

Richard Sexton  
English 352  
July 17th, 2003

Death and Language in *Lot 49* and *White Noise*  
Annotated Bibliography

Bonca, Cornel. "Don DeLillo's *White Noise*: The Natural Language of the Species." *College Literature* 23.2 (1996): 25-44.

Bonca explores DeLillo's treatment of language, both in verbal and non-verbal forms, in his early novels with a focus on *White Noise*. He compares James, the protagonist of *The Names*, to Jack in *White Noise*. James discovers that language, regardless of its content, is a means in and of itself to "bridge the lonely distances" between people. Jack, on the other hand, never makes the same conscious realization but Bonca lists three examples in the novel where Jack encounters the white noise of language with a sense of wonder: Wilder's crying bout, Steffie's whispering of "Toyota Celica" in her sleep, and Sister Hermann Marie's German outburst. Bonca argues that all communication in the novel, from primal utterances to technological noise, serves to announce life and uphold existence. Thus, DeLillo's conception of white noise is that of an ambivalent force, representing not merely a symptom of postmodern death but also a way of transcending it. Pynchon, of course, is more suspicious of this as evidenced by the "rich chocolaty goodness" passage. The possibility of a basic humanity in the media's banality is undercut because Mucho experiences only a drug-fueled illusion of transcendence.

Davis, Robert M. "Parody, Paranoia, and the Dead End of Language in *The Crying of Lot 49*." *Genre* 5.1 (1972): 367-377.

Davis points out the prefix of the words parody and paranoia can mean "beyond" and argues that Pynchon's use of language is suggestive not just of entropy and ambiguity but also allows transcendence through mystery. His article situates the novel in terms of Pynchon's short story, *Entropy*, which explores similar themes. Davis' article is useful because it was published among the early responses to the novel and explores the concept of entropy without delving into the postmodern debate concerning the relationship between signifier and signified.

Gleason, William. "The Postmodern Labyrinths of *Lot 49*." *Critique* 34.2 (1993): 83-99.

Gleason uses the concept of the labyrinth to illustrate Pynchon's use of ambiguity in language (puns, acronyms, allusion etc.). He explores the question of whether the novel's structure matches the traditional definition of a labyrinth, with an inside, outside and center or if it is better envisioned as a "rhizome" or "net" which has none of these. He gives evidence for both possibilities but concludes that Pynchon's novel is a more suitably expressed as Umberto Eco's concept of the postmodern "rhizome".

Keeseey, Douglas. " 'A Stranger in Your Own Dying': *White Noise*." Don DeLillo. Ed. Douglas Keeseey. New York: Twayne, 1993. 133-150.

Keeseey's article deals mainly with the idea of how death and other aspects of postmodern life lose their meaning through the mediation of mass culture such as television and computers. The article is primarily concerned with exploring the novel as an illustration of the theories of Frederic Jameson, Jean-Francois Lyotard and Jean Baudillard. Keeseey's introduction to the book offers more useful insights into Delillo's treatment of language and death because it offers a more comprehensive treatment of his work, including earlier novels such as *End Zone* and *The Names*. However, the article on *White Noise* is very comprehensive in analyzing passages in terms of postmodern theory that Leonard Wilcox's article misses.

Sorfa, David. " 'Small Comfort': Significance and the Uncanny in *The Crying of Lot 49*." *Pynchon Notes* 32-33 (1993): 75-85.

Sorfa explores the postmodern destabilization of signs and their significance in terms of the Freudian concept of the uncanny and applies it to Pynchon's novel. The tension between the familiar and the mysterious is nothing new, predating postmodern theories such as Baudrillard's concept of the simulacrum. He explains how Freud's definition of the uncanny is illustrated through a quirk in language. The German word *heimlich* has a dual meaning which means both the familiar and the unfamiliar, a rare example of a word that is synonymous with its antonym, *unheimlich*. Sorfa cites feminist critic, H  l  ne Cixous' reading of Freud and her idea of the uncanny as a "rehearsal of an encounter with death, which is pure absence." Thus, the stripping of significance and the blurring of the familiar and mysterious is a mental process that mimics the absence of death. This ties in with Cornel Bonca's reading of *White Noise* where all communication, even noise, is a means of confronting the fear of death. Sorfa concludes by situating Pynchon's destabilizing prose in the tradition of other American novelists such as Melville and Hawthorne in their use of all encompassing symbols such as the letter 'A' in *The Scarlet Letter* or the doubloon nailed to the Pequod's mast in *Moby Dick*. He writes: "One is led to suspect that what might look at first glance like postmodern self-reflexivity and linguistic self-consciousness in Pynchon might be more generally ascribed to a larger American legacy—that of the hieroglyph or emblem" (83).

Wilcox, Leonard. "Baudrillard, Delillo's *White Noise*, and the End of Heroic Narrative." *Contemporary Literature* 32.3 (1991): 346-366.

Wilcox argues that Delillo's novel is heavily influenced by Jean Baudrillard's theory of the simulacrum and its effect of substituting an "ecstasy" of communication for "the interiority of the self" (347). Wilcox's reading of *White Noise* is of "a world of simulacra, where images and electronic representations replace direct experience" (346). He goes on to demonstrate how Jack Gladney represents a modernist hero adrift in the postmodern world. He fails according to the traditional "heroic narrative" because he loses his sense of self in the confusion of mass media. This article thoroughly explores the connection between Pynchon's notion of entropy as noise in communication. Wilcox analyses Delillo's use of language in the passages that best illustrate the idea of simulated reality (the SIMUVAC and the Most Photographed Barn in the World) and the pervasiveness of advertising slogans and tv-speak that interrupt Jack's narrative. His analysis of Jack's fear of death and his participation in the "delerium" of mass media can be tied in nicely with Sorpha's analysis of the uncanny in *Lot 49* which Oedipa experiences as a sense of "delerium."