"I Am the False Character That Follows the Name Around:" Historiographic Metafiction of Don DeLillo's *White Noise*

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Abstract

Modern novels opposed power structures by struggling for personal autonomy, leading to alienation of the individual from society. However, this kind of alienation was insufficient to oppose power structures in postmodernism. It was recognized that power structures sustain on naturalization of language as tool of oppression, and postmodern texts therefore became self-conscious of the act of writing and reading. They began to question their own mediums of expression, and the relationship between fiction and reality. Metafictional writing made this turn inward possible, allowing the resistance to the dominant structures to come from within the text itself. This paper explores the use of metafiction that is characteristic of postmodernism, grounding its arguments in Linda Hutcheon's theorisation of historiographic metafiction. This understanding of metafictionality and postmodernism itself is then used to closely read Don DeLillo's novel, *White Noise* (1984). The motives and effects of metafictionality discussed is exemplified through the textual and formal analysis of the novel. The paper argues that by bringing together the literary, theoretical, and historical through its self-referential attempts, the novel is able to open up a dialogue about and challenge the dominant consumerist, postmodern American society it is situated within.

Keywords: Postmodernism, Consumerism, Historiographic Metafiction, Metafictionality, Linda Hutcheon, Don DeLillo, American literature

Introduction

> "I'm telling you stories. Trust me"
>
> – Jeanette Winterson, *The Passion* (5)

A self-referential statement such as the one in this epigraph reminds readers of the constructed nature of what is being read, thus prompting questions regarding the fictiveness of the story, who the storyteller is, what their authority is, and how the story is being told. Such self-reflexivity in

the act of writing and creating fictional worlds allows a narrative to contain within itself questions regarding the making of its world, the world in which it exists, and the relationship between the two. This paper explores the motives for this turn inward in literature and the effects of such self-conscious or metafictional narrative techniques in postmodernism grounded on Linda Hutcheon's theorisation of historiographic metafiction. The latter part of this paper exemplifies the motives and effects of metafictionality with a textual and formal analysis of Don DeLillo's novel, *White Noise* (1984).

In her book, *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction* (1988), Linda Hutcheon argues that "postmodernism is a contradictory phenomenon, one that uses and abuses, installs and then subverts, the very concepts it challenges" (3). According to her, the understanding of *post*modernism is a negative rhetoric associated in the construction of the term itself, where its relationship with modernism is both, as well as neither a simple or radical break from nor a continuity of modernism with respect to the aesthetics, philosophy, or ideology associated with both periods (18). This "contradictory dependence on and independence from" (23) modernism as well as the dominant western ideology of liberal humanism means that postmodernism challenges their associated concepts, such as autonomy, certainty, authority, unity, totalization, system, universalization, continuity, and so on (57). In response to, and as opposed to, these concepts, postmodernism is accompanied by discontinuity, disruption, dislocation, decentring, indeterminacy, and antitotalisation (3). The comfort of making sense of the world around us through reason and rationality has been shaken during this period.

However, it is important to note that postmodernism works within the system it challenges in an attempt to subvert it, and therefore has not replaced the dominant ideology of liberal humanism (*Poetics of Postmodernism* 4). Moreover, while there is a desire for stable aesthetic and moral values even while faced with the impossibility of such universals in liberal humanism, postmodernism refuses to posit any universal structures, or *metanarratives* as discussed by Jean-François Lyotard. Rather, there is an acknowledgement that these structures are illusory in postmodernism; "there is a loss of faith in our ability to (unproblematically) *know* [a significant external] reality, and therefore to be able to represent it in language" (*Poetics of Postmodernism* 119; emphasis in original). In other words, it is recognized that texts are ideological constructions, made possible by the imposed rules of language, and that power structures sustain on naturalisation of language as a tool of oppression.

Along with the recognition of the constructedness of language and texts, postmodernism also sets out to challenge these very structures using various techniques. Modern novels opposed power structures by struggling for personal autonomy and positing the human individual at the centre. Roland Barthes's seminal essay, "The Death of the Author" (1977) questions the figure of the author as the individual at the centre of and holding authority over the text. The centredness of the author ensures that a singular meaning is posited to the text, that is, the meaning ascribed by the author itself. Removing the author from the centre allows multiple meanings of the text to coexist, which culminate in the readers. The readers are no longer passive, and conscious reading calls for conscious writing as well. According to "The Death of the Author," writing is a "neutral, composite, oblique space where our subject slips away, the negative where all identity is lost, starting with the very identity of the body writing," where the voice is neither that of the characters nor of the author, but is of the writing itself (Barthes 142). Hutcheon notes that several postmodern novels recognise this importance of reading, while acknowledging the "*position* of discursive authority" that still lingers (*Poetics of Postmodernism* 77). Thus, postmodern texts often use and reuse preexisting literary patterns to reach new meaning (Krysinski 196). These works are playful in their use of language; parody and pastiche are hence often associated with postmodern writings. One other prominent feature of postmodern literary texts is the self-reflexive and conscious style of writing and reading, which problematises the power relations between the positions of the author/discursive authority and the readers. These literary texts begin to question their own mediums of expression, as well as the relationship between fiction and reality (Waugh 10–11).

Metafiction is one such self-conscious way of writing in postmodernism which "systematically draws attention to its status as an artefact in order to pose questions about the relationship between fiction and reality" (Waugh 2). Patricia Waugh discusses the origin of this term in her text, *Metafiction: The Theory and Practice of Self-Conscious Fiction* (1984); she notes that "metafiction" originated in an essay by American critic and writer William H. Gass, and has been used since the 1960s to discuss "a more general cultural interest in the problem of how human beings reflect, construct and mediate their experience of the world" (2–3). Metafiction and metafictional writing are self-reflexive and take into consideration the assumptions of the readers, who occupy the centre of the text. It is important to remember that this new centre is a faceless conscious being; a reader "without history, biography, psychology"

(Barthes 148), which brings in multiplicity to the text. Being self-reflexive and self-conscious about themselves provides space to highlight the processes entailed in the writing and reading of these fictions. In doing so, the possible fictionality of the world outside these literary texts are also explored (Waugh 2).

The recognition of language as "an independent, self-contained system which generates its own 'meanings'" leads to an exploration of the relationship between arbitrary linguistic system and the world, which in literary works translates to an exploration of "the relationship between the world *of* the fiction and the world *outside* the fiction" (Waugh 3; emphasis in original). Wladimir Krysinski explains the shift in terminology that occurred in the prefix "meta" to define metafiction, extending from meaning "after" or "beyond" (as in *metaphysical*) to having the signification of "about" (as in *metafiction*) (Krysinski 185). Metafictions therefore provide commentary *about* its own fictional stories by assessing its function and bringing attention to its insufficiencies (203). These texts problematise the relationship between the narrative processes and the internal self-reflection of these processes (185). They raise questions regarding not just the process of writing and reading, but also regarding the nature and history of the book as well as the translations and publishing processes that go into the making of the book. The position of the metafictional text is an interesting one: to be able to provide commentary about its own processes, limitations, and positionality, the text must be placed at the fringe of fiction and theory. According to Mark Currie, metafiction is a "borderline discourse," placed between fiction and criticism; metafictional works refer to their own position in the borderline (Currie 2). Hutcheon too argues for a transgression of boundaries to address the limitations of genres as well as of art/literature itself (*Poetics of Postmodernism* 9). Further, she states that, "The most radical boundaries crossed, however, have been those between fiction and non-fiction and—by extension—between art and life" (10). However, it is important to note that Hutcheon focuses on a particular kind of metafictionality that characterises postmodernism.

In *A Poetics of Postmodernism*, Hutcheon defines postmodernism as "fundamentally contradictory, resolutely historical, and inescapably political" (4). However, several theorists argue that postmodernism is itself a cultural dominant and a result of the dissolution of bourgeois hegemony and emergence of mass culture in the late capitalist period. Hutcheon nevertheless argues, "the increasing uniformization of mass culture is one of the totalizing forces that postmodernism exists to challenge. Challenge, but not deny" (6). As mentioned earlier in this

paper, postmodernism works within the very system it challenges, and therefore does not deny or replace the dominant liberal humanist ideology. Rather, Hutcheon contends that it attempts to assert multiple and provisional differences instead of a homogenous identity: "Whatever narratives or systems that once allowed us to think we could unproblematically and universally define public agreement have now been questioned by the acknowledgement of differences" (7). The newness of postmodernism lies not in reinvention, but in its historical parody, where returning or revisiting is not nostalgic, but a critical act — "an ironic dialogue with the past of both art and society, a recalling of a critically shared vocabulary" (4). Postmodern texts are specifically parodic in their intertextual relation to the traditions and conventions of the genres involved (11). Self-consciousness and metafictionality are therefore important to this contradictory but critical reflection of history in postmodernism. This kind of postmodernist contradiction has been theorised in what Hutcheon calls "historiographic metafiction," where the text is "both intensely self-reflexive and yet paradoxically also [lays] claim to historical events and personages" (5). As opposed to the critique of postmodernism being a period of de-historicization, Hutcheon argues that it is rather a poetics or ideology of self-reflexivity that highlights the limitations of history and historiography. In fact, in her essay "Historiographic Metafiction: Parody and the Intertextuality of History," she contends that the term postmodernism in fiction should "best be reserved to describe fiction that is at once metafictional and historical in its echoes of the texts and contexts of the past" ("Historiographic Metafiction" 3). It is hence even claimed to be one of the most didactic postmodern forms by Hutcheon (28). While metafiction has been defined by Patricia Waugh as a practice of writing fiction where a theory of fiction is explored (Waugh 2), Hutcheon looks at it specifically as the coming together of literature, history, and theory in historiographic metafiction: "its theoretical self-awareness of history and fiction as human constructs (historio*graphic meta*fiction) is made the grounds for its rethinking and reworking of the forms and contents of the past" (*Poetics of Postmodernism* 5; emphasis in original). Thus, the formal and thematic aspects of historiographic metafiction enable its readers to be aware of both the fictiveness of the work as well as its basis in the real world.

Historiographic metafiction is an active acknowledgement of the inevitability of conjuncture between history and literature. Hutcheon notes that history and literature help create and make sense of our world ("Historiographic Metafiction" 28). Postmodern art and theory

attempt to challenge the separation of these as two distinct disciplines, especially after the rise of Ranke's insistence on "scientific history" (*Poetics of Postmodernism* 105). Critical readings of history and fiction have begun to closely study their similarities:

> They have both been seen to derive their force more from verisimilitude than from any objective truth; they are both identified as linguistic constructs, highly conventionalized in their narrative forms, and not at all transparent either in terms of language or structure; and they appear to be equally intertextual, deploying the texts of the past within their own complex textuality. (*Poetics of Postmodernism* 105)

Works of historiographic metafiction note that the boundaries of the two disciplines are historically determined and therefore change with time. Traditionally, historiography and art have been kept separate. Hutcheon refers to Aristotle's *Poetics*, where he notes that linear succession is required in writing history, but a poet can deal with universals and thus could have different unities (*Poetics of Postmodernism* 106). While historical events and personages could be represented in art and historians have also used "techniques of fictional representation to create imaginative versions of their historical, real worlds" (106), a postmodern novel makes use of and confronts the paradoxes of historical and fictive representations through intertextual parody — that is, historiographic metafiction. This does not mean that their differences are dissolved within postmodernism. Rather, keeping true to its contradictory nature, the tensions between the historical context and formal aspects of these works remain unresolved, side-by-side (*Poetics of Postmodernism* 100). Historiographic metafiction therefore rejects cultural universality, promoting the postmodern ideology of plurality and multiplicity.

Historiographic metafiction establishes the frames through which history and fiction are understood as distinct narratives and then goes beyond these frames (*Poetics of Postmodernism* 109–110) to problematize the necessity for verification in historiography and veracity in fiction (112). As opposed to historical fiction which assimilates historical data to provide a feeling of verifiability to the text, for instance, historiographic metafiction foregrounds the attempt to assimilate such data to lay out the process of making narrative order (114). The use of irony marks the differences from the past in these works and intertextuality affirms the connection with this past textually and hermeneutically, highlighting what has been known as the *presence of the past* in postmodernism ("Historiographic Metafiction" 4–5). This is an acknowledgement that in the postmodern world, there is no external *truth* one can rely on, leaving only self-reference to

what has been inscribed into the discourse of culture (*Poetics of Postmodernism* 119). In the interaction between the historiographic and the metafictional, the "claims of 'authentic' representation and 'inauthentic' copy" are rejected, thus challenging "the very meaning of artistic originality" as forcefully as "the transparency of historical referentiality" (110). Such a postmodern poetics would work within and challenge the "ideological and aesthetic underpinnings of the cultural dominants" of their contemporary world — liberal humanism and capitalist mass culture (222). Hutcheon believes that the contradictions stemming from an inherently paradoxical nature of historiographic metafiction as practice is the basis for a poetics of postmodernism. Mark Currie states in his introductory note to Hutcheon's essay that this experimental writing technique is "uniquely capable of fulfilling the 'poetics of postmodernism'" (Currie 71). This paper therefore explores the metafictional and historiographic metafictional narrative techniques in a novel hailed as a postmodernist text to exemplify their effects and motives in postmodernism.

Effects of Metafictionality: A Case Study of DeLillo's *White Noise*

The novel that made Don DeLillo a "highly acclaimed writer" in 1985 (Lentricchia 1), *White Noise*, has been studied academically as a postmodern text (See, Cabrerizo 263; Hamdi 92–106). In the essay titled "DeLillo, Postmodernism, Postmodernity," Peter Knight even suggests that the reason for the increased interest in *White Noise* in the 1980s, canonising the novel in post-war literature, is its representation of the turn to postmodernism in American literature (Knight 27). Written from the first-person perspective of Jack Gladney, the inventor and chairman of the Hitler Studies Department at the College-on-the-Hill in the fictional town of Blacksmith, this novel follows his family's absurd life as they face an "Airborne Toxic Event," forcing them to confront their fear of death. The "plotless narrative" throws the readers "into a narrative time with no co-ordinates, with no assigned beginning or end," often held together by the feeling of déjà vu (Boxall 110–111), especially regarding conversations surrounding death and mortality. It becomes clear early in the text that no matter how much Gladney attempts to hold on to reason and rationality to understand his place in the world around him, the narrative reminds us of the impossibility of such comfort in the contemporary world. The novel begins with Gladney describing the arrival of the students to the campus in a long file of station wagons. Having watched this event for twenty-one years, he is confident in listing out the contents of the

students' luggage to the readers and even their parents' feelings of a sense of renewal and communal recognition: "This assembly of station wagons, as much as anything they might do in the course of the year, more than formal liturgies or laws, tells the parents they are a collection of the like-minded and the spiritually akin, a people, a nation" (DeLillo 4). However, the narrative soon begins to highlight irrationality, contradiction, and arbitrariness of language through Gladney's interaction with his family and the world around him to unravel the illusory nature of the structures that help comprehend reality.

The comfort of the world as Gladney knew it gets shattered during the Airborne Toxic Event, which forces Gladney and his family to flee from their home. However, despite the sound of sirens and his children's constant worry pervading his life, Gladney is initially sceptical of the impact it would have in his life:

> These things happen to poor people who live in exposed areas. Society is set up in such a way that it's the poor and the uneducated who suffer the main impact of natural and manmade disasters. People in low-lying areas get the floods, people in shanties get the hurricanes and tornados. I'm a college professor. Did you ever see a college professor rowing a boat down his own street in one of those TV floods? We live in a neat and pleasant town near a college with a quaint name. These things don't happen in places like Blacksmith. (DeLillo 133)

The society Gladney is familiar with has been structured such that disasters affect the lives of the poor and uneducated. The value of college professors in this reality has been ascribed and propagated through the images seen in TV and other media. He is unable to see beyond the social construct of his quaint family life in Blacksmith at this point of the novel. The novel proceeds to unravel this belief by forcing the family to evacuate their home, hinting at the fictionality of the social order of that world, and by extension, of the world *outside* the text as well. Laying bare the conventions of realism in this manner (Waugh 18), *White Noise* can be considered as a metafictional text as defined by Patricia Waugh. According to Waugh, metafiction is an elastic term covering a wide spectrum of fictions. Although *White Noise* does not explicitly reject realism through its self-conscious narrative techniques, "the symptoms of formal and ontological insecurity" (Waugh 19) about the relationship between fiction and the world does constantly pervade through the novel.

This self-reflexivity in constructing reality and discourse is also highlighted in a conversation between Gladney, his wife Babette, and his friend Murray Jay Siskind, when Murray says:

> This is the society of kids. I tell my students they're already too old to figure importantly in the making of society. Minute by minute they're beginning to diverge from each other. 'Even as we sit here,' I tell them, 'you are spinning out from the core, becoming less recognizable as a group, less targetable by advertisers and mass-producers of culture. 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.' Then I tap my pencil on the table to indicate time passing ominously. (DeLillo 59)

Murray here is alluding to the uniformization of mass culture and the loss of individual identity in a consumerist society. However, this statement has been presented to the readers through his conversation with Gladney and Babette, as he explains the formal ways in which he presents this discourse in a classroom. The meaning of this experience of losing one's identity over time is being constructed through not just the words a professor simply *tells his students* in the classroom, but also by the *tapping of a pencil on the table* to create the ominous effect of time passing by. This conversation becomes metafictional within the novel simply by drawing attention to its formal construction, allowing questions to be raised regarding its "medium of expression" (Waugh 10–11). By presenting such dialogues between the characters within the world of the novel, DeLillo works within the conventions of realism to challenge it. The metafictional narrative technique intertwined in the "plotless narrative" of this novel thus allows DeLillo to relate the fictional world to the one outside and thus present a cultural critique of contemporary society.

The metafictionality of *White Noise* works at the intersection of literature and theory to challenge the dominant ideology of the period. One of the most prominent literary and theoretical commentaries in the novel on the postmodern condition comes from the episode where Gladney and Murray visit the tourist attraction, "The Most Photographed Barn in

America." On seeing the multiple signs, photography equipment, and the string of people with cameras at the spot, Murray comments:

> We're not here to capture an image, we're here to maintain one. Every photograph reinforces the aura. Can you feel it, Jack? An accumulation of nameless energies […] Being here is a kind of spiritual surrender. We see only what the others see. The thousands who were here in the past, those who will come in the future. We've agreed to be part of a collective perception. This literally colors our vision. A religious experience in a way, like all tourism […] We can't get outside the aura. We're part of the aura. We're here, we're now. (14–15)

This commentary on superficial existence and simulation foreshadows SIMUVAC (short for "Simulated Evacuation"), the organisation that oversees the evacuation and other protocols for the public during the *real* Airborne Toxic Event. This is further parodied in the conversation between Gladney and one of the SIMUVAC members later in the novel:

> "Are you saying you saw a chance to use the real event in order to rehearse the simulation?"
>
> […]
>
> "The insertion curve isn't as smooth as we would like. There's a probability excess. Plus which we don't have our victims laid out where we'd want them if this was an actual simulation. In other words we're forced to take our victims as we find them. We didn't get a jump on computer traffic. Suddenly it just spilled out, three-dimensionally, all over the landscape. You have to make allowances for the fact that everything we see tonight is real. There's a lot of polishing we still have to do. But that's what this exercise is all about." (162–163)

Murray's commentary on being a part of an inescapable aura empty of the actual image provides us a framework through which the response to the toxic event can be read, referring to the concepts discussed in America and Europe during the 1980s. The novel is hence able to create "an ironic dialogue with the past of both art and society, a recalling of a critically shared vocabulary" (Hutcheon, *Poetics of Postmodernism* 4) through this intersection of fiction and theory. Peter Boxall notes that the novel dramatises the theory of simulacra presented by Jean Baudrillard, thus "[giving] expression to a form of global American postmodernity, in which history has become a vacuous fiction" (Boxall 114–115). It would, however, be erroneous to not

consider the critical self-reflection of the intersection of history along with fiction and theory in the novel.

White Noise confronts the paradoxes of historical and fictive representations in its use of intertextual parody surrounding the academic legacy of the protagonist, Jack Gladney. In the first chapter of the novel, Gladney mentions that he had invented and has been the chairman of the Hitler Studies department at the College-on-the-Hill for the past two decades:

> I invented Hitler studies in North America in March of 1968. It was a cold bright day with intermittent winds out of the east. When I suggested to the chancellor that we might build a whole department around Hitler's life and work, he was quick to see the possibilities. It was an immediate and electrifying success. The chancellor went on to serve as adviser to Nixon, Ford and Carter before his death on a ski lift in Austria. (DeLillo 4)

The creation of a field of studies rooted in the life and work of a historical figure is being set up for the readers through a description of the weather in March almost two decades before the publication of this book. A relationship between the chancellor of the fictional College-on-the-Hill who saw the possibilities of success with this department to the American Presidents in the world outside the fictional text is also drawn. Gladney goes on to tell the readers about the chancellor advising him to construct a character by changing his name and appearance to be "taken seriously as a Hitler innovator" (19). An extra initial was *invented* to change his name to J. A. K. Gladney — "a tag [he] wore like a borrowed suit" (19). He was even advised to gain weight so as to "'grow out' into Hitler" (19). Gladney even confesses: "So Hitler gave me something to grow into and develop toward, tentative as I have sometimes been in the effort. The glasses with thick black heavy frames and dark lenses were my own idea, an alternative to the bushy beard that my wife of the period didn't want me to grow […] I am the false character that follows the name around" (19–20).

The self-conscious writing in *White Noise* is used "to signal the discursive nature of all reference," while "[the] referent is always already inscribed in the discourses of our culture" (Hutcheon, *Poetics of Postmodernism* 119). While the character of Gladney is depicted as a simulacrum, a "false character" following the invented name, it is important to remember that such a self-reflection from the narrative voice actively acknowledges this as well as the fact that his identity, starting from his name and his appearance, is constructed. Following the arguments

of Hutcheon, it can be said that the "'simulacrization' process of mass culture" is contested in this novel, not by denying or lamenting it, but by challenging the notion of representation of reality (*Poetics of Postmodernism* 223). This is further emphasised in one of the first conversations between Gladney and Murray, where Murray points out the impact of creating the Hitler Studies department:

> You've established a wonderful thing here with Hitler. You created it, you nurtured it, you made it your own […] This is the center, the unquestioned source. He is now your Hitler, Gladney's Hitler […] 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. I marvel at the effort. It was masterful, shrewd and stunningly preemptive. (DeLillo 13)

This dialogue hints at the inevitability of fiction in history writing through an acknowledgement of the *masterful*, *shrewd*, and *preemptive* construction of a historical personage — *Gladney's Hitler* — and an intricate system around him. It is important to note that Murray wishes to do the same with Elvis, which points to the commodification of historical persons in a consumerist America.[1] On this note, Peter Boxall argues, "The 'College on the Hill' promises to absorb Hitler into its well-heeled, politically neutral economy, to appropriate him as a historical artefact which is no more resistant to incorporation than Elvis" (Boxall 119–120). However, by pointing out the "effort" and planning that went into this appropriation of Hitler, the novel exhibits a "theoretical self-awareness of history and fiction as human constructs" (*Poetics of Postmodernism* 5). Such formal and thematic paradoxical confrontations with the historical thus allows this work of historiographic metafiction to challenge the very consumerist society it is a part of.

White Noise* further highlights the fictiveness of history and reality using satire. Gladney confesses that despite being the most prominent figure in the field of Hitler Studies, he does not know German (DeLillo 36). The figure of the creator of discourse surrounding Hitler is satirised not just by revealing that he is a 'false character' following around a fake name, but by the constant reminder that he does not know the required language for the field. The novel is often interjected with Gladney secretly taking German classes from one of Murray's fellow boarders (37). While the use of irony in the characterisation of Gladney through such narrative interventions does bring in humour to the text, it has a critical function as well: in parodying the

innovator of the 'unquestioned source' of Hitler Studies, the novel rethinks the fictive and constructed nature of history writing. *White Noise* thus ensures that it is not merely assimilating data to represent contemporary American society, but is able to lay out the processes of creating narrative order within this society. As a work of historiographic metafiction, it foregrounds the *attempt* to assimilate the data of the postmodern world and acknowledges its paradox of the reality and its "textualised accessibility" (Hutcheon, *Poetics of Postmodernism* 114).

Having had notions of reason, rationality, and objective reality shattered in the postmodern world for the readers and, consequently, the protagonist of the novel, the self-conscious or metafictional narrative technique in *White Noise* raises questions regarding the relationship between fiction and reality, as well as the limitations of history writing and historiography. This confrontation with the literary and historical allows the novel to work within and challenge the "ideological and aesthetic underpinnings of the cultural dominants" of its contemporary world, thus allowing it to dramatise the theories and histories of a consumerist, postmodern American society.

Notes

1. Note that this dialogue is immediately followed by the scene where Gladney and Murray travel to the Most Photographed Barn in America, allowing readers to string together Murray's comments on the contemporary condition of living in a simulated world, commodification of history, and the fictiveness and constructedness of history.

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