White Noise: Character Analysis

In the novel, White Noise, Don DeLillo, the author, leads us on a journey that follows the life of Jack, a chairman of Hitler Studies, and his wife Babette, who eventually shares the same fear of death as her husband. Throughout, the novel Babette makes morally ambiguous decisions that affect her family because of her fear of death. She plays a critical, and often untraditional, female role, who's actions and decisions are the result of that irrational fear of death. In due course, this novel looks at this female character as she navigates the uncertainty of death and the outside world.

From the beginning of the novel, we notice that Jack primarily describes Babette by her physicality and looks, rather than her personality and disposition. Jack states that Babette is a "tall and fairly ample" woman and that she "lack[s] the guile for conspiracies of the body" (DeLillo 5). This characterization demonstrates the mindset and views that Jack, and men of that era, had of women, which is that they are seen as more of an object than a person. However, as the novel progresses, we notice that Babette isn't the perfect household wife that was described earlier in the novel and that she goes from nurturing to a cynical and evasive. This is observed when Jack confronts Babette about the Dylar pills, who becomes defensive and replies to Jack telling him that "…these cold gray leaden days" make her want to "crawl into bed with a good-looking man" (DeLillo 186). Babette's rather rash and secret decision to start taking the Dylar pills, highlights her untraditional female role in the novel. Another example of such contradiction is the fact that Jack admires Babette's honesty, a quality his past ex-wives did not possess, and relates honesty to her "bulkiness" (DeLillo 7). This situational irony of Babette not being what Jack admired her to be, emphasizes the fact that, unlike some people's views on women of this era, Babette is putting herself first.

In part three of the novel, Dylarama, Babette reveals what the pills are and that she's been taking it as a way to alleviate her rising fear of death. It's important to note that typical feminine gender traits are being talkative, open, and emotional whereas typical masculine gender traits are being uncommunicative, reserved, and objective. It seems as though Babette doesn't necessarily fit the typical female traits but rather the male ones. This is significant because it proves that Babette is her own individual who makes her own decisions. While revealing the process of how she came across Dylar, Jack cuts in and disregards Babette's intelligence and constricts her to his depiction of his "joyous" wife who "doesn't succumb to gloom or self-pity" (DeLillo 191). Despite his repeated interjections, Babette stays calm and reveals that she "offered [her] body" to the project manager, in exchange for the Dylar medication. By considering the fact that Babette knowingly engaged in an affair, we must consider that she manipulated her way to the Dylar medication in order to eliminate her fear of death. Babette even referred to this affair as a "capital transaction" which further proves her cunning and calculated personality (DeLillo 194).