the barn, it becomes impossible to see the barn" (12).

Unable to respond to these haunting and oppressive forces, the masses of people in *White Noise* feel abandoned, or rather abandon themselves to authorities other than their own. As Jack notices during the series of incidents caused by the Airborne Toxic Event, "In a crisis, the true facts are whatever other people say they are. No one's knowledge is less secure than your own" (120). This is, on the other hand, the way Jack himself responds to the immateriality of grand narratives. He recognizes the futility of the past together with the utopian promises and false images that it transmits to later generations, and, consequently, he shows his own disbelief towards it by forestalling its forces with every occasion: "Why do these possessions carry such a sorrowful weight? There is a darkness attached to them, a foreboding. They make me wary not of personal

failure and defeat but of something more general, something large in scope and content” (6).

As stated before, Jack appears as a dumbfounded character, always wearing a hunted and ashen look; but against this constant appearance, Jack is the only one who interrogates the pervasive unreality of his culture and who tries to test whether, indeed, the past possesses “some quality of light we no longer experience . . . .” As he is projected against a whole world that thinks, acts, and feels otherwise, Jack confines himself in a universe of antithetic relationships where both he and his partners enjoy their conversations. These are, for the most part, linguistic games rendering both pleasure in inventing, as in a chess game, newer and newer moves, and fight, in the sense that they are still a game, but one in which pleasure counts less than victory. Thus, the feeling of success won at Jack’s expense must be incommensurable for Murray, for his is a vilified storytelling wherein the double meaning carried in conversations reflects drives of any kind, from sexual to intellectual.

As the conflicting nature of *White Noise*’s narratives becomes visible in Jack’s relationship with those around him, the least abstruse delineation is, most likely, that of Jack’s conversations with Murray, or rather Murray’s clever lectures addressed to Jack. Murray Siskind, guest lecturer on living icons at College-on-the-Hill, is the main storyteller of *White Noise*, and he animates his discourse with a great amount of knowledge and with a practical critique, but also with wicked, almost perverse taunts aimed at Jack. Repeatedly, Murray is an entertaining character, amusing, amused, and witty, a Freudian pupil who never represses his instincts. Yet, mainly because he is

unrepressed, he is also a traitor and a terrorist, conveying a storytelling that is not only witty, cynical, and blunted, but also vile and self-centered.

For what else is a terrorist if not a guest whom we invite to interrupt our selfishly comfortable aesthetic world? And what else is a lecturer if not a Prospero ready to school his students with awe and magic, to seduce them with his art, and also to help them gain a sense of the real? Murray is the Magus of *White Noise*, and like Fowles's Conchis or Kennedy's Cyrano, he disrupts Jack's universe and is fantastic and philosophical in orientation. As a "guest lecturer on living icons," he is more immersed into the present, showing more interest in the actual than anyone else, and bridges the ethical and the aesthetic of *White Noise*.

A solitary and obscure individual, Murray grows malevolent because he is an unethical seducer and a nonchalant rhetorician who prepares symbolic provocations that are unleashed on Jack with a bang. Although his discourse addresses almost all the concerns and skepticisms of contemporary society, from philosophy to media productions, from simulacra to repressed aura, Murray is, as John Duvall argues, the villain of *White Noise*. Moreover, he emerges as a villain not necessarily because he indicts the entire space around him, but mainly because his hidden plans involve profit and pleasure, and because he uses his seducing interpretations mainly as a self-oriented aesthetic and semiological game (445). As many of the critics of *White Noise* have acknowledged, Murray is a cynical, ambiguous, and evil character, because he seduces Jack. Indeed, Murray becomes Jack in order to subdue him, and challenges him using the power of a fabricated grand narrative. He is evil and makes no effort to hide it because he leaves his repressions aside in order to challenge and threaten our artificial

representations of the real. The malevolence resides in him freely and we see him both as a terrorist and as a non-terrorist, the same way Jack is a fascist and a non-fascist. Both Murray's and Jack's exterior discourses are examples of master narratives: one believes in the mysticism of car crash footage and in the supermarket psychic data, the other struggles to understand the mentally institutionalized objects of consumerism of his time, and both, hopeful and defiant, relentlessly return to two of the most disturbing pop culture icons of today, Elvis and Hitler. Unlike Jack, however, who is naively absorbed into Hitler's fascist ideology, the power of which he eventually exhausts, Murray creates a master narrative through the unflinching image of Elvis that he can use only to dominate others and drain the power out of them.

Under the guise of shrewd optimism, Murray is the collector and retainer of narratives and critical observations that he uses to foster and animate social energy, and through his discourse, he is Baudrillard's unruffled interpreter and DeLillo's charismatic poet and terrorist, who builds up the metanarrative of *White Noise*. Because of his peremptoriness and inflated sanguinity, he might bitterly annoy Baudrillard, as Duvall suggests, for Baudrillard's rhetoric is apocalyptic and openly disparaging, a visionary work achieved on the edge of neurotics, whereas Murray's rhetoric is a bubble of splendid linguistic and philosophical play.

But even so, Murray has the power of the Airborne Toxic Event itself, since he appears as a dysfunction within a social context. Resembling strikes and political revolutions, Murray breaks in as an attempt at internal readjustment. He may inspire hope in Jack or lead him to a belief in an alternative, but in the end, he shows that only entropy is a viable alternative for the ideological stability he is looking for. Unquestionably, the

act of terror he performs represents a meaningful act in *White Noise*. Construed as an intellectual terrorist, Murray talks the way a true postmodern writer writes, namely, by creating a scandal within an already established capitalist world and by generating ontological possibilities to denounce a real evil or to disrupt history. In *Mao II*, DeLillo explored this relationship closely and illustrated the narrative structure of terrorist acts as a force that supplants the power of fiction in the process of altering human consciousness:

There is a curious knot that binds novelists and terrorists. In the West, we become famous effigies as our books lose the power to shape and influence .... Years ago, I used to think it was possible for a novelist to alter the inner life of the culture. Now bomb-makers and gunmen have taken that territory. They make raids on human consciousness. What writers used to do before we were all incorporated. (41)

The terrorist Murray Siskind arises in the novel partly as a hysterical response to the pressures of the past – a nostalgia for a powerful master narrative that he cannot repress – and partly out of his own inner drives. Part bestial and part divine, Murray resembles many characters in previous literature such as Conchis in John Fowles’s *The Magus*, Cyrano in Kennedy’s *So I Am Glad*, or Melquiades in Garcia Marquez’s *One Hundred Years of Solitude*. Yet, the most accurate resemblance is to be found in Dionysus, the god of wine, song, ecstasy, theatre, fertility, excess, and inspiration, but also a postmodern invention and one of the earliest terrorists in mythology, as Terry Eagleton describes him in *Holy Ghost* (4). Like Dionysus, Murray is the god of excess, a Bacchic divinity and an oxymoronic creature who inhabits the “realm of lethal ecstasy” (4). A Jew living in a rooming house, “a gorgeous old crumbling house near the insane asylum” (DeLillo 12),

Murray emerges as a dangerous and uncanny terrorist, who is also a seducer of women, falling apart “at the sight of long legs, striding, briskly, as a breeze carries up from the river, on a weekday, in the play of morning light” (11). Murray’s evil is, thus, an unrepressed drive that conducts his life, an active spirit of terrorism that opposes the passive spirit of Jack and that takes the shape of a hegemonic power over Jack.

Murray is the symbol of violence and vengeance that characterize the monopolizing power of metadiscourses and through this, he becomes the exponent of the materialistic past. Two instances of his attempt to manipulate Jack are worth mentioning here, both of them involving Murray’s insistence on the power of grand narratives. When Jack loses all faith in the system, Murray’s totalitarian force taunts him with the suggestion that technology may solve his dilemma:

You could put your faith in technology. It got you here, it can get you out. This is the only point of technology. It creates an appetite for immortality on the one hand. It threatens universal extinction on the other. Technology is lust removed from nature...new devices, new techniques every day. Lasers, masers, ultrasound. Give yourself up to it, Jack. They’ll insert you in a gleaming tube, irradiate your body with the basic stuff in the universe. Light, energy, dreams. God’s own goodness. (285)

Likewise, when Jack is shut out of scientific metanarratives and is in desperate need of another one, Murray suggests religion: “Millions of people have believed for thousands of years. Throw in with them. Belief in a second birth, a second life, is practically universal. This must mean something” (286). It must all mean something, but Murray doesn’t seem to hold the answers, choosing, rather, to live in his own comfort and to

taunt Jack's insecure knowledge with a mischievous discourse. On further probing, it becomes somewhat clear that Murray's fraud is so overtly vile that he will be its first victim. Baudrillard argues that to apprehend the illusion and the fraud of any discourse is to get beyond appearances (160); according to this theory, Murray's discourse fails because it imposes itself as mere seduction, and thus it fails to escape its own appearance. It seduces Jack and it seduces Murray too; ultimately, the discourse seduces itself because it questions its own objectives and validity. That is why, in the end, Murray vanishes from Jack's life and is no longer the brainpower behind Jack's plans.

The embodiment of Machiavelli and Dionysus alike, Murray refuses to obey the rules of his own discourse and to live the experience of his own stories. Fearful of the grand schemes of human consciousness or of questioning his own existence, Murray seems to enjoy all the comforts of contemporary life, from the techniques of wholesale information to the imagery of mass media, the political rhetoric, the obscure, and the grotesque. Thus, his intentionality is not only blurry, but also concealed under the guise of a Marxist critique. His seductive maneuver of interpretation carries both valid and fundamental analysis, but it becomes appealing because it consciously seduces the addressee. The language he uses is part of a semiological game, a spectacle that no longer carries meaning because it is mere spectacle and an acute metaphysical seduction.

Baudrillard contends,

And this is nothing of the secret, this unsignified of seduction circulates, flows beneath words and meaning, faster than meaning. It is what affects you before utterances reach you, in the time it takes for them to vanish.



Seduction beneath this course is invisible; from sign to sign, it remains a secret circulation. (Baudrillard 162)

Indeed, Murray is a storyteller, both sensational and meaningful, playful and Protean, marginal and rapacious. He is a treacherous storyteller because he operates by deception and secrecy, by profit and pleasure, and because he plays by his own rules. The only compromise that he makes is his attempt to understand Jack in order to subdue and supplant him as a rival. To do this, he also has to become Jack himself, hence the second level of seduction, manifested in Murray's attraction to Babette and in his attempt to challenge Jack's Hitler studies with his own Elvis studies. Another binary opposition arises here between Jack's fascist ideology and Murray's interest in popular culture, manifested in his Elvis class. It shows, on the one hand, the difference between the relaxed ideology of alienated consumption that governs Murray's psychological universe and Jack's Nationalist Socialist ideology, and on the other hand, it exposes Murray's plot to keep pace with and eventually supplant Jack. Duvall argues, "Murray is already more Jack than Jack because Murray understands and sees the possibilities of professional aura in ways Jack does not" (444).

Familiar with Baudrillard's theories as he is, Murray energetically responds to Jack's orgy of meaning, truth, and representation, and is well aware that this is the means for his seduction to lead to power: "To seduce is to weaken. To seduce is to falter. We seduce with weakness, never with strong powers and strong signs. In seduction we enact this weakness, and through it seduction derives its power" (Baudrillard 165). Murray's affability, withdrawal of self, and passive attitude towards his worldly existence are signs of a fabricated weakness that opposes the systematic attack on others and the active

interpretations he offers to the world. Murray is a storyteller and a force from the past who remains nothing but a seducer in a society of endless corruption, where “seduction is the destiny” (Baudrillard 166). The same as Conchis’s and Cyrano’s, his seduction becomes immoral, frivolous, and above all, devoted to his own, maybe more intellectual than visceral, pleasures. This works perfectly for his will to power, a power that is beneficial to the reader due to its didactic functions, but it is undeniably damaging to Jack, because it is void of the ethical wisdom that could answer Jack’s metaphysical doubts. The only thing that he achieves is disappearing toward the end of the novel, so that he could leave the space whereby Jack finds his own way out.

It is true, therefore, that Murray’s statements remain highly denotative, deontic, and evaluative. At the same time, however, they are hardly pragmatic for a deeply confused character like Jack. His story is not a bad one for the readers, possibly because they are in a place where they can enjoy Murray’s sarcasms without being affected by his wickedness. It is a bad story for Jack, bewildered as he is, because he does not need Murray’s discourse on religion, technology, or political ideology, but pure human affection springing out from honest social bonds. Therefore, Jack’s rejection of Murray’s grand narrative and his return to micronarratives stand here for a desire to widen the possibilities of human understanding, be they metaphysical, political, cultural, or social.

The internal struggle of characters and the apparently affable conversations between Jack and Murray show a total collapse of the conflicting ideologies, and their proliferation in the *White Noise* society is a key element in the novel. Because of the crisis in which postmodern narratives have fallen, it is not a surprise that DeLillo writes

in agreement with Lyotard when implying that the grand philosophical, political, and religious schemes of our times can no longer account for all aspects of our experience:

The principle of a universal metalanguage is replaced by the principle of a plurality and formal and axiomatic systems capable of arguing the truth of denotative statements; these systems are described by a metalanguage that is universal but not consistent. (Lyotard 43)

DeLillo's stance with regard to American culture appears to be minimal throughout the novel, and he may seem to look for the possibility of metanarrative that could recreate the sense of belonging, order, or reality. However, his mocking attitude lies behind cynical observations and in the imposition of a definite architectonic form on the novel, the nature of the characters, the blunt but exquisite language, the fragmenting of plot and the ethical unity that springs out of this fragmentariness. *White Noise*'s storytellers inhabit a magical world that is at times cynical, hysterical, or perhaps, cynically hysterical. It is also magical because, sometimes, it is a world loaded with hopes and potential, and other times with a brooding darkness where the widening of possibilities seems impossible. Yet, all the storytellers share the tissue of narratives they weave, no matter what they contrive behind their discourses, and they remain Benjamin's storytellers against their weaknesses and drives, and regardless of whether their discourse is fundamentally vile or highly practical. Despite the hidden plans, the dissensions, or the concurrences of their relationships, they look like experts in worldly matters, establishing language combinations among themselves to discuss today's rhetoric of the image, the burden of death, or the sensitivity to knowledge. If they fail as storytellers in the end, it is because

Jack has to learn by himself how to make his way out from the puzzle of his own life, and because he has to learn to feel responsible for his own condition.

Another key storyteller in *White Noise* is Babette, Jack's low-key and adaptable wife who reads tabloids and who teaches citizens' classes in posture. Although distinguished by her forgetfulness and preoccupation with death, Babette is expected to accomplish an important role in Jack's construction of knowledge, because she uses language as a medium for communicating various truths and understandings. Thus, through her own linguistic play and the pleasure she takes in it, she becomes another social agent in *White Noise*'s scheme of micronarratives: "Babette did the voices of Dr. Chatterjee and Patti Weaver. Her Chatterjee was a warm and mellow Indian-accented English, with clipped phrasing. She did Patti as a child hero in a contemporary movie, the only person on screen who is unawed by mysterious throbbing phenomena" (144). Like Kennedy's *Cyrano*, she is a slave of language, addicted both to the orgy of meaning and to linguistic games, and her main preoccupation is with her own death and the ways to escape it.

Babette and *Cyrano* seem to live with the continuous fear that metaphysically, things are what they are, and as they are, they are unbearable. Built upon her desultory mindset, Babette's failure launches Jack's failure instantly, and her ultimate composure does not institute Jack's composure. Calamitously failing to recognize Jack as a desperate individual, trapped in an incomprehensible and inescapable reality, she fails as a storyteller, despite the fact that storytelling is her job, and despite the fact that for her, speech equals truth. Immersed in her own alienated and aloof nature, Babette gradually loses her signifying aura and shows the reader that the unconscious sometimes becomes a

mere locus of instincts and drives, and other times, that speech reveals unconscious anxiety and desires. Then, if Murray is a Freudian and Baudrillardian character, Babette is Lacanian par excellence: “One is never happy making way for a new truth, for it always means making our way into it. The truth demands that we bestir ourselves. We cannot even manage to get used to the idea most of the time. We get used to reality, but the truth we repress” (81). Repressing the truth about her own neurotic condition, Babette represses the possibilities of her discourse, hence the effort to foster Jack’s knowledge. Giving in to the noxious power of the Dylar, Babette not only represses death, but also the language that mediates the understanding of the death and the poise to fight it. Thus, she initiates a whole technique of puzzlement whereby she never eases Jack’s enormous burden, but complicates it even more, and fails to become Jack’s Other and to impart affection by the agency of her discourse.

The transgression of otherness inside Babette affects Jack utterly and irreversibly, because it successively replaces Jack with the Dylar and with Willie Mink: “I believed everything. I was a Buddhist, a Jain, a Duck River Baptist. My only sadness was Babette having to kiss a scooped-out face” (310). In an interesting language game of his own, Jack is haunted by the odd number *three*. A Buddhist, a Jain, a Duck River Baptist, Jack is also betrayed three times, rendering the biblical image of victimization stronger than ever.

Babette betrays Jack with the Dylar, with Mr. Gray (Willie Mink), and with her own discourse. Once more, the capitalist transaction of commodities, the seduction, and the semiological *jouissance* proliferate and deter Jack’s metaphysical illusions (another scandal, alas, another abysmal exploration ...). The Dylar, symbol of the power of

consumerism, simulacra, and forgetfulness, erases Jack's artificially constructed bourgeois ideology. A symbol of grand narrative, the Dylar creates a new "reality" by luring Jack into the belief that grand narratives are no longer needed. This may be an explanation of the fact that, with the appearance of the Dylar, we witness the disappearance of Hitler's aura. Gradually, Jack is rid of the metanarrative of both Hitler and the Dylar, a skillful technique constructed so that he can understand that a myth, such as the symbolic image of Hitler or the use of the Dylar, is nothing but the translation of a fabricated bourgeois ideology into "a natural law." Myths, as Barthes seems to "explain" openly to Jack, confuse culture and history with nature to reinforce and to make normal social stereotypes (30). This is readily visible in *White Noise*, because Hitler's, Elvis's, or even the Dylar's discourses can be easily decoded through a semiological method, where the sign becomes Hitler, Elvis, or the Dylar, and the signifier exists only in the individual's mind.

The representation of the fascist ideology is a fundamental topic in *White Noise*, as it echoes the entire postmodern society of capitalist economy, of miming formal revolutions of social life, of gratuitous fiction, and amputated identities. Proceeding from the assumption that the National Socialist ideology continues to appeal to everyday American society, *White Noise* avoids the comic stereotypes of pop culture and refuses to portray a malevolent Hitler through the agency of a living character in the novel. Hitler's transgression from the past into the present, from evil to "good," is a symbolic one, functioning as an aura of signification, a modified archetype, stripped of form and meaning in order to suit the postmodern needs for abstraction and power.

Obsessed with the idea that Hitler and everything that is German embody the concept of power, Jack appropriates the Nazi ideology to portray his postmodern condition and thus to justify Murray's assertion that "hopeless and fearful people are drawn to magical figures, mythic figures, epic men who intimidate and darkly loom" (287). In spite of his assiduous mimesis, however, Jack finds himself unable to put enough breath into his grand narrative, mainly because he unconsciously believes in the possibility of deeper meanings of life and of a more authentic language, even in the midst of highly trivial manifestations of culture. Jack's watching his children sleep, his struggling to comprehend the significance of *Toyota Celica* behind its euphony, or his condemning the tabloids in the supermarket, are but a few examples that elucidate Jack's highly romanticized vision of life. In the many attempts to forestall his past by throwing away "possessions that carry a sorrowful weight," Jack fights both against the repressive society in which he lives as in a gestating monster and against his own disillusionment with the past, as if protesting that all that is postmodern has lost its value.

The society in *White Noise* constructs a universe of mercantile knowledge and dehistoricized dialectics and thus becomes a house of fiction where Hitler feels like home. Only in the end, once with the displacement of this signifying aura, does the novel prove that today's myths are only delusions, because they can arrest history and give the appearance of an unchanging nature. Like the Cyrano myth in *So I Am Glad*, the myths of *White Noise* function as an exnomination, a force that identifies everything but itself: the Nazi ideology is used to define the postmodern culture, but it will never appeal to Jack as a postmodern questioning individual. Jack's own confused nature and the relationship he develops with those around him and with his own past show that no grand narrative can

supply his metaphysical needs. Jack remains a romantic and a romanced character who responds to pressures from the past in a new way and who lives in a present that is as repressive as fascism itself. He needs group identity as a white noise coming from history, as a connection with the self and the others. His immediacy is marked by absence, both of the real and the simulacrum, and the only escape is to look beyond the “postmodern sunset” and to build his consciousness with the help of history and the future together. The insistent and, at times, astounding presence of children in the novel, always more watchful, always more attentive than any adult, shows that children are the encouraging and hopeful guardians of the heart, and that there is still hope for them not to “experience the vast loneliness and dissatisfaction of consumers who have lost their group identity” (60).



## Conclusion

For Those Who Forget How to Speak...

*Once there was a country called Fiction, bordered on one side by the mountains of Philosophy and on the other by a great bog called History....*

Robert Scholes, *Fabulation and Metafiction*

*I've always seen myself in sentences. I begin to recognize myself, word by word, as I work through a sentence. The language of my books has shaped me as a man.*

Don DeLillo, *Mao II*

The reason why I chose to work with A. L. Kennedy's *So I Am Glad* and Don DeLillo's *White Noise* as two representative samples of Postmodernist fiction has to do with the contribution these works bring to the understanding of Postmodernism as literary art. As I have argued throughout this thesis, the main attribute of contemporary literature is its moral force, and the attitude that writers today must strive to attain is an ethical commitment towards the reader and, subsequently, towards society as a whole. I found these aspects to be most relevant in both Kennedy's and DeLillo's works, together with the stance both authors have adopted regarding the importance of critical and literary studies when writing Postmodernist fiction. By this, I refer mainly to the fusion of theories that they create as an artifice meant to conceal both a moral code and intellectual strength.

Neither *So I Am Glad* nor *White Noise* could be fully understood without the theories of critics such as Baudrillard, Lyotard, Foucault, and Benjamin, no matter how differently Kennedy and DeLillo emphasize their reliance on theoretical studies, and no matter how intensely they want their work to be rid of critical insights. In reading Kennedy, for instance, I became aware of the author's concern for the writer's craft, his or her work, and his or her imagination. In "Love Composition: The Solitary Vice," Kennedy claims,

I have no appetite for amateur psychology, gossip and downright nonsense which seeks to confuse the writer and the writing and then to abandon both in favour of theorizing which manages both to patronize the "ploughman" and to mythologize away the labour inherent in being whatever 'Heaven-taught' might imply. (24)

Professing the artist's right to make his or her passion articulate without technical constraints, and to make inspiration interact with identity and writing, Kennedy insists that the focus on free will and love must be a pervading element of both fiction and literary analysis. Yet, the novel implies that no possible reading can be fulfilled without a plunge into technique and criticism or through a reaction against genre theory, and as such, understanding *So I Am Glad* comes primarily from exploring social, psychological, and literary issues such as Jean Baudrillard's simulacrum, seduction, and hyperreality, Jacques Lacan's the Other and the symbolic order, and Diane Elam's postmodern romance.

The development of Kennedy's work and the delineation of narrative modes and ideological discourses are inherent elements in the process of writing against class and race prejudices, and thus they have become intrinsic components in my analysis of the novel. Therefore, I may have entangled the fictionality of the novel into a tissue of turbid critical approaches, but I believe that the discussion of magical realism as a narrative mode and of the postmodern romance as one of the most acceptable literary genres today stands along the intertextuality of historical discourses in creating a language combination that promotes newer interpretations of identity, culture, and knowledge.

Much of the same view can be applied to DeLillo's work. Relying more heavily than Kennedy on social criticism in writing about the massive stillness of postmodern culture, he makes visible the need of literature to turn its face to the world and to explore the dynamics of human relationships by means of a close look at the critical principles of Poststructuralism and New Historicism together. Thus, Jean-Francois Lyotard's

postmodern condition and his delineation of narratives become the guiding principles in reading *White Noise*.

Looking for a new perspective, both novels deal with genre and critical theory in order to explore the notion of identity and the way postmodern individuals construct knowledge and experience, keeping the authors constantly engaged in the process of structuring meaning and making the reader conscious of the moral purpose of art. In this respect, the choice of a Scottish novel written by a female writer and an American novel written by a male writer arose from my intention to discuss the universal aspect of fiction in terms of their moral code and immersion into social and political discourses that address metaphysical questions of knowledge and identity in the postmodern condition. Thus, the same way DeLillo writes from the heart of America showing a deep concern for its status as a culture, Kennedy writes from the heart of Scotland, with Robert Burns and Sir Walter Scott still reaching to the minds and souls of mystified postmodern Scots. Within the confines of their culture, DeLillo and Kennedy attempt to interrogate the concepts of real, storytelling, evil, and discourse, in order to rejuvenate the act of writing and its role in the postmodern house of fiction.

Finally, I chose to write about a female writer and a male writer to reiterate the idea of ethical commitment coming from writers who consider themselves writers above anything else, transgressing gender troubles and going beyond national attributes. This is evident both in the revolutionary nature of both novels, meant to disclose the world and also to change it, and also, to a certain extent, in Kennedy's name as a writer. For she advertises her sexlessness by her initials, preferring to focus more on her role as a fiction

writer, on her craft, and on her work, for the benefit of a collective moral and intellectual literary mission.

What good effect will listening to stories have on our understanding of the world and on our behavior in the world? Ultimately, this is the question both DeLillo and Kennedy attempt to answer, and in order to do so, they constantly explore the didactic aspect of fiction in order to show that art can both survive in the late capitalist world and contribute to the transformation of the world. Thus, if for Annie Dillard fiction is food for sensations mainly, and if for Robert Scholes it is imaginative experience necessary to the reader's imaginative well-being, I would emphasize that, besides being a stimulus for our sensations, fiction today represents an agency that provokes our thought by endlessly testing it in order to improve it.

Both of them philosophical in orientation, *So I Am Glad* and *White Noise* attempt to accomplish a moral task by projecting characters engulfed in a claustrophobic misery, trying to reach spiritual revelations, and fighting for ambitions of dialectical self-improvement. In both cases, the characters are mystified exponents of a reified reality searching for a narrative of their own. Moreover, they are, for the most part, abstract characters and represent the *homo symbolicum* of fiction, rendering it as a disturbing weapon against our consciousness. Aware that fiction means more than representation of an action or of life itself, Postmodernist writers create characters that are allegorical and abstract, and that perform a formal and a structural role in order to act as messengers for their writer's purposes. Both Jennifer and Jack are the voice and also the disconcerting presence of Kennedy and DeLillo, meant to remind us that art is a necessary artifice, and bound to perpetuate the understanding of the parable and the allegory as moral forces of

literature. Thus, Jennifer and Jack are the tellers of a postmodern tale, makers of two magic worlds, and not mere voices of empty words. They chronicle their walk through life and dream, and thus make the novel a living thing speaking on behalf of any human being's struggle with history, identity, individuality, and love.

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21 April 2006

Date

Confessions of Justified Postmoderns  
in A. L. Kennedy's *So I Am Glad* and  
Don DeLillo's *White Noise*

Title of Thesis

Greg Cooper

Signature of Graduate Office Staff

5-12-06

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