

**UNIVERSIDAD NACIONAL DE CÓRDOBA**

**FACULTAD DE LENGUAS**



TRABAJO FINAL DE LA LICENCIATURA EN LENGUA Y  
LITERATURA INGLESA

**“LA INFLUENCIA DE LOS MEDIOS DE COMUNICACIÓN EN LA  
PERCEPCIÓN DE LA REALIDAD DEL INDIVIDUO”**

*White Noise* de Don DeLillo y *Saturday* de IanMcEwan

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Córdoba - Septiembre de 2015



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## INTRODUCTION

This work aims at analysing the role of mass media in contemporary families, the influence that news have on our perception of reality and on the behaviour of the members of a contemporary society. More specifically, it intends to analyse the influence of mass media on the Gladney family's perception of reality and behaviour in *White Noise* (1985) by Don LeLillo, and the influence of mass media on Henry Perowne's perception of reality and behaviour in *Saturday* (2005) by Ian McEwan.

Mass media is communication—whether written, broadcast, or spoken—that reaches a large audience. This includes television, radio, movies, the Internet, newspapers, magazines, and so forth. The Modern man is immersed in a society that depends on information and communication to keep moving and doing their daily activities. Contemporary life cannot be imagined without mass media. Members of any segment of society are constantly exposed to the media. Mass media has become a daily and essential necessity to the contemporary man. Almost every house in the civilized world features a TV set which is constantly on, playing an important role in the family, not only as a form of entertainment but also as a means of information.

The problem with mass media is that they not only spread the news, but they also impose certain values on modern society. According to Baudrillard (1993), because of their nature, the means of communication show "representations" of reality, that is to say, they manufacture or create reality instead of showing it as it really is. The "real", in words of this author, is defined in terms of the media in which the information appears. Taking into consideration that they are the main sources of information through which the individual accesses and interacts with "reality", mass media exert power over individuals, influencing their perception of reality and their behaviour. Many times information given

by television, radio, newspapers and the Internet is contradictory and to have a clear picture of what is going on, it is important that people are selective and critical enough when consuming mass media.

Both in the novel *White Noise* (1985) by Don DeLillo and in *Saturday* (2005) by Ian McEwan, the perception that the characters have of reality and their behaviour are influenced by mass media, which occupy a central role in the contemporary families portrayed in these texts.

*White Noise* by Don DeLillo portray show a typical post-modern American family deals with daily life. The novel is divided into three sections. The main character is Jack Gladney, a college professor who teaches at a school called the College-on-the-Hill, where he serves as the department chair of Hitler studies (he invented the discipline in 1968). He lives in Blacksmith, a quiet college town, with his wife, Babette, and four of their children from earlier marriages: Heinrich, Steffie, Denise, and Wilder. There are two major storylines: the airborne toxic event and Jack's discovery of his wife's participation in an experimental study of a new pill called Dylar to deal with her fear of death. One day, Jack gets to know about a cloud of smoke that is rising into the sky. His son tells him that this is due to a train crash and that it is releasing a poisonous toxic substance into the air. Because of this, the town of Blacksmith is ordered to evacuate. Meanwhile, his wife's daughter, Denise, finds some pills her mum is taking in secret; she tells Jack but when they ask Babette she avoids answering their questions. Afterwards, Jacks finds out that the drug is experimental and that it may cure her fear of dying. Babette confesses that, in order to get the drug, she has been having an affair with the drug's project manager. Almost by the end of the novel, when Jack comes back from work he decides to visit a friend who tells him who that project manager is and he decides to confront him and he shoots him twice, immediately after which he takes him to hospital and saves his life.

In *Saturday* (2005), Ian McEwan narrates the day of a neurosurgeon, Perowne, who starts his morning watching a plane crashing in London, which he thinks may be a terrorist attack. In spite of the news, he continues with his Saturday's routine: he plays squash with a colleague, shops for a family dinner, and when he is on his way to visit his mother he crashes, against Baxter, who is driving accompanied by two other people. Perowne gets out of being hit by Baxter diagnosing him with Huntington's disease and offering to help him. When, Perowne is back at home to celebrate the publication of Daisy's book of poems, Baxter suddenly shows up with one of his fellows, breaks Perowne's father-in-law's jaw and forces Daisy to get naked while he is holding a knife on Perowne's wife's throat. As Daisy is taking her clothes off, everybody realizes that she is pregnant, so Baxter apparently sympathizes with her condition and makes her read one of her poems instead of having her get undressed. Daisy chooses one by another author and Baxter, thinking that the poem is hers, seems to be moved. Trying to do something for his family, Perowne convinces Baxter of going upstairs with him to give him some information about his disease. Then, Baxter tumbles down the stairs when struggling with Perowne and his son, and Baxter's friend runs away. After the police takes Baxter to the hospital, Perowne is called into perform an emergency surgery: Baxter's. Perowne's day finishes when he goes to bed with his wife thinking about the episode and falling asleep.

An analysis of the role of media in the life of contemporary families as portrayed in *White Noise* and in the novel *Saturday* gives rise to the following questions:

- What is the role that members of a contemporary family give to mass media?
- How do mass media affect the perception the characters have of reality?
- What is the impact of mass media on the characters' behaviour?
- In *White Noise*, what is the characters' attitude towards mass media?

- In *White Noise*, how do the different reports of the air toxic event affect the behaviour of the different members of the family?
- In *Saturday*, what is the attitude of the main character, Perowne regarding what he perceives through mass media?
- In *Saturday*, how does the perception of reality affect Perowne's behaviour?

## LITERARY REVIEW

That mass media proliferate in contemporary society and that they function as a filter through which we perceive reality are facts, which are by no means foreign to us. Don DeLillo in *White Noise* explores American culture through the lives of the characters, which are saturated by the media. The constant presence of the radio and / or the television leads the characters to perceive daily life events in terms of mediated images and explanations. In fact, television seems to play the role of another member in this American family. In *Saturday*, Ian McEwan explores the way in which the world has been marked by the event of September 11th in 2001 and the role that mass media have in the representation of those events. The novel portrays how the main character is always attentive to the news, acting and reacting to them. Moreover, the author shows that as a consequence of the many news broadcast on the terrorist attack of September 11th, the characters in the novel consider that all accidents that take place in public obey to terrorist attacks.

Several researchers have studied the role of the media in these works. For example, Cecilia Acquarone in her article "Marshall McLuhan, the Postmodern Mentality and Don DeLillo's *White Noise*" (2007) analyses the novel from the theoretical perspective of postmodernism and the studies on the media of Marshall McLuhan. She establishes a

comparison between the concepts of modernism and McLuhan's in terms of Gutenberg's galaxy or human mentality from literacy. In "Living in a simulacrum: how TV and the supermarket redefines reality in Don DeLillo's *White Noise*" (2010) Ahmad Ghashmari explores the impact of simulation, hyperrealism and consumerism in the novel. The author discusses how technology and mass media are presented as an empire of signs and codes that erase or destroy meaning. In "Ian McEwan, *Saturday*(2006) José Ángel García Landa understands the work as an allegorical portrait of western everyday experience and life stories of the middle class in the historical and cultural context of the early 21st century.

This paper represents a new contribution to the research already done on the role of media in the life of contemporary families as it seeks to analyse how mass media have a direct impact on the actions or reactions of the characters in both novels. For such analysis, the behaviours of the different characters will be examined to show the influence of the media in the representations of reality.

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

One of the most important aspects of contemporary culture and society is the questioning of reality. In "Postmodernist and Postcolonialist Theories"(1993), Roman Selden and Peter Widdowson claim that there are two positions that comprise the two major "narratives" of what constitutes postmodernism. First, they assert that the "grand narratives" of historical progress initiated by the Enlightenment are discredited. That is to say, there is a certain scepticism towards previous certainties and consequently, there is a re-examination of past ways of thinking. What is more, the postmodern man has become aware of difference, diversity and for that reason, postmodernity is characterized

by an abundance of micronarratives. No one seems to agree with large-scale theories and philosophies of the world any longer that used to guide man during the Enlightenment; such as progress, science, and religion, among others. Secondly, any political grounding of these ideas in "history" or "reality" is no longer possible since both have become "textualised" in the world of images and simulations, which characterize the contemporary age of mass consumption and advanced technologies.

One of the authors that deals with the theories above mentioned is The French thinker Jean Baudrillard who introduces the idea of "the loss of the real" and the appearance of the culture of "hyperreality", in which models determine yet undermine the real. History and reality are replaced by "simulacra" which opposes representation. Representation implies that the sign and the real are equivalent. Simulation starts from the negation of the sign and the referent.

In "The Precession of Simulacra" (1993), Baudrillard states that the postmodern age is the age of what he claims the "hyperreal". The hyperreal is a representation not of a referent in the real world, but a representation of other representations. In order to explain this, the author uses the Borges fable where the cartographers of the Empire draw up a map so detailed that ends up covering the territory in an exact way. Baudrillard takes this as "the most beautiful allegory of simulation" but today abstraction, according to the author, is not that of the map, the double, the mirror, or the concept; simulation is no longer that of a territory, a referential being, or a substance; it is the generation by models of a real without origin or reality: a hyperreal. That is to say, the territory no longer precedes the map, nor does it survive it. It is the map that precedes and engenders the territory. The era of simulation is inaugurated by a liquidation of all referentials or with their resurrection in the systems of signs, a material more editable than meaning.



Simulation according to Baudrillard envelops the whole edifice of representation itself as a simulacrum and he distinguishes four stages in the sign order. The first stage is the reflection of a profound reality; that is, the image is a good appearance; it is not reality but the image of reality. The second stage is the perversion of reality; it masks and perverts a basic reality; it is an evil appearance. In the third stage, the image masks the absence of reality; it is the simulacrum where the image makes us believe there is much more behind which is not there. The last stage and the one that is the most useful for this analysis is the pure simulation, the simulacrum bears no relation to any reality whatsoever. It is the reproduction of an object or event where there is no longer a real external world because there has been an "implosion of image and reality" (635).

The hyperreal, according to Baudrillard, is "That which is already reproduced"(338); that is to say, it is the product of mass media since in the world of the hyperreal, mass media constitute and manufacture our reality. In our culture, as Baudrillard claims, we take maps of reality like television, movies, radio, and the news as more real than reality itself. These "simulacra" precede our lives and we are left with just appearance, a world of simulacra.

The "real" according to the critic, Neville Wakefield, is now defined in terms of the media in which it moves. (Seldem and Widowson180) Mass media are part of the event and people act according to what they get by the media.

The role of mass media in *White Noise*

*White Noise* depicts the central role television has on a postmodern family. TV is one of the most influential technological devices in the contemporary life of the Gladney's family. They even have a day (Friday night) when the six members of the family gather around the TV:

Babette had made it a rule. She seemed to think that if kids watched television one night a week with parents or stepparents, the effect would be to de-glamorize the medium in their eyes, make it wholesome domestic sport. Its narcotic undertow and eerie diseased brain-sucking power would be gradually reduced. (16)

But in fact, the medium is de-glamorized despite having become a “rule” since TV is always on in this house and the family pays attention to it while they are performing all their daily activities. The TV set fills the life of this family with its pops-up every now and then to interrupt their actions. For example, Babette reads to Jack while he is also watching TV: When they are going to bed, we can notice that while Jack is in bed studying German, muttering words to himself and wondering whether he would be able to restrict his German-speaking at the spring conference, he retells what he hears on TV

What is more, TV has become very important in their daily life. When Murray talks to Jack about TV, he says: "I've come to understand that the medium is a primal force in the American home. ... It's like a myth being born right there in our living room, like something we know in a dreamlike and preconscious way"(51). They agree on the fact that TV has become a very powerful medium in American families, if not the most important. In another conversation, Murray tells Jack that "For most people there are only two places in the world: where they live and their TV set. If a thing happens on television, we have every right to find it fascinating, whatever it is" (66). This quote shows TV has become essential to life itself: for them, real life is like television, and if it happens on TV it may even be more important. Murray is one of the characters that considers TV as a new and good source of knowledge:

You have to learn how to look. You have to open yourself to the data. TV offers incredible amounts of psychic data. It opens ancient memories of world birth. It welcomes us into the grid, the network of little buzzing dots that make up the picture pattern. There is light, there is sound...look at the wealth of data concealed in the grid, in the bright packaging, the jingles...the medium practically overflows with sacred formulas if we can remember how to respond innocently. (51)

This speech also shows how the “hyperreal” created by the TV is taken as reality. The importance that they give to TV or mass media can also be seen in another conversation between Jack and Heinrich about a man who killed somebody. They do not talk about the killing itself but they talk about the fact that the event was not broadcast. Heinrich says that there is no media in the town, where this man committed his crime and that "...if he had to do it again... he would select more carefully, kill one famous person, get noticed..." (45). The choice of words “get noticed” points to the importance they give to media and how actions and events are given more or less significance if they are broadcast or not. Members of this family think that if you appear on TV you are not worthy and this makes life or any event “real”. The same happens when Babette appears on TV when teaching her class and everybody is amazed; "out of their mouths"(104). They already know that Babette is a teacher and that she teaches yoga but when she appears on TV this fact seems to be more real or more important; she looks like a celebrity just because she is on TV doing what she does every day. Another instance of this can be seen in Iron City. Because of the airborne toxic event, caused by a train derailment, people from Blacksmith are forced to evacuate their town and to go to Iron City. Once there, as evacuees, they wait in a big room and everybody seems to agree with a man, who is carrying a TV set in the

air, showing the blank screen to everybody in the room and saying: “There is nothing on network ... not a word, not a picture... no film footage, no live report ...Is it possible nobody gives substantial coverage to such a thing? ... Don’t they know it is real? ...Isn’t fear news? ” (162).By asking that, it can be seen how they take for granted that if it is on TV it is real, if it is not, it may not be.

Another piece of evidence where this importance given to media can be seen is in a conversation between Bee and Jack. At the airport, a man tells them what has happened with the plane that has just arrived; the plane has lost power in its engines so they have experienced a shocking and frightening situation. As the man finishes his tale, Bee asks why there is no media at the airport covering the event to what Jack answers that there is no media in Iron City and she replies: “They went to all that for nothing?”(92). Again, they are more worried about the coverage of the event rather than about the event itself. In order for the event to be a big deal, important and to be noteworthy, it should be broadcast, otherwise, it is “for nothing”.

The influence of mass media.

As in *White Noise*, TV and mass media are given such an importance on daily life and a main role in the family, the consequence is the collapse of the real and the flow of signifiers emanating from an information society, that is to say, a loss of the real in a black hole of simulation. In this world, common to both Baudrillard and DeLillo, images, signs, and codes overflow objective reality: signs become more real than reality and they stand for the world they erase.

In this American novel, the family gets to know about what happens around them through the radio or TV and this shapes their perception of reality, and how they react to it. They

take everything that is said on the radio or TV as reality even if they do not quite understand what is being discussed. They do not question that and they change their perception of reality and act according to what they watch or what they hear. Mass media play a crucial role in the life of these characters, to the extent that they change the criteria of reality and truth. The media become the new reality—or more real than reality itself.

This is evident in many daily conversations the characters engage in. For example, Steffie tells Babette that they have to boil water and when Babette asks for the reason, she answers “it is said on the radio” (34). They obey and act according to what they receive through mass media without questioning it in a critical way. They are told to boil water and they obey even if they do not know why it is important to do it. They give media unquestioned power. Another situation in which this idea of signs becoming more real than reality can be seen in a conversation between Jack and his son when they talk about the weather:

-“It’s going to rain tonight”

- “It’s raining now,” Jack said.

- “The radio said tonight”

- Look at the windshields,” Jack said. “Is that rain or isn’t it?”

- “I’m only telling you what they said”

- “Just because it’s on the radio doesn’t mean we have to suspend belief in the evidence of our senses.”

-“Our senses? Our senses are wrong a lot more than they’re right.” (23).

He answers that the radio said that at night meaning that it is not possible that it is raining at that moment. In fact, he then talks about the senses and it becomes clear that he chooses to believe more in the radio than in his own senses. Once again, what the medium says becomes more real than reality itself. In both conversations, the one between Steffie with

Babette and the one between Jack and Heinrich, it can be seen how kids trust mass media without questioning them, without reasoning.

Another and maybe the most clear example of this is when the family is talking about the airborne toxic event trying to figure out what it is all about. The radio serves as the most important means of information. Initially, they get to know that the chemical is called Nyodene D. so, they try to figure out what effects that exposure to that chemical may produce. Heinrich says that at school he has seen a movie about that and explains some of the possible effects but Jack asks, "That's what the movie said. What does the radio say?" (111). The radio is given importance and authority as a source of information even in opposition to a documentary watched at school.

The radio describes the airborne toxic event and the symptoms it might cause; the symptoms keep being updated and both daughters develop whatever symptoms they hear, even when the symptoms are no longer correct. This is an excellent example that shows the immediate consequences of the power that media have over this family. When the cloud spreads closer to the town, the radio announces a list of possible effects for those people who are exposed to the noxious gas. One of the side effects is a sense of *déjà vu*, and as soon as the radio announces it, Jack's daughter, Steffie, begins to show the symptoms. With the entire family loaded up in the car and preparing to evacuate, they witness a wreck on the side of the road. Steffie says, "I saw all this before. The big wreck sitting in the snow...totally and exactly like this. We were all in the car. Rain made little holes in the snow" (125). She seems to react less to reality than to the media, which shapes her interaction with the world. As a reaction to this, Babette suggests that they had better turn the radio off.

-“So the girls can’t hear. They have not got beyond déjà vu. I want to keep it that way.”

-“What if the symptoms are real?”

-“How could they be real?”

-“Why couldn’t they be real?”

-“They get them only when they are broadcast,” she whispered.

(133)

This is an example of what Baudrillard refers to as “simulacrum”. He also refers to the fact that illnesses can be caused by the simulacrum when he expresses: “Someone who feigns an illness can simply go to bed and pretend he is ill. Someone who simulates an illness produces in himself some of the symptoms” (168). The girls are simulating the symptoms, that is to say, they are experiencing some of the symptoms. Baudrillard also argues that feigning only masks reality but the difference is there, whereas in simulation it is rather impossible to distinguish between “true” and “false”, between “real” and “imaginary”. In this situation, this “simulacrum” is triggered by the authority that Steffie gives to mass media. She immediately develops every symptom she is supposed to develop because of being exposed to that chemical. Even if these symptoms are just allegations.

As it has been stated, mass media is given a prominent role by the Gladneys’ family. It is present in almost every conversation and situation; what is more, every piece of information they get about the world or about any events is through mass media. TV and the radio are given a real authority by the members of the family and they even trust mass media more than their own senses. They do not question information that they get through the media, they just take that for certain, even to the point of developing symptoms of an illness just because they hear them on the news.

### The role of mass media in *Saturday*

*Saturday* by Ian McEwan also depicts the omniscient role of mass media. Perowne either spends all the time consuming the news or feeling the need of having the news on, even if he does not pay any attention to them. Perowne starts his morning and the first thing he does in the morning is to go to the front door to pick up the post and the newspapers. Then, he walks down to the kitchen reading the headlines. Afterwards, he turns on the TV set and presses the mute button waiting for the nine o'clock bulletin. He even has a small TV he keeps near the stove to be constantly updated with the news. He lives a media-saturated life where the news has a prominent role.

Like in *White Noise*, TV fills Perowne's daily activities with its pops-up every now and then interrupts his actions. He listens to the news while reading a book; "At the same time he was listening to the radio news" (6). He pays attention to the news when he is in the changing room while playing squash: "When he raises his head, he sees in the washroom mirror ...a reflection of the silent TV..." (107). When he drives, he does not listen to music but listens to the news and this attitude he has shows the pervasive role he gives to mass media: "It's only while he is parking off Marylebone High Street that he remembers to turn on the midday news" (125). Moreover, while driving "his attention is caught by a television shop to his left" (140). Even when he visits his mum he pays attention to the news: "On the screen above her head Perowne sees the march" (166) and he tries to reach the volume control but then he realizes he is visiting his mother and "he decides against the television" (167). Perowne is always aware of the news no matter the moment of the day or the activity he is doing. By saying, "he decides against TV", it can be seen that it is a permanent struggle between his compulsion to know the news and the activities he is supposed to do in real life. The narrator tells:



He takes a step towards the CD player, and then changes his mind for he's feeling the pull, like gravity, of the approaching TV news. It's a condition of the times, this compulsion to hear how it stands the world, and be joined to the generality, to a community of anxiety. The habit's grown stronger these past two years; a different scale of news value has been set by monstrous and spectacular images. The possibility of their recurrence is one thread that binds the days. The government's counsel -- that an attack in a European or American city is an inevitability -- isn't only a disclaimer of responsibility, it's a heady promise. Everyone fears it (...) the television networks stand ready to deliver, and their audiences wait (...). Please don't let it happen. But let me see it all the same, as it's happening and from every angle, and let me be among the first to know. (176)

He uses the word “compulsion” to show the important and ubiquitous role news and mass media have on him.

#### The influence of mass media

Perowne expresses his distrust of stories, texts and all things not strictly physical. He concedes that the world around us, largely, consists of role-play; that our view of what is real is coloured by representations which become more real than reality itself, and that the objective news stories perhaps are not so objective but rather follow the logic of a good story. He understands the ubiquitous role of mass media and although he wonders, “Isn't it possible to enjoy an hour's recreation without this invasion, this inflection from the public domain?”(108), he is dependent on the news all throughout the novel.

After September 11<sup>th</sup>, there are avalanches of repetitions of the event on worldwide media. Global citizens are gradually informed that they are in the face of evil enemies who lurk in the shadows and attempt to search for innocent targets to achieve their political effects. Because of this, every accident that takes place in public is pre-speculated in terms of terrorism. This is clearly seen in *Saturday* since one day, Perowne wakes up in the middle of the night, walks towards the windows and sees something in the sky. At first, he does not identify the object but then he realizes that is a burning plane, which he immediately relates to a terrorist attack:

It is almost eighteen months since half the planet watched, and watched again the unseen captives driven through the sky to the slaughter, at which time there gathered round the innocent silhouette of any jet plane a novel association. Everyone agrees, airliners look different in the sky these days, predatory or doomed. (15)

Thus, the sense of uncertainty as consequence of the fear of terrorist attacks permeates the novel. Every abnormal flight in the sky is overshadowed by the suspicion that it may be an intentional attack. 9/11 thereby becomes a spectre that keeps haunting and being summoned back in different ways.

As Perowne relates this plane to a terrorist attack, he tries to figure out what has really happened all day long. In the morning, this event does not appear in the news and apparently, this is very disappointing: Henry says "... it's obvious that the burning plane has yet to enter the planetary matrix. It remains an unreliable subjective event" (29). Henry takes what he has seen as an "unreliable subjective event" and the only thing that can change this is that the event appears on TV. When the event is shown on TV, it will be reliable and objective. He seems to be disappointed so his son says: "It'll be on the

next news, Dad. Half four” (31). At midday, they watch the news again and “there it is, made real at last...” (35); so the event becomes real only when it is mentioned in the news. If it were not in the news, it would not be real for them.

Despite of the fact that the event has already appeared in the news, for Perowne the issue is unfinished. In the afternoon, “Henry is hoping that his own story, breaking at four thirty, might just have made late editions in London. But there’s nothing” (69). He is still waiting for the news to get more information about it. The airplane is the second item, the same information with only a few more details. The narrator says:

the fading life-chances of a disappointing news-story – no villains, no deaths, no suspended outcome – are revived by a dose of manufactured controversy: an aviation expert has been found who’s prepared to say that it was reckless to bring a burning plane in over a densely populated area when there were other options.  
(70)

Supposedly, there is no fiction on the news, the spectator should be objectively informed but this is not the case and there is a construction, which creates reality for those watching them. The story follows the logic of a good story. But later, the story appears in the fourth place in the news “which means no developments, or sinister silence from the authorities; but in fact the story has collapsed – you can almost hear in the introduction the presenter’s regretful tone” (179) and this is because the pilots finally have nothing to do with terrorism, they work for a good company in Holland. These are really good news but Henry does not feel happy or pleasure on this and he starts asking himself:

Have his anxieties been making a fool of him? It’s part of the new order, this narrowing of mental freedom, of this right to roam. ... He

suspects he is becoming a dupe, the willing, febrile consumer of news fodder, opinion, speculation and of all crumbs, the authorities let fall. He is a docile citizen, watching Leviathan grow stronger while he creeps under its shadow for protection (180)

At this point, we can see how he starts realizing the influence mass media have on him: "... he's been only too happy to let the story and every little nervous shift of the daily news process colour his emotional state" (180). As I have already suggested he spends all day trying to catch the story in the news and changes his mood according to the developments in it. If the story does not appear in the news, he feels frustrated, disappointed and nervous: "His nerves, like tautened strings, vibrate obediently with each news release" (181).

Another effect that this "compulsion" to consume mass media has on Henry is the fact that he appears not to think independently any longer. He starts questioning his capacity to think independently. We can see this, for example, when he talks to his son, to one of Theo's questions Henry says: "I don't know what to think. ... It is too late to think. Let's wait for the news" (34). Apparently, he cannot pass judgement at that moment; he cannot think for himself; he will wait for the news only then will he have an opinion. He believes blindly in what the news will say. He is only going to have his "opinion" after he listens to the news: "He's lost the habits of scepticism, he's becoming dim with contradictory opinion, he isn't thinking clearly, and just as bad, he senses he isn't thinking independently" (181).

It is worth mentioning that another effect of this excessive consumption of mass media by Perowne is that he even reads some real events in terms of the media. When he encounters Baxter and realizes that the event may turn violent, he says: "He is cast on a

role, and there's no way out. This, as people may say, is urban drama. A century of movies and half of century of television have rendered the mater insincere. It is pure artifice..." (86). The author here suggests that Perowne's understanding of the self and of real events is not real; it is a fantasy mediated by the narrative and the discourse provided by mass media.

## CONCLUSION

Based on the theory of Jean Baudrillard developed in "The Precession of Simulacra" about the representation of reality, this work analyses the characters of *White Noise* (1985) by Don DeLillo and *Saturday* (2005) by Ian McEwan and how mass media influence their lives and their interpretation of reality. Contemporary families in which mass media have a prominent role live in a media saturated reality. They give mass media such an importance in their daily life that they believe in what the media say blindly and act accordingly to that. The problem is that mass media, as Baudrillard says, construct reality; what the media show, in word of this author, are maps of reality which become more important and real than reality itself. Consequently, contemporary men take for real a manufactured reality instead of seeing reality as it is. The way of thinking and behaving of contemporary society is influenced by mass media.

As it has been explored, in both novels *White Noise* and in *Saturday* mass media play a central role in the lives of characters, and in their everyday activities. Every important event of these novels such as the Airbone toxic event, the crashing of the plane or the argument between Perowne and Baxter, is interpreted according to what they perceive through the mass media. Consequently, the Gladney and Perowne's ways of thinking are far from being independent and critical and their behaviours and reactions are shaped by the "hyperreal". The characters of these novels are immersed in a media-saturated world

in which the media occupy a central role not only as a form of entertainment but also as a source of information. Everything the Gladneys and Perowne get to know is through TV, the radio or internet. Therefore, they also consume a mediated reality and act accordingly to what they get through the media. Not only do they rely on the media to be informed about events going on such as the Airbone toxic event in *White Noise* or the plane crash in *Saturday* but they also act in accordance to what information they get and if this information changes dramatically so do their actions.

These texts help to raise awareness that people need to develop their critical-thinking skills. People should be able to decide for themselves what to believe and how to act. They can do this critically or uncritically, rationally or irrationally; they can either tacitly accept their social conditioning, or they can make a decision to go beyond that conditioning. They have that choice.

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