

# Revisiting the Airborne Toxic Event: Eco-Critical Perspectives on Environmental Catastrophe in Don DeLillo's *White Noise*

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**Abstract**—Taken as a metaphor on environmental degradation and a sense of communal fear, this paper will analyze *White Noise* by Don DeLillo through the lenses of eco-criticism. This novel is based on the ecological disaster in a literary thrilling way; it covers the modern-day worries concerning the threats of industries, global warming and the uncertainty that is in the air. This paper analyses how DeLillo describes an ecological disaster and brings to the fore how literature predicts and assesses the cultural, psychological, and social responses to an ecological disaster. The research article refers to the concept of hyperobjects that Timothy Morton introduces in order to locate *White Noise* within the broad discourse of human beings and their natural environments. Similar to other modern ecological disasters, the Airborne Toxic Event cannot be explained and contained, and it is stressful to emphasize that it is unsophisticated to live in the Anthropocene. It is the time when human beings have terribly changed the ecology of the planet. It is a multidisciplinary method of literary criticism and environmental studies, and with a certain influence of cultural theory, it highlights the unity of ecological and existential problematics. The work supports the argument in the ongoing relevance of the novel to the history of environmental discussion by breaking down the way DeLillo dramatizes the contradiction between consumerism, media saturation, and environmental instability. The paper highlights the role of literary analysis in promoting conversations on sustainability, environmental awareness, and human – nature relations.

**Index Terms**—ecocriticism, Airborne Toxic Event, environmental catastrophe, hyperobjects, anthropocene

## I. INTRODUCTION

Concerns regarding the weak connection that humans have had with nature have manifested themselves in the contemporary discussion through the rise of environmental disruptions and their effect on the human psyche. *White Noise* (1985) by Don DeLillo portrays these anxieties through the Airborne Toxic Event which disrupts the lives of the characters in the novel. Applying the eco-criticism, in particular, the concept of hyperobjects introduced by Timothy Morton, which are so vast and diffusive that they cannot be understood by humans, the analysis of how the environmental disaster was depicted in this work is conducted. This paper explores the prophetic nature of *White Noise* in its commentary on ecological instability, industrial risk and psychological cost of residing in a precarious world by putting it within the context of hyperobjects.

*White Noise* by Don DeLillo follows the experiences of Jack Gladney, professor of Hitler Studies at a small college who attempts to cope with the absurdity of contemporary existence. The set of the book in a suburban community focuses on the anxiety of death in Jack, due to the secret use of an experimental drug called Dylar by his wife Babette, aimed at suppressing the anxiety of death. Their lives are thrown off, and their sense of control and safety is revealed as impotent in an airborne toxic event, a chemical leak that forces their town to evacuate. Between this, the book discusses the omnipresent influence of media, technology and consumerism represented by the unending din of commercials, television and supermarket culture. The alienation of modern life posed to *White Noise* by its broken tale and dark comedy is one in

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which individuals struggle to seek meaning and identity in a world dominated by spectacle and terrorism.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

According to Boldt (2011), the novels by Don DeLillo discuss the way the American identity of the postwar period is formed and perceived with the help of media publicity. According to the researcher, different types of media and the increased power of advertising industry has contributed a lot towards the creation of an identity that is not always realised. Facts are usually given in media to give the impression of hyperreality whereby the representations become more meaningful than the real things. DeLillo through the use of novels like *White Noise*, *Mao II*, and *Americana* demonstrates the presentation, popularisation, or distortion of facts, which results in a world where advertising determines perception and identity. This article also indicates that it is now more complicated to differentiate between reality and hyper reality, and therefore, it is difficult to prove facts in the postmodern world, unless there is some physical evidence or documentation that can be stored.

Kumar (2015) states that in his novels, Don DeLillo discusses the pressure of modern life, the danger of war, environmental pollution, how science and technology could intervene in human life. According to the argument of the researcher, DeLillo is worried about the noise that is too much in the modern society that people cannot actually hear their hearts. DeLillo in his works criticizes the cultural and psychological disturbances by this noise which affects the society and individuals individually. The thesis analyses in different ways people live their lives in modern life, which perverts their personal identity and how individuals struggle to take control over their nature only to realize that they are the ones controlled by nature. Also, the researcher emphasizes that DeLillo often depicts characters who are not able to find their identity in the society under pressure. Although his characters are most often American, the topics that he is addressing are universal, and each novel is devoted to another aspect of the modern life and how these forces are harming the human wellbeing.

According to Brown (2020), the book *White Noise* by Don DeLillo explores the process of people coping with the confusing and complicated nature of contemporary existence, especially in a postmodern cultural context. Conventional meanings, identities, and values are tentative and under constant fluidity in this world, and they are greatly influenced by media, advertising as well as consumerism. A constant change in the symbols and signs like brands and media messages makes it hard to find constant or universal truths. According to Brown, DeLillo offers the only constant and definite thing in human lives, death. Whereas the rest of it is flowing and can be redefined, death is absolute and unavoidable. The paper suggests that in *White Noise*, death is the so-called transcendental signified, the single point, which breaks the infinite uncertainty of postmodern existence.

Bhardwaj (2016) breaks down the concept of *White Noise* by Don DeLillo as a postmodern critique of the commercialised American society and the immense power of the modern technology. The article posits that technological changes and mechanisation have infiltrated the social life, which has added to existential emptiness. It dwells upon three main features of the novel that show the dual nature of the technology good and bad: television as a source of information and entertainment, toxic event in the air, and the Dylar episode, the outcomes of which are disastrous. Also, the article examines the broad effect of television on people and families including Jack and the effects of the television to the rest of the society. The paper also highlights the way DeLillo criticized the mindless reliance on scientific progress and technology. The researcher notes that although *White Noise* is widely noted as the technology, there are no allusions to computers and the internet because it was written prior to the introduction of the World Wide Web in 1990. Rather, the future of information technology is predetermined by technologies like television, radio, and international phone calls. The novel shows that communication has risen to global levels as in the case where Jack converses with his ex-wife in her ashram. The researcher also points out that technology is deeply integrated with everyday life as it easily blends with human activities.

According to Erden (2019), *White Noise* can be regarded as a pioneer of the material turn in literature because material forces dominate over human agency in influencing the events in the novel. According to the article, when trying to regulate material agency, frustration and catastrophe ensues. It also discusses the general intellectual transformation of the humanities in the linguistic turn into the material turn, citing Jane Bennett on how the linguistic turn ignored materiality. *White Noise* is pointed out as a novel that brings back the focus on non-human forces. The author also examines how the book depicts the environmental disasters as something humans cannot control. It condemns the protagonist, Jack Gladney, in his erroneous thinking that disasters affect only low-income people, which supports the theme that material forces do not depend on human intentions. Besides, the article claims that the White noises emphasize the active involvement of material agency in event formation, so that one should not think that mankind has the power over the material world. An example of such a false premise is the frustration of Jack Gladney. Lastly, the article makes a conclusion that material agency is unpredictable and something that cannot be controlled by human beings.

### Research Objectives

- Examine the representation of environmental catastrophes in Don DeLillo's *White Noise* through the lens of eco-critical theory.
- Analyse the Airborne Toxic Event as a symbol of hyperobjects and its broader implications for ecological crises and human-nature interactions.

- Explore the novel's contribution to interdisciplinary scholarship on literature, environmental studies, and the cultural dimensions of the Anthropocene.

### III. METHODOLOGY

The analysis in this paper is the interdisciplinary method and a qualitative method that involves the combination of literary analysis and eco-critical theory. The methodology includes:

- ❖ Textual and Theoretical Analysis - Have a close reading of *White Noise*, with references to themes, symbols, and narrative techniques with regard to environmental disaster and existential anxiety. Use the theory of hyperobjects applied to the Airborne Toxic Event and its ecological impacts in general by Timothy Morton.
- ❖ Contextual and Interdisciplinary Approach - Place the novel into its cultural and historical context, especially with the new discourse of the Anthropocene and ecological crisis of the 1980s. Combine environmental research, cultural theory and psychology to further analyze.
- ❖ Comparative and Contemporary Relevance - Demonstrate similarities between *White Noise* and modern environmental ecological stories to underscore the novel as a persistent part of the ecological discussions on ecological crisis and human understanding of ecological danger.

### IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

#### A. Eco-Critical Analysis: The Airborne Toxic Event

These qualities are reflected in the Airborne Toxic Event. Although it was originally seen as a localized disaster, its extended expanse and unpredictable expansion point to its hyperobject status. It is both there and not there, a concrete threat but an intangible power which cannot be accurately classified. The incident remains with the characters even after the visible impacts have disappeared, such as environmental crises remain unseen in the air, earth, and human body.

Ecocriticism emphasises this eco-consciousness, removing the ego-consciousness of man. The present environmental crisis is a byproduct of human culture. It is not caused by how the ecosystem functions, but by how our ethical system functions and how we behave with Mother Nature (Mishra, 2016, p. 168).

In addition, the Airborne Toxic Event highlights the lack of human control or conceptualisation of the ecological threats that a person experiences. Jack Gladney and other characters have problems with making sense of different scientific reports, and they are a symptom of the larger epistemological crisis that occurs as people face phenomena that can no longer be interpreted within a personal or cultural context.

“A dark black breathing thing of smoke.

Why do they call it a plume?”

“Air time is valuable. They can't go into long tortured descriptions. Have they said what kind of chemical is it?”

“It's called Nyodene Derivative or Nyodene D. It was in a movie we saw in school on toxic wastes.” (DeLillo, 1999, p. 94)

The black billowing cloud is an indicator of environmental disaster and existential dread. It is unnaturally silent and almost purposeful in movement; it is orchestrated, emphasizing the themes of the vulnerability of humans mentioned in the novel, the collapse in technology, and the spooky silence before a disaster. By doing so, the occasion reflects real-life concerns of climate change, pollution, and technological remnants, which are admittedly an issue but not one that may be solved (or even understood) in the short term. Considering the Airborne Toxic Event as a hyperobject, *White Noise* is a prophetic critique of the contemporary environmental and existential problems. The novel by DeLillo predicts modern trends of ecological disaster, surveillance, and the human mind unable to handle the disaster occurring on levels that we cannot perceive directly. In this perspective, the novel does not just satirize the dependence of the modern society on media and scientific discourse, but also questions the extent of human agency in the presence of the overwhelming global forces.

#### B. Psychological and Societal Disruption

*White Noise*, other than being a literal disaster to the environment, its Airborne Toxic Event is an analogy of the mental and social turmoil caused by ecological catastrophes. The fact that all these people are scared, confused and apprehensive due to what has happened speaks of how feeble the human institutions are when subjected to major changes. The institutions of the government, science and media which are expected to bring stability do not give clear guidance and leave people to experience the reality which is growing more chaotic and unpredictable. The exposure of the collective trauma by the humanisation of the human being, Jack Gladney, who was exposed to the very toxic substance, Nyodene D is further humanised. The incident affects an entire population. Nevertheless, the crisis is made more intimate and closer to Jack due to his condition. This shows how such very big environmental hazards can be very personal. Similar to the communities that struggle with an ecological and health risk with long-term effects that are a result of industrial pollution, radiation, or climate change, it is unclear what happened to him and this diagnosis remains a kind of reminder of the irreversible nature of the event; he is in an uncertain future now.

The reaction of different characters to the incident displays the ecological threats that transform our world psychologically. The constant threat which is not apparent makes certain individuals, such as Jack, experience the growing

paranoia and existential fear. One of them is Babette, his wife and passes through the stages of denying and desperate attempts at finding coping methods. Even their children respond in different ways to who Heinrich is logical in his attitude and Steffie subconsciously absorbs media influenced concerns. These varied responses support the general theme of information overload in the novel and the boundaries of human knowledge that the novel highlights the hard work of handling events that cannot be explained through the usual framework.

Table 1 shows a chronological summary of how the Airborne Toxic Event affects both individuals and society, demonstrating that an ecological crisis extends beyond physical damage to influence emotional, institutional, and informational dimensions of human experience.

TABLE 1  
INTERACTION BETWEEN ENVIRONMENTAL CRISIS, HUMAN PSYCHOLOGY, AND MEDIA REPRESENTATION IN \*WHITE NOISE\*

Stage/Element	Description	Consequences
Airborne Toxic Event	Industrial accident releasing a toxic cloud.	Triggers ecological damage and public panic.
Ecological Effects	Pollution and long-term environmental contamination.	Generates ecological anxiety and moral questioning.
Human Psychological Reactions	Emotional and cognitive responses such as fear, disorientation, and denial.	Exposes existential vulnerability and the erosion of human stability.
Media Portrayal	Sensationalized depiction of disaster through media channels.	Shapes collective memory and amplifies perceptions of crisis.
Feedback Loop	Continuous interaction between public response and media representation.	Reinforces awareness of environmental fragility and psychological unease.

Note. The table illustrates the interrelated dynamics of environmental catastrophe, human response, and media influence in Don DeLillo's *White Noise*, emphasizing how ecological and psychological disturbances feed into one another through mediated experience.

DeLillo emphasizes how conflicting and unreliable the information provided by the media and authorities is in the time of a crisis. Since various sources give conflicting information, it highlights the reliance of the society on technology where society loses its ability to provide clarity or control. The ambiguity portrays the themes of misinformation, fear and risk in the environment of the novel. On a larger scale than individual level, the Airborne Toxic Event illustrates larger scale dysfunction in the society. In addition to this, unethical consumption of the natural resources by the uncensored use of the technological advancement has resulted in mass destruction of the natural resources and the imbalance of the world (Mehta, 2024). Rather than bringing about real emergency preparedness or community resiliency, the response is confused by misinformation, bureaucratic inefficiencies, and excessive dependence on technology and media narratives. The official warnings change to panicked evacuation notices, as they mirror the real-world trends of crisis management, in which institutions tend to understate or under-respond to environmental disasters before they get out of control.

The incident highlights the growing challenge of the inability to separate the real and the mediated perception, between the real threats and the way they are portrayed in news stories, technical language, and in governmental words. Finally, it can be concluded that the Airborne Toxic Event in *White Noise* is a mini-epic of contemporary fears concerning the environmental breakdown, death, and the instability of social systems.

“What does the radio say?”

“At first, they said skin irritation and sweaty palms.”

“But now they say nausea, vomiting, shortness of breath.”

“This is human nausea we’re talking about.” (DeLillo, 1999, p. 94)

The description by DeLillo of the world being created by forces that are invisible, uncontrollable is an appeal to the modern-day anxieties of climate change, pandemics and industrial contamination like the toxic cloud that cannot be fully comprehended but always remains present.

### C. Environmental Catastrophes and Consumerism

Don DeLillo in *White Noise* criticizes the aspect of consumer culture in promoting the environmental degradation, which engages the ecological crisis and the deep entanglement of capitalist consumption as a source of environmental crisis. Airborne Toxic Event is a metaphorical representation of the effects of uncontrolled industrialisation, waste generation, and negligence by corporations, as well as a literal disaster. The disaster-causing chemical, Nyodene D, is an industrial byproduct, which demonstrates that in the quest to make a profit, the potential results are not always visible but can be widespread environmental risks. This type of revelation can also be exposed in the *White Noise* by Don DeLillo when the narrator attempts to reveal nature and materials through various moments as an actual reserve (Mohammed et al., 2023).

DeLillo also speaks of commodifying disaster by the sensationalized media reporting on the incident. Instead of providing readers with information that can be acted upon, the media houses present the crisis as a spectacle, which can be consumed like any other form of entertainment. This also shows how society wants to capitalize on disasters to benefit both economically and culturally and turn suffering into contentment and packaging it into something that can be sold. The characters themselves are also unable to separate the real threats they are introduced to and the mediated perception of such threats, which depicts the influence of consumer culture on perceptions of risk, reality, and survival. This criticism is compatible with the eco-critical views that associate the capitalist consumption with the destruction of the environment.

The supermarket shelves have been rearranged. It happened one day without warning. There is agitation and panic in the aisles, dismay in the faces of older shoppers. They walk in a fragmented trance, stop and go, clusters of well-dressed figures frozen in the aisles, trying to figure out the pattern, discern the underlying logic, trying to remember where they'd seen the Cream of Wheat. (DeLillo, 1999, p. 277)

The supermarket goods are bright-colored, a symbol of distraction and false security and the outside toxic cloud is an uncontrollable threat to the environment. It shows the cynicism of the modern society towards real perils in favor of material safety presented by *White Noise*. The unlimited production and disposal processes of modern consumerism contribute to the environment destruction impacting the environment with pollution, the disappearance of resources, and climate changes. The idea that is propagated by *White Noise* is that not only the Airborne Toxic Event is a one-off event but rather the manifestation of a larger system, where profit is the chief focus, as opposed to the environment and people. The characters go back to their consumer-oriented lives after the crisis is over, with a sense of finding solace in the world of supermarkets and shopping malls in case material consumption can offer some sense of stability in what is becoming more and more of a world of existential uncertainty.

In the end, DeLillo introduces consumerism as an economic and psychological phenomenon, defining the manner in which the people think and react to the threat to the environment. Society is stuck in a loop of distraction, misinformation and passive consumption rather than dealing with the real causes of disasters. In this light, *White Noise* is a prophetic commentary upon the problems of the modern era, both the denial of climate change and the commodification of modern-day crises in the digital era.

#### D. Hyperobjects in the Context of the Anthropocene

A major background to the interpretation of *White Noise* is the Anthropocene, a hypothetical geological period in which there is enormous human intervention into the systems of the Earth. The process of human activity in this era has transformed the environment such that the natural and artificial boundaries have become more permeable. Pollution of industries, global warming and ecological meltdowns are not externalities but are now part of daily life.

The system was invisible, making it all the more impressive and disquieting to deal with. But we were in accord, at least for now. The networks, the circuits, the streams, the harmonies. I woke in the grip of a death sweat. (DeLillo, 1999, pp. 39–40)

The Airborne Toxic Event is one of the examples of the features of the Anthropocene. It is a creation of the industrial activity, showing how technological advancements usually have unanticipated effects on the environment. Instead of being an exception, the toxic cloud is a symptom of a world in the world where industrial waste, artificial chemicals, and the disturbance of the ecological order have become inevitable. This is in line with the main theme of the Anthropocene the human species has changed the Earth and has resulted in the creation of an environment that is deadly to survival. The characters in *White Noise* have trouble trying to digest the occurrence since it is a bigger systemic problem that reflects some of the real-life issues of pollution, climate change and how the ecosystems have been changed permanently.

In order to further contextualise this in the theory of Timothy Morton, the toxic cloud can be viewed as a hyperobject, a phenomenon that is immensely distributed in terms of both time and space, which cannot be understood, and cannot be localised. A systematic reflection of the interrelatedness of hyperobjects and the Anthropocene crises of climate change, industrial pollution, and techno-capitalism is shown in Table 2 below.

TABLE 2  
CONCEPTUAL PROGRESSION FROM HYPEROBJECTS TO THE CLIMATE CRISIS

Stage	Conceptual Focus	Outcome / Theoretical Implication
Hyperobjects	Massive entities distributed across time and space; beyond human-scale perception.	Establish the framework for understanding global ecological phenomena.
Non-locality, Viscosity, Phasing	Core properties of hyperobjects that define their persistence and entanglement.	Reveal how ecological and technological systems interpenetrate human life.
Industrialization	Human-driven transformation of nature into capital and technology.	Intensifies ecological imbalance; material basis for the Anthropocene.
Media Saturation	Proliferation of information and spectacle that mediate ecological awareness.	Distorts perception of crisis and sustains consumerist detachment.
Environmental Catastrophe	Manifestation of ecological breakdown and planetary instability.	Marks the transition to the Anthropocene.
Anthropocene → Climate Crisis	Epochal shift characterized by human agency in geologic change.	Represents the culmination of hyperobject logic in planetary collapse.

Note. The table outlines the causal and conceptual chain linking Morton's hyperobject theory to the Anthropocene discourse, illustrating how material, cultural, and ecological systems intertwine to produce the current climate crisis.

Table 2 clarifies how hyperobjects like the toxic cloud replicate the broader environmental condition of the Anthropocene, revealing how unnoticed forces such as industrial waste and synthetic pollution operate on a vast, often unnoticed scale beyond ordinary perception.

#### E. Temporal and Spatial Scale

The second aspect of hyperobjects stated by Timothy Morton is that it breaks the established concepts of time and space. Hyperobjects such as climate change, nuclear radiation and microplastic pollution work on a scale beyond human perception, and span enormous temporal and spatial scales. The Airborne Toxic Event in *White Noise* can be viewed as a similar attempt, as it makes the audience and the protagonists directly face the scope of human understanding in the context of huge, slowly-moving environmental disasters.

In *White Noise*, technology facilitates convenience and fosters alienation from nature and human authenticity.

This section sets the stage by highlighting how technological progress reshaped societal norms while raising existential questions about the actual cost of progress. (Fatima et al., 2024)

Firstly, the toxic cloud may seem a small, localized tragedy, but its impact can be felt over an extended period of time. Even though Jack may not die immediately he is exposed to Nyodene D, the impacts on his health, and the environment will be long-lasting and may not be clearly realized until many years later. Slow violence is a sentence coined by Rob Nixon to describe the subtle and gradual devastation of the ecosystem. It replicates ecological disasters, such as global warming, deforestation and chemical pollution (Nixon, 2011). Similar to the old crises, Airborne Toxic Event is too apparent and too hidden at the same time, so people find it hard to comprehend all its consequences. It is momentary and persistent.

#### F. *Interconnected Crises*

The book shows the close connection between concerns of ecology and existential concerns. The Jack is already obsessed with the idea of death and the exposure to Nyodene D only makes it become a predominant theme in his life. This confounds his mortality and the larger environmental instability that defines the Anthropocene. The broader uncertainty of the world increasingly shaped by environmental threats is reflected in his inability to predict the long-term effects of the toxin.

According to DeLillo, ecological crises are profoundly psychological phenomena that alter people's perceptions of risk, time, and life. Environmental calamities such as oil spills, toxic smoke, hazardous chemical clouds, and the ubiquitous electrical and magnetic fields are common topics of conversation among the protagonists. (Bora, 2023)

Similar to the response to climatic change and industrial threats in real life, the main characters of *White Noise* attempt to deny the tragedy, disseminate fake news, and distract themselves regarding it. When human beings find comfort in shopping in times of crisis, they do not think about the real reasons of environmental degradation but rather they are devoured by the beats of the consumer society. In *White Noise*, the Airborne Toxic Event is portrayed as a foreshadowing of the concerns of the Anthropocene in the final chapter. It also forces the heroes and villains to confront the fact that the environment is not a thing that exists outside them but it is part and parcel of their identity.

#### G. *Literary Narratives of Environmental Anxiety and Ecological Crisis*

When it comes to how individuals respond to the issue of the environment, literature is a cultural thermometer that does serve two functions. Since romantic literature that glorifies the sublime of the 1700s to the dystopian novels of the modern era that predict the impending end of the world as we know it, literature has been a chronicle of the fluctuating relationship between man and nature. *White Noise* by Don DeLillo, as a cultural and psychological exploration of environmental fear, presumes the direction the modern world was heading toward ecological disaster. One worldwide issue is the ecological catastrophe. This has led to unprecedented interest in the environment because the crisis has already been of a catastrophic nature, the first manifestation of which is the destruction of the environmental state and damage to the ecosystem (Asenath & Santhanalakshmi, 2021).

The Airborne Toxic Event, though fictional, is a metaphor on environmental disasters, such as oil spills, industrial pollution and climate change calamities. The setting is a consumerist, suburban setting, and DeLillo needs to underline how environmental issues are now a possibility, and cannot be ignored. Physical conditions, as well as cultural perceptions, play a role in the ecological disaster accounts; his portrayal of confused government responses, media sensationalism, and general panic echo real reactions to disaster. Being a postmodern fiction, *White Noise* is also skeptical about the credibility of information in a time of media overload. As it is pointed out in the novel, when confronted with an ecological threat the difference between truth and misinformation is hard to draw. This question is still topical in the present-day discourse of climate denial, greenwashing in business, and politicisation of environmental science. Human beings cannot be properly nurtured without natural resources. They are forced to rely on the assistance of nature in order to live comfortably (Bhushan, 2021). By doing so, *White Noise* acts as a retrospective of past anxieties as well as the forerunner of the rising canon of climate fiction (cli-fi) that explicitly addresses the existential uncertainties of the Anthropocene.

#### H. *Role of Storytelling in Environmental Awareness*

Staging the effects of the Airborne Toxic Event, DeLillo asks the readers to approach issues related to the ecology both emotionally and intellectually. The novel does not give abstract statistics or scientific reports but makes the deaths of the environment personal by using the experience of Jack Gladney so that the reader is able to face the disorientation, fear and helplessness that are frequently associated with the ecological disaster. This goes hand in hand with eco-critical views that storytelling is a strong method of creating environmental awareness and empathy. Higher critics in eco-criticism believe that literature has a possibility of filling the gap between the scientific discourse and the populace, rendering the

problem of the environment more approachable and emotionally engaging. In a materialistic society, it enhances human capacity to get resources and wealth and make people exploit nature. It creates a social system that is unsustainable to the environment (Asenath & Santhanalakshmi, 2021).

Such stories as *White Noise* make the reader think of how their lives are connected with the global ecological systems and it is what makes people think that it is up to humanity as a whole how the future of the planet will be. The weapons used by DeLillo to draw the attention to the absurdity of the way humankind reacts to the environmental crisis are irony and dark humour. Trying to cope with the reality of the disaster and remaining in the consumer culture, the characters balance between apathy and dizziness. The sarcastic tone of the book makes a reader think about his/her impact on environmental destruction and doubt the values and lifestyles in the modern world.

### I. Implications for Modern Environmental Discourse

To have a better understanding and reaction to the contemporary environmental problems, read the novel of DeLillo. According to *White Noise*, the significance of a holistic approach to environmental issues is explained through the Airborne Toxic Event, which is represented as both a hyperobject and a personal disaster. The scientific knowledge is not enough, the novel indicates that cultural discourses, psychological reactions, and media images are vital in the determination of the popular perception and policy making. The fight of Jack Gladney to understand his exposure to Nyodene D is an indicator of a larger social challenge of dealing with the sluggish mass-level threats to the environment.

Thus, in *White Noise*, a litany of real and possible environmental disasters testifies to a growing concern for the environment and accidents that might result from a callous attitude toward our surroundings. Daily, there is news of toxic spills, cancerous solvents from storage tanks, and radioactive water from power plants. (Bora, 2023)

Similar to how he is obsessed with the uncertainty of his condition, the contemporary societies are finding it hard to digest the long-term implications of climate change, loss of biodiversity and industrial pollution. The novel is a warning about the risks of complacency, misinformation and the illusion that consumerism is the way of feeling safe in a period of ecological instability.

To underscore the relevance of DeLillo's fictional disaster to real-world environmental events, Table 3 presents a comparative framework that links the Airborne Toxic Event with notable ecological catastrophes from modern history.

TABLE 3  
COMPARATIVE FRAMEWORK OF FICTIONAL AND REAL-WORLD ECOLOGICAL CRISES

Aspect	Airborne Toxic Event (White Noise)	Real-World Example	Shared Implications
Origin	Industrial accident releasing a toxic cloud	Bhopal Gas Tragedy (1984), Chernobyl Disaster (1986)	Technological negligence, industrial risk, and environmental fragility
Public Reaction	Confusion, paranoia, and emotional disarray	Panic, mistrust, and social disorientation	Psychological trauma, dependency on mediated information
Institutional Response	Conflicting media narratives; delayed evacuation	Denial, poor crisis management, and politicization	Institutional fragility, policy failure, and erosion of public trust
Long-Term Impact	Lingering fear, existential anxiety, and health uncertainty	Chronic illness, mortality, and ecological contamination	Persistent health and environmental consequences
Media Role	Sensationalized and contradictory reporting	Misinformation, censorship, or underreporting	Manipulation of perception; mediation of fear and crisis

Note: The "Airborne Toxic Event" refers to a fictional chemical spill depicted in Don DeLillo's novel *White Noise*. The real-world examples serve as illustrative comparisons for academic analysis.

This comparative framework shows that *White Noise* functions not only as a novel of postmodern anxiety but also as a deeply prescient eco-critical text. It mirrors the real-world failures to recognize, respond to, and recover from environmental catastrophes, urging readers to reconsider the interplay between ecological fragility and institutional authority.

### J. Toward an Eco-Critical Future

Using the eco-criticism in the *White Noise* emphasizes the significance of interdisciplinary approach in solving environmental problems. The ecological science, literature, and cultural theory should collaborate to have a better insight into the issues of the Anthropocene. The novel by DeLillo reveals that environmental crises are not scientific or political issues but rather very cultural and psychological.

The novel for the most part is about fear of death, fear of destruction of nature and life, fear of modern technology and its consequences which controls all aspects of contemporary human beings and becomes an alternative for all spiritual dimensions including religion, beliefs, meditation, poetry, arts, and nature. (Mohammed et al., 2023)

Scholars and activists can better get people talking about sustainability, resilience, and environmental justice if they look at how stories affect public awareness. A rapidly expanding area of study known as the environmental humanities, which includes literature, philosophy, history, and media studies, is vital in connecting scientific understanding with real-world human experience. Ultimately, *White Noise* is still essential for modern environmental discussions because it provides a prism to examine how people are changing their connection to the natural world, technology, and their mortality.

To better understand the cultural and emotional aspects of ecological crises and to develop more effective and compassionate answers to the problems of the Anthropocene, it is helpful to view literature as a mirror of environmental distress.

## V. CONCLUSION

*White Noise*, as written by Don DeLillo is a traditional exploration of an ecological and existential crisis that makes a scathing evaluation of how modern society treats such tragedies. The narrative summarizes the anxieties of the Anthropocene, which was characterized by the irreversible damage that humans caused to the planet by presenting the Airborne Toxic Event through the prism of eco-criticism and hyperobjects. Besides the examination of the effects of such crises on human psychology, media discourses and social organizations, the works of DeLillo anticipate the present-day discussions concerning the world of industrial pollution, climate change, and environmental degradation. This discussion emphasizes the enduring significance of *White Noise* in the contemporary environmental rhetoric through an examination of the interrelationship of psychological and ecological disturbance.

The narrative presents the way in which environmental calamities have become normal in consumer culture, and the media and the people sensationalise them and go about consuming them without taking any action. The culture of denial, disinformation, the overdependence on institutions that may not be ready to deal with high-scale ecological issues, is one that is in a flux and swing between these issues and the process of dying is an element that Jack Gladney may be already experiencing and DeLillo is also warning and inciting action at the same time. The readers have to think about how our senses are narrow in understanding hyperobjects and struggle against the system that supports environmental harm. Moreover, it emphasizes that the Anthropocene cannot be addressed solely through the application of scientific approaches, so the cultural and psychological approach must be combined to understand its complexity. After all, there are too many uncertainties of the modern life, and *White Noise* is not merely a catastrophe story. By responding to the topics of the novel in an eco-critical perspective, one may gain an insight into the fears of the DeLillo era and the relevance of the novel to the uncertain environmental future. This way, *White Noise* makes us reconsider the relationship people have with nature, technology, and our mortality, and it makes us leave our complacent stance and start working hard to address the environmental issues of today.

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