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FACULTY OF LETTERS AND LANGUAGES
DEPARTMENT OF LETTERS & ENGLISH LANGUAGE

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DOMAIN: FOREIGN LANGUAGES
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ABSURDISM AND MORAL DECAY IN DON DELILLO'S *WHITE NOISE*

Dissertation Submitted to the Department of English in Partial fulfilment of the
Requirements for a Master's Degree

Candidates:

Ms. Chaima FOUDIH

Ms. Maroua Rihab GUERROUDJ

Supervisor:

Mr. Bachir SAHED

2020

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DEDICATION

To my family and my husband...

Chaima

DEDICATION

To my family and to those who give meaning in a meaningless world...

Maroua Rihab

ABBREVIATIONS

White Noise: WN

ABSTRACT

The present study addresses moral decay and faith crisis in Don DeLillo's *White Noise*. That is by the reference to the philosophies of Absurdism, Nihilism and Existentialism along with Jean Baudrillard's theory of Simulacrum. These thoughts share common concerns such as the human morality, anxiety, death, alienation, absurdity, nothingness and denial. Hence, the aim of this study is to explore images of Absurdism and Nihilism, along with Baudrillard's theory of Simulacrum in the novel. To achieve this aim, the study examines how *White Noise* portrays the meaninglessness and the moral decay in the postmodern era. In a nutshell, the research focuses on capitalism, media, materialism, and consumerism, along with fear of death as the promoters of meaning and spiritual vacuum.

Keywords: Absurdism, Nihilism, Simulacrum, moral decay, faith crisis

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INTRODUCTION

The First World War and the Second World War are considered as a turning point in world history. After the carnage that the 20th century has witnessed, the individual's sight towards life, faith, and morals have changed. Several thinkers and philosophers endeavoured to highlight the zeitgeist of the era and the beginning of a new world order.

Philosophies of the modern and the postmodern eras have travelled from the European continent into other continents to influence literature in a highly noticeable manner. Indeed, Philosophies like Absurdism and Nihilism influence modern and postmodern literature reflecting human condition. Moreover, contemporary literature suggests fragmentation, anxiety, and chaos, unveiling man's quest in the universe, and the way he is trapped inside it. Recently, several writers spot light on absurdity in a Postpositivist world.

The Existential philosophy has given birth to other philosophies that support it, and yet expand it into other wide humanistic aspects. The Absurdist movement is centred on the idea that life is irrational, illogical, incongruous, and meaningless. Jean Paul Sartre, Martin Heidegger, Soren Kierkegaard, Arthur Schopenhauer, Frantz Kafka, and Albert Camus have influenced the ways absurdist literary works question the nature of existence. They also depict the dilemma of values, the disorder of life, and the struggle to create meaning in void. Furthermore, they portray the man's struggle with freedom, choice, and responsibility. In addition to Absurdism, Friederich Nietzsche's Nihilism has also contributed in highlighting the corrupt individual values, the pessimistic notion of the world, and nothingness issues.

Don DeLillo is considered one of the most influential American writers in the last decade. His works often depict and describe the capitalist world. His dystopian novel, *White Noise*, has won The National Book Award after its publication in 1985. It presents consumer culture, visual culture, and techno culture of a postmodern American life that lacks morality and meaning. The novel unveils the postmodern individual disillusionment with technology and consumerism.

The postmodern era is the era that is plagued by materialism. Materialist ideology has been criticized by several thinkers and philosophers. The postmodern era is an era that generates man's desire to worship commodities. Thus, Frantz Kafka, Jean Baudrillard, Arthur Schopenhauer, Albert Camus, Martin Esslin, and Samuel Beckett have presented a scathing critique of materialism through their works and philosophies. Materialism is an ideology that tends to be linked to Absurdism. It represents a major cause of Nihilism and nothingness.

Esslin claims that, "the Absurd is that which is devoid of purpose [...] cut off from his religious, metaphysical, and transcendental roots, man is lost; all his actions become senseless, absurd, useless" (Esslin 23). As such, *White Noise*'s characters suffer from a spiritual and moral vacuum like any other absurdist characters. They are defeated by their belief in materialism, their lust to buy and consume.

White Noise is a novel that captures the researchers' attention. Indeed, several researchers have examined this novel from different perspectives, namely psychoanalytical, ideological, technological, and sociological. They attempt to depict the postmodern American scene that Don DeLillo narrates in his work.

Ahmed Ghashmari, in his work "Living in a Simulacrum: How TV and the Supermarket Redefines Reality in Don DeLillo's *White Noise*", studies the image of

the postmodern life in the eighties with the influence of the invasion of technology and the dominance of Capitalism and media. Ghashmari's work illustrates how TV is considered as a hyperreal simulation among DeLillo's characters. According to Ghashmari this device is the icon that creates passive individuals who are disabled to think or choose. He also compares the narrative style of *White Noise* to the television's narrative style due to the disintegration of information. He describes this narrative style as meaningless. Furthermore, Ghashmari explains the characters' mood after the Airborne Toxic Event, and the discussion about the *déjà vu* issues depending on Baudrillard's three orders of Simulacrum. On the other hand, Ghashmari sheds light on America as a consumer society. Ghashmari claims that in *White Noise*'s world the real has vanished, and reality is suffering. Moreover, his work portrays the victory of the simulacrum of TV and Supermarket over reality.

Jaemin Choi in his essay "Death, Noise, and (Un)plotting in Don DeLillo's *White Noise*" tackles the theme of fear of death within the novel of *White Noise*. Choi seeks to explore the relation between the three elements of death, noise and (un)plotting. Hence, he considers the noises that exist in the novel as forms of destruction to remain outside the plot. These noises can be noticed in televisions, telephones and supermarkets. Moreover, Choi believes that DeLillo uses meta-fictional elements to explain the nature of death. He also thinks that these meta-fictional elements shall illuminate the relation between the three themes of the novel.

Metehan Inci, in his work "Alienation in 1980s American Society: A Marxist Perspective on Don DeLillo's *White Noise*", shows how Marxist commodities dehumanize people and alienate them from their nature. He also portrays how Capitalism exploits people to serve their needs. He relates human alienation to the

dominance of media and technology which lead people to become slaves of Capitalism. An example of commodity in the novel is Hitler to Jack as an intellectual commodity.

Another researcher who has shown interest in *White Noise* as a postmodern novel is Djihad Hadjab. In her work, “Hitler as a Mask against Death: Anxiety in Don DeLillo’s *White Noise*”, Hadjab endeavours to represent *White Noise* as a work that provides one of the oddest characters “Jack Gladney”. Jack represents postmodern Americans with the appropriate regard to his obsession with the Nazi leader Adolf Hitler. Moreover, the study examines DeLillo’s protagonist Jack and his attempt to use Hitler’s persona as a mask to attain his quest for immortality. Hadjab studies the figure of Hitler from both aspects “the historical and the psychical”, and focuses on both Hitler’s persona and his psyche. She portrays Jack’s fear of death and his defence mechanisms. Therefore, Hadjab’s work sheds light on the novel from historical and psychoanalytical perspectives.

Gry Jacobsen is another researcher who shows interest in studying *White Noise*. His work “Living in Dangerous Times: Identity, Volition and Anxiety in Don DeLillo’s *White Noise* and *Falling Man* (2009)”, analyses the two novels *White Noise* and *Falling Man* as set in a contemporary American society, a society that deals with consumerism, mass media, terrorism, conspiracy and paranoia. Jacobson also suggests that DeLillo is pessimistic about the identity; he implies that a violent society inspires a corrupt identity. He suggests that *White Noise* is a novel of scepticism, anxiety, paranoia and conspiracy, which fundamentally characterize postmodern life and attitude. Moreover, Jacobsen suggests that consumerism and the supermarket grant a sense of belonging to the community of the novel. By buying and consuming, Jack

and everyone in the novel are postmodern subjects. He compares this aspect to the novel of *Falling Man* where characters seek to collect pieces of their identity back after the 9/11 events.

In this review, it is apparent that many critics have approached *White Noise* in relation to many literary theories. They have dealt with its different themes such as death, technology, consumerism, Capitalism and media, without considering philosophical and moral issues related to the novel. The theories mentioned above examined the novel from a consumer and a historical view. Hence, these studies did not attempt a criticism of moral decay and faith crisis in relation to Absurdism and Nihilism as relevant theories. Therefore, the current study has engaged the previous aspects mentioned in the studies above in relation to a philosophical humanistic lenses.

This dissertation seeks to provide answers to the following main question: How does Don DeLillo as a postmodern writer represent moral decay and meaninglessness in *White Noise*? In order to answer this question, the dissertation attempts to answer the following sub-questions: To what extent do DeLillo's characters embody an Absurdist and Nihilist attitude towards life? To what extent can moral decay be read as an outcome of materialism and consumerism? How does the absence of a supreme value in *White Noise* affect the characters in the novel?

The aim of this study is to examine Absurdist and Nihilist dimensions in the novel. It also attempts to read moral decay and loss of faith in the novel in relation to these theories. Besides, the study aims to discuss the dilemma of meaning and purpose within the postmodern novel, *White Noise*. The study also attempts to highlight the issue of faith crisis and moral decay in the Western society. Finally, it aims to depict

the anguish of the postmodern man in a hollow and dystopian Western society that is illuminated in the novel.

The study focuses on depicting the moral and faith issues that the postmodern individual encounters. Moreover, the present study illustrates the failure of Capitalism, technology, and media to fill the human's heart within an absurd, silent universe. Most importantly, it demonstrates the humanistic facet of the individual within the dystopian postmodern world.

This research is significant because it offers a philosophical and a humanistic insight to the reader. Thus, it highlights the issue of meaninglessness that is considered a serious matter to humanity. It also shows how some aspects in life such as consumption and technology can play the role of the devil in case they are not invested properly. Moreover, it shows the importance of faith and meaning in the individuals' existence.

The study includes different theories that shall clarify the methodology followed to explain the novel. The main theory is the philosophy of Absurdism. The research gives attention to Absurdist themes such as Absurdity, Alienation, Death Anxiety, and their existence in the novel *White Noise*. It also attempts to highlight the nature of the Absurdist characters that are plagued by Materialist commodities, moral decay and absence of faith.

On the other hand, Friedrich Nietzsche's Nihilism is another theory that the research relies on. That is to explain mostly the death God declaration which is related to the decay of morals, meaninglessness, nothingness and faith crisis. This philosophy is vague due to the multiplicity of theories and conceptions it presents to the field of philosophy. The research has adopted several aspects of this philosophy including the

theory of eternal recurrence, the paradox of affirmation and denial, the will to power, chaos and the disappearance of truth. These concepts are viewed in the novel *White Noise* in relation to the issues of moral decay and faith crisis.

Baudrillard's theory of simulacrum is mentioned in his book *Simulacra and Simulation* in order to depict a cetic on the disappearance of the real. Throughout his book, Baudrillard argues how the real has disappeared in the postmodern era. He introduced the concept of the hyperreal which is the artificial reality that replaces reality. Baudrillard also tackles Media in his book *Simulacra and Simulation* in a chapter entitled "The Implosion of Meaning in Media". In this part, he argues that the information given on media contribute to the meaninglessness. Hence in this study the concepts of simulacrum and hyperreality are tackled in the novel *White Noise* in relation to Absurdism and Nihilism. In other words, it deals with how this simulacrum reinforces the meaningless, Nihilist, alienated, and corrupt psyche of the novel's characters.

The dissertation will be divided into two main chapters The first chapter discusses the theoretical framework of the novel and presents the *zeitgeist* of the postmodern era. To begin with the theoretical framework explores the philosophies of Absurdism and Nihilism with reference to the Existential Philosophy. It reviews how Existentialism has developed as an outcome of the events of the modern to the postmodern eras, and how philosophers have enriched the world of ideas encompassing some literary works as a philosophical discourse. Hence, the theoretical part focuses on the philosophy of Absurdism in literature. It reviews the literary works of Albert Camus and Martin Esslin, in addition to the philosophy of Nihilism that depicts important Nietzschean concepts.

The first chapter also presents the *zeitgeist* of novel and studies the dystopian era of Postmodernism that is depicted in the novel. It also offers an insight into Baudrillard's theories of Simulacra and Simulation, hyperreality and his theory about media and meaning.

The second chapter is devoted to the analysis of the novel mostly from a Camusian and a Nietzschean philosophical insight. It attempts to spot light on the characters' death anxiety and lack of faith that lead to serious moral issues. On the other hand, it depicts the Nihilistic facets of the novel through the characters' discourse. These dialogues mirror the belief of DeLillo's characters in the no absolute truth, the reincarnation, the denial of life, and chaos.

Baudrillard's theory on Simulacra and Simulation is a key theory to highlight the characters' lack of meaning in real life. This lack of meaning appears through the daily consumer capitalist routine. The chapter also portrays Jack Galdney's and Murray Siskind's alienated identities as an escape from the real. It explores the characters faith in technology and its contribution to the process of absurdity and meaninglessness. Consequently, this dissertation examines the characters struggle due to the lack of faith, meaning, and the absence of the real in their lives.

CHAPTER ONE: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND THE ZEITGEIST OF THE ERA

Modernism and Postmodernism as two literary movements have witnessed series of historical events that shape the two eras continuously. Modernism is determined by the First World War and the Second World War, along with the Great Depression. Moreover, Postmodernism is mostly dominated by media, technology, the aftermath of the First World War and the Second World War, chaos, paranoia, and fragmentation. The 20th century and its repercussions glorified the philosophy of Existentialism along with Absurdism and Nihilism. Several writers glorify the philosophy of Absurdism in Postmodernist literature. Don DeLillo's *White Noise* is *par excellence* a work that explores the notion of the contemporary individual in an Existentialist and dystopian universe, where meaning and purpose in life are sought.

The key philosophies that explain a deep Existential insight are Absurdism and Nihilism. These two philosophies depict an Absurdist view of the world as chaotic and meaningless. In addition to the negation of God's existence that deeply contributed to the decay of morals. Thus, this chapter sheds light on the notion of Absurdism in philosophy and literature, some pioneers' insights, Nihilism's conception and its nexus with the decay of morals. Moreover, this chapter investigates the relation between Absurdism and the postmodern era. Furthermore, it explores Jean Baudrillard's insight into the postmodern epoch as hyperreal, consumerist, and Nihilist.

1. Existentialism: From Modernism to Postmodernism

The Existentialist philosophy has emerged during the 19th and the 20th centuries in Europe. This philosophy is originated by ancient philosophers like Plato and Aristotle. Existentialism has always been based on influence and continuity of ideas which are mainly depicted in the philosophy of pioneers like: Arthur Schopenhauer (1788-1860) Soren Kierkegaard (1813-1855), Martin Heidegger (1889-1976) and Jean Paul Sartre (1905-1980). Existential philosophers have contributed to the process of Existentialism's development to generate other philosophies which are mainly Absurdism and Nihilism. Thus, Absurdism is associated with Albert Camus' (1913-1960) contribution to both philosophy and literature. Nihilism, on the other hand has been identified by Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900).

Throughout the decades Philosophy has changed and developed. By the modern era and the dominance of Existentialism, the need to distinguish it from other philosophies has become crucial. Hence, the philosophy that is tied to objectivity is called the analytic philosophy. This type has focused mostly on facts and contains fields like mathematics and biology. Richard Tieszen in his article "Analytic and Continental Philosophy, Science, and Global Philosophy" states that "analytic philosophy strives for clarity, exactness, precision" (Tieszen 5).

On the other hand, the second branch of philosophy is called the continental philosophy. This philosophy is called continental because most of its pioneers originate from Europe. For example, Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, Heidegger, who are from Germany, Kierkegaard from Denmark, Sartre and Camus from France. Tieszen argues that "continental philosophy instead tends toward the use of poetic or dramatic language [...] [it] is concerned with description or narrative or literary quality" (5).

This means that Existentialism, Absurdism and Nihilism are continental philosophies. These philosophies turn mostly to literature to show their philosophical orientation. Philosophers like Camus and Nietzsche have written philosophy in forms of literature. Camus for instance has explained his novel *The Stranger* in French *L'étranger* by another literary work *The Myth of Sisyphus and Other Essays*, originally *Le Mythe de Sisyphe*.

Before exploring the notion of Existentialism, it is necessary to define it. Thomas Flynn in his book *Existentialism A Very Short Introduction* describes the philosophy of existentialism as a philosophy of an individual concern. He states:

Existentialism in its various avatars has played a major role in Continental philosophy for over 50 years and has now entered the perennial philosophical conversation in which it voices the abiding moral concerns of the human condition. In other words, it continues to defend individual freedom, responsibility, and authenticity [...] (Flynn 106).

This definition reflects how the Existential philosophy glorifies the individual through the analysis of the individual's Existential mood, choice, responsibility, freedom, paradox and dread in life. Therefore, Existentialism of the modern and the postmodern eras have revolutionized the conventional meaning of philosophy that has always been tied to logic and rationality. Different philosophers glorify human existence, insight towards life, and journey in life. Steven Crowell in his article "Existentialism" argues that Existential philosophers do not negate sciences that are associated with logic such as physics and biology. Yet according to them these sciences fail to define the human beings. He also claims that intention, blame, responsibility, duty, and virtue are the crucial human aspects that the analytic philosophy cannot explain (Crowell 3).

Schopenhauer like Nietzsche holds a Nihilistic and a pessimistic perspective towards life, and like Camus he believes that meaning cannot be achieved in life. He is also a philosopher who speaks about ethics. According to Mélissa Fox-Muraton in her article “Death, Solitude, and Being” Schopenhauer’s thoughts about ethics are not based on logic or understanding but rather on sympathy. She affirms this idea by the reference to his book *Paralipomena* in which she quotes “If one only observes [another’s] suffering, his need, his anxiety, his pain – then we always feel related to him, we sympathize with him [...]” (Muraton 115). She also argues that Schopenhauer has a whole chapter in his book called Ethics in which he supports the idea that morality cannot have another source other than sympathy (Muraton 115).

Schopenhauer like Kierkegaard does not address his Existential and Absurdist philosophy to logic but he explains it through the human inner voice. Muraton also argues that Schopenhauer believes that the source of human suffering and misery is the materialistic aspects of life. She quotes him once more “[The idea] that the world only has physical, and not moral, signification, is the greatest, the most pernicious, the fundamental error, the true perversity of the mind” (Muraton 115-116). Thus, these materialistic aspects are what distorts meaning in the human life, and what deviates morality. This idea remains to exist in the postmodern era and that is what Don DeLillo illustrates in his novel *White Noise*. It is a novel that tackles Materialism as a fake hope to find meaning in life.

Existentialism is a philosophy that convenes believers and non-believers. The philosopher Søren Kierkegaard is among the believers in God’s existence. His philosophy links faith to existence and absurdity of life. Golam Dastagir in his article “Existentialist Concepts of Freedom and Morality: An Appraisal” states that: “Søren

Kierkegaard is widely recognised as the fountain head of Existentialism, while Jean Paul Sartre is arguably the pivotal figure of its developments to the most influential philosophical movement in the mid-20th century” (Dastagir 6). He also claims that Kierkegaard links the human’s freedom to faith in God, However, Sartre denies the relation between human’s freedom and values with God (Dastgir 3-4). Thus, these two pioneers categorise other Existential thinkers between atheists like Sartre and believers like Kierkegaard.

The philosophy of Existentialism is associated with dread, boredom, the absurd, freedom, commitment, and nothingness. The German philosopher, Martin Heidegger in his 1927 book *Being and Time* introduces a set of concepts that shape the Existential thinking including the attitude of the individual, the human thought, reason, death, and Nihilism. In addition to that, according to Steven Crowell in his article “Existentialism” Heidegger is considered as a philosopher who gives a reluctant notion for Existentialism that is inspired by the 19th century writers: Soren Kierkegaard and Friedrich Nietzsche (Crowell 4). These philosophers have contributed to the contemporary problematic of existence. Heidegger’s insight is also shaped by Jean Paul Sartre’s Existentialism.

On the whole, Sartre is indeed considered as the father of the Existential philosophy. In that, Sartre creates the relation between humanism and existentialism in his famous essay “Existentialism is a Humanism”, in French “L’existentialisme est un humanisme”. His work expresses the power of human beings to make freely wild choices which can be fully independent from religion or society (Crowell 4). Thus, Sartre has proved in his essay “Existentialism is a Humanism” that Existentialism is a philosophy of a human concern in other words a continental philosophy.

In this regard, Existentialism's philosophies can be unified through different themes driven by several pioneers. Thelma Z Levine in her book *From Socrates to Sartre: The Philosophic Quest* suggests that there are six Existential themes. The first theme that she states is brought from Sartre's Existentialism, Existence Precedes Essence. Through this theme Levine highlights the consciousness of the human being. She rejects the idea that human's existence is by chance or prediction. The second theme that she mentions is Anxiety, Anguish or Uneasiness. She asserts, "Anguish is the dread of nothingness of human existence" (Levine 372). She also acknowledges that this theme is brought from Kierkegaard's philosophy. The third theme that Levine acknowledges in her book is Absurdity. She explains it as the inability to explain existence. She refers this back to both Kierkegaard and Blaise Pascal (Levine 372-373).

Moreover, the fourth theme is Nothingness or Void. She explains this theme by the rejection of all forms of existence such as: religion, science, politics, moral values, human relations, and how these aspects fail to define life. The fifth theme is Death. In this theme she states, "nothingness, in the form of death, which is my final nothingness, hangs over me like a sword of Damocles at each moment of my life. I am filled with anxiety at times when permit myself to be aware of this" (Levine 373). Here Levine shows how death, nothingness, and anxiety are highly related concepts. She supports this theme by the philosophy of Heidegger. The sixth and final theme that she mentions is Alienation or estrangement. She explains this by reference to Hegel's philosophy. She states two types of alienation which are: alienation of the spirit caused by freedom and the social alienation (Levine 372-376).

The focal themes that relate Absurdism to Existentialism are: Absurdity, Death, Alienation, and Anxiety. Absurdity means that life makes no sense and humans fall into the responsibility to create a sense “you’re on earth, there’s no cure for that” (Beckett 19). Existentialism tends to reject meaning-giving narratives. Hence, they are described mainly as futile attempt to create meaning. Alienation and anxiety are the feelings that humans suffer from when they realize that life is absurd. Camus states: “at any street corner the feeling of absurdity can strike any man in the face” (Camus 9). Moreover, Death is the trigger of the individual’s anguish, anxiety, and denial of life. Camus illustrates this idea in his claim that “the consciousness of death is the call of anxiety” (Camus 17).

On the other hand, responsibility is another concept that mainly relates to Absurdism. “Man is condemned to be free; because once thrown into the world, he is responsible for everything he does” (Sartre 1945). Sartre highlights the burden of responsibility that humans carry from their birth until their death. From the Absurdist point of view Sartre’s conception of responsibility can be explained as the responsibility of man to create meaning in life.

2. Absurdist Fiction: From Camus to Esslin

The feeling of strangeness and meaninglessness of the world, that the individual experiences, constructs the Absurdist view towards the universe. Camus claims that “what is absurd is the confrontation of this irrational and the wild longing for clarity whose call echoes in the human heart” (Camus 15). The perception of the Absurd is triggered by the consciousness of man about it. In this regard, the Franco-Algerian Albert Camus has largely contributed into philosophy, mostly by literary works that have revolutionized literature and introduced a literary theory. Therefore, Camus’

literary works are devoted to the theme of Absurdity. Camus has acknowledged the brutality, dystopia, the lost psyche of the human in the modern and the postmodern life. Moreover, his ideas are cantered on the contradiction of how the human seeks meaning in a meaningless universe and that is what he explains through his saying, “I don’t know whether this world has a meaning that transcends it. But I know that I do not know that meaning and that it is impossible for me just now to know it” (Camus 34).

The paradoxes that Camus suggests about Absurdism raise an Absurdist hierarchy that can be summarized into three key terms: Absurdity, revolt and death. This hierarchy is witnessed through different stages of Albert Camus’ writings. The novels *The Stranger* in French *L’ étranger* (1942), *The plague* in French *La Peste* (1947) the books of philosophical essays *The Myth of Sisyphus and other essays* in French *Le Mythe de Sisyphe* (1942) *The Rebel* in French *L’Homme Révolté* (1951), and the two plays *Caligula* in French *Caligula* (1941), and *Misunderstanding* in French *Le Malentendu* (1944).

Camus’ characters exhibit the disharmony that the postmodern man suffers from. In different literary works these characters struggle from their inner conflicts to find meaning, the phobia from the brutality of life and their lack of emotions that can be witnessed in *The Stranger*’s Meursault cold quote “mother died today or maybe yesterday. I can’t be sure” (Camus 1). They also suffer from strange behaviours in accordance to their atmosphere, in that they live the vertigo inside life according to their own acceptance. On the other hand, Camus’ essays present the solutions for this Absurdity, and that can be seen mainly in his *Myth of Sisyphus and Other Essays*. In this work, Camus rejects the physical suicide as an option to escape existence.

Camus believes in Nietzsche's rejection of spirituality and denies the escape from the awkwardness of reality through it and defines it as a philosophical suicide. In addition to that, Camus' model of the Absurd man is embodied in his character Sisyphus. The latter encounters his fate despite his consciousness about the failed consequences. Therefore, Camus identifies Sisyphus as an Absurd hero who sees life as a struggle without hope and reflects the Sisyphean punishment to the Absurd man's daily routines and duties.

The theme of Absurdity is once more obvious in Camus' novel *The Stranger*. The character Meursault suffers from alienation and feels himself as a different man. Throughout the novel, Meursault apologizes and explains himself repeatedly "I had an idea that he looked annoyed, and I said without thinking: sorry, Sir" (Camus 4). Alienation in Meursault's character is explained through this quote from *The Myth of Sisyphus* "In a universe suddenly divested of illusions and light, man feels an alien, a stranger" (Camus 6). Alexander, M. DeTillio in his thesis "Albert Camus: a prophetic voice", explains that the habits and the thoughts of Meursault alienate him from his surroundings; consequently, he is a man of different interests. DeTillio suggests that Meursault is not only a stranger to others but also to himself, as he does not present any metaphysical meaning to his life (22). Therefore, Meursault is an empty man inside and he believes only in what is observable or physical. Meursault's empty and meaningless essence manifests a morally corrupt character.

Meursault's morally decayed character can be depicted in many events throughout the novel: in the death of his mother and the fact that he offers no feelings for such a horrific event, as well as his relationship with Marie where he shows no difference in whether he marries her or not. Meursault's death of morals can be seriously seen

when he commits a crime and gives no valid reason, his only claim is that the sun hit his eyes while he shot the Arab. Finally, one cannot say that Camus' character is completely detached of feelings but rather he does enjoy the materialistic and the external aspects of life.

The ambiguity that Camus submits about Absurdity through his works is represented in the way the pursuit of meaning, the temptation to define the world and explain it are indeed an Absurd task. He argues: "That universal reason, practical or ethical, that determinism, those categories that explain everything are enough to make a decent man laugh" (Camus 22). Through this latter, in *The Myth of Sisyphus* Camus describes Absurdity as an "intellectual malady" (Camus 2), rather than a philosophy. Thus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, along with other parallel fictional works attempts to describe the Absurd and portray how one is able to recognize it along with its elements. Camus acknowledges that the Absurd appears in comparison with two paradoxical elements: the human that is rational and seeks meaning and the universe that is silence and grants no meaning. "This divorce between man and this life, the actor and his setting, is properly the feeling of absurdity" (Camus 6). This quote explains how everything in life is detached from meaning.

The feeling that man holds towards life after the God of such world is no more alive, creates the absurd notion in life and the rebellion against it. Camus' *The Rebel* in French *L'Homme Révolté* asserts that man's response to the universe is a metaphysical revolt. Metaphysical rebellion is the means by which man protests against the mechanisms of life. This can be depicted in his saying "It is metaphysical because it disputes the ends of man and the creation" (Camus 29). According to

Camus, what leads man to revolt against the universe and any supreme power is man's feeling of injustice, sins, and corruption in the world.

On the other hand, in an absurd world Camus displays another way to respond to life and that is "acceptance". Camus' Absurd hero "Sisyphus" shows the lack of hope, despair and acceptance to his fate. In this context Camus states: "The struggle itself toward the heights is enough to fill a man's heart. One must imagine Sisyphus happy" (Camus 78). This quote according to Camus shows the possibility of an individual to be happy and that is through the acceptance of one's fate.

Camus' *The Rebel* compares the Greek rebellion with the modern rebellion. Lana Starkey in her article "Albert Camus and the Ethics of Moderation" illustrates that the Greek rebellion is faithful to moderation, which means in oxford dictionary: the avoidance of extremes behaviours or political opinions. While the modern rebellion is concerned with a universal struggle between good and evil. She also adds that the Greek rebellion is against nature, however, the modern rebellion is against the human condition and creation. Starkey links the difference between them to the difference between crime and mistake (Starkey 10-13). Therefore, the modern rebellion takes place in the age of all forms of negation, and that what leads philosophers to relay of utilitarianism as a theory of ethical concern. All in all, the modern and the postmodern philosophers attempt to portray the human's ethical and moral struggle in life and how the human values and morals developed due to the historical backgrounds.

Albert Camus' *The Plague* in French *La Peste* demonstrates a rebellion against a disease and the evil inside humans rather than God. Unlike *The Rebel*'s characters *The Plague*'s characters display solidarity between people who are in trouble, however, *The Plague* and *The Rebel* similarly appeared under the dark shadow of the

First World War, the Second World War and the colonial life in Algeria. These aspects lead Camus to provide two types of rebellion: the metaphysical and the historical rebellion. Moreover, Avi Sagi in his book *Albert Camus and the Philosophy of the Absurd*, states that for Camus metaphysical rebellion that lacks a historical rebellion means rejecting reality without offering a positive alternative approach: “if metaphysical rebellion refuses to assert and restrict itself to absolute negation it commands itself to passive acceptance” (Sagi 83-84). Here Sagi explains the Absurdist conception of Acceptance by the reference to the aspect of rebellion.

Additionally, Camus’ *Myth of Sisyphus and Other essays* illuminates that self-consciousness begins with experience of the Absurd. Thus, revolt mirrors the mature consciousness rebelling. According to Melissa Payne in her paper “Discussion of the Absurd in Albert Camus’ Novels, Essays and Journals” Camus maintains Meursault and Rieux as two models who face circumstances such as the injustice that Meursault suffers from in court and Rieux towards the plague’s wrath to children. Therefore, they describe their experiences relating the Absurd in their descriptions of their life (Payne 15-16).

The Absurd goes through many phases. The first one is the recognition of the Absurd. In this phase the human realises the futility of the daily routines and actions. This step in particular does not require efforts rather it can happen to anyone at any place. “At any street corner the feeling of absurdity can strike any man in the face” (Camus 9). Hence, one becomes paranoid about all one’s surroundings and seeks clarity, “my nostalgia for unity, this fragmented universe and the contradiction that binds them together” (Camus 33). This recognition raises a tension between the human that longs order and the world that is chaotic. The second step is familiarity or acceptance of the Absurd as it is along with the quest for meaning. Consequently,

when a human passes through the first stages of the Absurd the process of judgment and the quest for solutions begins. Camus suggests that the best solution is to live with it. “It [life] now becomes clear, on the contrary, that it will be lived all the better if it has no meaning” (Camus 4). The process of judging involves as Camus explains whether the individual accepts to live with it or escape it through suicide. Hence, he suggests two types of suicide; philosophical suicide and physical suicide. The idea above is stated in Camus’ words as “Judging on weather life is worth living” (Camus 4).

Camus tackles the theme of death in his literary and philosophical works either by metaphorical or literal meanings. In *the Myth of Sisyphus*, Camus differentiates the Absurd hero that accepts his fate from the one who commits suicide. He raises the questions: “does its [life] absurdity require one to escape it through hope or suicide [...] does the absurd dictates death” (Camus 7). Camus in the beginning of his book *The Myth of Sisyphus* defines suicide as “A truly philosophical problem” (Camus 4). This means that one cannot commit suicide without a valid reason yet, it comes from the conclusion that life is absurd and not worth living. He later discusses why one would consider suicide as an option, the idea of suicide is followed by the discussion of his idea of Absurdity. Camus considers suicide as a confession. “Killing yourself amounts to confessing. It is confessing that life is too much for you or that you do not understand it” (Camus 5).

All in all, Camus’ contribution to the philosophy of Absurdism through literature is a lucid portrait of a developed understanding of Existentialism. Camus dismisses different Existentialist tendencies such as: León Chestov, Soren Kierkegaard, and

Martin Heidegger. However, his literature displays an agreement with the Nietzschean philosophy.

Absurdism creates a dilemma on whether its concern is philosophical or literary. From the philosophical aspect Absurdism has been tied to the philosophy of Existentialism and considered as its successor and continuation. Existentialism and Absurdism have always relied on literature to explain their philosophy. Postmodern Absurdist pioneers like Samuel Beckett, Martin Esslin, and Eugene Ionesco have related Absurdism to theatre, while others like Franz Kafka, and Albert Camus have incorporated Absurdism more into novels and essays.

The Absurd is a state of mind that concerns the individual who suffers from Alienation, Anxiety, and mostly Absurdity. Camus defines the Absurd as “a confrontation and an uneasy struggle” (Camus 22). While Esslin in his book *Theatre of the Absurd* (1978) supports the definition given by the Romanian playwright Eugene Ionesco in his essay on Kafka: Ionesco says, “the Absurd is that which is devoid of purpose [...] cut off from his religious, metaphysical, and transcendental roots, man is lost; all his actions become senseless, absurd, useless” (Esslin 23).

Additionally, Franz Kafka is a 20th century thinker and writer who depicts the European disturbance through his works. By the appearance of Darwinism and its dominance, people have lost the spiritual mood and have failed to create it. This lack of the spiritual meaning among the modern man is replaced by the capitalist ideology. Kafka’s works spot the light on the capitalist system and its corruption including the issue of bureaucracy. This issue portrays the absence of morals in relation to the control of the pillars of Capitalism. According to Nishat Tasnim in her paper “Humans Trapped in Bureaucracy: A Study of Franz Kafka’s Depiction of the

Modern Man”, Kafka is one of the pioneers who truly transmits the spiritual and the Existential turbulence (Nishat 7). Accordingly, Don DeLillo as a Postmodern American writer displays in his work *White Noise* a portrait of the *laissez-faire* world and how it manifests to the Decay of morals and it intensifies the feelings of Nihilism and Absurdism.

Additionally, The Theatre of the Absurd is a genre of drama that depicts the philosophy of Absurdism. It is considered as representation of Absurdism that is introduced in Camus’ writings. This theatrical genre has broken all the conventional norms of theatre that are known as the Aristotelian unities: the unity of action, unity of time, and the unity of place. Both Absurdism and its theatre lack logic and meaning yet they portray the need for it. The Theatre of the Absurd clearly mirrors this fact by focusing on subverting and disrupting the known logic of theatre, “The irrational, the human nostalgia, and the absurd that is born in their encounter these are the three characters in the drama that must necessarily end with all the logic of which an existence is capable” (Camus 20). Through these words, Camus summarizes the mood of the theatre of the Absurd.

In 1961, the Hungarian writer Martin Esslin contrived the term “Theatre of the Absurd” in his book *Theatre of the Absurd*. The book pays homage to several famous Absurdist playwrights such as: Samuel Beckett, Eugene Ionesco, Albert Camus and Franz Kafka. Esslin pertains the term “Absurd” to the post-war playwrights that depict the meaninglessness of the world and the futility of existence. According to Gabriela Morales and Esteban Heras in their paper “The Theatre of The Absurd”, the theatre of the absurd has abandoned the typical facet of the medieval age’s drama. In that, this postmodern theatre brings a new plot development, meaningless dialogues,

and ambiguous characters. Therefore, the Absurdist playwrights seek to mirror the feelings of confusion, alienation, and despair during the postmodern era (Morales and Heras 11).

Similarly, Alan E. Knight, in his article “the Medieval Theatre of the Absurd”, explains “[...] but, as Adanov implies in *L’aveu*, our crisis of faith is also a crisis of language” (Knight 186). Thus, Adanov’s idea is illustrated in the plot of the theatre of the Absurd that has neither climax nor triumph; rather it relies on language to express the Absurd. The idea of the language crisis is depicted in Samuel Beckett’s *Waiting for Godot*’s quote “idle discourse” (Beckett 72). Beckett’s play illuminates the new mode of expression that emerged after the Second World War. This mode is used by Beckett’s protagonists as a form of escapism and it carries no action.

VLADIMIR: Well? Shall we go?

ESTRAGON: Yes, let's go.

They do not move (Beckett 89).

The Theatre of the absurd depicts the puzzle of identity and the journey to search for meaning in life in “who I am?” (Esslin 53). The dilemma of identity is depicted in Samuel Beckett’s ambiguous and indefinite character Godot. Meanwhile, Vladimir and Estragon’s identities are dependent on the appearance of Godot. This idea is illustrated in *Waiting for Godot*’s quote “VLADIMIR: The point is – ESTRAGON: Until he [Godot] comes” (Beckett 7). Therefore, this idea reflects the fragmentation and the alienation of the postmodern man within the theatre of the absurd.

3. Nietzsche’s Nihilism and Moral Decay

The meaninglessness, the purposelessness, and the brokenness of existence came to its climax after Nietzsche’s declaration in *The Gay Science* (1882) that “God is dead” (Nietzsche 108). In this regard, the world of arts during the 19th and the 20th

centuries has abandoned the bourgeoisie as a key topic to discuss. This dilemma of faith has been intensified precisely after the Second World War and its terrors, when man denies believing in purpose and God. “One kills oneself because life is not worth living, that is certainly a truth yet an unfruitful one because it is a truism” (Camus 7). This means that the individual’s recognition of the melancholic meaning of life leads to corrupt issues and ideas.

Throughout the decades, Nihilism has been mentioned as a key concept among different philosophers and writers such as Friedrich Hegel, the German writer Jacob Hermann Obereit, and Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi who explain Nihilism as a combination of an aftermath of scepticism and suspicion about everything in life. The purposelessness that life suggests demoralises the individual “nothing frightens man so much, nothing darkens his mind to such a degree, as when God disappears from nature [...] when purpose, wisdom and goodness no longer seem to reign in nature, but only a blind necessity or dumb chance” (Beiser 50). Therefore, this quote reflects that the disappearance of God leads to the decay of morals which is not a human nature rather it vexes humans and destroys their essence.

Nihilism, Absurdism and Existentialism as continental philosophies have reconsidered the metaphysical and religious aspects of life. Thus, philosophers like Camus and Nietzsche have not only denied these metaphysical facts, but they have made fun of them. To Camus, they are considered as an escape from the absurd and a type of suicide. As he calls it in his book *The Myth of Sisyphus* “philosophical suicide”. Camus has judged Christianity and considered it as a void filler or a distraction from the feelings of absurdity “it is Christianity that began substituting the

tragedy of the soul” (Camus 114). Therefore, this quote explains that religion fails to detect the meaning of life.

Nihilism is mostly associated with the German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche, who has influenced the European thought, and the western literature and philosophy. Nietzsche’s Nihilism has several interpretations. According to Nietzsche there is a link between Nihilism and pessimism.

a nihilist is a man who judges of the world that it ought not to be, and of the world as it ought to be that it does not exist: such a man seems not to lack highest values, but rather to see them as unrealizable which is pessimism (Nietzsche 38).

The quote depicts that the pessimistic feelings that come from a Nihilist view of the world lead to the lack of values. On the other hand, according to Dominic Yates in his thesis “Nietzsche on Nihilism”, Nietzsche has divided Nihilism into two sections: Theoretical Nihilism, which depicts the belief that life is meaningless, and the Practical Nihilism as an action that comes from this belief. This latter is mentioned in Nietzsche’s *On the Genealogy of Morality* (1887) where he names practical suicide as suicidal Nihilism (Yates 24).

Nietzsche’s Nihilism is established through his works by the discussion of different ideas. Books like: *The Gay Science* and *Ecce Homo* (1888), discuss the idea of Eternal Recurrence which has occurred to justify Nihilism. Brian Gilbert explains in his thesis “Nietzsche and Nihilism”,

eternal recurrence, whatever it means, does mean at least that all aspects of history, including the abject (in Kristeva’s terms), illusion, the uncanny, as well as the horrifying, figures in what we have become (Gilbert 112).

Nietzsche relates eternal recurrence and his philosophy into historical analysis. He means by this term that everything in life can reincarnate throughout time. In his book *The Gay Science*, he states, “this life as you now live it and have lived it you will have to live once again and innumerable times again; and there will be nothing new in it” (Nietzsche 341). This idea in particular supports Nietzsche’s claim on Nihilism that there is no absolute reality or truth. “There is no reality for us- and not for you either, you sober ones” (Nietzsche 57). Here Nietzsche makes a link between the reality of a drunken man who might represent the intellectual and the sober man who can represent the majority of the society. He asserts that both cannot reach truth because there is no absolute, objective truth.

Nietzsche’s philosophy is based upon different doctrines that give the individual a value over a dystopian universe. His ideas mostly swing between science and logic to morality, which is a lucid reflection to Camus’ Absurdism. Along with the theory of Eternal Recurrence, Nietzsche presents the idea of the *Urbarmensch* in his book *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* 1881. Oxford dictionary defines *Urbarmensch* as “the ideal superior man of the future who could rise above conventional Christian morality to create and impose his own values...” According to Gilbert in his thesis “Nietzsche and Nihilism”, Nietzsche contemplates history as a way to state the possibilities of the future (Gilbert 102). Gilbert’s idea relates back to the Eternal Recurrence.

Thus, Zarathustra is like a prophet who came in the past and will reincarnate in a new form to save humanity from the decay of morals and the destruction or as Gilbert calls it “the promethean task” (Gilbert 102), as he believes that this task will bring hope. Moreover, he states that, “*Thus Spoke Zarathustra* attempts to overcome the malady of history” (Gilbert 102). while Gilbert mentions the idea of Eric Heller in his

book *The Importance of Nietzsche* that the fact that makes Nietzsche write about *Übermensch* is actually the reality that there was no *Übermensch* before. Therefore, eternal recurrence cannot recreate something that has not existed before (Gilbert 105). Since Nietzsche explains Eternal Recurrence in his book *The Gay Science*, he believes that it is a scientific theory. This leads one to relate into Nietzsche's perception that the *Übermensch* is nothing but a false hope to humanity.

our faith in science is still based on metaphysical faith, even we knowers of today, we godless anti-metaphysicians, still take our fire from the blaze set alight by a faith thousands of years old, that faith of the Christians, which was also Plato's faith, that God is truth, that truth is divine.. but what if precisely this becomes more and more unbelievable, when nothing any longer turns out to be divine except for error, blindness and lies- and what if God himself turned out to be our oldest lie? (Nietzsche 112-113)

Nietzsche's famous formulation "God is dead", opens the door to different critics about religion. Nietzsche's beliefs draw upon the idea that Christianity weakens people rather than strengthens them. Therefore, Nihilism came as a weapon to destroy the previous beliefs. According to Corinne Cutler Latozke in her thesis "The Last Man of Modern Liberal Democracy: An Ethical Study of Nihilism in the Twenty-First Century", Christianity for Nietzsche imposes equality on humanity including the intellectual people in order to oppress them. Also Nietzsche depicts that Christianity as a belief that addresses and sermons equality, suffering, and guilt. It also makes people unsatisfied and makes people doubtful about happiness in life (Latozke 34-35).

On the other hand, the new dimension that people hold about life mainly after the countless deaths of men did shake their faith in God. According to Latozke "the herd is a term used by Nietzsche to categorize people who share the same beliefs and thoughts and which their purpose in life is to satisfy the needs of a community. This

herd started to believe in Materialism as a doctrine (Latozke 35). Therefore, the shift that humanity has witnessed leads to a disharmony and a misbalance of the society's infrastructure. Latozke explains the idea above by claiming that the lack of morality leads to corruption. In addition to that, Zahra Meyboti argues in her thesis "Nietzsche and the Problem of Nihilism" that: Nietzsche devalues the Socratic wisdom and Plato's philosophy; he considers them as unsuccessful to respond to human suffering. Equally, he blames Christianity for failing to solve humans from suffering and describes it as a Nihilistic response (Meyboti 16).

Throughout Nietzsche's works, he presents two paradoxes or choices to humans, either affirmation of existence or denial of existence. Despite all the suffering and the dystopia that life offers to humans, Nietzsche has always aimed to affirm to life. Although humans are conscious about the anguish of existence, Nietzsche like Camus feels himself responsible to deliver a message through his works about acceptance of life. In that, Meyboti shows how Nietzsche tackles life affirmation in his book *The Birth of the Tragedy*, as he admires how ancient Greeks were able to affirm and how they make life meaningful and supportable even in tragedy (Meyboti 8).

On the other hand, Meyboti states as a result to the previous that "Nietzsche tries to find a way to genuinely affirm to life in the face of Schopenhauerean consciousness that life is fundamentally suffering, without meaning or goal" (Meyboti 8). Although Nietzsche is against Schopenhauer's idea, his philosophy of Nihilism has been linked to Pessimism. Meyboti explains that, "Nietzsche does not define even the contrast between Pessimism and Nihilism in *The Birth of Tragedy* (1872). However, in his interpretation Pessimism means that one can affirm life [...], but Nihilism means that

one cannot affirm (Meyboti 9). In other words, a Nihilist person always favours denial.

Nietzsche's endeavours in the philosophy of Nihilism exhibit different interpretations for the philosophy. He relates to it not only as lack of values and morals but also as a refusal of life. Dominic Yates claims that the 19th century has led to chaos, a Nihilistic sigh, a loss of all bearings, an instinct of weakness and fatigue. Thus, "chaos" and the lack of all bearings suggest the Nietzschean Nihilism that is the Nihilism of values and life's negation (Yates 49-50).

Paradoxically, Nietzsche's thoughts encourage the creation of meaning and purpose in a chaotic world where the person is the creator of his own virtues, thoughts and perspectives. This idea is witnessed in his quote "the noble type of men is [...] value creating" (Nietzsche 395). Moreover, Nietzsche's *Will to Power* (1901) promotes the individual to ideal perspectives and values where there is no violence, murder and torture. According to Angel Cooper in her article "Domination, Individuality, and Moral Chaos: Nietzsche's Will to Power", Nietzsche inspires individuals to be *Urbarmensch* who are brave, strong and merciful in a utopian society rather than a chaotic and psychotic one.

On the other hand, the theory of chaos has been interpreted by many researchers. Benjamin M. Schmidt in his work "Perspectives of Chaos: Determining Meaning Through interpretation" spots the light on the French philosopher Jean Granier's essay "Nietzsche's conception of Chaos". Granier has attempted to interpret the Nietzschean understanding of chaos through terms like: Appearance, Chaos, Nature and Mask, and Masking as Art. To explain the idea of chaos the focus shall be on Appearance and its relation with chaos mainly. He states that Granier believes that the

Nietzschean concept of “Appearance” constitutes reality itself which is apparent and reality is hidden behind the mask of appearances (Schmidt 9).

The idea of appearance that is mentioned above, opens the door for multiplicity of interpretation and refers to the fact that there is no absolute truth. On the other hand, multiplicity of appearances leads to dissimulation of realities or a shift from a reality to another. Schmidt states that “it must be noted that the direction of dissimulation or change, it is not one way and it is as much destructive and decay as it is development and growth” (Schmidt 12). He also defines Appearances as the following: “appearance refers to a state of things as they manifest themselves” (Schmidt 10).

Thus, the multiplicity of appearances leads to the dissimulation of appearances and multiplicity of realities. In other words, a total chaos is the result. The idea of multiple realities dismantles the essence of existence. This once more leads to Nietzsche’s idea God is Dead and his focus on subjectivity. The idea of subjectivity is stated implicitly is Nietzsche’s quote “God is dead! God remains dead! And we have killed him!” (Nietzsche 120). In other words, Nietzsche argues that people have killed God, which means that people are no longer unified in their view on morals and values and have created a dystopian life where each one has abdicated to their own Gods which are subjective and human made.

The subjectivity and multiplicity of realities that the modern and the postmodern man worship is what killed God. According to Schmidt, in his criticism of Granier’s essay, the manifestation of a certain phenomenon, event or appearance within the sphere of existence is referred to as significant “Manifestation of Chaos” (Schmidt 11). Thus, in a world full of chaos and multiplicity, the individual is condemned to

choose. Meanwhile, all humans are interpretive and selective by nature from the chaos of life in which that they ought to bear the responsibilities of their choices.

As a conclusion, values and morals in life are considered as a reflection to life itself. Dominic Yates in his work “Nietzsche on Nihilism” explains that a healthy life will generate healthy values, and a declined life will have declined values. Moreover, the Nihilistic values are values of decline (Yates 56). Nietzsche’s *On the Genealogy of Morals*, spots the light on the resistance of the individuals against the deconstructed, chaotic life through a communal solidarity (herd), that leads to limitation of thoughts and categorization.

4. Postmodernism and the Rise of the Vague and the Dystopian

Time is the trigger for all philosophers, thinkers, writers and researchers to produce, create and reflect the zeitgeist of each epoch. Postmodern literature is indeed a paradigm that displays a negation of all rules and norms in terms of style and content. Postmodern literature is a combination of different times; past and present, different languages, fictions, cultures and subjectivity. Ferdinand and Johannes in their article entitled “Postmodern Relativism and the Challenge to Overcome the Value-vacuum”, argue that Postmodernism can be related to a variety of cultures, realities and perceptions (Ferdinand and Johannes 189).

This postmodern era that has been generated after the Second World War and flourished in 1960s and 1970s, is associated with a series of decays. Thus, Postmodernist writers create a new doctrine that is based on relativity of truth, unreliability of words to convey meaning, irony and black humour in different genres of fiction.

Tewfik Yousef in his article “Modernism, Postmodernism, and Metamodernism: a Critique”, sets a clear view on the most significant theoretical establishers of Postmodernism. These writers include Ihab Hassan who offers different books that define Postmodernism and trace back its history. For example: *Dismemberment of Orpheus: Toward Postmodern Literature* (1971). Another writer is Francois Lyotard in his work *Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (1979).

Other writers and works that contribute deeply to the era are Jean Baudrillard’s *Simulacra and Simulation* (1981) and Brian McHale’s “From Modernist to Postmodernist Fiction” (2000). McHale’s argues that the shift between the two eras is notable in the change of the dominant from epistemological to Ontological. Moreover, Mary Klages in her article “Postmodernism” (2001), defines Postmodernism along with Modernism. Klages believes that Postmodernism has developed and appeared from modernism (Yousef 34).

The Postmodern era has witnessed several waves including industrialization, technological, scientific developments. In addition to the depressive echo of the world and the individuals after the massacres and the carnage that took place during the World Wars. These events are enough to define the mood of Postmodernism. Postmodernism has resulted in a dystopian society and individual. This idea of dystopia has been tackled in the work of Ferdinand and Johannes as the following: “In contrast to modernism, Postmodernism starts from the assumption that grand utopias are impossible or not viable” (Ferdinand and Johannes 238). This means that Postmodernism is the end of the utopian writings rather it is an era that tackles dystopia as a focal subject matter.

Dystopia has been defined as “a non-existent society described in considerable detail and normally located in time and space that the author intended a contemporary reader to view as considerably worse than the society in which that reader lived” (Sargent 9). The content of the quote can be illustrated in the postmodern novel *The Road* (2006) by Cormac McCarthy as post-apocalyptic novel that depicts an exaggerated dystopian, pessimistic, and empty life. The story took place during the dark shadow of the 9/11 event. This event represents a melancholic shift in America and the whole world. Thus, several writers shed the light on the post-apocalyptic genre of writings. In addition to Sargent, Gregory Claeys defines dystopia as following, “the word is derived from two Greek words, *Dus* and *Topos*, meaning a diseased, bad, faulty, or unfavourable place (Claeys 17).

On the other hand, dystopia has been defined by the English oxford dictionary as: “dystopia mean an imaginary place where people are unhappy and usually afraid because they are not treated fairly”. Therefore, dystopia as a key theme in postmodern literature is often related to the injustice of life, corruption of the individuals, pessimism, lack of emotions and hope. Yet, according to Fatima Kara in her work: “Analyzing the Postmodern Dystopia in literature: Aldous Huxley New World and George Orwell 1984”, there is a relation between dystopia and environmental disaster. In that the dystopian fiction relates the environmental disasters with technologies and their influence on the individual and society (Kara 9).

Environmental damage is clearly a reflection of man’s deeds and destructions. What leads the writers to relate the technologies with the damage of the environments is clearly the man’s obsession and addiction to these waves. Where a human is replaced by machines and emotions are replaced by commodities. Don DeLillo’s

White Noise exhibits the invasion of technology and chemical products in one's life to distract not only the psyche or the view of man to life, but also to eradicate the typical meaning of family that was characterized before by love sharing between its members and quality of communication. Yet technology has devalued these aspects.

Postmodernism glorifies the belief that there is no universal truth and depicts how many things in life are illogical and unexplainable. It is known that the postmodern era emphasizes different world views and realities, rather than one view or reality that should have been correct or valid. This fact can be driven from Jacques Derrida's philosophy of deconstruction which asserts that one word can be interpreted in different ways.

Thus, Deconstruction has won over the old Structuralism view. This may also be traced back to Nietzsche's Nihilism that there is no absolute truth. Ferdinand and Johannes argue that the era has brought about a *mélange* of value systems, which vary from the ones that are honoured and recognized by individuals to the ones shared by few people. They add that Hawking and Mlodinow explain that "it is commonly accepted that every individual is living in his/her own virtual fish bowl" (Ferdinand Johannes 242). Here, Ferdinand and Johannes argue that Postmodernism is an era of subjectivity.

Postmodernism is full of diversity, scepticism, fragmentation, and paranoia that destroy the psyche, the values, and the morals of the individual. Ferdinand and Johannes also believe that Postmodernism cannot give solutions to the "value vacuum" (Ferdinand Johannes 242). Postmodern writers can only demonstrate exaggerative scene where the psychological and moral issues that the postmodern individual suffer from without reference to any solution. Don DeLillo's *White Noise*

depicts a society that worships media and suffers from the malady of buying to fill their existential and spiritual void, and yet it offers no solution to those postmodern issues.

The contradiction of the Postmodernist literature mirrors the ambiguity and the vagueness of the epoch. That is to say from the period of 1960s until now, postmodern writers attempt to involve themes like fragmentation, irony, lack of faith, and alienation along with styles like collage and pastiche in order to confuse the reader on the short term and to portray the era on the long term.

The dystopian mood and the ambiguity in the Postmodern literature is viewed through the disorder of events to portray the disorder of life, the purposelessness and the absurd emotions of individuals that life is futile and not worth living. Thomas Pynchon's *The Crying of Lot 49* is the image of what Postmodernism is. It depicts a paranoid journey where the protagonist Oedipa Mass believes that there is an ordered system behind the disorder of life. According to Daniel Bukowski in his thesis "Paranoia and Schizophrenia in Postmodern Literature: Pynchon and DeLillo", throughout the story Pynchon's Postmodernist text does not provide Oedipa with the ultimate truth because there is no ultimate truth in Postmodernism (Bukowski 26).

The themes of postmodern literature are not the only elements that exhibit the vagueness of Postmodernism yet, the multiplicity of plots. In this regard, M.R Verma and A.K Sharma state in their book *Reflections on Indian English Fiction* that Davis Harvey Quotes Francois Lyotard's definition of the Postmodern as "incredulity towards metanarratives" (Verma and Sharma 126). According to Bukowski, Don DeLillo's *Libra* is considered as a cultural theory to the conception of Postmodernism. That is to say, his book posits questions about paranoia,

schizophrenia, and identity (Bukowski 26). Therefore, DeLillo is portraying the shift of postmodernity in relation to the conditions. Likewise, *The Crying of Lot 49*, *Libra* 1988 comprises multiple plots. In this regard, the vagueness that Postmodernist literature imposes reflects the era. The multiplicity of plots, paranoia in the age of Capitalism and Materialism, along with post-apocalypse and the loss of identity may summarise the spirit of the era.

The invasion of technology and the expansion of media as two postmodern features have two facets. The first facet shows the delicate image of the postmodern era as convenient and comfortable. The second facet exhibits the fearful and the profound image of this epoch, when the individual is cognitively paralyzed. These two facets form a sublime image for Postmodernism. Julien Henniburg in the paper “Something Extraordinary Hovering Just Outside Our Touch: The Technological Sublime in Don DeLillo’s *White Noise*”, states that according to Jameson “technology in the postmodern world is indicative of a network of power and control even more difficult for our minds and imaginations to grasp” (Henniburg 58). Here Henniburg illustrates the horrifying facet of technology.

The complexity of the postmodern era in association with the appearance of media as a powerful weapon reflects *White Noise*’s protagonists’ turbulence and disorientation. Henniburg illustrates the idea by mentioning Joseph Tabbi’s saying “when a literary figuration fails to match its technological object [...] this is the point in which literature can begin to represent not technology itself but the tumultuous and incongruous nature of postmodern experience” (Henniburg 53). What the postmodern literature conveys through its protagonists mirrors the way individuals are affected and distressed by the postmodern world.

Postmodern writings reflect the effect of Capitalism on the contemporary society. This phenomenon is mainly of major focus in America, the country of *laissez-faire* economy. Hence, Capitalism takes over the world in a way that makes it desirable for people. In other words, people surrender to this Capitalist ideology because it provides them with certain imaginary needs and addiction. The postmodern human is lost in his desires to buy and consume.

The postmodern subject first and for most no longer is a citizen of a political totality, but an isolated consumer, a rational utility maximizer. The act of consumption has become the prime expression of individuality in the postmodern. The fragmented satisfaction of infinite consumer desire is the supreme emotional goal of the postmodern subject (Geef 28).

The postmodern society is plagued by Capitalism and its multiplicity of offers to a point that they cannot distinguish between what they need and what they are brainwashed to buy. Dennis Geef in his work *Late Capitalism and Its Fictitious Future(s): The Postmodern, Science Fiction and the Contemporary Dystopia*, argues that a postmodern individual cannot have enough satisfaction of these things they buy what they do not really need. Meanwhile, this postmodern society does not cherish what human beings actually need, and neglect all the sensible, meaningful work or healthy relationship that are based on moral values like respect. They remain running behind filling the void that can never be filled, problems that have no solutions, and diseases that have no cures (Geef 28-29).

Accordingly, *White Noise* sets clear this image of the postmodern subject that is infected by Capitalism. The Gladney's family goes to the supermarket every day to give an impression to themselves that they are alive. They watch advertisements on television and get persuaded more into consumption. Most significantly, they forget

about normal human values, morals, and norms. This fact is represented in their lack of communication and the repeated act of cheating.

Postmodernism is mainly an era of continuation as it is equally an era of negation. This can be seen in terms of investing in most of the Existential philosophies of the modern era. Postmodernism is influenced by Absurdism in terms of the meaninglessness of life, the belief in the existence of the irrational universe and the creation of void fillers. Postmodernism is also influenced by Nihilism concerning the death of God, the negation of truths, along with the creation of different truths, the subjectivity of meaning, and the dying values.

All in all, Postmodernism is a combination of chaos, dystopia, and the leftovers of Modernism. Hence, alienation as a key theme in Absurdity plays a focal role in the postmodern *White Noise*. In which Capitalism and technology contribute in ones' alienation from their human nature. Additionally, this work does not only show how nature and life lose their meanings but also names and language.

5. Jean Baudrillard's Simulacra and Simulation

Jean Baudrillard is a French philosopher, cultural theorist, and one of the most significant representatives of the postmodern era. Marcin Golab in his work "Jean Baudrillard's Theories of Simulations Applied to Recent Crime Fiction", claims that as a sociologist Baudrillard is an observer of popular phenomena and has approached them in a unique manner with unique complex and difficult arguments (Golab 11). His most famous work *Simulacra and Simulation* in French *Simulacres et Simulation* 1981 that represents deeply the social postmodern status quo has been a literary theory and reference to many works most notably the American Postmodern Nihilist

works such as: Don DeLillo's *White Noise* and Thomas Pynchon's *The Crying of Lot 49*. "Baudrillard's works [...] challenge the common understanding of notions such as reality, death, morality, the humanities, and later terrorism" (Golab 12). This quote illustrates the themes that Baudrillard studies.

Baudrillard mentions three major influences that established his work *Simulacra and Simulation*. The first influence is the birth of the global Capitalism and its spread from the United States to the rest of the world. The second influence is the appearance of the consumer culture that has invaded the essence of the individuals and mostly the western life. The third influence is the technological advances and the political stances that have resulted from the Post Second World War and the Cold War. Moreover, Golab argues that *Simulacra and Simulation* can be regarded as continuation to Baudrillard's previous works such as: *The System of Objects*. In which he discusses the object of Consumerism. *Consumer Society* in which he analyses the nature of consumption with reference to production. In addition to his other work *For a Critique of Political Economy of the Sign*, where he links it to value-based economy (Golab 29).

Baudrillard's formulation "the end of transcendence" that is borrowed from the philosopher Herbert Marcuse depicts Baudrillard's refusal to the consumer society of the postmodern epoch. It also explains the individual's turbulence and confusion where a product loses its value, and the individuals lose the guidance and the clarity about what they need and the way they want to live. Jean Baudrillard as Marxist French philosopher neglects the conception of bourgeoisie and attempts to glorify a society of values rather than a society of commodity and Capitalism. Moreover, his book *Perfect Crime* (1996) reflects the destruction of the real.

The postmodern individual is a recipient individual who is able to receive copious information from different types of mass media without any ability to create or to sense their meaning. Ahmad Ghashmari in his PhD paper “Living in a Simulacrum: How TV and the Supermarket Redefines Reality in Don DeLillo’s *White Noise*” claims that the French philosopher Baudrillard considers the postmodern individuals passive response as a kind of receiving information and rejecting meaning and that what he calls “non-reception” (Ghashmari 173). In this context, the postmodern American fiction spots the light on the concept of hyperreality of technology including: televisions and mass media. These waves are considered as a real image more than the real portrait according to the postmodern individuals.

In this context, Baudrillard portrays three hypotheses on how meaning and media function together to reinforce the insignificance of information. This huge amount of information that the media offers dissolves the meaning of life aspects. In the first hypothesis he states: “Either information produces meaning [...] but cannot make up for the brutal loss of signification in every domain” (Baudrillard 55). Here, Baudrillard means that media fails to give meaning that the humans seek when they turn to media. In the second hypothesis he states: “Or information has nothing to do with signification” (Baudrillard 55). Here Baudrillard assumes that perhaps the insignificance of different aspects of life cannot be blamed on media.

Most importantly, the third hypothesis on the function of meaning, media, and information is the hypothesis that Baudrillard supports and approves the most. He states “The loss of meaning is directly linked to the dissolving, dissuasive action of information, the media, and the mass media” (Baudrillard 55). Here, he argues that the information given on media is what destroys meaning and gives illusionary

images. Thus, Baudrillard is a theorist who tackles meaning from the contemporary eye. His work is continuity to what Nietzsche, Camus and other existential philosophers that have tackled meaning in life.

On the other hand, Baudrillard in his book *Simulacra and Simulation* explains the concept of simulacrum as following: “the simulacrum is never what hides the truth-it is a truth that hides the fact that there is none. The simulacrum is true” (Baudrillard 3). Here, Baudrillard argues that for someone to simulate a certain aspect is to pretend to have what one actually does not have. This aspect of the simulacrum creates certain confusion between the real and the fake. He illustrates the simulacrum in someone’s act of pretending to be sick. The confusion on whether the simulator is sick or not creates a paranoia. This paranoia results in the negation of the real. Thus, the fake often becomes more real than the real itself.

Whoever fakes an illness can simply stay in bed and make everyone believe he is ill. Whoever simulates an illness produces in him some of the symptoms. Therefore pretending or dissimulating lives the principle of reality intact: the difference is always clear it is simply masked, whereas simulation threatens between the true and the false, the real and the imaginary (Baudrillard 4).

The term of simulacra is argued by Baudrillard to have three orders. The first is the counterfeit or the imitation of the real or the natural. He describes it “harmonious”, “optimistic”, and “ideal” (Baudrillard 81). This order masks a certain reality; he argues that this first order “belongs to the imaginary of utopia” (Baudrillard 81). The second is what he relates to science fiction, as it depicts the absence of genuine reality; a model without a genuine origin. The third order represents a model that has no relation with reality. This model itself becomes its own. Baudrillard states that,

the third corresponds- is there an imaginary that might corresponds to this order? The most likely answer is that the good old imaginary of science fiction is dead and that something else is in the process of emerging (not only in fiction but in theory as well (Baudrillard 81).

Baudrillard introduces the term of the hyperreal as the model or a copy without real to explain the third order of the simulacra, which he defines as “it is the generation by models of real without origin or reality: a hyperreal” (Baudrillard 3) and he explains more intensively as following “Simulacra of simulation founded on information, the model, the cybernetic game-total, operationality, hyperreality, aim of total control” (Baudrillard 3). Baudrillard presents the hyperreal as the evil that possesses the souls of the postmodern individuals. This hyperreal can be either media or Capitalism that people surrender to voluntarily.

Baudrillard gives the example of Disney land to explain all orders of simulacra. Disney land in the first order can be explained as the imaginary world; an imitation of the real world in a utopian manner that gathers people inside it and grants them a certain illusion that fills their existential void. The second order in Disney land is represented in the fact that it contains “pirates”, “frontiers”, “future world”, “illusion and phantasms” (Baudrillard 10). In the third order Baudrillard argues that Disney land is portrayed as the imaginary world to make people believe that the outside world is real (Baudrillard 10). He also compares it to a prison, “Disney land exists in order to hide the fact that it is the real country, all of the real America that is Disney land” (Baudrillard 10).

On the other hand, with the dominance of the American Capitalism in the 1980s and the invasion of the mediated life, the postmodern American life holds a new proportion. Due to this technological infestation in the contemporary life, the humans

recur to believe what television implodes in that this device starts to be the idol of the era, its image, and reality. Moreover, people attempt to live, behave, buy like and dislike according to what television interprets. Furthermore, the privacy and the individual creation of meaning have lost their impact. In that, peoples' ultimate goals are simply being under the category of sane people not mentally but in terms of the products they possess.

Additionally, television is the device that has paralyzed the individuals' brains to think, analyse or generate ideas because of the fragmented and imploded news and advertisement that are displayed through it. According to Ghashmari, Baudrillard argues that prioritizing individuals is the main goal of the media, and this goal may occur inside recipients' lives in the simulacrum mainly that of television. In this context the postmodern humans have no choice but to neglect meaning and accept the media's image. That is to say meaning is vacuumed and destroyed by media (Ghashmari 174). In this way the postmodern American life carries a new God that is not only Capitalism but also media which dictates to people what to choose, which ideology to follow and what to buy.

The postmodern novel that depicts the image of a capitalist and mediated America during the 1980s is Don DeLillo's *White Noise*. Winning The National Book Award after its publication in 1985, the novel reflects the contemporary American life. It is a work that displays the hyperreal mood, implosion of media along with the lack of meaning and faith. Ghashmari in his paper explains that television in *White Noise* is of a crucial importance because it fills the world of the novel (Ghashmari 174). DeLillo's work shows the control of television of the individual and the similarity

between its dialogue and the characters' dialogue that is characterized by chaos, disorder, fragmentation and meaninglessness.

On the other hand, DeLillo's work shows the depthless of the contemporary life through the characters' attempts to simulate. In that, *White Noise* depicts the aspects of simulacrum through the character's dependence on media and surrender to its image. The lack of meaning in the contemporary life leads people to escape to the hyperreal image. In this context *White Noise* is *par excellence* a work that depicts the conception of "Déjà vu" in simulacrum through the dialogue of the Gladney's family (the protagonists), "eating yogurt, sitting here, talking about Déjà vu" (DeLillo 138).

The lack of meaning expands to include not only emotions and senses of individuals toward life yet the products that lose their value in the contemporary life and they become a source to fill the void and to portray a superficial image of modernity. In this regard, the supermarket and the goods have become the guru for them. Thus, what the mediated culture and consumer culture provide is a saturation and chaos more than the life's real chaos.

I observe, I accept, I assume, I analyze the second revolution, that of the twentieth century, that of postmodernity, which is the immense process of the destruction of meaning, equal to the earlier destruction of appearances. He who strikes with meaning is killed by meaning (Baudrillard 105).

Baudrillard and the postmodern writers portray the aimlessness of the world and the loss of its real image. This pessimistic idea has been tackled by the modern philosophers and thinkers and expands to reach the postmodern writers. The Existential thinkers attempt to spot the light on the man's escapism from the melancholy of life in many ways. The postmodern era is not only an era of negation

but rather it has been an era that has created copies of reality which Baudrillard calls Simulacrum or the hyperreal.

Baudrillard like Nietzsche and Camus believes that God is nothing but a creation of people. This creation is made to fill a moral void, escape from the absurd or cover for a truth that does not exist. This idea is depicted in his quote, “That deep down God never existed, that only the simulacrum ever existed, even that God himself was never anything but his own simulacrum” (Baudrillard 5). However, the sense of emptiness, and meaninglessness by the philosophies of Absurdism and Existentialism are explained in Baudrillard’s works. Baudrillard himself acknowledges the fact that he is a Nihilist and he explains his works according to his ideology of Nihilism. He states clearly in his book *Simulacra and Simulation*. “I am nihilist” (Baudrillard 105). The lack of meaning in the postmodern era has led to different subjective images of the hyperreal that distract the Godless humans from the void and emptiness.

All in all, to hide the fact that there is no God to guide or to grant salvation, television and Capitalism tend to mask that reality and play the role of God. The creation of the hyperreal is an attempt to find a Utopian world. Likewise, the Absurd is a search for meaning in a meaningless world; the hyperreal is the attempt to find Utopia in a dystopian world.

CHAPTER TWO: ABSURDISM, NIHILISM, AND VALUE

SHIFT IN DON DELILLO'S *WHITE NOISE*

Don DeLillo's *White Noise* is a novel that sheds the light on the postmodern struggle against the universe and life's absurdity. The novel carries the philosophies of Absurdism and Nihilism. These philosophies exist in the novel implicitly through its major theme "Fear of Death". DeLillo exhibits the characters' attempts to escape the inevitability of death. The refusal of mortality through commodities of Capitalism and technology, along with Baudrillard's conception "Implosion of Meaning in Media", mirror the moral decay that is caused by the lack of faith in the world of *White Noise*. Therefore, their fear of death forces them to employ Jean Baudrillard's concept of Simulacrum and creation of hyperreality which are mentioned in his book *Simulacra and Simulation*.

The simulated world that is human made generates new Gods that are Capitalism and Media. This latter contributes to the decay of morals and the absence of faith. DeLillo's characters rely on creating a superficial and a temporary meaning in their lives to contravene their fate. Thus, fear of death in the life of the characters foreshadows a meaningless life in which they employ several strategies to reverse it, and attempt to make it meaningful. Yet, DeLillo depicts the fear of death as the absolute that cannot be defeated, which makes all their attempts to create meaning futile.

Jaemin Choi, in his paper "Death, Noise, and (Un)plotting in Don DeLillo's *White Noise*", argues that any reader is able to detect and to ponder over the theme of death in the novel. Choi believes that death disrupts the images of the novel and creates an ambiguous meaning. He adds that the themes of death and noise haunt the novel

excessively without forming any explicit nexus between the two (Choi 1). Therefore, death in the novel can be explained through different views and different intellectual backgrounds. The title, *White Noise*, can represent many ideologies that carry hidden motifs like Capitalism and Materialism. *White Noise* might even represent death itself as Jack states:

“What if death is nothing but sound?”
“Electrical noise.”
“You hear it forever. Sound all around. How awful.”
“Uniform, white.” (WN 186-187)

Jack has used both terms “white” and “noise” to show the possibility that *White Noise* can represent death. The term *White Noise* in general refers to background noises and sounds that exist in the daily life. Jack’s selection of the two words can be related to the idea that death exists around him just like white noise does.

The title *White Noise* may represent the contradiction of the postmodern life. In other words, the characters’ dependence on technology and Consumerism gives them the impression that their death anxiety is solved. The attempts of the character’s to deny and create meaning, reflects noise. However, the silence of these attempts to solve their death anxiety mirrors the silence of the universe towards all the attempts to create meaning in life and this represents the white.

1. Death of God and Moral Decay

Nothing frightens man so much, nothing darkens his mind to such a degree, as when God disappears from nature [...] when purpose, wisdom and goodness no longer seem to reign in nature, but only a blind necessity or dumb chance (Beiser 50).

Since Nietzsche’s declaration in his book *The Gay Science* that “God is dead” (108), most of the literary and philosophical domains appeared to tackle this idea.

This is due to the horrors and the atrocities of the First World War, the Second World War, and the Cold War. These aspects have contributed to atheism. DeLillo's *White Noise* exhibits the absence of a supreme power to guide humans. The character's quest to create their own God in order to worship leads them to a serious Absurd sense. Martin Esslin claims that, "the Absurd is [...] cut off from his religious, metaphysical [...] roots" (Esslin 23). Therefore, DeLillo's characters are spiritually empty and emotionally cold like any other Absurdist characters. They are defeated by their belief in Materialism. Throughout the novel, they deny their Existential fate. Death is among the themes that DeLillo's characters endeavour to neglect, "the ultimate end, awaited but never desired" (Camus 50). This denial of mortality as a fatal necessity drives the characters to depend on the corrupt aspects in their lives.

The fear of death in the novel is a trigger that reveals the evil inside each character. In his essay, "Non-human Agencies in Don DeLillo's *White Noise*", Erden El claims that *White Noise* depicts the anthropocentric of being a human. In other words, human wisdom does not enable them to understand that they are going to die (Erden EL 37). The anthropocentrism of the characters appears through this quote, "No sense of the irony of human existence, that we are the highest form of life on earth and yet ineffably sad because we know what no other animal knows, that we must die" (WN 101). This quote illustrates the characters' negation of the Existential and universal order. This negation is a reflection of the spiritual vacuum that the characters live in.

Dylar, the experimental chemical, and the anti-fear of death drug that the scientist Willie Mink invents in order to make people deny their fear of death, is a crucial device in the novel. Jack Gladney's wife Babette struggles within her journey to get

this drug. In that, she is involved in a series of other moral crises among them: her adulterous relationship with the scientist, as well as lying and denying the fact that she is taking this drug. The decay of morals appears in Babette's confession about her betrayal,

It involved an indiscretion. This was the only way I could get Mr. Gray [Willie Mink] to let me use the drug. It was my last resort, my last hope. First I'd offered him my mind. Now I offered my body (WN 182).

This shows that Babette's lack of faith leads her to give up her values for the sake of denying her fear and getting access to the drug, Dylar. Moreover, Babette's words depict how this postmodern character puts faith in everything but God. Putting faith and hope in a drug provider shows the way DeLillo portrays his character's despair and Absurdity.

DeLillo illuminates to the reader that every supernatural, scientific invention that has a corrupt basis, is a source of mental, emotional and physical destruction. Dylar is indeed a device that eradicates *White Noise*'s characters.

[...] secret drug, code-name Dylar, that he'd been working on for years. He'd found a Dylar receptor in the human brain and was putting the finishing touches on the tablet itself. But he also told me there were dangers in running tests on a human. I could die. I could live but my brain could die. The left side of my brain could die but the right side could live. This would mean that the left side of my body would live but the right side would die (WN 181).

The human surrender to the chemical drug Dylar may represent a new form of the Camusian physical suicide in the postmodern era. Thus, the despair that Babette faces forces her to risk not only her family life, but her physical life, too. In this regard, Steve Quam, in his work "A Meaningful Play: Exploring the Possibilities of the Novel

in Don DeLillo's *White Noise*", explains that Babette's journey to deny her fear of death is an Existential struggle and her husband Jack fails to understand this struggle (Quam 28). This idea is stated clearly when Babette tells her husband that "This is not the story of a wife's deception. You can't sidestep the true story, Jack. It is too big" (WN 185). Babette's words reflect her Existential despair that is generated by a spiritual emptiness. On the other hand, this quote depicts the way the characters value their fear of death, while they devalue the incident of Babette's adulterous relationship with Willie Mink in particular and devalue morality in general.

Quam compares the absence of morality in Jack Gladney's character to Camus' character Meursault. He argues that Jack's attempt to become a killer is a source to generate meaning and to fight his Existential anxiety caused by fear of death (Quam 6-7). He also depicts how Camus' works demonstrate the absurdity in meaningful and major events. Quam links the insignificance and meaninglessness of the murder committed by Meursault's character to the meaninglessness of Jack's attempt to kill Willie Mink. On the other hand, he depicts how Murray's character is corrupt by advocating freedom to Jack in the meaninglessness of the social law (Quam 27).

In this regard, Murray's character appears to be corrupt from the beginning of the novel. This is first shown in his psychotic way of woman admiration and the illegal relations he has with them. He quotes,

The irony is that I love women. I fall 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. The second irony is that it's not the bodies of women that I ultimately crave but their minds. The mind of a woman. The delicate chambering and massive unidirectional flow, like a physics experiment. What fun it is to talk to an intelligent woman wearing stockings as she crosses her legs. That little staticky sound of

rustling nylon can make me happy on several levels. The third and related irony is that it's the most complex and neurotic and difficult women that I am invariably drawn to. I like simple men and complicated women (WN 18-19).

Murray through this quote argues that what he admires is the intelligence of women, but he contradicts his words by continuing to describe their gestures and bodies. Murray's words depict how he seeks meaning through women. He even approaches Jack's wife in inappropriate manners "He clutched Babette by the left bicep and sidled around her, appearing to smell her hair" (WN 40). Even when the Disastrous, horrifying Airborne Toxic Event takes place, Murray does not give up on his mental obsession with women, "I realized the man talking to the prostitutes was Murray Jay Siskind. I walked over there, waited for him to finish his sentence before addressing him" (144). This can be driven back to Camus' character Raymond Sintés a friend of Meursault who shows a serious abuse to the Arab girl and find meaning in that. That causes Meursault to commit the murder.

Murray's corruption does not only stop in illegal affaires. He also plays the role of the persuader who later in the novel convinces Jack that the only way to forget his anxieties about fear of death is to become a killer. He states,

I believe, Jack, there are two kinds of people in the world. Killers and diers. Most of us are diers. We don't have the disposition, the rage or whatever it takes to be a killer. We let death happen. We lie down and die. But think what it's like to be a killer. Think how exciting it is, in theory, to kill a person in direct confrontation. If he dies, you cannot. To kill him is to gain life-credit. The more people you kill, the more credit you store up. It explains any number of massacres, wars, executions (WN 270).

Murray does not care about the social norms or moral values. Yet, he makes Jack believe that the only way that could grant him salvation, a sense of power and relief from his pessimistic, nihilistic and absurdist senses, is to become a killer,

Nothingness is staring you in the face. Utter and permanent oblivion. You will cease to be. To be, Jack. The dier accepts this and dies. The killer, in theory, attempts to defeat his own death by killing others. He buys time, he buys life. Watch others squirm. See the blood trickle in the dust (WN 270).

Along with Murray Vernon Dickey, Babette's father plays a role of convincing the weak character Jack to commit the crime of murder. Vernon is the one who gives Jack the gun and stimulates his first intentions to kill.

"In your whole life as a man in today's world, have you ever owned a firearm?"
"No," I said.
"I figured. I said to myself here's the last man in America who doesn't own the means to defend himself."
He reached into a hole in the rear seat, coming out with a small dark object.
He held it in the palm of his right hand.
"Take it, Jack."
"What is it?"
"Heft it around. Get the feel. It's loaded" (WN 236).

The conversation of Jack and Vernon shows the corrupt character of the free, democratic and capitalist America that permits people to own guns. Thus, the exaggerative condemning freedom does not serve the real sense of freedom. Yet it participates in the corruption of mankind. Hence, the meaning of human life itself in the novel has become insignificant. Due to the atheistic, morally decayed, weak and unstable characters that DeLillo shows in his dystopian novel, *White Noise*.

Despite Murray's endeavours to convince Jack that the only remedy for the fear of death is killing others, the essence of the human individual triumphs at the end. Jack's

Schopenhauerean sympathy appears after his attempt to kill the scientist Willie Mink, “I know I felt virtuous, I felt blood-stained and stately, dragging the badly wounded man through the dark and empty street” (WN 290). Jack’s morality is awakened when he shoots Willie Mink, but he decides to save his life and take him to the hospital. This incident adds to the character’s nostalgia and appetite for goodness in life. Furthermore, Jack explains his sympathy and desire for faith during his conversation with the nun he finds in the hospital. She says that, “The nonbelievers need the believers. They are desperate to have someone believe. But show me a saint. Give me one hair from the body of a saint” (294). Jack’s sympathy is a trigger that leads him to reconsider his spiritual need. Yet the nun’s response is the aspect that shows that the lack of faith curbs all the layers within the society, even those who must transmit spirituality lack spirituality.

Jack’s exposure to the chemical Nyodene D and the evacuation that happens in Blacksmith due to the Airborne Toxic Event lead the characters to have the impression of apocalyptic and post-apocalyptic events. These events are commonly used in postmodern writings to depict the dystopian era and to show nostalgia to the religious aspects of life.

During the evacuation Jack has a conversation with a black man who still believes in God. The man says, “what is coming is definitely coming. No government in the world is big enough to stop it” (WN 132). The man tells Jack that the apocalypse is God’s word and promise to the world, “It’s here, isn’t it? People feel it. We know in our bones. God’s kingdom is coming” (WN 132). The man keeps explaining the apocalypse with biblical facts while the atheist character of Jack as a man detached of faith speaks about the statistics. He states, “Earthquakes are not up, statistically” (WN

133). The man attempts to persuade Jack into believing by the description of the battle of good and evil “Armageddon” (WN 133), “You’re either among the wicked or among the saved. The wicked get to rot as they walk down the street. They get to feel their own eyes slide out of their sockets. You’ll know them by their stickiness and lost parts” (WN 133).

Paradoxically, Jack does show a certain desire for faith through his admiration of the religious man’s words. He says, “I took one look and I knew. This is a man who understands” (WN 133). After the conversation is over, Jack goes back to his anxieties and fears. Thus, this part shows the scepticism and disorder of the nonbelievers. Yet DeLillo depicts the nostalgic feelings of the postmodern individuals towards faith.

As a conclusion, nostalgia for faith is the characters’ answer that the dystopian world does not give a utopian individual. The postmodern individual struggles to face the Existential order within chaos and spiritual vacuum. DeLillo exhibits the characters shift towards Media, Technology, and Capitalism to create a new supreme value that might lead them to choose and bear responsibility. This draws back to Kafka’s works that illuminate Capitalism as a new evil which destroys human values. Therefore, *White Noise* displays the individuals’ melancholy and nothingness inside their hearts. The appearance of the Nun in the hospital at the last pages of the novel represents the world’s contradiction and absurdity. Katelyn Hummer in her paper “The Green in White Noise: Consumption, Technology, and the Environment” compares the symbolism of the nun that does not believe in God to the society of consumers that are alive but they do not live (Hummer 13) yet, this contradiction has resulted in a spiritual and moral vacuum.

2. Images of Nihilism in *White Noise*

White Noise contains several modern and postmodern ideologies. The Nihilistic features that the novel carries are within its major theme which is Fear of Death. DeLillo's characters lead the reader to think of Nihilism each time they discuss life and death matters. Nihilism goes back to the Nietzschean belief that God is dead and people have killed him through their corruption and greed. The death of God in the world of *White Noise* leads the characters to believe in science and Eternal Recurrence, to seek power, and to deny life and truth. Therefore, this novel depicts different Nihilist perspectives, "this life as you now live it and have lived it, you will have to live once again and innumerable times again; and there will be nothing new in it" (Nietzsche 341).

Nietzsche, the famous pioneer of the philosophy of Nihilism, tackles the theory of Eternal Recurrence. This theory states that the individuals are positioned in a closed order without any connection to any supreme power. Hence, if there is any recurrence, it has to be bound to this universal order. DeLillo's characters through their conversation they reflect their familiarity with Eternal Recurrence. Thus, they use it as a kind of defence mechanism against their fear of death and to sooth their Existential anxieties. The characters depict a rationality of any atheist that does not believe in God or the judgement day. Hence, they replace this spiritual belief by the Eternal Recurrence.

Eternal Recurrence can be illustrated in Murray and Jack's conversation. When Jack says that he does not want to see doctors because they remind him of his disease and increase his fear of death, Murray proposes a solution that shall help him: "In that case you can always get around death by concentrating on the life beyond" (WN 265).

Here, one can get an impression that Murray is about to talk about spiritual matters, but in reality he proposes the thought of Eternal Recurrence. This can be seen in the following conversation with Jack.

“How do I do that?”

“It’s obvious. Read up on reincarnation, transmigration, hyper-space, the resurrection of the dead and so on. Some gorgeous systems have evolved from these beliefs. Study them.”

“Do you believe in any of these things?”

“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” (WN 265).

DeLillo’s characters illuminate the nothingness and the Nihilistic perspectives they have, through the Nihilistic and Existential questions they ask. This idea is explicit through the character’s redundant use of the term *Déjà vu*. This term is used by the characters to express any previous event or action. Heinrich the rational child uses this term to signify a familiar sense. Jack says, “It was Heinrich who’d told me that exposure to the chemical waste could cause a person to experience a sense of *déjà vu*” (WN 123). Moreover, Steffie uses the term *déjà vu* to express a conversation that she has witnessed before. She tells Babette,

She spooned some yogurt out of the carton, seemed to pause, deep in thought.

“This happened before,” she said finally.

“What happened before?”

“Eating yogurt, sitting here, talking about *déjà vu*” (WN 130).

DeLillo, through the character of Jack, illustrates that the *déjà vu* appears in the novel to refer to a theory. This theory might be the theory of Eternal Recurrence,

A talk-show host said: “You are on the air.” The fires burned in the oil drums. The sandwich vendor closed down his van.

“Any episodes of *déjà vu* in your group?”

“Wife and daughter,” I said.
“There’s a theory about déjà vu.”
“I don’t want to hear it” (WN 146).

This quote shows that the characters’ use of this term is a sign of their consciousness about the way time and history repeat themselves within this order. Therefore, déjà vu in *White Noise* is the signifier to the signified “Eternal Recurrence”.

Murray is a character who displays a firm belief in one of the concepts of Eternal Recurrence, “this six hundred years before Christ. It is true once again, perhaps more true than ever” (WN 145). These words elicit the reader’s attention to think about the background they have about the Nietzschean theory. Furthermore, in a conversation between Jack and Heinrich, DeLillo shows the characters’ insignificance of time.

“Is there such a thing as now? ‘Now’ comes and goes as soon as you say it. How can I say it’s raining now if your so-called ‘now’ becomes ‘then’ as soon as I say it?”
“You said there was no past, present, or future.”
“Only in our verbs. That’s the only place we find it”
(WN 28)

Thus, this conversation describes past, present, and future as verbs only. This description means that the characters believe that there is no difference between past, present and future. In other words, the same fear, atrocities, and ends keep repeating throughout time.

On the other hand, DeLillo’s *White Noise* represents the two paradoxes of affirmation and denial of life that Nietzsche tackles throughout his works. Nietzsche relates the denial of life to Nihilism and nothingness while he urges people to affirm life and encourages them to put their fears behind in order to be able to live a normal life. He asserts, “We negate and have to negate because something in us wants to live

and affirm itself, something we might not yet know or see!” (Nietzsche 207). The characters of *White Noise* depict a denial rather than an affirmation. This can be illustrated in the consumption of Dylar by Babette and Willie Mink in order to deny and escape their fear of death. Babette says, “They isolated the fear-of-death part of the brain. Dylar speeds relief to that sector” (WN 188).

The denial of life can be represented in the obsession with Media and Consumerism as an escape from life, while they let things occur without any plans due to their fear that planning and plotting may cause death. Jack remarks, “All plots tend to move deathward” (WN 31). Murray, on the other hand, once more proposes to Jack affirmation as a solution. He implies that to take action in life is an urgent necessity to abandon fear of death. He tells him: “Your whole life is a plot, a scheme, a diagram. It is a failed scheme but that’s not the point. To plot is to affirm life, to seek shape and control” (271).

Nietzsche related the idea of a man who affirms life into a man who abandons a certain anxiety or obsession. He calls this type of man “the renouncer”. He asserts:

The renouncer, what does the renouncer do? He strives for a higher world, he wants to fly further and higher than all affirmers – he throws away much that would encumber his flight, including some things that are not valueless, not disagreeable to him: he sacrifices it to his desire for the heights (Nietzsche 97).

This quote explains the above quote of Murray that the affirmer of life, unlike the denier, has to have a path to follow and important things to put behind.

In the novel, DeLillo endeavours to reflect the Nietzschean conceptions of truth and reality. According to Maureen Finnigan in her article “Nietzsche’s Perspective: Beyond Truth As an ideal”, Nietzsche does not eliminate truth, or claim that it is

unmasked and uncovered. However, Nietzsche believes that truth is within the game of life, and the process of the human to discover it. Finnigan claims that Nietzsche neglects any form or attempt to categorize, or conceptualize truth and reality as absolute. Nietzsche asserts that science and religion cannot illustrate reality and truth, because they are beyond explanation (Finnigan 1-2). DeLillo's characters exhibit a sense of rationality and scepticism about everything in life. These characters question everything in life even death.

“Do you think your death is premature?” he said.
“Every death is premature. There's no scientific reason
why we can't live a hundred and fifty years” (WN 263).

This quote illustrates the characters' consciousness about the disability of science to define, assert, and guarantee death and life. Thus, DeLillo mirrors Nietzsche's explanation that truth is not static, yet dynamic.

Scepticism in *White Noise* is one of the themes that depict the characters' desire to reach the truth, the reality of the universe, and people inside this universe,

I did not feel Armageddon in my bones but I worried
about all those people who did, who were ready for it,
wishing hard, making phone calls and bank
withdrawals. If enough people want it to happen, will it
happen? How many people are enough people? Why are
we talking to each other from this aboriginal crouch?
(WN 133).

This quote represents DeLillo's will to spot the light on the postmodern individual's hunger to know about the aboriginal crouch and about their struggle within this universe. Thus, this search for a truth and the scepticism inside the individual demonstrate the difficulty to find and define everything in life. Here DeLillo demonstrates the failure of religion by the use of Armageddon as a spiritual symbol.

DeLillo's characters question the transcendentalist aspects within this universe and find a difficulty to illustrate these aspects. In a conversation between the Gladney's family about rain, DeLillo highlights the beliefs they hold,

"Rain is a noun. Is there rain here, in this precise locality, at whatever time within the next two minutes that you choose to respond to the question?"
"If you want to talk about this precise locality while you're in a vehicle that's obviously moving, then I think that's the trouble with this discussion."
"Just give me an answer, okay, Heinrich?"
"The best I could do is make a guess."
"Either it's raining or it isn't," I said.
"Exactly. That's my whole point. You'd be guessing. Six of one, half dozen of the other."
"But you see it's raining."
"You see the sun moving across the sky. But is the sun moving across the sky or is the earth turning?"
"I don't accept the analogy."
(WN 28-29).

In this discussion, Heinrich exhibits his rational background. In that, he attempts to convince his family that the thing that they are thinking it is rain, in fact it is not rain. Heinrich tries to define rain through scientific explanations in order to avoid believing in one fact and one term in life.

The Nietzschean concept of Will to Power can be represented in the novel through many levels. Nietzsche claims, "This world is the will to power – and nothing besides! And you yourselves are also this will to power – and nothing besides" (Nietzsche 579).

In that, Jack Gladney holds the belief that learning German is a path to achieve power in his life. This can be due to his attachment and obsession with Hitler as a symbol of power in his life, or to a certain belief in the concept of the Nordic race. Jack states:

I'd made several attempts to learn German, serious probes into origins, structures, roots. I sensed the deathly power of the language. I wanted to speak it well, use it as a charm, a protective device. The more I shrank from learning actual words, rules and pronunciation, the more important it seemed that I go forward (*WN* 36).

Here Jack attempts to illustrate his will to power through the will to learn German.

Another aspect that may depict this Nietzschean concept is the fact that Jack names his son Heinrich in hopes that this will grant him a strong personality. This can be depicted in this conversation:

“Why did you name Heinrich Heinrich?”
“Fair question.”
“You don’t have to answer.”
“Good question. No reason why you shouldn’t ask.”
“So why did you?”
“I thought it was a forceful name, a strong name. It has a kind of authority” (*WN* 68).

This conversation shows how Jack believes in German as a source of power to him and to his child Heinrich. Angel Cooper, in her article “Domination, Individuality, and Moral Chaos: Nietzsche’s Will to Power”, argues that Nietzsche explains the will to power as a human instinct. She explains that this power must be balanced in order to produce a healthy individual. This means that if it misbalances it might lead to a moral decay. In this case she illustrates that murder is a will to power that leads to moral chaos (Cooper 2-3). Hence, Jack Gladney attempts the murder of Willie Mink as his as a will to power, which contributes to his moral chaos. Jack’s plan to kill Mink grants him an enormous stance of power,

I took out the Zumwalt. Great and nameless emotions thudded on my chest. I knew who I was in the network of meanings. Water fell to earth in drops, causing surfaces to gleam. I saw things new (*WN* 289).

Here Jack explains how he feels a sense of power when he holds the firearm. In this action, he knows that he is the one who holds power in the room. In other words, Mink's life is in the hands of Jack. Thus, he begins to see his life from a different perspective as a killer rather than a dyer.

Perhaps the best representation of Nietzsche's theory of Chaos is Samuel Beckett's, *Breath*. It depicts its only setting of garbage as a symbol of life. In the beginning and the end of an approximately one-minute play there is a cry that represents life and death. In this context, Murray says, "We start our lives in chaos, in babble. As we surge up into the world, we try to devise a shape, a plan. There is dignity in this. Your whole life is a plot, a scheme, a diagram. It is a failed scheme" (WN 271). This quote depicts the pessimistic existential mode of Beckett's representation of life as chaos and nothing more.

The repetitive appearances of garbage and chaos in the novel can represent the disappearance of morality and meaning in life in the postmodern era. These scenes often appear in a consumerist sense or a disaster evocative sense. Jack states:

I entered the city and turned on the radio, needing company not on the lonely highway but here on the cobbled streets, in the sodium vapour lights, where the emptiness clings. Every city has its districts. I drove past the abandoned car district, the uncollected garbage district, the sniper-fire district, the districts of smoldering sofas and broken glass. Ground glass crunched under the tires. I headed toward the foundry (WN 281).

Here Jack shows how the consumerist garbage has taken over all America. This is not only seen in the literal sense but in how it plagues society and causes a meaning and value dilemma. This can be witnessed in how he uses the word emptiness along with garbage and the consumerist products.

As a conclusion, DeLillo's *White Noise* is a novel that depicts a new form of nothingness, rationality, and chaos. These new forms are associated with the philosophical waves of the postmodern era. The characters' Rationality and Nihilistic insights towards life drive them to the obsession of technology, consumption and Materialism. They start a journey towards hiding several truths and realities in life among them: death. Thus, this journey of denial leads them to believe in the truth of the mediated and capitalist life.

3. Absurdism, Fear of Death, and the Simulacrum of Consumerism

The will to meaning in the world of the novel is a reflection of the emptiness and the lack of faith that the characters suffer from. Thus, the absurd gap between the human and the universe which Camus mentions has widened with the contributions of Capitalism "This divorce between man and this life [...] is properly the feeling of absurdity" (Camus 6). Through *White Noise*, DeLillo invites the reader to notice the dominance of the capitalist ideology in the postmodern American life. The capitalist aspects impose Consumerism as a crucial element in the postmodern individual's life.

Capitalism is the Janiformity of the contemporary life which embodies Sartre's conception of freedom. In other words, this ideology brings an exterior freedom, but it bounds the human being to Consumerism and Materialism. This can be supported by the Schopenhauer's idea that Materialism is the source of human suffering and it represents a fake hope. Additionally, the postmodern capitalist life in the novel is a journey towards filling the emptiness inside their hearts. Therefore, Capitalism is the means through which man creates a hyper world and a simulacrum to seek meaning. yet it is the source that eradicates all meanings in their lives and illuminates all the traditional values.

In *White Noise*, as a postmodern novel, Consumerism fills the characters' life, brains, and hearts. This aspect becomes a part of the characters' essence, through which they choose, buy, believe, and eat. The spiritual emptiness that the characters suffer from leads them to worship consumption. Thus, for Jack, the supermarket becomes the temple of the postmodern individual,

And this is where we wait together, regardless of age, our carts stocked with brightly colored goods. A slowly moving line, satisfying, giving us time to glance at the tabloids in the racks. Everything we need that is not food or love is here in the tabloid racks. The tales of the supernatural and the extra-terrestrial. The miracle vitamins, the cures for cancer, the remedies for obesity. The cults of the famous and the dead (WN 301).

The theme of Consumerism in *White Noise* takes over the novel. Consumerism represents an important simulacrum which the characters try to employ in their lives in order to conceal their undesirable reality and avoid facing the existential question of fear of death. The ideology of Consumerism takes place in the supermarket and the kitchen mostly.

It seemed to me that Babette and I, in the mass and variety of our purchases, in the sheer plenitude those crowded bags suggested, the weight and size and number, the familiar package designs and vivid lettering, the giant sizes, the family bargain packs with Day-Glo sale stickers, in the sense of replenishment we felt, the sense of well-being, the security and contentment these products brought to some snug home in our souls – it seemed we had achieved a fullness of being that is not known to people who need less, expect less, who plan their lives around lonely walks in the evening (WN 26).

The supermarket is where Jack Gladney, his wife Babette, their children from different Marriages and Murray Jay Siskind often visit not only to shop for their basic needs but as an attempt to search for meaning in there. In *The Myth of Sisyphus*, Camus argues that meaning making in life is an urgent need, "I therefore conclude

that the meaning of life is the most urgent of questions” (Camus 4). Camus asks the question “How to answer it?” (Camus 4). DeLillo’s characters indeed manifest a Camusian sense through Consumerism as a possible answer, which seems to be successful in the beginning. This can be represented in the deep admiration of the supermarket that Jack and Murray express in the novel. Jack describes it as “The place is sealed off, self-contained. It is timeless” (WN 43). Here, he considers it mainly as one of the meaning providers to his life, “Supermarkets this large and clean and modern are a revelation to me” (WN 43).

Murray and Jack equally express their need to this meaning provider and both fall deeply into the simulacrum of a consumer. This hyppereality that Murray has created to himself about the supermarket makes him feel that he is immortal. This means that when he practices the act of buying and consuming he is saved from death. He states, “here we don’t die, we shop” (WN 43). Murray attempts to hide his Absurd life that dictates death every time he is absent from the practice of this simulacrum.

“I’m happy to be here,” Murray said.

“In Blacksmith?”

“In Blacksmith, in the supermarket, in the rooming house, on the Hill. I feel I’m learning important things every day. Death, disease, afterlife, outer space. It’s all much clearer here. I can think and see” (WN 40).

The character’s need for Consumerism through food and other objects can be related to Materialism. Their need to purchase and own objects as an attempt to create meaning is depicted in the novel. This postmodern dilemma is portrayed in Murray as one of the characters who invests it in his life. Murray represents a conscious postmodern consumer who knows that Consumerism in his life and his sounding’s lives is employed as a simulacrum and a concealer from life’s absurdity along with what it imposes. In the meantime, both Jack and Murray are aware that adult

Americans suffer from this issue and still see the purity in children that are not yet plagued by this phenomenon.

Kids are a true universal. But you're well beyond that, already beginning to drift, to feel estranged from the products you consume. Who are they designed for? What is your place in the marketing scheme? Once you're out of school, it is only a matter of time before you experience the vast loneliness and dissatisfaction of consumers who have lost their group identity (WN 54-55).

Murray's quote tackles Consumerism as a certain kind of addiction that cannot grant satisfaction. Thus, Consumerism represents a capitalist black hole that will never stop brain washing people. His words also imply how the characters in the novel do not only buy what they need. This can also be represented in Babette's routine of buying yogurt all the time but never eating it.

"She keeps buying that stuff."
"But she never eats it," Steffie said.
"Because she thinks if she keeps buying it, she'll have to eat it just to get rid of it. It's like she's trying to trick herself."
"It takes up half the kitchen."
"But she throws it away before she eats it because it goes bad," Denise said. "So then she starts the whole thing all over again" (WN 16).

This draws back to the idea of Murray in which he relates death to Consumerism. Babette believes that if she keeps applying the simulacrum of a buyer and a consumer she will reach the hyperreality that the products will grant her life, help her with her fear of death and contribute to her process of meaning creation. Jack, on the other hand, feels the need to buy every time one of his other simulacrams are threatened to disappear. Hence, when Jack is told by Eric Massingale that he does not resemble Hitler as much as he thinks he does, he feels a sense of emptiness that encourages

another simulacrum (WN 86). Here Jack's simulacrum of Hitler is threatened and he felt an urgent need to shop,

The encounter put me in the mood to shop [...] puzzled but excited by my own desire to buy [...] I shopped with reckless abandon. I shopped for immediate needs and distant contingencies. I shopped for its own sake, looking and touching, inspecting merchandise I had no intention of buying, then buying it [...] I began to grow in value and self-regard. I filled myself out, found new aspects of myself (WN 87).

Jack here acknowledges that buying is not always related to what they need rather it is related to the simulacrum that they become addicted to. In the same time, Jack's words suggest implicitly that Materialism and Consumerism are related to meaning creation. Thus, Jack and the other characters grow in value and have a sense of achievement when they put on the mask of consumerist and materialistic simulators.

Paradoxically, the nostalgia for meaning within the consumerist society in the novel, illustrates the way this attempt to fill the emptiness in life, destroys other meanings in life and one of them is the healthy physical meaning. DeLillo portrays the loss of a traditional, healthy life among the characters in *White Noise*. This loss is witnessed through the characters' consumption of medicine as a typical routine. In a conversation between Gladney and his step-daughter Denise about Babette's mental problem, Jack explains that forgetting things and taking medicine is a sane and a shared action that everyone in the postmodern era does.

"We could always call her doctor. But I don't want to make too much of this."
"Everybody takes some kind of medication; everybody forgets things occasionally."
"Not like my mother."
"I forget things all the time."
"What do you take?"
"Blood pressure pills, stress pills, allergy pills, eye drops, aspirin. Run of the mill" (WN 67).

Additionally, the nostalgia for the traditional meaning of family reflects the failure of the capitalist norms through Consumerism to give solidarity within the family. This idea is explained in the novel through the following words, “He asks me why strongest family units exist in the least developed societies. Not to know is a weapon of survival, he says. Magic and superstition become as the powerful orthodoxy of the clan” (WN 85-86). Murray’s words depict the difference between a modern capitalist family and the traditional spiritual family. Moreover, this difference draws upon the idea that family is a spirit and an emotion. Yet Murray is convinced that this spiritual solidarity is “superstition”. This lack of emotions and faith within Murray’s character reflects the emptiness inside him. In other words, this character exhibits the Camusian example of a cold, empty man: Meursault’s the stranger.

Gladney’s family as an example of the typical postmodern American family, images new norms within the family. These norms are a reflection to the ideology they follow. Therefore, the novel is full of conversations that lack an emotional meaning. Several conversations depict the way the characters’ topics are based mostly on science, consumption, and food. The family attempt to fill the existential void through different discussions that detach its members from the traditional spirit of the family. The new norms lead them to contribute to empty discussions that have the impression of the “Idle discourse” mentioned in Beckett’s *Waiting for Godot* (Beckett 72).

“I’m not a criminal,” Babette said. “All I want to do is chew a pathetic little tasteless chunk of gum now and then.”

“Well it’s not that simple,” Denise said.

“It’s not a crime either. I chew about two of those little chunks a day.”

“Well you can’t anymore.”

“Well I can, Denise. I want to. Chewing happens to relax me” (WN 47).

This conversation depicts the way Consumerism dominates the characters’ life in that it is not only a simulacrum, yet it is a topic to be discussed in order to finally convey nothingness.

All in all, Consumerism fails to give an absolute meaning to life. It manifests a fake reality which DeLillo’s protagonists use to escape their own reality. Baudrillard states “[hyppereality is] more real than the real, that is how the real is abolished” (Baudrillard 56). He explains that the manifestation of a simulacrum makes the real disappear and this is the case in *White Noise*. This version of life is their road to deny their real life that demands living under the horror of death and the feelings of Absurdity. In other words, the simulacrum that the whole novel attempts to achieve is in Camus’ words “a metaphysical rebellion” (Camus 15). This means a rebellion against the mechanisms of life. Thus, the quest for meaning through the capitalist pillar, Consumerism, is the illusion that the characters follow. This idea explains Baudrillard’s formulation “he who strikes with meaning is killed by meaning” (Baudrillard 105).

4. The Simulacrum of Hitler and the Alienated Identity

Jack’s simulacrum has taken different paths in his life as it has reached his career and source of living, “I am chairman of the department of Hitler studies at the College-on-the-Hill. I invented Hitler studies in North America in March of 1968” (WN 13). Jack plays the role of simulator who cannot live without the hyperreality that he imposes on himself in a Baudrillardian sense. While through this simulacrum, he also plays the role of meaning creator and hope seeker in a Camusian sense. Jack

deeply attaches himself to this simulacrum, and believes that it grants him prestige, power, and status. He wears a gown and glasses inside the campus where he teaches.

“DEPARTMENT HEADS wear academic robes at the College-on-the Hill. Not grand sweeping full-length affairs but sleeveless tunics puckered at the shoulders. I like the idea. I like clearing my arm from the folds of the garment to look at my watch” (WN 17).

Here Jack attempts to establish meaning through any aspect that has a relation with Hitler. He feels happy that he has some feature that resembles Hitler “big hands” “big feet”, He tries hard to look like Hitler.

The chancellor warned against what he called my tendency to make a feeble presentation of self. He strongly suggested I gain weight. He wanted me to “grow out” into Hitler. He himself was tall, paunchy, ruddy, jowly, big-footed and dull. A formidable combination. I had the advantages of substantial height, big hands, big feet, but badly needed bulk, or so he believed – an air of unhealthy excess, of padding and exaggeration, hulking massiveness. If I could become more ugly, he seemed to be suggesting, it would help my career enormously (WN 23).

To Jack, Hitler represents a source of meaning and escape from his fear of death, “So Hitler gave me something to grow into and develop toward, tentative as I have sometimes been in the effort” (WN 23). He believes that he has established this by his own hands and efforts. He does not admit that what he actually does is a creation of a simulacrum to fool himself and escape his Existential fears. In the same sphere, Murray establishes a similar simulacrum through the use of Elvis. He admires what Jack has created by Hitler “I marvel at the effort. It was masterful, shrewd and stunningly preemptive. It’s what I want to do with Elvis” (WN 19). Jack does not only admire the character of Hitler as a figure but he also admires his action. In other words, his creation of a universal fame and the fact that he gave himself meaning in his own life “crowds came to hear him [Hitler] speak, crowds erotically charged, the

masses he once called his own bride” (77). Here Jack implies that Hitler’s crowds are his source of meaning. The crowds to Jack may represent the students whom he teaches on Hitler’s achievements.

Jack, Murray and another character in the novel called Orest Mercator represent the Sisyphean task in Camus’ philosophy of the absurd. Sisyphus the mythical creature in Camus’ work *The Myth of Sisyphus* represents any modern and postmodern man in labour or in an attempt to establish meaning. Sisyphus as the absurd hero is like the characters of *White Noise* who hated death, had no will to confront it and have committed futile attempts to end it.

The Greek Mythology suggests that Sisyphus has cheated death and tries to escape it. He tries to go against nature and stop death so that he enchains Thanatos, the personification of death in the Greek mythology. Sisyphus is banished to the underworld for eternity. The Gods have sentenced him to the eternal task of pushing the rock through the mountain over and over and watch it roll back every time he lands. Sisyphus now represents a moral or a symbol to those who attempt to go against the laws of nature (Cartwright 1).

In *The Myth of Sisyphus*, Sisyphus attempt to create meaning even through that rock that he pushes “All Sisyphus’ silent joy is contained therein. His fate belongs to him. His rock is his thing. Likewise, the absurd man, when he contemplates his torment, silences all the idols” (Camus 78). Here Camus symbolises Sisyphus as the absurd hero of hope, the hero who does not surrender. He has created a meaning through his rock “his rock is his thing” means that he has something to live for and achieve. The same can be explained in Jack’s choice of Hitler studies; Hitler is his thing that he works hard for. The job that he wakes up every day to do, the routine of

the postmodern man in general is illustrated in Sisyphus' rock. Hence, every time Jack feels bad about his life's achievements, he is reminded by another character that he has Hitler in his life. Apparently, having Hitler in Jack's life is equal to having a reason to live, "But you've got Hitler." "Yes, I have, haven't I?" (WN 50)

The same can be said on Murray who teaches Elvis Presley classes on the College-on-the-Hill. From a Sisyphean point of view, Murray routinely practices his job as Elvis' admirer and like Sisyphus has his rock, Murray has his Elvis. Orest, on the other hand, is Heinrich's friend who found his way of establishing meaning through snakes. He sits in cages and rooms full of snakes, which Jack admired because he sees it as a way to escape death. "I'd found myself thinking of Orest and his snakes and wanted a chance to talk to him further" (WN 246). While Orest himself admits that these snakes and what he practices with them are the only thing that gives him meaning in his life. He says, "I'm nothing without the snakes" (247).

In addition to that, Jack views what Orest does with the snakes is much bigger than what he does with Hitler. This can be due to the fact that Orest endangers himself and faces death in the face while Jack is the coward who fears death more than anything ever. He states, "What purpose he conveyed, what sense of a fixed course of action pursued absolutely. If each of us is the centre of his or her existence, Orest seemed intent on enlarging the centre, making it everything" (WN 249). Jack thinks that Orest is a person who controls his life and defeats the absurdities it imposes involving fear of death.

Jack does not only believe that Hitler is a simulacrum, but he employs this simulacrum and follows Hitler's steps because he believes that this might defeat death. Murray interprets this in Jack's simulacrum of Hitler after he has confronted

him about his fear of death. He says to him “Some people are larger than life. Hitler is larger than death. You thought he would protect you. I understand completely” (WN 267). Hitler here can embody the senses of salvation from the absurdist point of view of Samuel Beckett’s *Waiting for Godot*. Beckett presents Godot as a source of potential salvation to Vladimir and Estragon from the miserable life conditions. On the other hand, in *White Noise* Hitler is Jack Gladney’s salvation from the miserable fear of death. In that, Murray keeps insisting that Jack uses Hitler as salvation.

“It’s totally obvious. You wanted to be helped and sheltered. The overwhelming horror would leave no room for your own death. ‘Submerge me,’ you said. ‘Absorb my fear.’ On one level you wanted to conceal yourself in Hitler and his works. On another level you wanted to use him to grow in significance and strength. I sense a confusion of means. Not that I’m criticizing. It was a daring thing you did, a daring thrust. To use him. I can admire the attempt even as I see how totally dumb it was” (WN 267).

Murray’s words suggest that Jack’s attempt to simulate Hitler is an escape from reality and a search for salvation. In fact, it is nothing but a futile attempt to establish meaning in his life that cannot be established. Thus, no hyperreality can grant salvation from the Absurdity that life imposes.

Don DeLillo displays an implicit call for the reader to think about the historical events that misbalance the infrastructure of the postmodern society and the postmodern individual. The postmodern atmosphere that is influenced by series of damaging events influences the individual’s identity, appetite for life and search for meaning in life. Hitler as a historical figure that appears redundantly in *White Noise* reflects Jack Gladney’s identity. This character who suffers from a fragmented schizophrenic identity, utilizes Hitler to mask his fears and weaknesses. Murray explains Jack’s need to establish a whole department for Hitler studies saying that:

Nobody on the faculty of any college or university in this part of the country can so much as utter the word Hitler without a nod in your direction, literally or melancholy. This is the centre, the unquestioned source. He is now your Hitler, Gladney's Hitler. It must be deeply satisfying for you. The college is internationally known as a result of Hitler studies. It has an identity, a sense of achievement. You've evolved an entire system around this figure, a structure with countless substructures and interrelated fields of study, a history within history (WN 19).

Murray's words display the character's mood that is triggered by history. Jack Gladney selects a powerful, historical identity to define his character through it. Thus, Hitler is Jack's attempt to create a powerful image rather than a persona that eradicates humans through atrocities like the holocaust during the Second World War.

Jack's attempt to create an identity through Hitler is a failed attempt because his fearful feelings have grown bigger due to his refusal of mortality. "We were scared to death we still are" (WN 155). Paradoxically, this postmodern character that fears death, knows that his identity is a fake identity when he admits that he is the false version of Hitler. "I am the false character that follows the name around" (23). This contradiction inside Jack's character represents the individual's failure to create and simulate an identity that is beyond his reach.

The sociologist Zygmunt Bauman explains through his book *Identity: Conversations with Benedetto Vecchi* the individuals' obsession to create a character is enough to burn one's character. He explains identity as "the burning issue on everybody's mind and tongue" (Bauman 17). Bauman's idea summarizes Jack Gladney's formulation when he speaks about obsession "some people put on a uniform and feel bigger, stronger, safer, it's in this area that my obsession dwells" (WN 68). Jack's obsession with Hitler kills his real identity and constructs an

alienated identity that does not belong to his real world. This character's fear imposes alienation on him, and that what Camus explains in his *The Myth of Sisyphus* "But, on the other hand, in a universe suddenly divested of illusions and lights, man feels an alien, a stranger" (6).

The idea of alienation is discussed in Shabnam Ashai's work "Camus' Concept of Alienation". Shabnam claims that "In modern terms however, "Alienation" has been used by philosophers, psychologists, men of literature and sociologists to refer to an extraordinary variety of psycho-social disorders; including loss of self-anxiety states, psychosis despair, depersonalization, rootlessness, apathy, social disorganization, loneliness, atomization, powerlessness, meaninglessness, isolation, pessimism and the loss of beliefs or value" (Ashai 33). Ashai's idea illustrates that alienation is the result of several issues among them: meaninglessness and depersonalization like what Jack attempts to create through Hitler, and the lack of faith and belief.

DeLillo's protagonist struggles to hide his fears and simulates another identity that is according to him "larger than death" (WN 267). This struggle eradicates the meaning of his life. Jean Baudrillard explains this idea in his book *Simulacra and Simulation* claiming that,

[...] hyper-realists fix a real from which all meaning and charm, all depth and energy of representation have vanished in a hallucinatory resemblance). Thus everywhere the hyperrealism of simulation is translated by the hallucinatory resemblance of the real to itself (Baudrillard 17).

Therefore, Jacks' hallucination to create an identity that is larger than death is a source of a shallow, depthless reality, and a source of alienation that is based only on simulating.

Djihad Haddad in her work, "Hitler as a Mask against Death Anxiety in Don DeLillo's *White Noise*, A Psychoanalytical Study of Jack's Psyche", illustrates that Jack Gladney's creation of a character that is dependent on Hitler's persona is indeed an escape from death anxiety (29). Haddad's idea clarifies the character's attempt to construct an identity that alienates him from his real and weak identity. In other words Jack is the coward who fears death.

The universe of simulation is transreal [...] no test of reality will come to put an end to it -except the total collapse and slippage of the terrain, which remains our most foolish hope (Baudrillard 103).

Thus, Hitler is Jack's simulacrum to deny the human's Existential truth, destiny and an attempt to create meaning in his shallow postmodern life. He is the source that alienates him from the whole absurd world. Yet, this source of meaning and escape does not restrain his fear. Rather it represents a "foolish hope" in Baudrillard's words. This idea can be witnessed when he admits to his wife that, "I've been afraid for more than half my life" (WN 186).

As a conclusion, DeLillo's *White Noise* displays simulacrum as an illusion that the characters endeavour to believe. This illusion leads them to a serious issue, the "lost self" issue, which contributes more into the loss of meaning. Consequently, the process of simulacrum that the protagonist Jack Gladney follows through Hitler is a process of becoming and a choice that he decides to hold the responsibility behind it. Yet this path creates a slave, addicted human being to a false version of reality.

5. Media and Technology: the Embodiment of Meaning Vacuum

White Noise depicts an explicit mediated image, where characters attempt to create meaning in their lives through addiction to media in order to escape from the world's Existential melancholic order. This image reflects the way television and radio are considered as one of the family members. In that, the presence of television and Radio becomes as important as the presence of the characters within the house. Murray clarifies the impact of television in the American family saying that,

I've come to understand that the medium is a primal force in the American home. Sealed-off, timeless, self-contained, self-referring. It's like a myth being born right there in our living room, like something we know in a dreamlike and preconscious way. I'm very enthused, Jack (WN 55).

Through these words Murray explains the contradiction of the appearance of technology in the postmodern individual life. In other words, this digital world that imposes its presence within the family to define its life and its existence fills Murray's heart. The pseudo feelings that this device gives about reality is once more summarized through Murray's words to Jack Gladney, when he confesses that this device has changed his life radically and his feelings are dependent on it.

I tell them [students] I've been sitting in this room for more than two months, watching TV into the early hours, listening carefully, taking notes. A great humbling experience let me tell you. Close to mystical (WN 55).

Technology in *White Noise* embodies a meaning vacuum or a black hole that absorbs meaning. This idea is tackled by Baudrillard in his chapter "Implosion of Meaning in Media" from his book *Simulacra and Simulation*. Baudrillard asserts, "We live in a world where there is more and more information, and less and less meaning" (Baudrillard 55). Baudrillard's third hypothesis on media shows how the

information given on media are what destroy meaning and give illusionary images. This aspect can be seen in *White Noise*'s repetitive use of the media that existed at the time, which are radio and television. Television and radio represent the source of the information that the characters receive.

DeLillo depicts how the absence of faith in God leads the characters to create their own new God, which is media. Thus, television and radio are often referred to as "the voice upstairs" (WN 211, 240). Yet, DeLillo illustrates the characters' consciousness that media contributes more into generating corrupt, absurd, and paralyzed adults. Thus, Jack claims that children who are not prone to media preserve their human essence,

"The boy is growing up without television," I said, "which may make him worth talking to, Murray, as a sort of wild child, a savage plucked from the bush, intelligent and literate but deprived of the deeper codes and messages that mark his species as unique" (WN 55).

In addition to that, Media intervene in the Gladney's order and daily routine to give them meaning and an impression of a sane reality. This idea can be witnessed in the weekly routine of the family that involves television as a crucial element for the gathering. "That night, a Friday, we ordered Chinese food and watched television together, the six of us. Babette had made it a rule" (WN 22). The routine is known as a major Absurdist theme in the depiction of Camus' Sisyphus as the hero of routine. Thus, this Sisyphean routine represents the postmodern characters of *White Noise* that practice their sacredness of routine in watching television. This rule bounds the family feeling and makes it dependent on television. Hence, this devise gives a pseudo image that is considered as typical, real, and sane among the postmodern characters. Moreover, throughout the novel DeLillo portrays the control of media in the

characters' life. When Steffie (Jack Gladney's daughter) acts according to the radio's instructions and information. She says to her mother,

Steffie: we have to boil our water
Babette: why?
Steffie: it said in the radio (WN 38-39).

Therefore, in *White Noise* television and radio reinforce a sense of emptiness, create an empty individual and a passive receiver, with no judgments of what they see on media. Television and radio represent a source of trust to the characters more than they trust themselves,

"It's going to rain tonight."
"It's raining now," I said.
"The radio said tonight" (WN 27).

[...] Just because it's on the radio doesn't mean we have to suspend belief in the evidence of our senses."
"Our senses? Our senses are wrong a lot more often than they're right" (WN 27).

The characters often question their own senses, and trust the media which they believe to be the real source of information. These sources of information have destroyed the meaning of the normal life to create an artificial side. This idea proves the third hypothesis of Baudrillard's "Implosion of Meaning in Media". The media does not only create a source of trust in the conscious sense of the characters, but rather it has touched their unconscious mind to create illusions that their bodies respond to.

The blind trust in media can also be seen in the second chapter of the novel, when a toxic cloud hits the city of Blacksmith and the radio says that it causes symptoms like sweaty palms to the ones exposed to it "the girls were complaining of sweaty palms" (WN 111). The girls in the family started to feel the symptoms which later are proved to be wrong symptoms "What does the radio say?" "At first they said skin

irritation and sweaty palms. But now they say nausea, vomiting, shortness of breath” (110). The family felt compelled to act according to the radio and television. This shows how the characters’ nature and essence are ruined by technology and media. In this context, Murray says,

You could put your faith in technology. It got you here, it can get you out. This is the whole 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 (WN 265).

Murray’s quote represents the evil in technology that created an addiction and lust. Meanwhile, it still anticipates the blind trust that people put in technology even if it has failed to fill their Existential void.

In addition to media, another technological event that the novel tackles as a meaning vacuum is the “Airborne Toxic Event”. This event represents the novel’s climax and the waited event that shall make things worse. Though the source of this event is not truly confirmed, it is believed by the characters that a train wreck caused it. It resulted in a toxic cloud that flouts over the city of Blacksmith. This toxic cloud contains a deadly chemical called Nyodene D. It grows inside the human body for several years “Nyodene D. has a life span of thirty years” (WN 137).

This toxin that has been caused by technology has distorted the usual natural meaning of death itself, “This is the nature of modern death,” Murray said. “It has a life independent of us. It is growing in prestige and dimension. It has a sweep it never had before” (WN 145). Murray’s quote illustrates how postmodern death has lost the ordinary meaning of death. Hence, it has created its own personification of humans. After Jack is exposed to the substance of the chemicals, he sees the true evil and bad side of technology. In his book *The Rebel*, Camus asks the question “Does the advent

of the technical world suppress death or the fear of death in the natural world?
(Camus 72). The answer according to Jack Gladney seems to be “No”,

“Every advance is worse than the one before because it makes me more scared.”
“Scared of what?”
“The sky, the earth, I don’t know.”
“The greater the scientific advance, the more primitive the fear” (WN 154).

Jack’s fear increases and he blames it on technological advancements. He sees it as an unjust matter to die because of technology. From the Absurdist point of view, Camus’ *The Plague* reflects the evil inside humans by the symbolism of the plague. Don DeLillo is like Camus; he endeavours to show the evil inside the humans in the way they destroy nature. Thus, the technology that was meant to help humans is now killing them. Camus states “To the actor as to the absurd man, a premature death is irreparable” (Camus 54). Jack does feel that his death is unescapable and irreparable. In other words, the absurd man cannot stop being haunted with death ideas. Thus, technology or any source of entertainment to the absurd man is nothing but a void filler, and a temporary escape from the absurdities of life, including death.

Jack’s actual source of anxiety and fear is his loss of faith and believe in God. Technology in *White Noise* often plays the role of God. Murray urges Jack to put his faith in technology, and to believe that it can represent a sense of salvation from his exposure to the deadly substance,

It’s what we invented to conceal the terrible secret of our decaying bodies. But it’s also life, isn’t it? It prolongs life, it provides new organs for those that wear out. New devices, new techniques every day. Lasers, masers, ultrasound. Give yourself up to it, Jack. Believe in it. They’ll insert you in a gleaming tube, irradiate your body with the basic stuff of the universe. Light, energy, dreams. God’s own goodness (WN 265).

Murray believes that technology is a source of faith represented in light, energy and dreams that God grants. Jack indeed falls in the webs of technology. When he is diagnosed of his disease he says, “He spent a fair amount of time tapping on the keys and then studying coded responses on the data screen” (WN 136). The man who diagnoses Jack uses a computer to insert his data; he informs him that what the computer says about Jack’s health is not good “you’re generating big numbers” (WN 136). Jack feels fascinated of what the technology knows about him, but at the same time, he feels paranoid that the computer may know too much,

What history was he referring to? I’d told him some basic things. Height, weight, childhood diseases. What else did he know? Did he know about my wives, my involvement with Hitler, my dreams and fears? (WN 136)

Technology dictates a nostalgia for the old ordinary life that used to exist before the major inventions. These technological inventions know more than they should and represent a source of Panopticism and surveillance on humans’ lives. Jack says, “A network of symbols has been introduced, an entire awesome technology wrested of the gods. It makes you feel like a stranger in your own dying” (WN 138). Jack’s words imply that the technology has taken the role of God in terms of knowing more than humans and the Panopticism it offers.

Esslin explains this idea by his definition of the absurd, “the Absurd is that which is devoid of purpose [...] cut off from his religious, metaphysical, and transcendental roots, man is lost; all his actions become senseless, absurd, useless” (Esslin 23). This quote mirrors the toxic event in *White Noise*. This event exhibits the Post-industrial world in the novel and the way it might change the human’s spirit. Despite the character’s addiction to technology and science, DeLillo insists to portray the human longing for nature as a crucial need to will meaning in life. This longing for nature

among the characters is a sign that the individual lives in vertigo by the invasion of developed technological waves.

DeLillo's "The Airborne Toxic Event" is a reflection that the technological developments destroy all the spirits and creates a sense of boredom. Therefore, the characters seek to fill this boredom and the absurd Existential emptiness created by the evil facets of technology. Beckett in *Waiting for Godot* states that "[in life] We always find something [...] to give us the impression we exist" (Beckett 60). Beckett's words mean that humans tend to follow things that distract them from the absurd and attempt to give them meanings. DeLillo's characters in *White Noise* demonstrate Beckett's quote and turn to many things to give them this impression.

David Grinstead in his paper, "The Psychology of Viktor Frankl" illustrates the tension between the invasion of science and technology and the human's self transcendence. Grinstead explains this tension referring to Viktor Frankl's words that state the following:

The existential vacuum is a widespread phenomenon of the twentieth century. Because man doesn't have instincts or drives to tell him what to do, he has to make decisions, which requires choices. Compared to former times when there were traditions and values to help with decision making, few exist now to tell man what to do. Much of the time he doesn't even know what he wants to do. The result is the conforming to the desires of what others do or wish him to do (Grinstead 4).

Here, Viktor Frankl shows the dark shadow of the technological wave. This promethean task of the twentieth century eradicates not only nature, yet the human spirit and contributes to create an Existential Vacuum. Furthermore, Grinstead explains that Frankl formulation about Existential vacuum in the industrialized society manifests boredom (Grinstead 5).

DeLillo often highlights the Existential vacuum created by technology and industrialization. This vacuum appears in the characters longing for nature, and love for children as pure, meaningful creatures within this universe. Therefore, the characters' recreation of self-satisfaction through the dependence on children and the admiration of nature mirrors the nostalgia for meaning and illustrates Beckett's impression of existence that the characters follow.

Children in Gladney's family play a major role in the novel because they represent meaning. The adults throughout the novel endeavour to spend time with children to kill this Existential void, and anxiety created by the Airborne Toxic Event. This idea is mentioned in one of the conversations between Murray and Jack about Wilder; the baby of the family,

“Why do I feel so good when I'm with Wilder? It's not like being with the other kids,” I said.
“You sense his total ego, his freedom from limits.”
“In what way is he free from limits?”
“He doesn't know he's going to die. He doesn't know death at all. You cherish this simpleton blessing of his, this exemption from harm. You want to get close to him, touch him, look at him, breathe him in. How lucky he is. A cloud of unknowing, an omnipotent little person. The child is everything, the adult nothing. Think about it. A person's entire life is the unraveling of this conflict. No wonder we're bewildered, staggered, shattered” (WN 269).

This conversation displays that the adults' life is full of paranoia and anxiety. However, children are a source of purity, because they find meaning in life through their pure essences and instincts. Moreover, the children's souls are empty from any fear of death and fate. Therefore, they are a source of purity and natural feelings. Moreover, Jack finds his inner self within children, mainly after the Airborne Toxic Event to avoid and deny her fear of death, “I went back to our area. I wanted to be near the children, watch them sleep makes a feel devout, part of a spiritual system. It

is the closest I can come to God” (WN 142). Through these words, Jack does not only exhibit his longing and desire for faith, yet for a natural life that needs restfulness, and sanity. Therefore, DeLillo illuminates this idea in the third chapter of *Dylorama*, “the world is more complicated for adults than it is for children” (162).

On the other hand, DeLillo depicts the Existential void created by the Airborne Toxic Event through the character’s desire for Transcendentalism. This desire is explicit through Babette and Jack’s discussion about nature.

“What else can we believe?” Babette said. “How else can we explain?”
“I don’t know.”
“We’re not at the edge of the ocean or desert. We ought to have timid winter sunsets. But look at the blazing sky. It’s so beautiful and dramatic. Sunsets used to last five minutes. Now they last an hour” (WN 162).

This quote illuminates the transcendental essence within the postmodern individual. The characters shift towards nature to deny the melancholic atmosphere created by the Airborne Toxic Event. Besides, the sunset is the symbol that gives them an answer about the earth’s mood and health. Throughout the novel DeLillo endeavours to depict the characters’ admiration of sunset and the way they reconsider it after each crucial event. Post the Airborne Toxic Event, the characters claim that “Ever since the Airborne Toxic Event, the sunsets had become almost unbearably beautiful” (WN 162). This formulation illustrates the characters’ satisfaction and relief within nature.

All in all, despite the mediated and the technological atmosphere that dominates the novel, DeLillo urges to involve nature and children. Indeed, children and nature are the fire that represents hope within the characters, the play to kill the boredom, to defeat the emptiness made by the mediated life.

CONCLUSION

The present research explored moral decay and faith crisis in DeLillo's *White Noise* through the theories of Absurdism and Nihilism. The latter can be analyzed through the major themes and the ideologies that the novel's discourse carries. Therefore, studying the novel from a philosophical and dystopian lens unveils the existence of meaninglessness and spiritual emptiness within the postmodern era in the world of the novel. Depicting DeLillo's characters as alienated, anxious, and morally decayed, the dissertation revealed the postmodern era as dystopian and hollow.

Postmodern writings in general tend to represent a vague and dystopian world. Thus, they can contain many hidden philosophies and ideologies that can have a variety of analytical forms. DeLillo is a writer who spots light on the Capitalist ideology within the American society through his works. *White Noise* depicts the corrupt facets of this ideology portraying DeLillo's characters as individual consumers who seek to find meaning in an empty world. Furthermore, DeLillo depicts the characters' religious and moral vacuum, which leads them to create new gods to worship which are Materialism, technology, and media.

Accordingly, Absurdism is a philosophy that sprang from the philosophy of Existentialism. They put forward common themes such as absurdity, alienation, death and anxiety. They both belong to the Continental philosophy that originates from Europe and that is mainly of a human concern. The philosophy of Absurdism dominates and shifts the narrative style, plot, and characters mood. This dissertation attempted to view Absurdism from both a modern and a postmodern insight along with its main figures. This includes mostly Albert Camus and Martin Esslin.

Henceforth, postmodern writings are characterised by the eclectic style which draws upon the multiplicity of several previous ideologies, arts, languages and philosophies.

On the other hand, this dissertation examined the Nietzschean ideas in the novel, notably the death of god declaration which plays a major role in explaining the decay of morals, meaninglessness and faith crisis. Nihilism is mostly associated with the philosophy of Nietzsche. Other facets of Nihilism were explained as attempts to fill the void that has resulted from the post death of God dilemma. This includes the paradox of affirmation and denial, the will to power and the belief in historical recurrence through Non-Divine agencies. This has developed into a moral and spiritual chaos, and to the disappearance of truth.

White Noise is a postmodern work that represents the technological and materialist scene. Absurdism and Nihilism can be explained through the portrayal of the Gladney's family and other characters like Murray Jay Siskind as the consumers who often visit the supermarket and watch television in order to fulfil their grasp for meaning and spirituality. These characters tend to neglect important aspects of life such as morality, loyalty, family values, and faith. Paradoxically, the characters often depict a sense of nostalgia for faith and goodness.

The study examined the failed attempt of DeLillo's characters' to reach meaning through faith in Materialism and Simulacrum. On the other hand, the study highlighted the characters' nostalgia for the natural real life after this failure, which leads the characters to the belief in Eternal Recurrence. The latter tranquillizes their death Anxiety. It also leads them to accept the afterlife and the closed circled system of life which reincarnate history and death. Furthermore, the study illuminated the futility of the Ubermensch individual who seeks to bring what is beyond the closed

system that God creates. Perhaps the most important aspect that depicts the dominance of the artificial in the novel is the appearance of Dylar. This human made pharmaceutical drug is believed to help people forget death anxiety. Dylar reveals technology as a promethean task that leads to what is beyond nature in order to alienate people from reality.

The characters' lives swing from moments of absolute emptiness to other moments of faith nostalgia. In order to achieve spiritual satisfaction, they turn into different methods such as attempting to find meaning through children. This is because they believe that children are pure and unaffected by the postmodern elements of greed and corruption. This can be noticed as well in their attempts for Transcendentalism to leave out the mood of the artificial that surrounds them. The artificial mood does not only include the technology and media but rather their simulated identities that do not convey the image of the real.

Besides, the study explored the existence of death and anxiety as two major Absurdist themes in *White Noise*. This death anxiety is a result of the faith crisis that the characters suffer from. It is also a major influence for the corrupt actions that the characters commit in order to lessen or discard this fear. In other words, the characters' anxiety about death leads them to deny their fate, their life, and accept corrupt aspects of life. This can be exemplified in drug consumption. Thus, the characters' corrupt attempts to quiet the noise of fear of death inside their hearts are nothing but a futile hope.

The world of the novel is full of several images of reality that distance the real from its nature and make it more real than the real. This concept is what Jean Baudrillard calls the hyperreal. This can be seen in Jack's serious obsession with

Hitler. Throughout the novel Jack uses Hitler to cover up for his empty soul which is only haunted by the thought of death. Thus, Jack hides behind the simulated persona of Hitler in order to feel a sense of power and tranquilize his fear of death. This simulation leads Jack to the Absurdist theme of alienation.

On the other hand, the characters also create a simulacrum of consumers under the belief that this shall grant meaning to their lives. Consumerism gives the characters the impression that life is infinite and death is excluded. DeLillo mentions the supermarket as the representation of the vivid life that means everything for the characters. Therefore, throughout the novel, DeLillo's characters endeavour to change the real meaning of the supermarket. They tend to buy objects they do not need just to fall in the category of consumers and create an unreal image about themselves.

It can be concluded that the journey of DeLillo's characters to reach meaning reflects the postmodern individual's spiritual fatigue. This individual puts faith in several fake and simulated images of reality and glorifies Capitalism, instead of the real God. The abundance of the real is a main aspect of the suffering of the individual in the world of the novel. Therefore, *White Noise*'s characters call the reader to think about the human essence and choice in life when they seek meaning. Hence, these characters choose to seek meaning through an ideological path "Capitalism" which leads them to nothingness and void.

All in all, *White Noise* is a postmodern, Absurdist and Nihilist work that could not achieve meaning according to the Camusian philosophy. Although *White Noise* has shown a clear nostalgia for faith and transcendentalism, the characters' greed for Consumerism and Materialism has continued to win over in the end, which renders Don DeLillo's work as ironic. This is due to the inability of the characters to change

their habits or insecurities. That is also because it contains no triumph over the capitalist seduction nor does it offer a clear criticism that shall lead for change. Hence, this novel gives a clear view about the postmodern world that is mostly stripped of faith and morals.

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الملخص

اهتمت التيارات الفلسفية الوجودية العبثية والعدمية و نظرية المحاكاة لجان بودريار وذلك بمعالجة مواضيع الأخلاق و القلق و الموت و العدم و العبث و الإنكار. تتناول الدراسة الحالية أزمة الانحطاط الأخلاقي و أزمة العقيدة في رواية الضوضاء البيضاء (وايت نويز) لدون ديليلو. و بالتالي تهدف هذه الدراسة لإثبات أوجه الفلسفة العبثية و العدمية بتطبيق نظرية جان بودريار للمحاكاة. و بدافع تحقيق هذا الأخير، يدرس البحث كيفية تجسيد الرواية لغياب المعنى والانحطاط الأخلاقي غداة فترة ما بعد الحداثة. يركز البحث على إثبات الايديولوجية الرأسمالية و الإعلام

والفلسفة المادية و الاستهلاكية ، وكذا
فكرة الخوف من الموت كأبرز الدوافع
للفراغ الديني و ضياع المعنى.

الكلمات المفتاحية: العبثية ، العدمية ،
المحاكاة ، الإنحطاط الأخلاقي، أزمة
العقيدة .