

## Postmodern Paranoia, Schizophrenia, and Social Justice in Don DeLillo's *Libra*

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DOI: <https://www.doi.org/10.34785/J014.2022.263>

Article Type: Original Article

Page Numbers: 147-161

Received: 31 March 2021

Accepted: 26 November 2021

### Abstract

The present article attempts to demonstrate how Don DeLillo's *Libra* addresses the lack of social justice because of the domination of paranoia and conspiracy in the contemporary American society. John Rawls, the late Harvard University professor, has written about a just society and a utopian world in his major works. In *Libra*, DeLillo explores the assassination of Kennedy by Oswald and its adverse effect on society in general. In this novel, paranoia is experienced as paranoid schizophrenia, in which sufferers exhibit traits of both of them. Although *Libra* is based on historical events and real-life figures, it is not an attempt to produce a historically accurate version of these events. DeLillo does not aim to explain what really happened on that day, or establish an unequivocally true account of the assassination conspiracy. Rather, he uses the character of the conspirator Everett's young daughter Suzanne to portray the disturbing paranoid state. By combining fragmented reality and evoked paranoid responses DeLillo is producing a work of literature by illustrating how this paranoid schizophrenia breeds social disease. Therefore, the main objective of this paper is to illustrate there is no social justice in this paranoid postmodern world.

### Keywords

Social in/justice; Don DeLillo; *Libra*; Social Justice.

### 1. Introduction

This paper attempts to address social injustice through paranoia, conspiracy, and schizophrenia, and their impact on postmodern society. *Libra* (1988), written by Don DeLillo, reflects that in the postmodern world, paranoia and conspiracy dominate the American society. Even though John Rawls, the late professor of Harvard University, has written about social justice and utopian ideals, the society is dominated by paranoia and conspiracy, and this paranoia breeds social crime and war. The idea of paranoia comes from "the Greek root words, *para* (beyond), *noos* (mind), and *ia* (condition), but is also etymologically linked to the Greek word *paránoos*, which

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suggests something closer to ‘a demented mind’’. Each amount, etymologically speaking, means, “*being out of, or beside, one’s mind*” (Sandlin, and Wallin 1). However, today, this expression being out of one’s mind is perhaps *too* common and refers often to “minor nonconformist or asocial behaviors” (1). Despite all our parental watchfulness, “the number of children murdered in the UK has remained pretty much constant over the past 30 years—around 60 to 80 per year” (6). Regarding America, Jesse Walker, in his book, *The United States of Paranoia*, states, “In America, it is always a paranoid time” (12). He argues that conspiracy plays “major roles in conflicts from the Indian wars of the seventeenth century to the labor battles of the Gilded Age, from the Civil War to the Cold War, from the American Revolution to the War on Terror” (12).

Paranoia, or the threat of complete engulfment by somebody else’s system, is eagerly sensed by many of the dramatis personae of postmodernist fiction. It is “the exaggerated or unrealistic belief that other people want to harm us. Or to put it another way, it’s what happens when we’re bad at judging risk” (Freeman 43). A person who is paranoid has a strong inclination to feel that you cannot trust other people or that other people have a bad opinion of you. And schizophrenia is a mental illness in which a person becomes unable to link thought, emotion and behavior, leading to withdrawal from reality and personal relationships. Also, conspiracy is the activity of secretly planning with other people to do something bad or illegal. According to the Mayo Clinic (2020), Schizophrenia is “a serious mental disorder in which people interpret reality abnormally. Schizophrenia may result in some combination of hallucinations, delusions, and extremely disordered thinking and behavior that impairs daily functioning, and can be disabling” (2020). The present researchers examine one of these plots revolving back to the assassination of John F. Kennedy in 1963. Twenty-five years after this catastrophe Don DeLillo portrays how conspiracy and paranoia influence the society. We aim to illustrate, with paranoia and conspiracy, how our society lacks justice and that, paranoia is experienced as paranoid schizophrenia in the society of postmodern world.

## **2. Literature Review**

Even though some critics have worked on DeLillo’s novels, their investigations have not been specified to analyze his works from John Rawls’s point of view. Jeremy Green, in *The Cambridge Companion to Don DeLillo*, states that the novel recreates the dramatic moment in Dallas. He asserts, “the novel is more than just the imaginative recreation of a particularly important and troublingly elusive historical event; it is also a speculative study of the origins of our own historical and cultural moment” (94). He

mentions paranoia and conspiracy and says conspiracy theorists found ample fuel for their speculations in the bewildering mass of contradictions and gaps in the evidence and witness statements amassed by the Warren Commission. Ashleigh Whelan, in her thesis, "For the Future: An Examination of Conspiracy and Terror in the Works of Don DeLillo", discusses a few prominent themes, conspiracy, paranoia and terror. She argues that in *Libra*, "we must view not only the whodunit, but also the larger cultural implications of the event – particularly the spread of paranoia" (2). In *Libra*, "we find the emergence of conspiracy in a modern world after the assassination of JFK, and we can examine the effects of paranoia on our culture through the characters of Lee Harvey Oswald and Suzanne Everett. What readers receive is DeLillo's own account of history, one in which conspiracy and paranoia are major players in the psychology of our times. This "renarrativization, or (re) writing of history, serves as the segue into my second chapter, where I will continue my study of paranoia in DeLillo's novels, but this time with a focus on terror" (3).

Peter Boxall, in *Don DeLillo: The Possibility of Fiction*, has a historical point of view towards *Libra*. He contends that history must definitely go through the process of becoming to be qualified to become historical: "Historical figures, as much as historical plots, wheel into themselves, until they reach that mystical point at which they enter history, the point at which they assume the heavy responsibility of being what they are" (131). However, the very probability of turning into historical includes a denial of history, "just as history does not allow for the process of becoming" (131). History can read becoming only through the filter of that which has already become. Boxall, referring to Walter Benjamin, argues that "a historical fact only becomes historical posthumously" (131). To watch history become is to testify the development of a story that has been told so many times, to watch time move along covert wires.

Marjolein Kolkman explores suspense in *Libra*. In her thesis she states that "*Libra* is well acclaimed and many papers have been written about DeLillo's novel; however, none focus solely on suspense in the novel" (3). DeLillo applies several methods to boost the level of suspense in this postmodern novel. Kolkman explores four aspects to analyze this level of dilemma: "The multiple narratives, the knowledge and continuing threat of the assassination, the role of Branch and the role of Oswald" (3). These four elements accord with the suspense throughout the novel. Paul Giaimo, in *Appreciating Don DeLillo the Moral Force of a Writer's Work*, refers to *Libra* as a dystopia and the unspeakable. A true definition of the concept "the Unspeakable" (93) that can readily guide us comes from James W. Douglass's 2008 nonfiction treatment of exactly the same event DeLillo portrays in his novel *Libra*. The book *JFK and the Unspeakable: Why He Died and Why It Matters* is about the assassination of President

John F. Kennedy on November 22, 1963, written as a direct and data-supported history of that killing, positing as objective truth what Don DeLillo's *Libra* is limited to suggesting that the death of Kennedy was the result of a conspiracy and that the "lone gunman theory" (93), posited by the Warren Commission Report, which DeLillo apparently had access to during the composition of *Libra*, is not accurate. Giaimo believes that the major theme of *Libra* is the theme of unspeakable evil.

Timothy Melley, in *The Covert Sphere Secrecy, Fiction, and the National Security State*, proposes that "DeLillo locates the value of his novel *Libra* in its use of invention over traditional historiography. In a case in which rumors, facts, suspicions, official subterfuge, conflicting sets of evidence, and a dozen labyrinthine theories all mingle" (147). He explains that *Libra* offers readers "a way of thinking about the [Kennedy] assassination without being constrained by half-facts or overwhelmed by possibilities" (147). DeLillo calls his novel a refuge and an asset precisely because it "makes no claim to literal truth," but is a "work of imagination" (147) in which the author has "altered and embellished reality" (147). What DeLillo desperately needed to invent, moreover, was "officers of intelligence agencies and . . . organized crime figures" (147). The work of the fiction writer seems most urgently needed at the interface of public history and the covert state. Works like *Libra* poise narrative invention with expressions of historical skepticism to offer the limits of knowledge in a dysfunctional public area. While the novel gives two detailed descriptions of Kennedy's assassination, it refuses to resolve the popular "lone-gunman versus conspiracy" (147) debate. *Libra* also gives an explanation on the frustrations of the CIA historian Nicholas Branch, suggesting that we cannot produce a vivid narrative, even though we gain access to the secret archive of the State.

Patrick O'Donnell, in *Latent Destinies*, probes cultural paranoia. He explores the source or cause of paranoia which becomes a means for questioning its existence. He asks if there has been a plot to kill Kennedy, for instance, or an "insistence on figuring assassination plots around the historical accident called Lee Harvey Oswald mark an obsession with historical and political plots" (15). He asserts, "If Oswald did not exist, wouldn't we have to invent him as, indeed, it appears we have done according to the Oswald-fictions of Mailer's *Oswald's Tale* (1995) and DeLillo's *Libra* (1988)?" (15). In *Libra* an accurate reflection on clash between narrative conspiracy and the possibilities of realities, what replaces this lost sense of a consistent reality are the graphic productions of cultural paranoia.

### **3. Theoretical Framework: John Rawls' Theory of Justice and Equality**

The researchers employ John Rawls's theory of justice and ethical standards in addressing Don DeLillo's novel in order to find out if DeLillo's postmodern novels are in line with the realistic utopia Rawls has portrayed in his works. John Rawls, in his major books, *A Theory of Justice* (1971), *Political Liberalism* (1993), and *The Law of Peoples* (1999) illustrates an ideal society. He writes about various points including, a realistic utopia, justice of fairness and the idea of a well-ordered society.

#### **3.1. A Theory of Justice**

Rawls's most discussed work is his theory of a just liberal society, called justice as fairness. He states, "the aim of justice as fairness is to resolve this question by starting from the idea of society as a fair system of cooperation in which the fair terms of cooperation are agreed upon by Citizens..." (7). He considers this approach as the basic structure of society. Besides, Rawls points out two principles in serial order. One of them is "the absolute weight of liberty with regard to social and economic advantages," (63) and the other is "the distinction between fundamental rights and liberties and economic and social benefits" (55) which differs among primary social goods that one should try to use. He argues that in justice as fairness society is interpreted for collective advantage and in this public system of rules men are supposed to act together so as "to produce a greater sum of benefits and assigns to each certain recognized claims to a share in the proceeds" (74). In addition, he believes that justice as fairness estimates the social system from the position of equal citizenship and the different levels of earning and richness.

Besides, he writes about the idea of a well-ordered society. In justice as fairness the basic idea of society as a just system of cooperation over generations is developed in conjunction with "two companion ideas: the idea of citizens as free and equal persons, and the idea of a well-ordered society as a society effectively regulated by a public political conception of justice" (341). He believes that a society is well-ordered on condition that it conveys three things: firstly, it is "a society where everyone accepts, and knows that the others accept, the same principles of justice" (4); and secondly, its basic structure and how they fit together as "one system of cooperation" (410). And thirdly, its citizens have a "normally effective sense of justice" (435). Such a society is regarded just and ideal, and any conception of justice that cannot provide a permanent democracy is not accepted.

#### **3.2. Political Liberalism**

In *Political Liberalism*, Rawls talks about justice as fairness and states, "the aim of justice as fairness is to resolve this question by starting from the idea of society as a fair

system of cooperation in which the fair terms of cooperation are agreed upon by Citizens..." (35). He considers this approach as "the basic structure of society" (286). Besides, he poses the idea of a well-ordered society. He writes:

In a democratic society there is a tradition of democratic thought, the content of which is at least familiar and intelligible to the educated common sense of citizens generally. Society's main institutions, and their accepted forms of interpretation, are seen as a fund of implicitly shared ideas and principles. (14)

Rawls holds that justice as fairness begins from within a political convention and gradually takes its basic idea from its society as a fair system from generation to generation. Two companion fundamental ideas develop with the central organizing idea: one of them is the idea of citizens who deal with cooperation as free and equal people and the other is the idea of a well-ordered society which is inspired by political conception of justice.

### **3.3. The Law of Peoples**

Furthermore, in, *The Law of Peoples*, Rawls writes about a realistic utopia. He hopes that in the future we would have a reasonably just and democratic societies of peoples. "In such a social world peace and justice would be achieved between liberal and decent peoples both at home and abroad" (6). He believes that the idea of this society is "realistically Utopian in that it depicts an achievable social world that combines political right and justice for all liberal and decent peoples in a Society of Peoples" (6). In *A Theory of Justice* and *Political Liberalism* he examines the ways "how a liberal society might be possible" (6). In *The Law of Peoples*, he states how a world society of liberal and decent Peoples might be possible.

Clearly, many would argue that "it is not possible, and that Utopian elements may be a serious defect in a society's political culture" (6). On the contrary, he would not deny that such elements could be misconceived. He believes the concept of a realistic utopia is crucial. He suggests that two ideas draw the law of peoples. One is "the great evils of human history — unjust war and oppression, religious persecution and the denial of liberty of conscience, starvation and poverty" (126), which comes from political injustice. The other one, clearly connected with the first is that "once the gravest forms of political injustice are eliminated by following just social policies and establishing just basic institutions, these great evils will eventually disappear" (126). He calls a world where these great evils have been eliminated and just basic institutions founded by decent and liberal people who care about the law of peoples, a real utopia.

#### 4. Discussion: Reading *Libra*

##### 4.1. Representations of Paranoia and Conspiracy

*Libra*, Don DeLillo's ninth novel is a mixture of historical fact and fictional supposition. It deals with the events that helped shape the assassination of President John F. Kennedy on November 22, 1963. The story is about Lee Harvey Oswald's life, the protagonist, as an adolescent in the Marine Corps, his marriage, and his role in Kennedy's assassination. DeLillo grew up in the same Bronx neighborhood as Oswald without ever actually meeting him. DeLillo states that the assassination attempt made on Kennedy was in fact a conspiracy by the CIA so as to convince the government to have "an invasion of Cuba" (Whelan 15). In the novel, Oswald is portrayed as a strange man with dyslexia.

Timothy Melley, in this regard, considers DeLillo's *Libra* "as one of his major examples of dysfunctional narrative. This seems misguided to me. What *Libra* so brilliantly reveals about the Kennedy case is the dysfunction of *the public sphere itself*" (146). DeLillo, in *Libra*, writes, "Oswald is an aggravation. He knows some little *iffy* things" (430). He is not portrayed sympathetically, nor is he criticized; he is behaved fairly in the novel, yet is not a character easy to attach to. He loves his wife, yet he beats her; he dotes upon his children yet disrespects his mother. DeLillo also introduces other men involved in the assassination attempt: Win Everett, Beryl Parmenter, and Guy Banister. They are the conspirators of the assassination of President Kennedy.

Jeremy Green, in *The Cambridge Companion to Don DeLillo*, writes Everett is a "disgraced CIA officer who has an intimate knowledge of surveillance technology, muses on its troubling aspects: Spy planes, drone aircraft, satellites with cameras that can see from three hundred miles what you can see from a hundred feet" (Duvall 102,103). Also, Beryl Parmenter is "the wife of one of the CIA conspirators, watching the continuous reruns on television of Ruby shooting Oswald as the horror became mechanical" (33). Despite the fact that the novel is based on historical events and real-life figures, it is not an attempt to produce a historically accurate version of these events. DeLillo does not aim to explain "what really happened" (Whelan 6) on November 22<sup>nd</sup> and he does not establish an unequivocally true account of the assassination conspiracy. Rather, he aims to provide ways of thinking about the assassination without being constrained by half-facts or overwhelmed by possibilities. This does not mean to say that it is necessarily untrue, merely that the question of truth or falsity is not relevant to our understanding or appreciation of the novel. It is a work of fiction and, as such, it should come as no surprise that DeLillo's engagement with, and account of these figures and events should bear so many of the hallmarks of his work in general.

The terror and homicide, in the society, indicate paranoia and anthropophobia in the society and this is in contrast with the utopian world John Rawls has mentioned in his major works. Paranoia, or the threat of complete engulfment by somebody else's system, is eagerly sensed by many of the dramatis personae of postmodernist fiction. It is an indirect mimetic representation of the climate of fear and suspicion that prevailed throughout the Cold War. It is the unfounded belief that someone is out to hurt us — affects our society, more than we've ever suspected and possibly more than ever before. A person who is paranoid has a strong inclination to feel that you cannot trust other people or that other people have a bad opinion of you. In addition, conspiracy is the activity of secretly planning with other people to do something bad or illegal. In a well-ordered society, as Rawls believes, people should respect the rights of others so that we can have "peace and justice" (6); while, paranoia and conspiracy change the balance in such a society. Norman Mailer, in his book, *Oswald's Tale*, writes, "America is cursed with an absurdity. There was no logic to the event and no sense of balance in the universe. Historical absurdity (like the war in Vietnam) breeds social disease" (357).

Patrick O'Donnell argues that "paranoia manifests itself as a mechanism that rearranges chaos into order, the contingent into the determined ... it is a means of (re)writing history" (11). This search is a desire for conspiracy as well, and therefore it shows paranoia, a mind frame that O'Donnell tells the reader "can be viewed as the reaction-formation par excellence to the schizophrenia of postmodern identity, economy, and aesthetics" (11). DeLillo poses paranoia because he wants to illustrate the intricacies of living in a de-centered, fragmented postmodern nation. In *Libra*, conspiracy emerges in a modern world after the assassination of JFK, and we can experience the effects of conspiracy on our culture through the characters of Oswald and Everett. *Libra*, as DeLillo's own explanation of history, tells us conspiracy and paranoia are the major players in the psychology of our times.

Regarding social justice, John Rawls holds that justice is the first step in social institutions, as truth is of basis of thought. Rawls, in *A Theory of Justice*, notes, "A theory however elegant and economical must be rejected or revised if it is untrue; likewise, laws and institutions no matter how efficient and well-arranged must be reformed or abolished if they are unjust" (3). He contends that a just society must not allow that "the sacrifices imposed on a few are outweighed by the larger sum of advantages enjoyed by many" (3). In addition, he notes that "the primary subject of justice is the basic structure of society, or more exactly, the way in which the major social institutions distribute fundamental rights and duties and determine the division of advantages from social cooperation" (6). He believes the doctrine of justice would



adjust a well-ordered society and thus states that everyone in such society “is presumed to act justly and to do his part in upholding just institutions” (8), while the postmodern society is dominated by injustice and disorder.

Regarding injustice and lack of order, Patrick O'Donnell, in *Latent Destinies*, states that in *Oswald's Tale*, the remedy to a public disorder takes the form of an illness, “for the performance of Oswald's character — the articulation of this tragic as opposed to absurd figure — relies on certain contradictions that reinscribe the conditions of cultural paranoia critiqued in DeLillo and disseminated in JFK” (72). Paul Giaimo, in *Appreciating Don DeLillo*, believes that DeLillo's works are in conjunction with social injustice inspired by Nelson Algren's work: “the aesthetic influence of Nelson Algren is ignored by the majority of critics” (1). The domination of the American civil writer of *The Man with the Golden Arm* (and another mimetic realist) appears in DeLillo's clear and merciful description of the “American underclass and of social injustice” (1) more generally, two of Algren's great particular involvement.

#### **4.2. Schizophrenia and Social Justice**

A few writers pose the problem of postmodernism's schizophrenia along with paranoia. Fredric Jameson, whose theory is based on Lacan's conception of subjectivity, provides a definition that is on the basis of his understanding of schizophrenia from Lacan's theory of language disorder. A Schizophrenic experiences isolation and disconnection so that s/he cannot link up coherence, hence s/he “does not know personal identity in our sense, since our feeling of identity depends on our sense of the persistence of the ‘I’ and the ‘me’ over time” (*Consumer Society* 119). Danielle Bukowski argues that “the postmodern schizophrenic is incapacitated by the fragmentation of time into a series of perpetual presents, and so becomes an agent-less non-self” (125). Jameson's vision is not just a diminishing of agency and identity but a total removal. A schizophrenic mode of knowledge causes inability to make connections.

In *Libra*, paranoia is experienced as paranoid schizophrenia. As defined by the Mayo Clinic, paranoid schizophrenia is a type of schizophrenia in which sufferers exhibit traits of both schizophrenia and paranoia: “The classic features of paranoid schizophrenia are having delusions and hearing things that aren't real. The delusions are paranoid — thinking someone is out to get you—but sufferers are distinctly experiencing psychosis, which is a break from reality” (Mayo Clinic). The World Health Organization classifies paranoid schizophrenia as “dominated by relatively stable, often paranoid delusions, usually accompanied by hallucinations, particularly of the auditory variety, and perceptual disturbances. Disturbances of affect, volition

and speech, and catatonic symptoms, are either absent or relatively inconspicuous” (ICD-10 F20.0).

We can read paranoid schizophrenia as a fusion between paranoia and schizophrenia, but one which is not as strongly experienced as either paranoia or schizophrenia. The disturbances of affect usually associated with schizophrenia are missing from paranoid schizophrenia, and while paranoids’ suspicions are overreactions grounded in reality (i. e., thinking someone is going to poison you because they handed you a drink), paranoid schizophrenics’ suspicions are not grounded in observed events. Norman Mailer, in *The Armies of the Night*, explores paranoia and schizophrenia in the American society. He holds that schizophrenia creates brutality among Americans so that “the average good Christian American secretly loves the war in Vietnam” (191). He writes that “we live in a universe where our aspiration for coherence and order is so serious that we create narratives of conspiracy in order to provide answers and meaning” (191). Therefore, it is illuminating to observe how paranoia and conspiracy ruin social order.

#### **4.3. Suzanne and the Ethical Questions**

In order to recreate the Bay of Pigs invasion, which went wrong the first time, Win Everette, the political conspirator, plans an attempt to not assassinate John F. Kennedy, creating an assassination designed to put an end with a shot which deliberately misses. He uses Lee Harvey Oswald to fulfill his plan. We know from the outset that Win is a man with a lot to hide; he thinks about secrets at breakfast. A man with that much to hide must, without a doubt, lead a double life, meaning he is one person at work (or wherever his secrets take place) and another when he is at home. Although Win leads a double life, he is dependent on his family, too; he has to “be aware of his wife’s whereabouts at all times. He is okay as long as he knew where she was. She had to be close and he had to know where she was. Those were the two inner rules” (222). Inner secrets in Everett may cause insecurities.

Whelan states that perhaps in a universe that is so covered and fractured, “this is one of the few ways he can find comfort” (16). He further contends that “anxiety and secrets are not limited to the adults in the Everett family, as readers find these traits in Suzanne as well” (16). When readers learn about his daughter, Suzanne, they find that “she stood with her head propped against her daddy’s arm, feet crossed in a certain way, half sullen, a routine bid for attention” (18). Although it may be normal for a little girl to vie for her parents’ attention, it does not seem appropriate to appear as sullen, especially when at the end of the paragraph we see Mary Frances, Everett’s wife listening to “a commentary on the need for parents to be more vigilant in checking

what their children read and watch and listen to" (18). These statements imply that Suzanne may face the narratives that she has no business hearing. As we go through the book, we find Everett "at work devising a general shape, a life. He would script a gunman out of ordinary dog-eared paper, the contents of a wallet . . . They wanted a name, a face, a bodily frame they might use to extend their fiction into the world" (50).

We discover Suzanne is inspired by her father's conduct. DeLillo writes that "Suzanne sat next to her mother, arms at her sides, slim white legs pointed straight out, a show of mock obedience" (135). This detachment is sensed at the beginning of the novel as we see Mary Frances in the car thinking about her happiness, while "Suzanne [is] holding her breath" (136). In fact, Suzanne is already learning how to become an inner figure, as she is applying the techniques of detachment, and is already harboring secrets, just like her father. These messages are developed in the last emergence of the child in the novel, at which point the reader is made aware of Suzanne's inner secret. Suzanne pretends to be asleep, but as soon as she knows her parents are out, she begins her mission to move her little figures. There is danger involved because "once they found the Little Figures, that was the end of Suzanne. She would have no protection left in the world" (365). Soon the nature of the figures is revealed and Suzanne, the six-year old girl, is never clear of "the dark scary side" (366). Every night she sleeps with her little figures of a clay man and a clay woman. Harold Bloom proposes, "The little Figures were not toys. She never played with them. The whole reason for the Figures was to hide them until the time when she might need them" (148). It seems she has to keep them near and safe lest the people who call themselves her parents be really someone else.

Suzanne is already aware of the fabricated people living around her, most importantly her parents. She must rely on her clay dolls just as her father has to have his figure (his wife) around him at all times to feel safe, or just as her mother has to reassure herself that her family is happy. Suzanne has clearly learned the techniques of detachment from her own family, and is already in the process of creating another family that satisfies her needs, just as Everett uses Oswald in the conspiracy. Like Oswald, she begins to show signs of paranoia, participating in her life. Win has no idea that his daughter has become involved in the world of secrets and paranoia. This is observed in his dismissal of his wife's concerns when he says, "She's all right ... she's a healthy child" (222). He has not consciously, or intentionally, intended for Suzanne to pick up these habits, but it has become inevitable that Suzanne will pick up on, and absorb this paranoia.

Concerning the novel, Jeremy Green notes that "the voice of warning is never far away ... Danger everywhere" (18). He intones a radio commentary "on the need for

parents to be more vigilant in checking what their children read and watch and listen to" (18). We read in the novel that when Mary Frances Everett "hears these words at breakfast one morning", she quickly "applies their lesson to her six-year old daughter, worrying about her moods, her secrecy" (102). DeLillo, additionally, portrays the character of Suzanne in a way that what is observed is that conspiracy and paranoia are not confined only to the players, but instead, the effects are also felt by their children. Whelan notes that "Suzanne's story encourages us to see that we are all in some way or other responsible for, and implicated in, the conspiracy theories that abound in our society" (17), and as a consequence, we are all vulnerable to the resulting paranoia. DeLillo wishes to draw our attention to the expanding presence of paranoia and fear in our society; a presence that he finds disturbing. DeLillo illustrates the effects of paranoia on our society and, regarding Suzanne, it is noteworthy that children are inspired by their parents and this fear can raise ethical questions.

## **5. Conclusion**

*Libra* is based on a famous historical event, which allows the readers to be aware of President Kennedy's assassination. The effect of conspiracy, paranoia, and plot has been shown not only in *Libra*, but also for the everyday lives of Americans. The effects of these narratives and the versions of history indicate the presence of paranoia in our society. This dysfunctional public sphere, Mailer argues, tends to create mass schizophrenia so that the average good Christian American secretly loves the war in Vietnam. We live in a universe where our aspiration for coherence and order is so serious that we create narratives of conspiracy in order to provide answers and meaning. This is in contrast with a well-ordered society. Conspiracy seems to be the essence of postmodernism. By delivering his own description of the Kennedy assassination and its effects, DeLillo gives an explanation of this historical event that may in fact be more real than any other, precisely because it does not provide answers or impart a final truth. In *Libra* we see that Oswald's character is angry and contradictory and he wants to get himself noticed. His paranoia is paranoid schizophrenia in that he feels everyone, from the Russian and US government to pro- and anti-Castro factions, is out to get him. It seems that DeLillo provides the reader with an account indicating fear and paranoia abounding in our world. Besides, the mystery of assassination informs the reader of the incoherent and fragmented aspects of postmodernism. In fact, in order to improve standards, DeLillo illustrates an accurate personal account of the effects of paranoia on our society.

As for social justice, it is noteworthy that John Rawls, in *A Theory of Justice*, argues that justice is the first virtue of social institutions, as truth is of systems of thought.

Also, Rawls addresses the welfare of the society and proposes that each person should possess an inviolability founded on justice that even the welfare of society as a whole cannot override. For this reason, justice denies that the loss of freedom for some is made right by a greater good shared by others. He believes a just society must not allow the sacrifices imposed on a few to be outweighed by the larger sum of advantages enjoyed by many. In addition, he holds that the primary subject of justice is the basic structure of society, or more exactly, the way in which the major social institutions distribute fundamental rights and duties and determine the division of advantages from social cooperation. Moreover, he argues that the principles of justice would regulate a well-ordered society and believes everyone, in this society, is presumed to act justly and to do his part in upholding just institutions. It seems that, regarding conspiracy, paranoia and assassination, we do not have a, so to speak, well-ordered society in the postmodern world, and we come to an understanding that American society is cursed in this regard. Therefore, the postmodern world is where social justice and socio ethical standards are ignored.



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