

## Responding to Neoliberal America: A Jamesonian Reading of David Foster Wallace's *Girl with Curious Hair*

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### Abstract

This research intends to read David Foster Wallace's *Girl with Curious Hair* from a Jamesonian perspective. In this research, it is argued that the American people's ideology has been shaped by liberalism and neoliberalism which are the main products of modernity and postmodernity and it is discussed that Wallace, as a critique of neoliberal society rejects the capitalist values that are influencing people's lives. This research proves that liberalism and neoliberalism are imposing false identities on people to preserve their power. According to Fredric Jameson, historicizing literary texts helps the readers comprehend all layers of meanings in a text. He talks about the alienation and reification of postmodern man caused by the authorities' use of ideology to preserve power. With ideology, the citizens are turned into consumers who have lost their identity and the postmodern man loses his true identity and faces his death. Wallace's *Girl with Curious Hair* can be studied to see how Wallace shows the importance of ideology in the American neoliberal system which can help them preserve power, give people false identities, and turn them into alienated, reified people who only follow the values of a neoliberal society and forget about all the other values.

**Keywords:** Alienation; History; Identity; Ideology; Power; Reification

### 1. Introduction

Man has encountered lots of challenges and difficulties throughout history and by examining all these challenges and struggles, it can be seen that identity and finding a true self has always been significant to man. In

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each era, the world has witnessed the dominance of a group of people who have tried to rule other people, and to do so, they need to impose certain identities on people. After the 19<sup>th</sup> century, with the development of liberalism and neoliberalism, there were new hopes for a better future, a better life, and reaching the desirable self and identity. However, after putting them into practice, they turned out to be destructive and it was observed that the identity they imposed on people was not the desired one. People were turned into finger-puppets who only followed the rules and consumed the products in a capitalist society. Fredric Jameson's main concern has always been the matter of culture and identity in the postmodern world and he has always tried to explain how the capitalist authorities plan to use people to be able to preserve their power. Wallace attacks neoliberalism and neoliberal values in his works to show people the dangerous situation they are living in and he also tries to give them a solution. In this research, his work will be examined from Jameson's perspective.

Before the 20<sup>th</sup> century, People were working on farms and everything was different back then. The economic system was different and the life and situation of people were nothing like today. By the Industrial Revolution, there was the development of the bourgeoisie and the emergence of capitalism. Capitalism brought with it its ideology to work on people's minds and lifestyles. New systems like liberalism and neoliberalism were offered as promising systems and people hoped to have better life conditions by following their values and instructions. These systems needed to control people's minds to turn them into desirable citizens. Thus, they started to set ideologies and spread them through different institutions and by different techniques. They used literature and art, schools and universities, and even entertainment. Therefore, all the values started to change and people were influenced by the superstructure that was controlled by the authorities. Wallace is one of the writers who noticed the danger humans are facing and he tried to open their eyes and warn them both in his fiction and nonfiction. He asked people to refuse to accept neoliberal and capitalist values and find another way to live and discover new identities for themselves.

## **2. Literature Review**

In *The Cambridge Companion to David Foster Wallace*, Ralph Clare analyzes and examines Wallace's personal life and historical background and the influential factors in his writings. The cultural, economic, and political changes of the second half of the 20th century are mentioned in this book and Wallace's main concerns are discussed. Wallace's

impression of contemporary literature can be found in this book in addition to a complete examination of his books.

In *Conversations with David Foster Wallace*, Stephen Burn's main attempt was to show Wallace's inner thoughts and intentions to make his writings more palpable to the readers. The book is full of conversations with Wallace and by reading these conversations, the readers will understand Wallace's intentions and thoughts in his writings. The book can help Wallace's readers to know his writing process, literary influences on him, and his standpoints on different topics like cultural and social matters and also his approach to writing and literature, and his ideas about popular culture and media.

In *Understanding David Foster Wallace*, four fictions of David Foster Wallace are examined in this book. Two of his novels *The Broom of the System* and *Infinite Jest*, and the story collections *Girl with Curious Hair* and *Brief Interviews with Hideous Men* are the works discussed by Marshall Boswell to show the readers how Wallace has presented his purpose for writing fiction. An analysis of Wallace's personal life, and experiences, works, and themes, are discussed in this book alongside the influences he gained from his environment and the writers and critics he was interested in. Wallace's position in literature, the challenges he had with modernism and postmodernism and the conventional literary forms and styles are the discussions made in this book and the dominant themes and concerns of his writings and his desire to warn his readers and find a solution to the identity problem of the contemporary era make this book a valuable collection for Wallace readers.

Different books have talked about Wallace's and Jameson's thoughts and ideas, their writing styles, and the influences they had on literature. The present research has brought these two thinkers together to show Wallace's defiance of capitalism and neoliberalism in Jamesonian terms. In neoliberal societies, the authorities found entertainment as an easy way to control people's minds. They use entertainment to spread ideology to turn the citizens into consumers and to make the citizens help them preserve power.

### **3. Theoretical Framework: Fredric Jameson**

Here are some of Jameson's key ideas that were applied to Wallace's works in this study. The first one is historicizing the work of art as he always insists on historicizing to find the latent meanings and to find all the influential factors in shaping the literary work. The second one is the matter of reification and alienation of the postmodern man which is the problem of the postmodern man. Due to industrialization and the primacy

of market and commodification, man is reified and alienated and has turned into a consumer.

The next one is the importance of ideology which is the most important factor in a capitalist society that can help the system shape the identity of people. The last one is the matter of power that is spread in the society and all the institutions practice power on the citizens and help the dominant power to be preserved. Jameson emphasizes that in the postmodern era, all the cultural phenomena, popular culture, television, media, etc. help the system to distribute power and control people.

### ***3.1. Historicizing***

"Always historicize" (Jameson, 1982). One needs to look at the text with attention to the context in which it is created. The text shows the social and economic forces of its time (Roberts, 2001). There are economic relations between every single structure in society and nothing is separated from economic principles. Everything comes out of economics even art that comes from a person's mind that was engaged in economic relations with the society.

According to the Marxists, economics is the base of all societies which shapes superstructure. In a society, money is the most important factor, and those who own money and make money are superior to others. The superstructure supports them as well; the form of law and all principles will be in a way that they are supported. This superstructure includes religion, ethics, art, culture, education, and so on (Roberts, 2001). Jameson believes that this ideology that has structured culture and art has constructed people's identities. As a result, neoliberalism creates identity for people and claims it is the best for the postmodern man. For Jameson, the right or wrong of these ideas is not important. It is the identity they create that is more important (Roberts, 2001). With so great effect ideology has on culture, a Marxist critic knows that any piece of art that emerges out of this culture should be read as ideological as well, together with other possible readings. They all reveal the ideology from which they are born.

### ***3.2. Reification and Alienation***

Jameson believes the only way to save the existence of humanity is through art. Only art can resist and help people resist. It can resist reification and can rebuild the sense of the totality a society needs to be glorious with. According to Jameson, culture, and art are influenced by commodification and capitalism, and culture, as Adorno says, is the "culture industry" in a capitalist society. There is a commodification of

art. Culture is corrupted and infected by capitalism and capitalism has turned culture into a "culture industry"(Roberts, 2001).

Art and literature in such societies are only to stupefy people to think everything is the way it should be and therefore there would be no sense of resistance or revolution (Roberts 40). The dullness and repetition of music shows are symptoms of capitalist oppression. Jameson agrees with Adorno who "attacks popular American culture of the 1930s and 1940s as designedly dull and repetitive, feeding the populace minimal variations of the same oppressive stories of love and adventure to stupefy them, to turn them into sheep and so effectively to defuse their revolutionary potential"(Roberts, 2001). It only tends to keep people away from novelty and creativity and takes away the power of their minds. Therefore, they would think the life they have is quite natural and normal and there is no need for resistance.

Traditional conventional music only causes conventional reactions; reactions that were anticipated and put people in a routine, dictated life with dictated feelings, tastes, enjoyment, and hobbies. Everything popular only teaches people to enjoy the things that are familiar to them and there is no pleasure in resistance to creativity and novelty of ideas (Roberts, 2001). Therefore, popular culture is another tool for the oppression of people in society and preserving power. "The dull repetitive music and dull repetitive films conditioning people into accepting their dull repetitive jobs and lives, into thinking that this dullness and repetition is somehow natural instead of a symptom of capitalist oppression"(Roberts, 2001). On the other hand, new creative unconventional music, movies or literature teaches people to be creative, to resist the monotonous life, and to rebel. Jameson believes that art and literature are the best ways for resistance. Literature can be unconventional in the same way as music. Lots of realistic works show the injustice in a capitalist society and they open people's eyes to the miserable situation they have.

A new unconventional piece of writing like Beckett's is the best because it challenges the mind, breaks all the settled concepts in the mind, and makes people build a new mindset. This new mindset can easily oppose the dominant ideology of capitalism and can break the self that liberalism and neoliberalism have created. The challenge the reader faces in reading such texts is the price he should pay for thinking real thoughts (Roberts, 2001). What Jameson claims is that art and literature have the power to resist the reification and the blindness it has caused people. But people must be aware of the popular culture art and literature that only amuse people to forget about the miseries they have and take away their power of revolution and resistance (Jameson, 1988).

### **3.3. Ideology in Capitalist Societies**

Neoliberalism is another form of capitalism for Jameson and he calls it late capitalism and claims that the world is in the stage of global capitalism. He believes that the identity and consciousness of people are determined by their existence in a society, their relations and interactions with other people, and their reactions and responses to the social and economic forces in a society. Ideology is a crucial element in shaping the identity of people and Jameson finds it a threat to man's life condition and identity. To Jameson, capitalism is a system that is manipulative and alienating. All aspects of modern life and all conditions of people's lives, including culture, are influenced by the ideology that is used by capitalism. Cultural production (like art, literature, and media) are means to impose the dominant ideology of capitalism on people's minds. The authorities control people's minds and lives, determine their way of life, and make them alienated. Ideology in every system refers to all the dominant beliefs ideas and values of the system that is influential in shaping the culture and cultural phenomena and social relations in a society.

Through ideology, one can see how cultural phenomena are produced in, for instance, capitalist society and how ideology can help this system preserve its power. Jameson agrees with Althusser in considering "ideology not just as false-consciousness, but as the structures of thought and feeling that define us as citizens in late capitalist society. Culture has a large part to play in this form of ideology – an increasing part, eclipsing now the roles played by education, religion, and patriotism. We learn much of how to act, what to believe, how to perform, and indeed how to *be* from the culture around us"(Roberts, 2001). He pays attention to popular culture as a means to distribute ideology. Jameson finds popular culture interesting and believes that the conflict between the dominant ideologies in society and all other subordinate ideologies happens in popular culture. He believes that the authorities use popular culture to produce and distribute their dominant ideology and it can be even used to challenge any kind of ideology they disagree with. He believes that popular culture reflects the collective consciousness of people in society. Jameson believes that this ideology that has structured culture and art has constructed people's identities. As a result, neoliberalism creates an identity for people and claims it is the best for modern man. For Jameson, the right or wrong of these ideas is not important. It is the identity they create that is more important (Roberts, 2001).

### **3.4. *The Concept of Power***

According to Jameson, in each society, the most powerful group takes the power in hand and controls people's lives. This group makes other subordinate groups and institutions obey the rules and work for the preservation of the dominant power. For instance, Marx announces religious institutions to be the means to preserve the dominant power by stupefying people and hiding the truth from them (Roberts, 2001). In a capitalist society, culture and power have an entangled relationship. This relationship is very significant to Jameson and he explains the way the authorities manipulate cultural production to preserve power in capitalist society. The capitalist authorities use culture to support their interests and values. Culture is manipulated to influence people's understanding of life and to teach people how to observe the world around them. "Lots of institutions are involved in the production, distribution, and consumption of art, entertainment, information, and knowledge, from the media industries through the universities to the corporate research institutes" (Homer & Kellner, 2004).

Jameson considers power, culture, and capitalism dynamic and intertwined, and defying the dominant power is not as easy as the old times when people defied the kings and queens. Power is spread in all organs of the society and it is difficult to be defied. Neoliberal or capitalist authorities attack culture by using entertainment, media, or any other cultural phenomena to shape people's desires, worldviews, and everyday experiences of life in a media-saturated society (Jameson, 2000). According to Jameson, if people want to defy capitalism and regain their freedom, they need to find the ruling system and discover how it is manipulating power and spreading ideology. To find out about these, one needs to understand the social and economic relationships that exist in society (Roberts, 2001).

## **4. Discussion**

### **4.1. *Historicizing Girl with Curious Hair***

Wallace's writing was a bridge between "Generation X which spanned the stagflated 1970s to the slackered 1990s and was perceived to be cynical and lethargic, and the Millennials, whose wired-era ambitions and optimistic outlook on life signaled a shifting generational ethos" (Clare, 2018). His works can be studied ideologically and he "has been embraced by members of Gen X largely because of his diagnosis of debilitating, cultural irony; his call for sincerity in a media-saturated, consumerist world; and his ability to reveal a core sadness that persisted in a post-Cold

War would-be utopian America"(Clare, 2018). The stories in *Girl with Curious Hair* are full of boundary oppositions such as self and other and poststructuralist conceptions of presence and absence and their main concern is popular culture and the ideology, they create in the society which was the main concern of the last decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century due to the rise of the influence of television and social media on people.

Wallace spent his life working on popular culture and he believed that when someone deals with commercial art, watching TV for instance, unconsciously they accept that pleasure and entertainment are an important aim of art because they are enjoying that. However the question here concerns the aim of giving pleasure and whether the audience is aware of that aim or not (Boswell, 2020). In *Girl with Curious Hair*, Wallace tried to answer this question. He attempted to show the readers how popular culture can be influential in people's lives and how it can give them false consciousness and false identity. It also brings loneliness and isolation to people, separates them from others, eliminates human relations, and replaces them with neoliberal values and commodities.

The X generation "of which Wallace was an uneasy member", practiced "self-satisfied irony and pop-culture in-jokes" but Wallace had something different in mind when he was working on *Girl with Curious Hair* (Boswell, 2020). He tried to find the problem with irony and the discontent in the society. Wallace is one of the first writers who warned people of the danger of loneliness caused by television and he claims that it is the source of "great despair and stasis in U.S. culture"(Wallace, 1993). He was the first to criticize the way the new generation watched TV in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century and claimed that in the 1990s, Generation X watched television with "tender, ironic derision"(Clare, 2018). This is the irony that Wallace warns people about because it only brings stasis and disaffection to society. People only sit and criticize but the ability to react and rebel has been taken from them. What Wallace and writers like him try to do is to restate the meaning of humanity and human values. That's why in his fiction, Wallace always emphasizes honesty, responsibility, love, significance, empathy, and other humane values. He insists on joining cynicism and naivete because none of them alone can help people in life.

In his works he shows that the replacement of irony in the way the Television and the authorities have taught people is the cause of "our isolation and failure to find real meaning and purpose in our life"(Clare, 2018). What Wallace means by attacking irony and cynicism is not to make people afraid to think. He desires to give people back the ability to have freedom of thinking and to think critically instead of being indifferent to everything or cynical to everything around them which



again leads to their indifference (Clare, 2018). He believed that it is never enough to show the reader how pop culture can influence his life, how something like social media can change people's minds, and how pop culture can make people alienated from others and society. A writer needs to do more because knowing all these can also make them alienated again.

On the copyright page of *Girl with Curious Hair*, Wallace had to write "These stories are 100 percent fiction. Some of them project names of 'real' public figures onto made-up characters in made-up circumstances. Where the names of corporate, media, or political figures are used here, those names are meant only to denote figures, images, and the stuff of collective dreams; they do not denote, or pretend private information about, actual 3-D persons, living, dead, or otherwise" (as cited in Boswell, 2020). It is not just a way to get rid of the law and the rules that may cause trouble for the publication of the book, it is also a way to show how pop culture references or those important people in public media turn into archetypes and join the collective consciousness of people and how they influence their minds. "Pop culture is our new mythos, the source of our contemporary archetypes" (Boswell, 2020). These figures, influential in positive or negative ways, join the "Spiritus Mundi" which is the world spirit or a universal memory that exists in the world in people's minds (Boswell, 2020). From the innovative modernist techniques of William Faulkner and James Joyce to the postmodern metafiction of Barth and the new techniques of Wallace, these writers were trying to work on how the mindsets and perspectives of people were shaped in the 20<sup>th</sup> century and how contemporary history is being formed. Before Wallace, these writers were trying to show how normal people can be mythos and archetypes. But Wallace goes even further and shows how these people who have become archetypes can influence people's minds.

*Girl with Curious Hair* is written under the influence of Barth's and Joyce's works. Joyce wrote his novel, *Ulysses*, in the form of Odysseus' long journey to connect the events of his antihero's life to this "timeless archetypal past" (Boswell, 2020) and instead, Barth used the famous mythic archetypes in everyday life of his own contemporary time, to show that it is the narrative that is shaping the truth around us not the truth shaping our narratives. By the narratives, he means everything that is giving people's minds directions and teaching them what to believe whether it is ideologies of the government or simply the social events directed by pop culture references. In response to Barth's novels (which were responses to Joyce's novels), Wallace built the realm of the mythic from mass media (Boswell, 2020). He believed that people create their archetypes from pop culture references and mass media and create their

reality based on them and he moves one step forward by claiming that these real mass media figures are the modern everyday archetypes that are created by media and society and influence the minds of people. Barth's novel is conscious about this matter but Wallace's novel is even conscious of that self-consciousness which alienates man a second time. In his story collection, Wallace aimed to prove two points; one is the way these real popular media figures become a part of people's collective unconscious and then he showed that even that collective unconscious is made intentionally and consciously to be a part of our memory and history. Therefore, he pointed out that whatever is there in people's collective unconscious and whatever they believe to be the truth, is something constructed and spread as ideologies in people's minds and these ideologies have the power to control them and to reconstruct their identity.

By showing how the collective unconscious is formed, he showed the inevitability of having them in mind (as the postmodern writers do) and at the same time, he tried to show the reality that exists outside of the influence of the ideologies in a society. He called the reality that is imposed by the government "mediated" and said, "The book holds a mirror up to our mirror and, in so doing, seeks a way out of the postmodern dilemma, a way out that allows us to recognize the inescapability of mediated reality while at the same time pointing away from the mediated reality and toward some undepicted, yet still vital, reality—the reality surrounding those two mutually reflective mirrors"(Boswell, 2020). Therefore, according to Wallace, there is a way out of this mediated world or the closed system of ideologies, and people can resist and enter the undepicted, untouched, and pure reality of the universe.

#### ***4.2. Reification and Alienation in Girl with Curious Hair***

'Luckily the Account Representative Knew CPR' is a story about two men who leave their workplace late at night and go to the underground parking garage of the building that is frightening and empty at that time. One of them is a "newly divorced" Account Representative and the other one is an old man who is a "Vice President in Charge of Overseas Production" (Wallace, 1989). The narrator goes on to explain the similarities between these two businessmen by saying "Each man, leaving, balanced his weight against that of a heavily slender briefcase. Monograms and company logos flanked handles of leathered metal, which each man held. Each received, to the varying degrees their respective pains allowed, an *intuition of the askew* as, in the neatly stacked slices of lit space between the executive and the distant lament of a custodian's vacuum..." (Wallace, 1989). This pain none of them are aware of is the

pain of loneliness which Wallace has always been concerned with. In a society in the time of postmodernity, people are only attached by commodification and reification, material objects have decided for all values in a neoliberal society. They are lonely people in their lives and the only interaction they have is at work. Due to the elimination of human relations and the reifications of all emotions and feelings, people suffer from the pain of loneliness.

In this story, Wallace focuses on a shared theme with *Infinite Jest* which is "our isolation from one another as well as our inability to access the interior of others"(Boswell, 2020). Wallace believes that this pain all people in such societies feel and suffer from will eventually lead to their coming together and will lead to their survival and it will act like CPR as the title hints exactly like what he assumes as the purpose of a good fiction. These two men are alone in the underground parking garage and suddenly one of them, the older one gets a heart attack. "The Vice President in Charge of Overseas Production, gargling, holding his chest's recession, fell with a slow grace to the exhausted floor of the Executive Garage, where he proceeded to writhe"(Wallace, 1989). They are both lonely, one of them is old and the other is recently divorced but when they get close there is this possibility of CPR and survival. This is what Wallace asks people to do as a solution to the alienation problem of society that is caused by social media, commodification, and reification. He asks them to put away the mass media and all the things that move them away from direct communication with others and he wants them to get close to other people to apply CPR figuratively and save both themselves and others. He describes the "street above, across which two lovers walked, stately, pale as dolls, arms weaved, silent, listening for but hearing always no real difference in the city's constant distant nighttime traffic's hiss and sigh"(Wallace, 1989).

What Wallace proposes in this story is that the loneliness caused by any kind of mass media will lead to the destruction of humanity and it will be the death of the postmodern man and his solution is a simple one. Man can be saved by empowering human relations once again and getting in touch with other people. This power of saving people is what Wallace attributes to good fiction which he defies this way: "In dark times, the definition of good art would seem to be art that locates and applies CPR to those elements of what's human and magical that still live and glow despite the times' darkness. Really good fiction could have as dark a worldview as it wished, but it'd find a way both to depict this dark world *and* to illuminate the possibilities for being alive and human in it"(cited in Boswell, 2020). The matter of human relations is what Fredric Jameson is

also concerned with and he believed in a capitalist society they change into material and become reified. There is no place for human values and relations and they only live as consumers. Not only do they consume the products, but also, they consume the ideologies and they turn into the citizens that are appropriate for the capitalist societies.

#### ***4.3. Power in *Girl with Curious Hair****

In 'Little Expressionless Animals', the first story of this collection, Wallace talks about the television and the reality it offers and whatever is told through language to people via mass media to show none of them is the reality of the world and the truth. They are all "mediated reality" (Boswell, 2020). In 'Little Expressionless Animals' there is a game show named "Jeopardy" in which they estimate the knowledge of contestants but the show is different from other shows in this point that it gives the answer and asks the contestants to give the question. In this way, Wallace just makes the relationship between the reality of the world and TV reality more complicated. By having this kind of show and the inversion it has in the form of the question and answer, Wallace hints at the idea of hegemony or the power of authorities in society.

The government and the neoliberal authorities only give the citizens answers to deal with. They offer the solution and the ready-fit answers and they expect them to have them in their minds. These answers are the ideologies of a closed system for people. If a question is asked of someone, there are multiple possible subjective answers to be presented but when the answer is given, there is only one possible question to that answer and there would be no opportunity to think and use the power of creativity and innovation. Eliminating the power of creativity and the power of deduction and thinking is exactly what the capitalist system tries to do. "In Wallace's depiction the show is all about inversion and the fluidity of rules and binaries" (Boswell, 2020). When the protagonist of the story, an orphaned savant named Julie Smith, gives questions to all the answers and the director wants her out of the game because it is the fair rule of the game to be out and come back next year in case you win 5 times in a row, the producer, Merv Griffin, says "See that window? . . . That's where the rules go. Out that window" (Wallace, 1989). When there is the possibility of showing the questions to people and making them understand the situation the authorities wanted, the rules will go out the window. The window brings to the mind of the reader the TV screen that is the boundary between reality and fiction and by the attempts of the authorities all people are trapped in the TV screen and they are all inside the window; "outside the window is the real, while inside the window is

the game"(Boswell, 2020). Wallace desires to throw away the binaries between reality and fiction, combine the two, and set the people free of the false reality they have in their minds. At the same time, he shows that breaking through the TV Screen is impossible unless the authorities change their attitudes toward people and toward the nature of the reality that they offer people. This is what Wallace desires for the world. He wants the authorities to stop giving people false consciousness and fake reality and stop making a gap between the reality and the ideologies they want people to believe and he wants them to throw all those ideologies and rules away (out the window) and unite the two and offer people the reality and truth that can help them find their true identity and live a better life.

In the pause between the questions, she stares at the audience without any expression on her face like an expressionless animal, and "something happens to Julie Smith when the red lights light. . . . Every concavity in [her] now looks to have come convex. . . . Her face, on-screen, gives off an odd lambent UHF flicker; her expression, brightly serene, radiates a sort of oneness with the board's data" (Wallace, 1989). It is as if she becomes united with the television screen and becomes a part of television. This is what happens to the postmodern man. They have become united with popular culture. The authorities want people to break the boundary between the real outside and the reality depicted on television and be united with the false reality inside the TV screen which is the representation of any social media and she tries to make the two realities become one. This person who is uniting and also becoming united with the reality inside or in other words the ideology that is spread by TV, can give the right question to all answers because her identity has changed and her mindset is set according to what the government desires. By showing that Julie is becoming united with the screen and trying to unite the reality inside and outside, Wallace presents the impossibility of uniting the two realities because one is the objective reality and the other is the subjective and biased one that is controlled by the authorities. Inside the screen is the reality that the authorities want people to believe and based on which they form their identity and outside the screen is the reality of the world. One of the characters in this story talks about TV and says it "comes to be their whole emotional world, . . . their whole way of defining themselves as existents, with a distinct identity, that they're outside the set, and everything else is inside the set" (Wallace, 1989). The show is an entertainment show and Wallace emphasizes the purpose of a media like television that is giving pleasure and the cost of this pleasure is the false identity people will have.

#### **4.4. Ideology in *Girl with Curious Hair***

'Lyndon' is another story in the story collection *Girl with Curious Hair*, and it shows Wallace's idea about the love of the nation and the ideology of the necessity of war against the outside enemy. The story has President Lyndon B. Johnson, one of the archetypes in people's minds, as one of its characters (who was the president of America at the time of the Vietnam War) as the presidential candidate. America has always had policies against outside enemies and has always had special ideologies to make people unite in times of war and to make them attend war to support their country. In this story Wallace shows these ideologies that are directed to the youth for the security of the country; the idea of the nation that needs its youth to fight for its survival and sends them to war and supports war against any possible enemy. Again, Wallace focuses on the loneliness all these ideologies of a neoliberal society can cause people. By focusing on commodities, production, and consumerism, neoliberal values eliminate all possibilities of human relations and people get distant from each other and suffer from loneliness. This distance is shown in this story in the personal life of Lyndon.

The neoliberal United States wants all people specifically the youth to sacrifice their lives for their country and to put their country in priority. Wallace shows Lyndon's loneliness and his lack of relationship with his wife in the part he stays up late in the office and his reaction when someone sees him there in this way: "You give your life to other folks, you give your bodily health and your mind in your head and your intellectual concepts to serving the people, you and your wife got to carry each other inside, 'matter from how far away, or distant, or alone" (Wallace, 1989). This statement by someone who is one of the most important figures in society and who has turned into a popular culture reference would act like an ideology to affect people's lives.

In some other part, his wife approves of their being inside each other and claims "We do not properly *love* one another anymore. Because we ceased long ago to be enough *apart* for a 'love' to span any distance. Lyndon says he shall cherish the day when *love* and *right* and *wrong* and *responsibility*, when these words, he says, are understood by you youths of American to be nothing but arrangements of distance" (Wallace, 1989). The meaning of these abstract words "*love* and *right* and *wrong* and *responsibility*" and what someone can think of them and understand of them is the meaning the government decides for its citizens in a neoliberal society and to convey the desired meaning to people, the government needs them to be lonely and to forget about human relations such as love.

Through the ideologies that are spread via mass media or the attitude of the popular culture references, the desired meaning of these words would be accepted by people, and in the case of war against outside threats, the youth will go to fight for their country in an act of nationalism and patriotism. "So you tell them what you do is just reach up there and get that lever and just say,"All the way with LBJ. "Your Mamas and your Papas and your Grandpas, some of them are going to forget this. But I am depending on you youths who are going to have to fight our wars, and who are going to have to defend this country, and who are going to get blown up if we have a nuclear holocaust—I am depending on you to have enough interest in your future which is ahead of you to get up and prod mama and papa and make them get up early and go vote"(Wallace, 1989). Later in the story when the number of war victims rises and Lyndon notices some people's protests, he says "I believe I am out of touch with the youth of America. I believe that they cannot be touched by me, or by what's right, or by intellectual concepts on what's right for a nation" (Wallace, 1989).

Here Wallace offers another solution to this problem and he offers that the youth can save the country from these ideologies. For Wallace, there is still hope for the youth to think critically, to choose what is right and what is wrong, and to decide for their own identity and destiny. To emphasize the extremity of the danger of the loneliness these ideologies can cause people, Wallace shows Lyndon's loneliness when he asks David Boyd, a character in the story to stay with him in the office without really having anything to do with him. He is only afraid of and annoyed by staying alone. "He hated to be alone. I mean he really hated it. I'd come into his office when he was sitting alone at his desk and even though you could tell it wasn't me he wanted to see, his eyes would get this relieved light... He carried a little pocket radio, a little transistor radio, and sometimes we'd hear it playing in his office, while he worked in there alone. He wanted a little noise. Some voice, right there, talking to him or singing. But he wasn't a sad man. I'm not trying to give you that impression of him. Kennedy was a sad man. Johnson was just a man who needed a lot. For all he gave out, he needed things back for himself. And he knew it"(Wallace, 1989). He notices the effects of the ideology on people and how it has made everyone lonely but still, he is loyal to the dominant ideology of the system.

Wallace also shows the monotony and dullness of life of people who work in this system. Boyd says "And I delivered mail. I emptied, thrice daily, gold-starred boxes, wire baskets, and dull-white sacks of mail into carts with canvas sides, trundled them over gray cellar stone into the

freight elevator, and brought them up to Lyndon's maze of wooden offices and glass cubicles" (Wallace, 1989). Wallace ends his story with Lyndon's death in loneliness and isolation and his struggle to get out of that loneliness in the last moments of his life. This reminds the reader of the fate of the veterans who come back from wars, shattered and devastated without the ability to have a normal life. They become mentally ill and suffer from loneliness all their lives. In this story, Wallace shows the danger of ideologies of nationalism and patriotism and the loneliness they cause and the loneliness all the ideologies of a capitalist society can feel (because they have to work and turn into producers and consumers) and the opportunity the youth have to get out of this closed system and choose another life.

## 5. Conclusion

The first short story collection to be mentioned is *Girl with Curious Hair*. In this collection, Wallace focuses on entertainment and popular culture that occupied the American lives in the last decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and he tried to show how they influenced people's identities. He also highlights the popular culture references that turn into archetypes for people and impact their lives and identities. Wallace believes that the ideology of the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century which was following the neoliberal values of the American society was distributed through popular culture and mass media and people were influenced by them and have turned into reified alienated citizens. In the story 'Luckily the Account Representative Knew CPR', Wallace depicts people who are alienated and lonely and the only chance to save them is by having human relations and having real contact with other people.

In another short story called 'Little Expressionless Animals' Wallace shows the impact of television on people and how society and the government apply power to the citizens. The gameshow presented in the story reflects what Wallace has in mind about the power of the authorities exercised through mass media. The gameshow is not in the form of asking questions and awaiting the answers. It is quite the opposite. The answers are given and the contestants need to find the question. It means the authorities never ask the opinion of people or ask for their help in solving social problems. They prepare the answer without allowing other possible answers to show up. The story shows how a person who is mesmerized by television gets the shape of a Television monitor and becomes one with the ideology the authorities have tried to spread.

'Lyndon', another short story in this story collection shows the power of popular culture references in shaping people's identity when Lyndon



who is a candidate for presidency influences people and tries to persuade them to be responsible for their country with hard work or fighting for their country and prioritizing working for the improvement of the society over their human relations. He has valued his responsibility to his country over human relations and he felt lonely in his life and this is the outcome of the neoliberal ideologies. Wallace also refers to the ability of the youth to overcome these problems, to get out of the closed system, and to help others get out as well.

Studying Wallace's *Girl with Curious Hair*, the researcher showed how ideology can help the authorities preserve power, give people false identities, and turn the citizens into alienated, reified people who only follow the norms and values of a neoliberal society and forget about all the other values such as equality and justice and freedom of thinking and bring about their death of identity. In his writings, Wallace tried to warn people and give them antidotes to this identity problem in the postmodern era.

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