

## САН КАО СТВАРНОСТ У РОМАНИМА ДОНА ДЕЛИЛА

## DREAM AS REALITY IN DON DELILLO'S NOVELS



**Милица Д. Матић**, доктор наука

ОШ „Јован Дучић“  
Милентија Поповића 16, 11070 Београд  
milicamabg@yahoo.com

**Milica D. Matic**, Ph.D.

Primary School “Jovan Dučić”  
Milentija Popovića 16, 11070 Beograd  
milicamabg@yahoo.com

The aim of this monograph is the analysis of the complex relationship between truth, fiction and myth in Don DeLillo's novels *White Noise*, *Libra*, *Underworld* and *Cosmopolis* from the perspective of philosophy and literary theory of postmodernism. The introductory chapter of the monograph deals with the postmodern notions, which are relevant for the research, with special attention to the works of theorists such as Linda Hutcheon, Jean Baudrillard, Roland Barthes, Michael Riffaterre and Hayden White. Special attention is also paid to the connection with Aristotle and ancient theoretical heritage.

Selected novels are analyzed in four separate chapters. However, it has been pointed to the thematical interconnection between the novels. The analysis is gathered around key social, cultural and political issues: the relations between people and technology; the contrast between history conceived as a totality and history conceived as fragmented; the excesses of consumer society and its effects on individual life; the world as waste and waste as art; the feelings of powerlessness, paranoia and alienation; reality and simulations of reality. While analyzing these themes, we focus on what the author

frames as the question of the subject within the historical and national contexts, and how he blends historically accurate and fictional events and characters. DeLillo is interested in the period of great changes – The Cold War, Kennedy assassination, September 11th – showing the way in which historical events define one era and individuals' lives as well.

In the chapter about the novel *White Noise*, it is emphasized that DeLillo shows how technological progress, consumer ideologies and media influence a community. Thus, the novel presents the ethos of a postmodern society. One of the key events in the novel is “the airborne toxic event”. Although the event causing chemical contamination and the evacuation of a small college town seems real, the word ‘simulated’ in ‘simulated evacuation’ blurs the boundary between the real and unreal. In this sense, the most frequent reading of the novel is through the hyperreality theory of Jean Baudrillard, who argues that in the cultural domain of hyperreality, the distinction between the real and the simulated is blurred. According to DeLillo, television is also an important aspect of simulacra. The event becomes event only when seen through the

medium of television. Another example of the world of simulacra is “the most photographed barn in America”. The barn is lost in its numerous representations, photos of the barn. It becomes impossible to see the barn itself. Thus, the object dissolves into its numerous representations, confirming Baudrillard’s thesis of the copy without an original, to which the loss of the real leads. The postmodern reality is colored by modern technology, consumerism, and globalization. Life is organized around the shopping mall, supermarket, fast-food restaurant and TV family gatherings, which have become the key features of reality at the end of the twentieth century. One of these features is also diversity, DeLillo shows, and it is not just a philosophical concept, but also the reality in the society in which racism persists as an unconscious category. Mink is an example of this cultural diversity, a composite. Jack cannot tell the difference whether he is Melanesian, Polynesian, Indonesian, Nepalese, Surinamese or Dutch-Chinese. However, DeLillo shows that generational differences in perceiving the non-white “Other” exist.

The next chapter deals with the novel *Libra*, in which DeLillo uses historical facts, events, and personages, blending historically accurate facts and fictional. The central event is the assassination of the American president J. F. Kennedy, which allows DeLillo to speak about the configuration of history itself. By presenting the efforts of the retired secret agent, Nicholas Branch, who has to write the secret history of the assassination for CIA, the writer challenges the assumption that history means joining the facts from the past. Although pages of testimony surround Branch, he cannot connect them and write his version of the truth. The more isolated facts Branch knows the less he knows about the whole picture. Thus, instead of bringing us to knowledge and certainty about the assassination, all the facts Branch has bring us to a bigger uncertainty. That is also DeLillo’s perception of history, and inability to join the facts about the past into a true version of an event. Beside almost seven hundred witnesses and a multitude of cameras, the truth about

the event stays in the shadow. Barthes’ analysis of the effect of the real shows that technology gravitates toward presenting the final truth of an event. Photography confirms that an event really happened. In this sense, we conclude in this chapter that DeLillo shows how it seems at first sight that photography and shot of the assassination reveal the truth, but they do not do it. Although Oswald believes that he is a part of History as an enormous force, he is just its object. He is the proof of the underside of the system, staying left out, isolated from the system. His life is the antithesis of life that America promises to its citizens, the life of a wide variety of choices. Oswald is unable to offer his wife, Marina, participation in the consumer promise. Results of this research show how DeLillo presents social fragmentation and isolation as the offset of that promise, thus shattering the myth of America as a country of consumer fulfillment and equal rights for everyone.

In the next chapter of the monograph, the novel *Underworld*, which is deemed to be DeLillo’s best novel so far, is analyzed. The themes he deals with in this novel are: the increasing power of the image and media in the modern world; uncertainty of life in the period after Kennedy assassination; the world as waste and waste as art, paranoia. In this monograph, it is demonstrated how DeLillo blends historically true and fictional so that the boundary between them remains indiscernible. The novel presents a portrait of modern American culture. Historical events and characters which contribute to the reconstruction of the period are: baseball game in 1951, Soviet second atomic test, Cuban missile crisis in 1962 from the perspective of Lenny Bruce, a film about The Rollingstones tour, Sergei Eisenstein’s film *Unterwelt*, characters like J. Edgar Hoover, Frank Sinatra, Toots Shor. One of the themes that the writer deals with is the question of waste. Waste, literal and figurative, is novel’s explicit subject – landfills, nuclear waste, streets full of waste, burying waste, recycling waste, wasted time and wasted lives. These images reveal a dark side, ‘the underworld’ of consumer mentality and manners. The novel

is often determined as an example of the great age of American paranoia. Conspiracy theories and paranoia characterize American post-war society. Similarly, Elaine Showalter's book *Hystories* speaks about "the plague of paranoia" spreading through western society. With this in mind, we conclude in this chapter that DeLillo demythologizes the idea of American West as a place of rebirth and renovation.

In the next chapter, about the novel *Cosmopolis*, it is shown how DeLillo shatters the myth, perception of the world as an organized and arranged system. Paranoia has become the main characteristic of the culture at the beginning of the twenty-first century. The image of Eric's asymmetrical prostate can be read as a metaphor of that world's disharmony. Although place and time frames of the novel are compressed, DeLillo demonstrates the end of one age and events, obsessions, and manners that meant entering into the twenty-first century, between the Cold War and September 11th attacks. Presenting reality is one of DeLillo's themes from previous novels. Episodes from the novel show how the screen and the media tend to get near to the absolute real in its truth. Baudrillard's thesis about dissolving of television into life and dissolving of life into television is once again confirmed. Similarly, the logic of capital dissolves its own participants, coming into all pores of a society. It dissolves

the main character of the novel, Eric Paker. Contrary to the usual perception of the west as an ideal place of rebirth, journey towards the west brings Eric Paker to death. Thus, the myth of that ideal place is once again shattered.

Places as landfills and desert, hotels, supermarkets play a significant role in presenting DeLillo's themes. They contribute to the analysis of the culture from which his characters originate. Beside clearly defined place frames, time frames are important for understanding and interpreting these novels. DeLillo uses important historical events, in a direct or indirect way, but always having in mind an individual who was influenced by those events. Beside historical events, DeLillo uses deeply rooted myths for his stories. It is shown in this monograph how he uses these myths not to confine our perception of the world, but on the contrary, to open our views toward that world. Namely, the myth is presented as an illusion, error in his novels. First, DeLillo demythologizes the concept of America as a place of financial power, security, and excesses, by showing negative consequences of a hopelessly commercial, consumer culture. Secondly, it is shown in this monograph how the American myth of wilderness is just a culturally created concept. The West is not an ideal place, place of rebirth and resurrection, DeLillo shows.

У овој монографији испитује се сложени однос истине, фикције и мита у романима Дона ДеЛила: *Бела бука*, *Ваја*, *Подземље* и *Космополис* са становишта филозофије и књижевне теорије постмодернизма. Одабрани романи анализирани су у самосталним поглављима, али је указано на њихову тематску сродност. Према томе, теме које се издвајају као значајне за ову монографију су: технолошки напредак, медији, потрошачко друштво и утицај на живот појединца, свет као отпад и отпад као уметност, осећања параноје и отуђености, стварност и симулације стварности. Приликом

разматрања ових тема акценат је стављен на начин на који ДеЛило смешта појединца у историјски и национални контекст и преплиће историјски тачне и фиктивне догађаје и личности. Поред историјских догађаја, писац користи и дубоко укорене митове. У монографији је показано како писац раскринкава мит, говорећи о негативним последицама потрошачке културе. На основу наведених примера у монографији је утврђено да је шири историјски контекст значајан за разумевање и тумачење ДеЛилових романа.