

THE BOMB: FROM TERROR TO CYNICISM

ANDREW DUKE

There are plenty of problems in the world, many of them interconnected. But there is no problem which compares with this central, universal problem of saving the human race from extinction.

--John Foster Dulles

In a world in which extinction of the human race is possible (even probable at times) people feel intense emotions, emotions that are often indescribable but which represent universal human feeling. The introduction of the atomic bomb to the world stage instigated a chain of reactions that can be separated into stages of social acceptance—from initial fear and questions of morality, to a silent unease and denial, and finally to a cynicism-induced humor. These stages are identifiable in the literature of different historical periods and reveal how significant the bomb has been in inspiring literature since its inception. The bomb has had a profound effect on American society and leaves an indelible, though hardly obvious, mark in American literature—a mark that is often ignored because of its inchoate understanding. Literary criticism, especially of the pre-Postmodern era, often overlooks the profound effects of the bomb to explicate more obvious themes and styles.

There was a brief honeymoon period directly following the initial use of the bomb against Japan. At the end of the war the United States held the weapon that contained the most awesome force man had ever seen. The ramifications of the use of the weapon, moral and structural, were not yet fully realized. This period was short, however, and debates as to the ethics of the use of such power, and the resulting justifications, began to appear in literature. Literature of the initial stage—dating from the bomb's introduction until the early 1950s—can be patriotic and naïve, but as this stage drew to a close authors began a cautious questioning of the moral consequences of the country's actions.

It was on August 6, 1945 that the United States dropped the powerful new weapon on Hiroshima, Japan, and then again on August 9 when Nagasaki suffered a similar fate. Both reports only included sketchy details, and Americans were soon distracted by the news that the Japanese had surrendered on August 15 (Hardy 132). The United States' government had previously issued a "complete blackout" on media coverage of the bomb, and then censored any foreign (especially

Japanese) news coverage of the bomb's effect on Japanese civilians (Bliven 210, Steele). This news blackout allowed Americans a level of apathy and prevented uproar for humanitarian aid.

While Americans' ignorant apathy helped shield them from the effects of the bomb on civilians, the sheer number of people killed was too blatant to ignore. Although Americans were not necessarily considering the immediate or enduring physical effects of the bomb, questions of morality still arose. Many religious leaders of the time spoke out against the United States' use of the bomb. For example, Father James Gillis, editor of *Catholic World* wrote a scathing article accusing the government of what he "...would call...a crime were it not that the word 'crime' implies sin and sin requires consciousness of guilt." He argued that the government "...was in defiance of every sentiment and every conviction upon which our civilization is based" (Gillis 449). Gillis' mention of the word "crime" was a bit more extreme than other religious critics, but his argument that the government was violating basic moral values was not uncommon.

John Foster Dulles, along with the Methodist bishop G. Bromly Oxnam, wrote a plea to President Truman requesting restraint on the use of atomic weapons, arguing that the country had a responsibility to demonstrate moral use of the bomb to the world: "if we, a professedly Christian nation feel morally free to use atomic energy in that [immoral] way, men elsewhere will accept that verdict . . . the stage will be set for the sudden and final destruction of mankind." The two argued that it was immoral for the United States to continue attacks of this magnitude without giving "adequate opportunity" to the Japanese to process the loss and react accordingly (Oxnam 6).

Relevant literature from this point in history is difficult to find and is mostly limited to editorials and newspaper articles. These pieces, like those cited above, demonstrate the feelings of the American public directly after the war effort, but leave little room for literary analysis. Memoirs and historic interviews, while mostly written later, provide pieces for such analysis. One such work is Zoe Tracy Hardy's essay "What Did You Do in the War, Grandma?" in which she recounts her feelings and experiences from that fateful period. Not only does the essay use creative language to demonstrate the moral dilemma that Americans felt, it also portends the intense fear that was to come.

Throughout her essay, Hardy discusses the new social and moral questions that progressives were beginning to ask in the period: allowing women to work after the war, an impending sexual revolution, and eventual use of the bomb. These subjects were rather taboo in 1945, and while Hardy treats them as such, the fact that she wrote the essay much later allows her to discuss them explicitly. She, first and foremost, makes it clear that she was unsure about the use of the bomb when she first

heard the news. However, she felt alone in her skepticism, as she “[looked] for speculation from someone about how we were going to live in this new world,” but found nothing—nobody seemed yet to be asking these same questions (Hardy 131). When she asks her friend Mildred for her opinion she is met with hostility; Hardy asks if the United States might have been “...kicking a dead horse—brutally,” but Mildred is unreceptive to the possibility that the United States acted immorally and accuses Hardy of expecting too much (Hardy 132).

While it helps to accentuate the feminist undertones present in the essay, Hardy’s description of “terror at being out in the night alone” really portends the fear that would soon pervade the nation (131). Furthermore, Hardy begins to describe the malaise that pervades Walker Percy’s *The Moviegoer* (1961); as the essay draws to a close she describes feeling like “...it was going to be very hard, from now on, for the whole world to take care of itself” and is filled with sadness and envy when she sees a cow with “uncomprehending brown eyes” (Hardy 133). The new fear and responsibility that the nation felt was going to greatly alter the American attitude.

The souring of relations between the United States and the Soviet Union interrupted this period of naive questioning; the former ally of the United States also held the power of the bomb by the end of 1949. No longer was the threat against the United States a theoretical example on an editorial page. It was real—at any moment the two world powers could launch nuclear weapons at each other, triggering a nuclear holocaust. Following an initial panic, society settled into an uneasy silence, a silence created as the characters in literature attempt to deal with the appearance of the threat of such raw, destructive power; the “malaise” and “everydayness” that permeates Walker Percy’s *The Moviegoer* are representative of this uneasy mood.

Binx Bolling, the main character in Percy’s work, spends the duration of the novel on what he describes as “the search”. “The search,” in Binx’s opinion, “is what anyone would undertake if he were not sunk in the everydayness of his own life” (Percy 13). The everydayness is a result, describes Mary Thale, of “the healthy, creative, enthusiastic citizen of the Eisenhower era, using his money and leisure to express his individuality” (85). Thale even argues that “the evil of the times is not recognized,” but goes on to relate this unrealized evil to the ironic tone that Binx adopts to attack society—she does not venture a guess as to what the evil is, outside of rampant consumerism. The relevant point here is that this “everydayness” could be the outcome of fear; without realizing it, society entered into a quiet routine that not only provided normalcy but also offered an opportunity to forget about the recently discovered dangers of the atomic age. Binx’s actions (and ironic tone, argues Thale) throughout the novel serve to question the logic and safety of this state of being, a state that borders on social denial (85-6).

The title of *The Moviegoer* reflects Binx's favorite hobby: seeing movies. Binx's description of movies and his motivation for seeing them reveals that he sees movies as a part of "the search" he has undertaken. He is able to identify with some of the characters; they may very well be the only members of society that he feels approach an understanding of "the search." Thale argues, however, that Binx's obsession with movies is really a ploy to allow his ironic commentary that relates to movies; his ironic discussions are his way of attacking society, of attacking "everydayness" (85-7). With that being said, Binx specifically discusses the relationship between movies and "the search", stating that "the movies are onto the search, but they screw it up ... [the movie character] [becomes] so sunk in everydayness that he might just as well be dead" (Percy 13).

His statements reveal two things: that he does identify with the characters in movies as being others who are on "the search," and that he sees death as a reasonable alternative to "everydayness". Binx's encounter with William Holden in the French Quarter emphasizes the first point; he describes with envy the "peculiar reality" in which Holden lives. In Binx's mind Holden is able to temporarily interrupt the "malaise" and "everydayness" for those fans that surround him at any given time. However, as soon as the street's interaction with Holden has ended, and Holden leaves, a "fog of uneasiness, a thin gas of malaise, settle[s] on the street" (Percy 18). Whenever the famous person has departed, regular people cannot maintain a level of stimulation that goes beyond their day-to-day routine—they cannot escape the "everydayness".

The latter revelation, that Binx sees death as a reasonable alternative to "everydayness" seems to be more of an indication of the character as a person, not of society as a whole. Virginia Osborne, a critic of Southern literature, speaks of this character trait: "the promise of disaster serves as a constant in Binx's life—he preemptively accepts death rather than suffer the anxiety of the nuclear threat" (120). This quote demonstrates the impressive analysis of Percy's novel that Osborne performs; she masterfully articulates some of the effects that the Cold War culture had on the novel, but her analysis of these effects is largely obscured by her thesis—that Southern literature was suffering an identity crisis during the same period. The article falls short of really pointing out how vastly different literature would have been had nuclear war never been a threat.

Binx's questioning of the social norm provides the main conflict of the novel—it is his questioning of "everydayness" that makes his character significant. Without placing the novel in this context the plot seems somewhat disjointed; it would be difficult to find an explanation that would better combine the many, otherwise seemingly unrelated conflicts into a common theme. Without society's fear providing a common cause to the conflicts in the novel it would seem that there is no point

to the novel—it is simply a demonstration of the life of angst in the 1950s that provides no explanation as to its ultimate cause. The Moviegoer is not alone in this seeming lack of steady theme—many of the works that date from this period, in film and in literature, reflect this feeling of angsty rebellion that does not clearly demonstrate motive. A well-known example of such a work is the 1955 film *Rebel Without a Cause*, starring James Dean. The sense of juvenile delinquency that the film portrays was not simply Hollywood fantasy—it was a genuine concern in the 1950s.

James Gilbert, in his book *A Cycle of Outrage*, gives an impression of youth culture in the 50s: “the changing behavior of youth, in terms of speech, fashions, music, and mores, appeared to erase the boundaries between highjinks and premature adulthood and even antisocial delinquency” (12). There was increasing concern for the moral character of American youth, and everybody (from scholars, to psychologists, to TV personalities) seemed to be scrambling for an explanation of the problem of juvenile delinquency. “[B]roken families, mobility, and absent working mothers” initially took the blame for the delinquency of adolescents, but were quickly upstaged by a popular new theory—one that “supposed links between delinquency and the media” (Gilbert 14). The war against media had begun: society began to blame mass media for the “rapidity of evolving tastes for clothing, music, and behavior” that “suggest[ed] that the structure...was creating...headstrong junior consumers” (Gilbert 14-5). Gilbert quotes Harrison Saludbury of *The New York Times* in saying that mass media fads “...had spread nationwide to create a ‘shook-up’ generation of youth...who spoke an underground argot and lived outside the dominant social and moral order” (15). Essentially, mass media was being blamed for creating an unsteady, consumer-based youth culture.

Warren Susman, however, wrote an article, “Did Success Spoil the United States?”, that suggests mass media was involved in a different way—through the increasing use of violence. In the decade following World War II “one billion comic books were produced each year” and “the total cost [of production] was \$100 million” (Susman 27). Themes of “sex, violence, and crimes against persons” filled each of these comic books and each was headlined by a hero that “dramatized the same kind of personality, the same kind of collective representations appearing in so many realms of postwar culture...” (Susman 28). The importance being that comic books depicted delinquent behavior by glorified, relatable characters. It was not long before there were “...thousands of articles analyzing [American violence] as a fundamental character defect in American life” (Susman 24). This argument still echoes even in the present: that violence in film and comic books (and video games today) can be used as an explanation for uncontrolled adolescent behavior.

Gilbert and Susman both propose compelling explanations for the changes in that youth culture exhibited in the 1950s, but in their ultimate conclusions they both ignore important parts of their analyses. Susman discusses Robert Lindner, who wrote *Rebel Without a Cause*, and who insisted that the youth were simply “revolt[ing] against a society deserving revolt” (27). Susman proceeds directly from this claim to his study of comic book violence, ignoring the intense culture of fear in the world created by the United States’ use of the atomic bomb that might cause these characters to revolt against their society. Gilbert states in his concluding paragraph that “many of the changes adolescents experienced were disruptions of society shared equally by adults,” and that the modifications in society were simply more apparent among adolescents. He ultimately finds that mass media was simply responsible for bringing the youth culture into the mainstream—previously hidden behaviors were now apparent in the mass media, but that it did not necessarily cause a change in adolescent behavior. Essentially ignoring the root cause of the social changes he had been studying, which, again, were arguably based on the presence of an atomic threat.

While Binx is older than the adolescents that Susman and Gilbert discuss, Walker Percy’s tone and choice of conflict certainly reflect that of the angsty youth of the 1950s. Binx’s refusal to accept “everydayness” reflects his awareness of the oppressive fear permeating society. Binx was a bit ahead of his time in even trying to question this oppression, but he did not necessarily realize his foresight; he realizes that America has fallen into an “everydayness” but is at a complete loss to explain what the cause of this fall may be (which is somewhat reminiscent of both Gilbert and Susman). He says himself that if asked whether he was ahead of or behind society’s understanding of the world he would “...not know the answer” (Percy 14).

Binx probably would have lived a happier life in the time of Don DeLillo’s *White Noise* (1985); he almost certainly would have been able to throw off the oppressive force of “everydayness” in a time in which the cause (fear and threat of death) was better understood and life was more easily interrupted. Starting near the end of the Cold War, it was more acceptable to rebel against the oppression that resulted from the fear of death. Certain trendsetters began questioning the importance of the bomb and poking (albeit uneasy) fun at the oppressive culture of fear that had been created. Don DeLillo’s work embodies this type of character rebellion; his work *White Noise* follows characters with lives that are saturated with cynicism and sarcasm. They are conscious of the fear that still pervades society, and work to ensure the source of the fear is made comically obvious.

Jack Gladney, the main character in *White Noise* is a model of sarcasm, irony, and rebellion. He is a college professor who “invented Hitler studies in North America,” even though he is not proficient

in German language (Delillo 4, 31). The irony that he has become a successful scholar as a result dwarfs the irony of the character devoting his life to studying (almost revering) such an icon of fear and death. The connection to World War II is almost certainly intentional; Delillo would undoubtedly be aiming to point out the connection between the general feeling of anxiety among the characters in the novel and the advent of the nuclear age. The novel is full of (semiridiculous) situations in which the characters are advised to take special precautions to protect their safety. In one instance Steffie, one of Jack's precocious children, insists that they must boil their water because of an advisory she heard on the radio (Delillo 34). In another instance the children evacuate their school because they "were getting headaches and eye irritations, tasting metal in their mouths..." and "a teacher rolled on the floor and spoke foreign languages" (Delillo 35). These events demonstrate Delillo's attempt to make fun of society's tendency to overreact and panic—an outcome of the constant threat from nuclear weapons they had felt for decades.

The reactions of Jack and his family to these occurrences tend to reveal the ridiculousness of society's panic. The pinnacle of this type of occurrence is the "airborne toxic event" that is important enough to warrant an entire section of the novel. A train car transporting a toxic chemical, Nyodene D, derails and causes a "black billowing cloud" that forces an evacuation of the area in which Jack and his family live (Delillo 111). Jack's initial reaction to the news that such a catastrophe has occurred so close to his home (prior to the evacuation order) is important in that it deals with society's growing, ironic tendency to return to a stage of denial of the existing threats, instead of with the judgment of society as panicky. Jack spends much of the time after hearing about the event saying that the cloud "won't come this way," seemingly trying to reassure himself more than to reassure his family (Delillo 108-11).

The "airborne toxic event" mirrors a large-scale disaster, like a nuclear attack, that would terrify and panic society. The toxic chemical, Nyodene D, has effects comparable to the radiation that would follow a nuclear attack; it is incredibly harmful to health and carries an uncertain threat of future ill-health, as nuclear fallout would. Not to mention the fact that the community is alerted to the need to evacuate by air-raid sirens (Delillo 116-8). The family's reaction to the catastrophe is especially interesting in terms of social critique. While Jack claims a "...subdued, worried confused" mental state his son Heinrich finds the situation, in Jack's words, "brilliantly stimulating" (Delillo 120). Jack experiences the socially acceptable reaction to the situation (at least in part), but Heinrich is more fascinated and excited than frightened by the situation. The question becomes what has caused Heinrich to react in this way? Arguably, this is Delillo's way of pointing out the effect that a constant fear of death (caused by the nuclear threat) can have on society—without having ever known anything else, young people find it

difficult to imagine a life without the fear. The unknown menace becomes less frightening when it is the only thing someone has ever experienced.

The fear of death is arguably the main motivator for all conflicts in *White Noise*. However, Jack's children do not seem to suffer the same level of fear of death as he and his wife, Babette, does, if they are afraid at all. This is probably due to Delillo's point that the children are being raised in a culture that demands they are aware of their mortality at all times. They know nothing but a society in which nuclear war can at any moment destroy the Earth. It is perhaps for this reason that Jack and Babette are so aware of their own fears; the fact that they experience greater fear than their children makes them question their fear in the first place. Babette's fear of death ultimately leads to a major conflict in the novel: she reveals that she has been unfaithful to her husband in order to gain access to a drug, "Dylar," that claims to remove the fear of death from a person. Ultimately, this sparks Jack to attempt to murder the man she slept with and ultimately come to terms with his own, and with society's, mortality. Babette speaks of her fear of death as being unbearable, and she feels that she "fears it right up front" as opposed to other people who do not realize their fears (Delillo 187).

It is no accident that the fear of death is such a large motivator in the novel; Delillo is commenting on the consequences of society's fear of death—a fear it has been overwhelmed with since the advent of nuclear weaponry. In his examination of the novel, Daniel Cordle argues that "Jack's fear of mortality is...nuclear to the extent that it arises from a culture permeated by images of catastrophe, that it remains forever deferred into a threatening future, and that it connects broad cultural insecurities to those at the heart of the family" (Cordle 106). Jack reflects a society surrounded (almost fascinated) by death, a society that is unsure of its future.

In an interview with Adam Begley, in fact, Delillo explained that many readers, representatives of society at large, are looking for a chance to make death "less fearful" through the opportunity of "encountering the death experience in a superficial way" (298). The "superficial way" being through novels in which "all plots lead toward death" (Begley 298). Delillo lampoons society's tendency to treat death superficially as a sort of defense mechanism; Jack's family treating death as a "source of fascination," as described by Cordle, demonstrates Delillo's critique. Cordle writes: "the family gather, for instance, to watch television footage of disasters: 'We were otherwise silent, watching houses slide into the ocean...every disaster made us wish for more...'" (105).

The growth from the slightly ironic behavior in *The Moviegoer* to the cynical wittiness of *White Noise* in regards to danger and the unknown is glaringly obvious. However, the two works share a

certain penchant for the commercial that may be less obvious. The characters' attitudes in *The Moviegoer* and *White Noise* toward obsessive consumerism reflect the growth society throughout the nuclear age mirroring the changes in their attitudes toward danger and death. Thomas Frank, in his book *The Conquest of Cool*, writes regarding the beginning of society's changing attitude toward consumerism:

The tale of postwar malaise and youthful liveliness is a familiar one... Author after author warned in the 1950s that long-standing American traditions of individualism were vanishing and being buried beneath the empires of the great corporations, the sprawl of prefabricated towns, and... mass-produced goods... the descendants of the pioneers were in danger of being reduced to faceless cogs in a great machine, automatons in an increasingly rationalized and computerized system of production that mindlessly churned out cars, TVs, bomber jets, and consciousness all for the sake of the ever-accelerating American way of life. (*Conquest* 10)

Binx's attitude in *The Moviegoer* seems to play with these notions of the dangers of losing individuality to rampant commercialism. Publishing *The Moviegoer* in 1960, Percy would have been aware of the borderline-trite argument that Frank describes; after all, Frank states that "there could have been very few literate Americans... who were not familiar" with the dangers of "conformity" by this time (*Conquest* 10). However, Percy portrays Binx as perfectly comfortable being a conformist consumer. Binx, for example, prefers life in the suburban Gentilly, rather than the upscale, urban New Orleans Garden District. While his life can never be described as content, he shares his gratification in subscribing "to *Consumer Reports* and as a consequence... own[ing] a first-class television set, an all but silent air conditioner and a very long lasting deodorant" (Percy 7).

Mary Thale argues, however, that Binx's embracing of the items that represented the consumer culture of the decade—the credit cards, his subscription to *Consumer Reports*, etc., were simply a way for him to "match the situation..." (85). She argues that in order to affect a culture that was "too padded with complacency to feel direct blows" that Percy had to create a character that embraced the consumerism and attacked it from a position of "selfknown protest of irony"—Binx develops an ironic tone to mock the tendencies of 1950s culture (86).

Numan Bartley analyzed Percy's intentions in his analysis of Southern culture in *The New South: 1945-1980*, stating that "in Percy's middle-class universe, a person lived without values, measured success by money, and alleviated boredom with periodic sexual conquests" (266). "In shedding the values of an older South," says Bartley, "the New South had become a place where credit cards defined an

individual's identity" (267). While Percy understood the prevailing social attitude that conformity was a dangerous, undesirable new phenomenon he created Binx as a character that embraces a consumerist, conformist lifestyle. It seems as if Percy might have been aware of what Thomas Frank later laments as "co-optation" of the "counterculture" (the non-conforming culture) by advertising and business, and created a character that embraces the culture, rather than fighting an un-winnable battle.

In an earlier work, "Why Johnny Can't Dissent", Thomas Frank describes the tendency of advertisers and producers to co-opt popular movements in order to capitalize on their popularity. As the rebellious, anti-conformity counterculture of the 1960s grew, business adapted to portray their products as non-conformist; by giving their customers a sense of individuality the businesses were able to thrive. The irony (and the reason that "Johnny Can't Dissent") being that in refusing to conform consumers were, in fact, conforming to a new norm (Frank 40-5). In this world of opposites in which non-conformists are conforming to cultural norms it is those who willingly embrace consumerism that are rebelling. While Percy's *The Moviegoer* was a bit early to realize this irony (it is quite possible that Percy was really just creating a character that challenged the mainstream society through irony, as Thale suggests) it is likely that Jack Gladney in Delillo's *White Noise* is meant to represent a rebel in this new consumer culture.

In his book, *Fictions of Commodity Culture*, Christopher Lindner argues the opposite: that Jack Gladney is inextricably steeped in consumer culture. He contends that Jack's "ability to read the...thoughts" of his students' parents while they participate in the phantasmagoric university move-in "suggests more than just an understanding of their fetishistic relationship with the material world. It suggests...some degree of identification with the parents and their consumer activity" (Lindner 141). In his extensive analysis, however, Lindner never approaches the ideas proposed by Frank in *Commodify Your Dissent*. Lindner has several quality points, but here he arguably misses Delillo's major point regarding consumerism—not that consumer culture is unavoidable per se, but that it is impossible to rebel against. In order to be remarking on the rise in consumerism as a result of the atomic threat, Jack would be required to choose the consumer lifestyle, not be forced into it as an unavoidable result of the times. To be considered a rebel, Jack's consumerism must be considered self-aware, as a remark on the rebellion he is undertaking by fully embracing the consumer lifestyle.

Lindner discusses throughout his analysis of *White Noise* the importance of both television and shopping as experiences that "provid[e] a temporary escape from reality" that help Jack Gladney break from "morbidly ruminating about death – a subject that preoccupies his thoughts and causes attacks of anxiety throughout the novel" (Lindner 160). As previously discussed, Jack's fear of death is quite easily

attributable to the general feeling of unease in society—the general uncertainty of the postwar era of the atomic bomb. Lindner explores the idea that shopping and consumerism became more prevalent as an outcome of fears of nuclear destruction, though he never explicitly states as such.

Lindner describes the tendency to overshop, to be defined by possessions in the novel to be a form of “retail therapy”—shopping allows the characters to escape the fears and complexities of their everyday lives in exchange for money. While there is certainly a consumerist parallel to this “retail therapy” for Binx Bolling in *The Moviegoer*, Binx subscribes to *Consumer Reports*, spends money on films, etc., consumer culture may not provide the best parallel for the therapeutic experience between the two novels. Lindner, in discussing “retail therapy” describes the phenomena’s fleeting delight: “the ecstasy of shopping only provides a temporary escape from reality. It only lasts as long as the subject remains lost and immersed in the delirium of shopping...those moments are inevitably short-lived” (Lindner 160). This quote is comparable to Binx Bolling’s description of Canal Street during the brief appearance of the celebrity William Holden. It is not long after the episode with William Holden that a “thin gas of malaise...settle[s] on the street...” and Binx is left without an escape from the “everydayness” of his life, lamenting “ah, William Holden, we already need you again. Already the fabric is wearing thin without you” (Percy 18). The similarities between the two situations are obvious: both characters are looking for an escape from their everyday lives—arguably from the strain caused by the atomic danger, but can only find temporary solutions that are ultimately unsustainable. Their behavior reflects that of society as a whole, the full range of human reaction to the atomic bomb is represented in literature, it is simply difficult to decipher sometimes.

An examination of the works that were produced as American society adjusted to the knowledge of atomic weaponry and to the possibility of instant annihilation shows that the public developed countless coping mechanisms that have ultimately made life livable for the general public. The chain of reactions that was instigated by the introduction of the bomb has left an undeniable mark on American literature. The underlying anxiety and fear has been motivating literature since the era of the bomb’s inception, although its effects have been largely ignored as the root cause of many behaviors. From the uneasy denial of the danger to the complex humor that aims to defuse the fear of death, the resulting behaviors have been a major component of literature in the entire postwar era, despite a glaring lack of detailed scholarly research.

Works Cited

- Bartley, Numan V. *The New South 1945-1980*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1995. Print.
- Begley, Adam. "Don DeLillo: The Art of Fiction CXXXV." *Paris Review* 35.128 (1993): 274-306. Print.
- Bliven, Bruce. «The Bomb and the Future.» *The New Republic*. 20 August 1945, 210. Print.
- Cordle, Daniel. *States of Suspense: The nuclear age, postmodernism and United States fiction and prose*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2008. Print.
- DeLillo, Don. *White Noise*. New York: Penguin, 1985. Print.
- Frank, Thomas. "Why Johnny Can't Dissent." *Commodify Your Dissent: Salvos from The Baffler*. Ed. Thomas Frank and Matt Weiland. New York: W.W. Norton & Co, 1997. 31-45. Print.
- . *The Conquest of Cool: Business Culture, Counterculture, and the Rise of Hip Consumerism*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997. Print.
- Gilbert, James. *A Cycle of Outrage: America's Reaction to the Juvenile Delinquent in the 1950s*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986. Print.
- Gillis, James. "The Atom Bomb." *Catholic World*. September 1945, 449. Print.
- Hardy, Zoe Tracey. "What Did You Do in the War, Grandma? A Flashback to August 1945." *Fields of Readings: Motives for Writing*. Ed. Nancy R. Comley, et al. 366-74. Print.
- Lindner, Christoph. *Fictions of Commodity Culture: From the Victorian to the Postmodern*. Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2003. Print.
- Osborne, Virginia Nickles. "'the most Ordinary Life Imaginable': Cold War Culture in Walker Percy's 'the Moviegoer.'" *Southern Literary Journal* 41.2 (2009): 106-25. Print.
- «Oxnam, Dulles Asks Halt in Bomb Use" *The New York Times*. 10 August 1945, 6. Print.
- Percy, Walker. *The Moviegoer*. New York: Vintage Intl, 1960. Print.
- Susman, Warren. "Did Success Spoil the United States? Dual Representations in Postwar America." *Recasting America: Culture and Politics in the Age of the Cold War*. Ed. Lary May. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989. 19-37. Print.
- Steele, Diana. "America's Reaction to the Atomic Bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki." *Diss.* Dickinson College, 1999. Online. 25 Oct 2011.
- Thale, Mary. "The Moviegoer of the 1950's." *Twentieth Century Literature* 14.2, 1968. 84-9. Print.