White Noise Essay, Research Paper

The central conflict between Jack and Babette Gladney is basically the

struggle for control and also the struggle for who is more afraid of death. Jack Gladney throughout the whole novel tries to think that he knows his wife Babette he tries to control her thoughts by saying she is supposed to act a certain way. Jack wants to be the one afraid of death and at the same time wants to get rid of his fear.

In the story Jack confronts Babette about the medicine she is taking, he wants to know what it is and why she is taking it. He tells her that if she doesn t tell him the reasons that Denise will. Jack is very understanding and tells her to take her time telling him. Babette tells him that Gray Research was conducting human

experiments on fear and then decided not to conduct them on humans but on

computers. She told Jack how she made a deal with Mr. Gray and in exchange to

continue with the experiment with Dylar (the drug) she would give him her body.

Jacks reaction to this was not the kind you d expect when your wife is telling you she cheated on you. He was mostly calm, stayed laying in bed, and even offered Babette some Jell-O with banana slices that Steffie had made.

Jack went on asking why Babette needed this drug and what it s purpose was. He

wanted to know why they couldn t test on animals. Babette answered,

That s just the point. No animal has this condition. This is a human condition.

Animals fear many things, Mr. Gray said. But their brains aren t sophisticated

enough to accommodate this particular state of mind. (195)

Jack then was starting to realize what Babette was getting at. This is when the

emotion kicks in for him. Now he feels all the emotions he was supposed to feel when she told him he cheated on him. He states, My body went cold. I felt hollow inside. (195) He was waiting for her answer. She tells him, I m afraid to die..I think about it all the time. It won t go away. (195) He responds with, Don t tell me this, this is terrible.

Jack s reaction to Babette s fear seems misplaced. He is more upset that she could possibly be more afraid of death than him than he seemed to be about her sleeping with Mr. Gray. He goes on trying to tell Babette that maybe she isn t sure that she is afraid of death, death is so vague. He tries to tell her that it might be her weight or height that is her problem. He cannot accept that she is scared of death. Much of this could stem from what he depends on Babette for. Jack depends on Babette

psychologically more than sexually. So that could compensate the reasoning that he was more upset that she was afraid of death than of the cheating. He depended on

her for abundance of life and now his safe place was gone.

In the end of the novel Jack tells Babette that he is going to meet with Mr. Gray to get some Dylar. In reality he plans to kill Mr. Gray, only everything goes wrong when he tries to do this, and it s almost comical to read. He doesn t succeed in killing Gray but ends up taking him to the hospital. No one ever knows why Jack decided to try and kill Gray. Maybe he actually was jealous that Mr. Gray had slept with his wife or maybe it was because by killing Mr. Gray he could kill his fear of death.

Even to the end of the novel not much about the role of death in the eyes of Jack and Babette changes. The book ends when Wilder is crossing the road on his tricycle and cars are honking and swerving to not hit the little boy while he is in a state of oblivion, he doesn t hear the cars, he doesn t hear the women yelling for him to stop,that s all just white noise to him. Suddenly he falls into a puddle off of his tricycleand begins to cry and he realizes that he brushed death for the first time.

Throughout the story Wilder represented a kind of innocence not found in any

character in the novel, he was the only one who was not concerned with death or

dying, he didn t understand the concept. Now his innocence is gone and he is now

just like everyone else.