

Anxiety and Disorder in Postmodern Absurd Realist Novels: case study of The Pale King for David Foster Wallace

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القلق والاضطراب في روايات ما بعد الحداثة الواقعية العبثية: دراسة حالة الملك
الشاحب لديفيد فوستر والاس

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المستخلص

تؤكد هذه الدراسة أن القلق والاضطراب لهما دور كبير في توضيح موضوعات رواية الروائي الأمريكي ديفيد فوستر والاس "الملك الشاحب". تبحث الدراسة في تطور مفهوم القلق والاضطراب الذي يشمل مشاعر اللامبالاة والكسل وقلة الحماس. كما يتناول شكلين متميزين من الملل: الملل الشخصي والملل الثقافي. يستكشف **The Pale King** العلاقة بين الملل والقلق والاضطراب، مع التركيز بشكل خاص على الملل كأحد المواضيع الواضحة. بعد ذلك، تتعمق الدراسة في فحص منظور والاس الفني والأخلاقي لتوضيح كيفية ارتباط القلق والاضطراب بمسعى والاس للابتعاد عن السخرية السائدة لأسلافه في ما بعد الحداثة، نحو الالتزام بالمبادئ الحقيقية والصادقة. في النهاية، يستخدم البحث القلق والاضطراب كإطار لتحليل الملك الشاحب، مؤكداً أن نهج والاس في معالجة الملل هو من خلال الانتباه للكلمات المفتاحية: ما بعد الحداثة، القلق والاضطراب، الملك الشاحب

Abstract

This study contends that Anxiety and Disorder have a significant role in elucidating the themes of the American novelist David Foster Wallace's work *The Pale King*. The study investigates the evolution of the concept of Anxiety and Disorder, which encompasses feelings of indifference, laziness, and lack of enthusiasm. It also examines two distinct forms of Boredom: personal Boredom and cultural Boredom. *The Pale King* explores the connection among boredom, Anxiety and Disorder, with a particular focus on boredom as one of the explicit themes. Subsequently, the study delves into an examination of Wallace's artistic and ethical perspective to illustrate how Anxiety and Disorder relates to Wallace's endeavour to shift away from the dominant irony of his predecessors in postmodernism, towards a commitment to genuine and heartfelt principles. Ultimately, the research uses Anxiety and Disorder as a framework to analyse *The Pale King*, asserting that Wallace's approach to addressing acedia is via attentiveness. **Keywords : Postmodern, Anxiety and Disorder, Pale King**

1. Introduction

This study focuses on David Foster Wallace's *The Pale King* (2011) and its depiction of a postmodern contemporary civilization characterised by monotony, confusion, and absurdity. It analyses how Wallace achieves his goal of ludicrous realism via the use of realistic, but absurd, people and events. It discusses the novel's representation of existentialism and paranoia, concentrating on how the combination of these two ideas defines ridiculous realism (Palmer, 2003:67). In addition, the study analyses how these personalities mirror the cycle of boredom-induced focus and chaos. comprehending absurd realism as a possible off-shoot of postmodernism demands a strong knowledge of the postmodern ideological notion. The word "postmodern" has several connotations and draws attention to its inherent ambiguities and inconsistencies (Milovanovic & Thomas, 2019:116). The disruptions in the global financial system, the Cold War as well as its collapse, the

growth of the suburbs as an aesthetic force, the overwhelming influence of television as a cultural medium, and the rise of computer" are all considered to be hallmarks of the postmodern era. Which is generally agreed to span from the 1960s to the present day. It's thought of as a cluster of ideas, an experiment in creative form, and a fresh way of looking at familiar topics (Hinojosa, 2022:148).

2. The extents of Postmodernism

The definition of postmodernism is a topic of heated debate in many different communities, not just the academic one. Paula Geyh et al (2006) note out that "from the creators of the Christian Broadcasting Network's 700 Club, who in January 1996 produced a 'fact sheet' work . He warned the Simpsons' writers that postmodernism was a morally bankrupt pseudo-religion. "nouveau postmodernism for the masses," they sarcastically marketed their smash hit TV show (Wu, 2023:106). Different communities have had various reactions to the phrase, each trying to make sense of it through the lens of their own worldview. Postmodernism's limits and theoretical foundations are still hotly contested topics, even in the academy. Many people have voiced their disapproval of postmodernism studies, including prominent figures like American linguist Noam Chomsky (Anjaria, 2013:34). He attributes the term's ambiguity and lack of clarity to the "gibberish" authored by its academicians. The postmodern thinkers Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault, and Julia Kristeva were all dismissed ("curtly dismissive") by Chomsky in his article on postmodernism (Cumpa, 2014:197). According to Chomsky they "proposed some of the philosophies and theories guiding postmodernism." He argues that these thinkers have fallen short because, first, they have been unable to articulate postmodernist ideas clearly and concisely. Secondly, interested researchers cannot simply comprehend and grasp these notions on their own (Castelli, 2016:72). To paraphrase Chomsky: "what are the foundations of their hypotheses, on what evidence are they based, and what do they explain that wasn't previously obvious, etc." If these questions aren't answered, Chomsky says, "these are fair requests for anyone to make," and he recommends following Hume's advice for similar situations and "throwing oneself into the flames." (Milovanovic & Thomas, 2019:115).

2.1 Dick Hebdige and Chomsky

While Chomsky's critique of postmodernism may come out as dismissive, his point of view is not against the notion itself but rather against the idea that postmodernism lacks a defined set of rules and ideology. Dick Hebdige agrees with him that the term "postmodernism" may be used in any context, therefore he calls it a "buzzword" for its lack of specificity (Hvolbek, 2020:108). To quote Hebdige "When it becomes possible for a people to describe as 'postmodern' the décor of a room, the design of a building, the diagesis of a film, the construction of a record, or a 'scratch' video, a television commercial when it becomes possible to describe all these things as 'Postmodern' (or more simply using a current abbreviation as 'post' or 'very post') then it's clear we are in the presence of a buzzword" (Hoffmann, 1986:194). Hebdige argues that the word "postmodernism" has been so loosely used across so many different fields and borders that it is becoming ever more difficult to define precisely. It's possible that this is just another way of saying "avant-garde," without referring to any particular time period, cultural phenomenon, or artistic movement. Therefore, in a hundred years to come, artworks labelled as postmodern now may no longer qualify (Fleay, 2020:58).

2.2 Perry Anderson and the term postmodernism

Others, such as Perry Anderson, have argued that the seeming contradictions between the many uses of the word "postmodernism" are really superficial. Because the major concerns mirror the state of modern civilization. Anderson provides a comprehensive historical explanation of postmodernism's development (Hinojosa, 2022:52). He discusses the social, political, economic, and cultural factors "that may have released the postmodern" and offers explanations for each. Among other things, he analyses Frederic Jameson's intellectual impact on the rise of postmodernism. He demonstrates how Jameson's observation of a change in the underlying assumptions of capitalist economies in the postwar era (Hoffmann, 1986:197). The rise of multinational corporations and the "consumer society" also prompted fresh criticism. Anderson claims that Jameson's efforts to make sense of the new stage of consumer capitalism's complexity and transformations ushered in new languages of postmodern thinking. He also takes into account the roles played by Ihab Hassan, Jürgen Habermas, Charles Jencks, and Jean-François Lyotard in the formation and definition of postmodernism. He thinks that it is via their writings that we may get insight into modern society (Hvolbek, 2020:210).

2.3 Genre and Boundaries of Postmodern Literature

The diversity of postmodern literature is largely to blame for the heated debates around its genre and boundaries. Pastiche, according to Gey et al., "incorporates contradictory 'voices' within a single work;" fragmented or 'open' forms that put the power in the audience's hands to assemble and interpret the work; and the adoption about a

playful irony as a perpetually useful stance are other traits (x). This is by no means an exhaustive inventory of postmodern American literature (Palmer, 2003:87).

A number of other characteristics are absent, including paranoia, multiple meanings, and what Linda Hutcheon terms "historiographic metafiction" (the fictionalisation of real historical events). Mason and Dixon (1997) by Thomas Pynchon and the concepts of "technoculture" and "hyperreality" put forward by Jameson both provide examples of such characters. While many works of postmodern literature share characteristics such as paranoia, a disjointed storyline, and many meanings, this is by no means an exhaustive list (Xueming, 2017:19). In order to effectively convey the ideas she wants to convey, each writer chooses to embody just those traits. White Noise (1985) by Don DeLillo, for example, focuses on media overload and paranoia. White Teeth (2000) by Zadie Smith depicts the intricacies of cultural hybridity as well as the incorporation of multiple ideologies into society (Milovanovic & Thomas, 2019:115). The implications of war on human life and the pointlessness of free choice are central themes in Slaughterhouse Five (1972) by Kurt Vonnegut, the Crying of Lot 49 (1966) by Thomas Pynchon, who delves into the connection between reality and truth, lending credence to the structuralist claim that language and its connotations as social constructions. Thematic concerns drive each of these postmodern books, which together reflect many sectors of modern life (Goldman, 2022:22).

2.4 Symbiosis Between Literature and Popular Culture

The aforementioned novels show the absurdities of our postmodern culture, yet they make these absurdities seem true. They use realistic persons and situations in their depictions, even if their topics are similar to absurdism. The books demonstrate absurdism with topics that illustrate the anarchy in modern society and challenge the essence of life (Hinojosa, 2022:47). The impacts of modernization and technological progress are just two examples of the changing societal realities shown in their works. This is the result of a hitherto unseen partnership between literary and popular culture. They try out different approaches to conceptualising and, in some instances, physically creating their writings. As seen in Steve Tomasula's Table of Contents (2012), however, others choose to use modern equipment (Gumenyuk, 2021:745). The Pale King is an experiment in physical appearance by authors David Foster Wallace, Mark Danielewski, and Chris Ware. Wallace has a reputation for writing in a unique way. His works are characterised by a heavy reliance on explanatory endnotes and footnotes, a plethora of complicated narrative devices, and a variety of voices and styles in writing. Some of the 388 numbered endnotes in his 1996 novel Infinite Jest include lengthy footnotes of their own (Miley, 2017:26). Due to its length and intricate narrative, this book is considered his most praised work. The over-a-thousand-page book covers a wide range of topics, including mental illness, broken families, political unrest, sports, and pop culture. In Infinite Jest, the protagonist searches for the long-lost master version of a film cartridge that holds the audience's attention until they pass out from thirst (Boswell, 2017:25). Wallace illustrates the psychological implications of addiction and the obstacles one has in obtaining this film cartridge. By collecting a massive cast of people, he conveys the novel's storyline in a realistic but ludicrous way. Addictions and mental illness are common among his characters, who often suffer from childhood trauma and abuse at the hands of loved ones (Mayo, 2020:131).

3. Anxiety and Disorder in the Novels of David Foster Wallace

Wallace addresses absurdity, anxiety, and disorder in particular via his works, emphasising on the dissatisfaction and struggle to deal with banal day-to-day tasks, the fruitless desire to escape reality, and the battle to acclimatise to a media-saturated world. Wallace's characters in his novels and short story collections have heightened existentialist ideals that coincide with ludicrous realism (Fehrle, 2020:13). He presents the view that solipsism is a natural, yet unrecognised, aspect of the human experience, and he attempts to warn against it in his works. In most of his stories, he approaches boredom like a psychological condition and presents his ostensibly monotonous characters as dynamic, complex, and energising individuals. Boredom, according to Wallace, holds the secret to freedom since it requires heightened self-consciousness (Miley, 2017:26). Wallace notes in his Kenyon College lecture address that "the really vital type of freedom includes attention, as well as awareness, and discipline, & effort, and being able to actually care about other people and sacrifice for them, again and over, in numerous small little unsexy ways, every day." That is true liberty" (paragraph 14). Wallace proposes that the only way to exist in an environment where human beings are endangered by conservative capitalism is to live and endure whatever it is that one does until one comes to receive some joy from it (Leddy, 2011:269).

3.1 The Pale King of David Foster Wallace

Wallace's *The Pale King*, like the majority of his other works, may be classified as an absurd realist literature. The subject pertains to the Internal Revenue Service Regional Examination Centre (REC) located in Peoria, Illinois, during the year 1985. The agency comprises individuals with idiosyncratic personalities that have developed as a result of distinctive and intricate conditions they encountered in their past experiences (McHale, 2013:193). Wallace provides an elaborate narrative of the unorthodox encounters of these distressed hyper-real individuals. He examines the diverse amalgamation of psychological factors, childhood trauma, and financial situations that unite them as accountants inside the agency. By portraying the IRS and its employees in this manner, Wallace conveys the ennui, estrangement, and disarray that typify modern society (Kaltenbeck, 2017:37). Wallace's unfinished work, *The Pale King*, explores the idea that transforming boredom into focus might lead to an elevated state of consciousness, as reconstructed by Michael Pietsch. The novel also showcases Wallace's distinctive style of creating neologisms and acronyms that pertain to various disciplines, employing lengthy sentences spanning multiple clauses within paragraphs that extend over a page (Clare, 2018:142). The novel is an example of incorporating extensive explanatory footnotes often written in academic jargon, and employing a narrative that skillfully employs technical terminology. *The Pale King* portrays characters' experiences using a narrative style that challenges the patience of the reader by employing a stream of consciousness technique (South, 2022:312). According to critics such as James Wood, there are times when a certain style is taken to excessive levels. An instance of Wallace's meticulous portrayal of apparently trivial objects and the subsequent utilisation of these portrayals as adjectival phrases can be seen in his depiction of the shoes worn by the girlfriend of a character's Jesuit roommate (Ladyga, 2019:242). These shoes were adorned with flowers, not mere cartoonish depictions or isolated floral designs, but rather an intricate, realistic representation of a flourishing meadow or garden (Hamilton, 2020:179). Consequently, the boots resembled a calendar or greeting card. Subsequently, he condenses the detailed depiction into a concise adjectival phrase by labelling her as "the girl with the meadows on her boots". Through the use of intricate portrayals, which he then condenses into concise expressions, he establishes the identities of his characters with minimum disruption to the storyline (O'Connell, 2020:179).

3.2 Wallace's characters and absurdity

Although incomplete and disjointed, the story portrays a submerged America characterized by boredom, repetition, and useless bureaucratic protocols. It seems to diminish the people's awareness of their civic duty. Wallace attempts to reframe this position in a good perspective, maybe as a spiritual prospect, by portraying people who transform their ennui into a state of enlightenment. An elevated mind has the capacity to focus on ordinary matters that are often considered insignificant according to Wallacean norms (Reichardt, 2020:56). By deliberately immersing the mind in the situation, even if it involves tax returns. The combination of fluorescent lights and styrofoam cups transforms into a state of profound consciousness. Claude Sylvanshine argues that the choice between focusing on something or deliberately ignoring it is what turns boredom into a condition of heightened consciousness. Wallace's characters exhibit several absurdities (Marsh, 2016:115). According to the author, the work is a fictionalised version of a memoir, created to comply with legal requirements. The author also mentions the character "David Wallace." The alleged author is then misidentified as a superior employee who has the same name, David Wallace. The individual known as "author," David Wallace, is assimilated into the personnel system, as his profile is combined with that of the more senior David Wallace, as a result of the comprehensive debugging endeavour (Mann, 2021:58). This is an update to the personnel systems, resulting in the complete erasure of its previous existence as an independent entity. Additionally, there is Leonard Stecyk, an excessively kind official, who sent 316 invites for his eleventh birthday "Blowout Bash," however only nine attendees attended (Shanske, 2012:89). This is due to the fact that individuals harbour a deep-seated animosity towards him, characterised by a complex emotional response that often induces feelings of malice and remorse, leading them to despise themselves for harbouring such sentiments towards a highly accomplished and well-intentioned young man. Consequently, this self-loathing inadvertently intensifies their hatred towards the boy, as he becomes the catalyst for their own self-reproach (Andrew, 2022:327). Claude Sylvanshine is a "data mystic" with both "dramatically important foresight" and the capacity to recall seemingly little details. Sixteen automobiles were behind them on I-5 at McKittrick, CA during a warm and wet October day in 1971, which is something they sit near in a movie. Some people, like David Cusk, are always self-conscious about their perspiration, and the more they worry about controlling their perspiration, the more they sweat (Gumenyuk, 2021:745). As a stunning tax examiner with a past of "cutting," the egotistical Meredith Rand has a hard time believing that other people's responses to her are genuine. This is because, in her mind, her attractiveness is the

only attraction for men. Her demeanour embodies the subconscious anxieties we have about ourselves—the transient nature of beauty, time, and life, for example—but do our best to suppress (Susen, 2015:83). Over an ironic Happy Hour drink, she forms a relationship with her aspergic coworker Shane Drinion, who seems to float in his chair when he's completely engrossed in everyday matters. Another character is the pious and suicidal Lane Dean, who weds his pregnant high school sweetheart and remains wedded to her for the sake of his kid, even though he has no romantic love for her (Parker, 2019:131). Chris Fogle, whose lengthy monologue echoes Clamence's in Albert Camus' *The Fall*, explains his mother's identity issue, his father's terrible death, and his parents' divorce in an uncomfortable but amusing way. He decided to become an IRS agent, had a Jesuit flatmate in college, and used recreational drugs (which he called "doubling") for fun. A beautiful lady named Toni Ware describes her terrifying ordeal of feigning death to evade her mother's murderer (Older, 2022:462).

3.3 Realism and Extremism in Wallace's Work

Some of the play's characters teeter on the edge of the supernatural, yet all of them are severe realists. Their preposterousness is a byproduct of them coming together in the confines of a single book, its hallways, and the IRS office's cubicles. It seems like these individuals and the broken chapters are depicting actual life. In spite of their seeming lack of narrative relevance, they help flesh out Wallace's chaotic depiction of human life via his use of "a voice that appeared to be a condensed version of everyone's lives" (Larsson & Mattsson, 2022:229). Even though their job is tedious—what Lane Dean calls "boredom beyond any boredom"—and, in a suicidal episode, likens to hell, these IRS employees heroically shoulder the burden of bringing order to a chaotic world by collecting and organising a deluge of information. For instance "He felt in a position to say he knew now that hell had nothing to do with fires or frozen troops. Lock a fellow in a windowless room to perform rote tasks just tricky enough to make him have to think, but still rote" (page 379), and "asks involving numbers that connected to nothing he'd ever see or care about, a stack of tasks that never went down, and nail a clock to the wall where he can see it, and just leave the man there to his mind's own devices" (page: 380). Wallace implies, in a manner similar to Camus' existential position, that one need not resort to death in order to confront the absurdity of existence. Through their mundane labour, these individuals discover a purpose that validates their own being. They are able to endure this monotony not because they are untired, but as a result of the impact that their ridiculous experiences have made on them. The text goes on to say that "the capacity, whether natural or conditioned to locate the other face of the rote, the picayune, the unimportant, the repetitious, the pointlessly complicated" is the secret to surviving in today's environment, according to Wallace. Being, in a word, uninteresting. A person who is resistant to boredom may do literally anything" (page : 438). This leads us to believe that these people have developed an immunity to boredom and an eagle eye for detail because of their high degree of self-awareness. Characters in Wallace's work face harsh and bizarre realities, putting them in a difficult position as they try to adjust to their contradictory situations. As an example, Cusk is very sensitive to room temperature due to his fear, which is a consequence of his regular sweat episodes (Tahir, 2022:181). Because of the complex interaction of hereditary, neurological, and emotional elements, he is experiencing a kind of schizophrenia characterised by his feedback-looped battle to gain control of this circumstance. Prolonged exposure to a pattern of interaction that is contradictory causes it to materialise. Some examples of the characters' struggles between states include Cusk's recurrent sweat attacks, Toni's dead stare, Meredith's cutting, the boy's father's growing number of mistresses, the confined claustrophobic, the citizens' declining civic engagement, and their consumer behaviour. No amount of ignoring or evading the demands placed on these victims by competing logical planes can help (Saarinen, 2022:319).

3.4 Orderliness in The Complex System

Thus, the characters in Wallace's work have found a way to cope that is both active and passive. Because they feel helpless in the face of all the uncertainty, they develop severe anxiety and seek for constant reassurance, qualities that have made working for the IRS such a desirable experience. On rare occasions, kids exhibit a "rage of innocence," characterised by sudden, intense fury over apparently little matters that escalates to threats of physical harm (White, 2011:241). Angry outbursts like Toni Ware's, in which she threatened to murder Lotwis and his family over a misunderstood complaint about her dogs, show how people will go to extreme lengths to protect themselves when they feel their lives are in danger. In Wallace's opinion, there are many people on the cusp of disorder who are attempting to establish some kind of stability amongst the complicated web of both fluid borders and rigid structures (232). So, the "key," he says, is to make it through the monotony of IRS work and modern life in general by becoming an unusual kind of existentialist—to be one of the few who establish limits and can, like Shane Drinion and the boy who wants to kiss every inch of his body, endure the agony of

monotony and resolve. Achieving and maintaining a particular stable level of focus, attention, regardless of their activity, "achieve and sustain a certain steady state of concentration, attention, despite what they are doing" (page : 547) They, too, have triumphed over the aimless meandering and sloth of nihilism and the false freedom it offers: the ability to "choose 'whatever' because it didn't really matter" (page :223). No reader can overlook Wallace's repeated and vital appeal to personal responsibility, no matter how dull the book is. "I don't like this aspect of how our culture has progressed, and I don't know what to do about it, but maybe acknowledging that this exists in myself may somehow make it better or easier for all of us" (page :256) Thus, the Kierkegaardian philosophy is evident in most of Wallace's works. According to this philosophy, each person must face existential challenges like despair, angst, absurdity, isolation, and boredom head-on and live their lives passionately and honestly in order to find meaning. David Kangas claims that modern thinkers like Robert Roberts see boredom as a condition of concentrated indifference. Whereas Kierkegaard argues that it is rather a mental state that brings to deep awareness and self-consciousness: "In boredom the excess of time over meaning opens up and manifests itself. This involves the experience of discovering the way that self-consciousness is not the origin of meaning, does not reign sovereignly over its temporality cannot enable itself. It is the experience of being unable to flee oneself toward an object" (page :287).

3.5 Characters' Realization of a Personal Truth

After expanding on this idea, Wallace posits that each person's existence has significance based on his own personal values. Inspiring individuals to recognise their own truths and propelling society forward as a whole is the goal of such a purpose. A feeling of shared duty, he says, will eventually wipe out that new wave of carelessness. This legalises the idea that "on a personal level that it's all right to abdicate our individual responsibility to the common good and let the government worry about the common good while we all go about our individual self-interested business and struggle to gratify our various appetites" (page: 136). When people's priorities shift, he says, "lady gets stabbed over off the river, houses up and down the block hear her screaming, nobody even sets foot outside" (page:142), which leads to tragedies like the one he depicts. It would seem that Wallace is worried about the shift in values in today's culture. He states "We don't think of ourselves as citizens in the old sense of being small part of something larger and indefinitely more important to which we have serious responsibilities..... being beneficiaries—we are actually conscious of our rights as American citizens and the nation's responsibilities to us and ensuring we get our share of the American pie. We think of ourselves now as eaters of the pie instead of makers of the pie" (page: 136). This existentialist shift in how we see society and the pervasive postmodern feeling of entitlement is a key feature of modernity. The existentialist idea of the absurdity of the human condition is at the heart of Wallace's and other absurd realist writers' work, but he expands on this idea by arguing that society, rather than individuals, is responsible for the slow but steady descent into existential despair. He analyses Kafka's work to show how our modern civilization has made us lose sight of what it is to be human due to its obsession with entertainment and popular culture. "No wonder [we] cannot appreciate the really central Kafka joke that the horrific struggle to establish a human-self results in a self whose humanity is inseparable from that horrific struggle" .he states. Despite this disconnection from collective duty, Wallace shows, one attains a heightened self-awareness comparable to what Jameson terms "intensities" when they embrace boredom. Knowing how to "and also completely ignore being able to "pay great attention to the most tiresome thing you can discover" and totally disregard any kind of limitation "as the dog ignores the chain that ties him down" (page : 117) leads to self-consciousness. Also in this line, he makes passing references to postmodern America's defining characteristics, such as the pervasiveness of drug-induced awareness in popular culture. For instance, Fogle, who plays a character known for his "doubling," acknowledges that it's "unrealistic to expect to efficiently attend to business while constantly taking Obetrols and sitting around doubled and conscious" (page :186). Liberals who put their own interests above those of the community have ensnared the populace and made them feel responsible primarily to "themselves" rather than to the larger whole. The emergence of a complicated system where people are ensnared in a state of "stare" and only emerge when their privileges and liberties are threatened seems to be a product of this liberalism. Wallace, following in the footsteps of Baudrillard, Bell, and Jameson, is worried in this book about a cultural business that prioritises consumption over creation.

3.6 Wallace and Rise of The Chaos

To that end, the book restates the Marxist claim that "a way to look cool to the others in your generation you wanted to impress and get accepted by" (page : 145). It has come to dominate post-industrial society. Society, the book argues, is to blame for creating people whose wants are too childish. Wallace suggests that the current

state of instability that mankind must face is a direct result of boredom. Because individuals are so good at concentrating, they have come up with a wide variety of manipulative tax evasion strategies, and these strategies show up in people's tax returns. However, "induced chaos; since people have devised various manipulative means of tax evasion because of their ability to concentrate, the "attitudes about paying taxes seem like one of the places where a man's civic sense gets revealed in the starkest sorts of terms" (page :141)". Tax collectors get to carry out their heroic task of confronting fundamental human desires like greed and selfishness by focusing on paperwork to reveal the subtle signs of tax avoidance in returns. By participating in these returns, people are able to see firsthand the anarchy and deterioration of civic life. For instance, nobody seems to care that Blumquist has been dead for four days and is still sitting at his desk; everyone is too busy absorbed in their own work lives to notice; they seldom converse with each other and instead focus on their results. As Kierkegaard put it, "strange that boredom, in itself so staid and solid, should have such power to set in motion" (page :385). Unlike the IRS employees' picnics and happy hour gatherings, which bring people together, the book implies that boredom is a complex component of modern life and encourages isolation and alienation. Isolation is the end result of the detachment and breakdown it promotes. This work is like Kierkegaard's *Either/Or* on the subject of boredom: "Since boredom advances and boredom is the root of all evil, no wonder, then, that the world goes backwards, that evil spreads. This can be traced back to the very beginning of the world. The gods were bored; therefore they created human beings. Adam was bored because he was alone; therefore Eve was created. Since that moment, boredom entered the world and grew in quantity in exact proportion to the growth of population" (Kierkegaard, 1987:3). Wallace also adopts the notion of the boredom in the absurd philosophy of Kierkegaard "Adam was bored alone; then Adam and Eve were bored en famille. After that, the population of the world increased and the nations were bored en masse. To amuse themselves, they hit upon the notion of building a tower so high that it would reach the sky. This notion is just as boring as the tower was high and is a terrible demonstration of how boredom had gained the upper hand" (Kierkegaard, 1987:4). Wallace's work is described by many writers as "anti-confluent, chaotic, multitudinous portrayal of systems and experiences" that depicts the reality of modern society's disarray and disillusionment. The absurdity of life, according to Wallace, is in the fact that different emotions and motivations may coexist in a human mind. The objective of the contortionist kid, which is to kiss every inch of his body, is symbolic of this as it is a goal that every whole person has. Wallace says that, like Toni Ware's unwavering gaze, the secret to success is bearing through excruciating pain until you reach a reassuring level of fulfillment. Wallace asserts that one may find joy in spite of the ridiculousness of human existence. "Drinon is glad... It turns out that bliss—a second-by-second delight + thankfulness at the gift of being alive, conscious—lies on the opposite side of crushing, crushing ennui," Drinon is happy . . . It turns out that bliss—a second-by-second joy + gratitude at the gift of being alive, conscious—lies on the other side of crushing, crushing boredom (page : 546). Wallace successfully reconciles the perceptible everyday reality with the equally perceptible complexity of the actual world by using the Internal Revenue Service as an example. He delves into the question of how one stays alive in the actual world and presents it as it is—a phenomena comprised of monotony, focus, intricacies, and the absurdities brought about by human consciousness and intelligence—in the hopes that this may lead to contentment and joy.

Conclusion

My objective in doing this research was to provide evidence that acedia and anxiety are prominent but unstated themes in David Foster Wallace's writings, especially in his unfinished book *The Pale King*. I had to distinguish between two types of acedia for this assignment: personal, as in Lane Dean's character, and cultural, as in the melancholy Chris Fogle portrays. Contrary to popular belief, history theologians have devoted a great deal of time and energy to studying and writing on the idea of personal acedia. It has a lot to say, especially about post-Enlightenment literature, and I hope it gets into more literary studies conversations because of that. This "acedia" and "unabashed celebration of the subjective" has been so prevalent since the Reformation, as pointed out by W.H. Auden in 1927. However, researchers seldom bring up societal acedia, that apathetic cynicism, and acedia is usually considered a personal illness. The idea of cultural acedia is relevant, especially in light of American views throughout the last fifty years, as seen in Wallace's research. I found this in the studies that focused on Wallace's ideas, and it manifests itself in the cynical indifference that Wallace saw among his generation of Americans—the irony that has found its way into popular culture. *The Pale King* offers paying attention as a remedy for acedia, following in the footsteps of the Desert Hermits. To make my case, I have focused on one specific facet of Wallace's writing and how it appears in *The Pale King*. Having said that,

Wallace's writings deal extensively with morals and ethics. Scholar Marshall Boswell is among many who have noted a spiritual, even mystical, aspect to it. For Wallace, the scope of American society was considerably broader than what words like "boredom" and "ennui" could convey. Nevertheless, the idea of acedia is perfect for the job because of its spiritual, bodily, and psychological implications.

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