David Foster Wallace Learns How to Live

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Abstract

David Foster Wallace once said that “fiction is about what it is to be a human being”. But what did he mean? This question has been addressed by Marshal Boswell, Allard den Dulk, Clare Hayes-Brady, and Jamie Redgate; who have all added to our understanding by reading Wallace’s work through the ideas of dualism, existentialism, post-structural linguistics, and cognitive historicism. But, in my view, we have not got to the heart of the matter. In this thesis, I use Harold Bloom’s theory of misreading to address the ideas that have influenced Wallace, to unpick how he handles them, and uncover how he moves beyond them. By only reading his novels, I pay more attention than previously given to these tensions, allowing us to develop a deeper understanding of what drives his characters, how they shape each other, and how they create the force of Wallace’s human being. I read *The Broom of the System* as a novel that challenges the uncertainty of post-structural thought by turning away from the ontological foundations of postmodern fiction and choosing to believe in the certainty of reality. After that, I read *Infinite Jest* as a novel that continues to develop these ideas. But, this time, I see Wallace challenging the uncertainty of post-structural thought by encouraging the reader to love one of the book’s protagonists, Hal Incandenza. I then read *The Pale King* as a novel that turns to the root causes of our post-structural and postmodern world, the narcissism of modernist ideas and traditional values. In this novel, I see Wallace working to relinquish that narcissism. With these ideas of belief, love, and the relinquishment of narcissism, then, I suggest that, to Wallace, fiction and being human is about learning how to live.

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Introduction, Wait, Wallace, What are you Saying?

This first sentence is one of the last I have written. And, as I sit here nearing the end, I cannot help but remember the start. A time when almost all I did was read. Back then, around four years ago now, I frequently came across the statement that the study of David Foster Wallace's work had reached an extraordinary level; that extraordinary level has only continued to grow.

Before Wallace's suicide in 2008 critical writing on his work was pretty limited. Stephen J. Burn had written a reader's guide to *Infinite Jest*, Greg Carlisle had also thrown his hat into the ring of mapping Wallace's *Infinite Jest*, and Marshal Boswell had written a monograph on Wallace's work up to that date. Alongside these books, Tom LeClair had included Wallace in an article on the new generation of "post-modern-maximalists", Mary K. Holland had written an article reading *Infinite Jest* as a critique of the narcissistic authors of modernism and post-modernism recently past, and Timothy Jacobs had written an article that highlighted the struggle of the Karamazov brothers in the Incandenza brothers of *Infinite Jest*.

It was not until after Wallace's suicide that criticism of his work began to build momentum. Nicole Timmer included Wallace in her monograph on the rising discontent towards post-modernism in contemporary American fiction. Holland expanded her article on Wallace's critique of narcissism and included it in a new monograph about the succession of postmodernism. And Burn regularly included Wallace in his work on Jonathan Franzen, as both shared similar motivations. People were starting to see that Wallace had a hand in changing the tone of contemporary literature, which did not go unnoticed outside academic institutions. Many people dedicated their time to large-scale social media events such as *Infinite Summer,* an online reading group devoted to *Infinite Jest* and *The Howling Fantods* an online encyclopaedia of all things Wallace.

According to Adam Kelly, the above works — by the likes of Boswell, Burn, LeClair and others — characterised the first wave of Wallace scholarship; a wave that was defined by the need to show Wallace as a worthy part of the canon. Kelly claims that this was achieved around 2009 and, after that, a second wave started. This second wave, Kelly tells us, is defined by a sense of freedom. With Wallace's academic worth established, there was no longer a demand to bind Wallace's work to the history of ideas, key texts, or defining literary principles. Accordingly, around the same time, we began to see — and have continued to see — edited collections being published, works such as *Consider David Foster Wallace, The Legacy of David Foster Wallace, A Companion to David Foster Wallace Studies, David Foster Wallace and the Long Thing, Gesturing Toward Reality, The Cambridge Companion to David Foster Wallace,* and *David Foster Wallace and Religion.* All of which leap between single-text analysis, diverse cultural engagement, and philosophical questions. But this second wave, which Kelly identified, appears to be changing and developing into a third wave.

Around 2015, we started to see — and have seen a rising number of — single-author monographs being published. Monographs such as *The Unspeakable Failures of David Foster Wallace, The Gospel According to David Foster Wallace, David Foster Wallace Fiction + Form, David Foster Wallace's Balancing Books, Wallace and I Cognition, Consciousness, and Dualism in David Foster Wallace's Fiction, Ordinary Unhappiness The Therapeutic Fiction of David Foster Wallace,* and *David Foster Wallace's Toxic Sexuality.* Bloomsbury have even established a series of annual monographs on David Foster Wallace studies that started with *David Foster Wallace and World Literature,* followed by *The Wallace Effect,* and most recently *Wallace's Dialects*. These single-author monographs, like the second wave, all read Wallace's work with a sense of freedom; from textuality,

linguistics, history, economy, theology, and philosophy, there are no limits to how we can read Wallace's work.

The single-author monograph has, arguably, come to define the landscape of Wallace studies as it provides the space to address the extraordinary breadth of Wallace's work. With it, scholars can follow an idea from fiction, short story, and non-fiction, allowing them to build a "complete" picture of one perspective of Wallace; Wallace the philosopher, Wallace the theologian, Wallace the literary historian etc. Yet, in the face of these perspectives, I am often left feeling like the meat of Wallace's work has been overlooked.

This feeling forces me to do something a little out of the ordinary. Even though Wallace scholarship has come so far, I want to take a few steps back; back to that first wave. In the early period of Wallace studies, there was, given the need to establish his place in the canon, a necessity to validate his ideas with his own words. This had to be done to give Wallace a certain value; it attested to the fact that Wallace's significance was his own, not something assigned to him by others; to show, in other words, that he was the "real deal". And, while Wallace said many things to many people across interviews and essays, to me, nothing is more important than what he said in an interview with Larry McCaffery in 1993: "[f]iction is about what it is to be a fucking *human being*" (Burn 26, emphasis original).

Of course, I am not the only one who finds Wallace's saying significant. In *Understanding David Foster Wallace* — which has recently been revised and expanded to include *Oblivion* and *The Pale King* — Boswell uses what Wallace said to McCaffery as somewhat of a keystone. He tells us that, as a young writer, "Wallace cut his teeth not only on the work of the postmodern canon — the likes of John Barth and Thomas Pynchon — but also on twentieth-century philosophy" (Boswell 7). Wallace was, he continues, more than just aware of the modernist/postmodernist debate; he was "directly engaged in moving beyond it" (Boswell 7). Barth saw it his job to "yank out the ground from underneath the writers of his

era, to produce that anxiety […] and create a new zone of pure possibility" (Boswell 7). But, by the time Wallace had arrived on the scene, this feeling of pure possibility had changed. Touching on Wallace's essay "E Unibus Pluram", he explains how Wallace accused television of being the primary cause of a shift from pure possibility to isolation. As far as Wallace sees things, the original intention of postmodern irony was "to illuminate and explode hypocrisy" (Boswell 7). But the idea that this could be done through language was, in his own words, "frankly idealistic […]" (Boswell 7). For Wallace, postmodern irony became "a way for the cynic to see hypocrisy wherever it was at work" (Boswell 7).

With the hypocrisy of everything being fair game, it did not take long for pop culture to get a handle on this way of thinking. Postmodern irony was, Wallace tells us, co-opted by television. Pointing out one's own hypocrisies became a trendy sales technique. It sapped postmodern fiction of its pure potential. With mass culture using this sophisticated irony and cynicism as a tool, these strategies became nothing more than a force of "great despair and stasis in U.S. culture" (Boswell 7). As far as Wallace saw things, this posed an especially sinister problem for aspiring fiction writers. In Wallace's view, postmodernism leads us to the realisation that "we are all horribly alone in our sophisticated irony: so preoccupied […] with *getting the joke* that we never allow ourselves to feel anything directly, for fear of ridicule" (Boswell 7, emphasis original).

So, how did Wallace overcome this isolation and anxiety; this solipsistic way of life? How did he set fear aside and feel again? One view, is that Wallace achieved this by possessing a "bothness"; something "earnest and ironical, sensitive and cerebral […]" (Boswell 9). Wallace can be seen to join of cynicism and naivety; a phrase that he used in "E Unibus Pluram", "Westward the Course of Empire Takes Its Way", and *Infinite Jest* (Boswell 9). Wallace's fiction, he insists, "in its attempt to prove that cynicism and naivety are mutually compatible, treats the culture's hip fear of sentiment with the same sort of ironic

self-awareness with which sophisticates in the culture portray gooey sentimentally" (Boswell 10). That is to say, Wallace "ironizes hip irony in such a way that the opposite of hip irony, that is gooey sentiment, can emerge as the work's indirectly intended mode" (Boswell 10). Wallace does not "merely join cynicism and naivete: rather he employs cynicism — here figured as a sophisticated self-reflexive irony — to recover a learned form of heartfelt naivete, his work's ultimate mode and what the work really means, a mode that Wallace equates with the really human" (Boswell 10).

Boswell takes his reading of "bothness" to all of Wallace's fiction — which will be touched on as this thesis continues. He concludes that it allows Wallace to "direct a damning mirror on our own defence strategies of irony and self-consciousness, inviting us not only to transcend our own divided interiorities but also, through an act of empathy […] to reconnect with our hidden true selves […]" (Boswell 147). He tells us this is "the secret target of all of Wallace's work" (Boswell 147). But he cannot explain what he means by this "true self", this "really human", he cannot tell us what Wallace's target actually is. He may see Wallace ironizing irony to achieve something "gooey"; something apparently truer than irony, but he can only claim this by appealing to theology. Consequently, the really human becomes "spiritual, even mystical […]", and he props this up by using Wallace's words on religion (Boswell 147). He argues that the true self, the really human, becomes something "unknow-and-sayable" (Boswell 147).

Allard den Dulk's essay, "Boredom, Irony, and Anxiety" in *David Foster Wallace and "The Long Thing"*, names what Boswell does not. He says boredom is the human thing Wallace's fiction is about and he sees it through the lens of Søren Kierkegaard's existentialism.

For him Wallace's work "express a view of the self that is almost identical to that of Kierkegaard" (Dulk 44). *Either Or* explains that we are not automatically a self but have to

become one (Kierkegaard 250-251). His existentialism is characterised by fact and transcendence. On the one hand, there are facts — where we are born, who our parents are, and our culture — and, on the other hand, there is transcendence — the potential to reshape our situation creating new possibilities (Kierkegaard 275-279).

Quoting Wallace's essay "Some Remarks on Kafka's Funniness", he tells us in "Boredom", that it is a common mistake to think "that a self is something you just *have*" (Dulk 45, emphasis original). With these words, he insists that Wallace is drawing our attention to the "central insight of existentialism", the idea "that the horrific struggle to establish a human self results in a self whose humanity is inseparable from the horrific struggle. That our endless and impossible journey toward home is in fact our home" (Dulk 45).

After he makes this connection between Kierkegaard's idea of the self and Wallace's idea of the self, Dulk draws on *Either Or* again to note the distinction between the aesthetic and ethical life-view.

Both views are underpinned by irony and are essential in the development of the individual. In *Either Or* irony allows the individual to free themselves from the facts of their life; but, as it is pure negation, we should use it cautiously (Kierkegaard 130). In the aesthetic-life-view, facts are escaped through irony and all reality is suspended because the real is just an unnecessary limitation to the endless possibilities of the aesthete's thinking (Kierkegaard 135). All distinctions and criteria become invalid, the only thing that remains is pleasure; the aesthetes want to make their life match their fantasy and desire for pleasure (Kierkegaard 135). Unfortunately, as the aesthete knows no limits they know no reality; they neglect themselves and completely empty themselves out; the ironic-aesthetic-life-view is often "a person's downfall" (Kierkegaard 137).

Dulk takes this personal downfall from the ironic-aesthetic-life-view and links it to Wallace's addicts in *Infinite Jest*. The novel's aesthetic ironizing of values, he tells us, leads to the point where, for most of the addicts, the cliché "I don't know who I am turns out to be more than a cliché" (Dulk 48). The addict's aesthetic attitude, he continues, results in a feeling of emptiness and despair that Wallace describes as anhedonia or depression; a kind of emotional Novocain (Dulk 48).

But Dulk also sees Wallace challenging the aesthete. In *Either Or* individuals can liberate themselves from the aesthetic attitude and create a meaningful life by choosing to do so. To overcome the empty despair of the aesthete, irony can be followed by taking responsibility for one's life (Kierkegaard 208-213). Touching on *Infinite Jest,* he notes *"*the characters Remy Marathe and Hugh Steeply explicitly discuss — in terms very similar to Kierkegaard's — the importance of choice in self-becoming and in overcoming the emptiness of contemporary, aesthetic life" (Kierkegaard 49-50). He also notes the elevator discussion in *The Pale King,* where "several IRS employees similarly express the neglected bond between freedom and choice, between rights and responsibilities […]" (Kierkegaard 50). Choice, then, is "always an action in which the individual connects to reality, to the world" (Dulk 50). For him, like Kierkegaard, this "means taking responsibility for a certain commitment to the world" (Dulk 50). And, it is "through that connection to reality, in consciousness transcending itself toward the world, that the self emerges" (Dulk 50).

So, for him, in "both Kierkegaard and Wallace […] the realization of the importance of attention is crucial" (Dulk 50). Our realisation of failure, he tells us, is the first choice through which we leave behind an aesthetic life. He sees this in *Infinite Jest* when Don Gately chooses to kick his addiction. And he sees it in *The Pale King* too, when Fogle accidentally attends an Advanced Tax Class and decides that accountancy is his calling. The

choices these characters make, he tells us, "connect with the world in the Kierkegaardian sense […] (Dulk 50)".

All this attention and these serious choices lead Dulk to the idea of boredom. In *Either Or* boredom empties out meaning (Kierkegaard 291). When we are confronted with nothingness and living in a world empty of meaning the only relation we have is to ourselves. This makes us awear that we "are not automatically a self but have to become one, precisely because a human being is not a thing, but a relation to [themself], who can therefore determine [themself] through choice (Kierkegaard 250)".

Dulk addresses the anxiety a person feels when confronted with existential responsibilities and, trying to distract themselves, flees from the questions that have to be faced for a meaningful life to be achieved. And it is this motif of the anxious flight from responsibility that Dulk believes plays an important role in Wallace's fiction.

He tells us that boredom can either be the root of all evil or something absolutely magical. Boredom's magical effect, though, is not a positive thing. The magic of boredom is a force of repulsion. Something that forces us to look for ways to distract ourselves because we are repulsed even by the idea of being bored. He sees *Infinite Jest* portraying his dynamic of seeking distraction from nothingness which leads to even deeper boredom, emptiness, and unhappiness. He tells us that, "the different addictions of almost all characters symbolize their deep need for distraction from potentially difficult, existential issues" (Dulk 50). He also sees *The Pale King* touch on this dread of boredom when Wallace writes that "maybe dullness is associated with psychic pain because something that's dull or opaque fails to provide enough stimulation to distract people from some other, deeper type of pain that is always there […]" (Dulk 50). But, while Dulk links the boredom of *Infinite Jest* to *The Pale King* he believes Wallace does something very different with boredom in his last novel. *The Pale King,* he says, "connects enduring boredom to the ability to pay prolonged attention, to

attend and thus commit to something outside oneself" (Dulk 57). The daily tasks of the IRS employees are extremely tedious and require a capacity to stay focused on work; they must be able to deal with boredom. For him, enduring this boredom means attending to the nothingness that underlies it, to the infinite abyss of possibility; this is where he sees the IRS employees making an ethical choice. For Dulk, the IRS employees of *The Pale King* take a leap of faith, one that returns them to reality. When they endure boredom, Wallace's IRS employees resist fleeing into an aesthetic distraction; they choose to attend to something; and, with this choice, they commit to the real world and take up a task of self-becoming (Dulk 57).

But, as the recent history of theory has taught us, self-becoming is something that happens in language, which complicates things a bit. Fortunately for us, *The Unspeakable Failures of David Foster-Wallace,* took up the task of reading Wallace's "strong engagement with philosophy […]" (Hayes-Brady 1). *Unspeakable Failures* explains that the "philosopher Richard Rorty held that the purpose of philosophy is not to find answers, but to keep the conversation going" (Hayes-Brady 2). And that, "the same perspective is visible" (Hayes-Brady 2). We are told that Wallace's use of plurality is infused with a sense of continuation that creates a negative thematic and structural centre of his creative output; that the purpose of his writing, "is not to *find* closure, but to resist it, to frame the possibilities of meaning, not to achieve, and so to close them" (Hayes-Brady 2, emphasis original). With this reason in hand, she continues to tell us that "failure, read as the absence of closure, is the primary positivity of Wallace's writing" (Hayes-Brady 2). While her words may feel jarring, as something "bad" is turned into something "good", she is quick to reassure us that the word "is carefully chosen, and refers to a range of attributes […]" (Hayes-Brady 2). Indeed, failure was part of the working title of *Infinite Jest* (Hayes-Brady 2). This centre of the novel, this force of failure, is a "repository of possibilities, not a univocal object but a play of potentialities" (Hayes-Brady 2). In this potential, this central failure, there is an echo of

Ludwig Wittgenstein's "resistance to the idea of the perfect expression of anything […] as well as […] later readings of Wittgenstein by Rorty and [Stanley] Cavell […]" (Hayes-Brady 2). So, for her, "Wallace's foundational concept of communication becomes an unending process […]" (Hayes-Brady 2). In her view, he shuns closure for a dynamic process of communication, one held between author and reader.

With this model of communication, she tells us that the effort to reach the other, that is, the reader, "must be sincere and full" (Hayes-Brady 2), but "cannot be completed" (Hayes-Brady 2). In an attempt to clarify what she means, she proposes three modes of failure to understand Wallace's work, "abject, structural, and generative" (Hayes-Brady 2). Abject failure, she says, "is the total failure of an attempt to communicate", which she sees in the short story "The Depressed Person" (Hayes-Brady 2). Structural failure, she continues, "is failure of the process of communication, caused by the absence of an element necessary to communication […]", which she sees in Hal Incandenza's inability to form intelligible words and Don Gately's attempt to resist medication even though he cannot speak (Hayes-Brady 2). Generative failure, she goes on, is the most important kind in Wallace's work and refers to the necessarily unfinished nature of communicative acts. This kind of failure, she adds, aims to highlight and bridge the gap between self and other. As she explains, "in our inevitable failure to communicate successfully, due to the fundamental absence inherent in textuality […] the fundamental unbridgeability of the gap between self and other is reinforced" (Hayes-Brady 5). But, as that "gap entails alterity", it allows a space for interpretation that "opens the possibility of plural and unpredictable communicative outcomes" (Hayes-Brady 5). In other words, it creates a space for the other, in this sense, the reader. Hayes-Brady sees generative failure throughout Wallace's body of work. And while she calls this mode of Wallace's creation tragic and frustrating, she also sees it inviting the reader to consider why we fail to communicate, allowing us — each time — to get closer to the clarity of knowing we will

never quite reach anything else. This type of failure, where we choose to fail again and better, where we chose a generative imperfection over encompassing perfection, where we break open rather than close off, is the “conceptual core” of her monograph (Hayes-Brady 5).

Hayes-Brady begins working toward this core by investigating general ideas of incompleteness in Wallace’s work, such as resistance to closure in structural, vocal, and narrative ways. She sets out to remind us that while Wallace engaged with several philosophical traditions and lenses — naming the likes of Wittgenstein and Cavell — as far as she sees things, he often literalised their problems as part of a process of investigation, presenting hypotheses in narrative or structural form, testing out the literalised hypothetical product. Having presented Wallace as a thinker embedded in the work of other thinkers, she continues to consider Wallace as a product of his time. She focuses on the breadth of his references and his involvement in contemporary literature and popular culture. She paints, for us, a picture of Wallace as a writer who is tied to but tries to reach beyond his own distinctively American culture and period to find something “timelessly vital and scared” (Hayes-Brady 13). As someone who zeroed in on the “fact that we still *are* human beings, now. Or can be” (Hayes-Brady 13, emphasis original).

With these philosophical ideas arising, she then turns to a detailed exploration of Wallace’s specific grounding in philosophy, which focuses on “Wittgenstein and Rorty” (Hayes-Brady 13). She uses Wallace’s first novel, *The Broom of the System*, to ground this philosophical grounding. She explores, in detail, Wallace’s “specific encounters with Wittgenstein, and his direct engagement with the work of Rorty” (Hayes-Brady 13). Returning to Rorty’s idea, that philosophy should keep the conversation going, Hayes-Brady associates his playful irony with the language games of Wittgenstein’s later work, arguing that Rorty’s Wittgensteinian heritage offers a lens through which to view Wallace’s own engagement with Wittgenstein. An engagement, she continues, that suggests Wittgenstein’s

primary aim in philosophy is, as he once said, "a *therapeutic* one" (Hayes-Brady 14, emphasise original). Hayes-Brady feels that this therapeutic aim, which she sees Wallace adopting through Rorty from Wittgenstein, in *The Broom of the System* is — in fact — the concern that dominated all his writing. Coherence of the self, duty to the other, civic responsibility, connection, and the importance of paying attention are, Hayes-Brady tells us, visible in his earliest novel.

Building on the central concern she has identified, she goes on to focus on "Wallace's specific conception of the process of communication […]" (Hayes-Brady 15). Exploring the "living transaction between human beings", through Jacques Derrida's work, she proposes that the dynamic aspect of the transaction be called love; a feeling, she goes on, that is never completed (Hayes-Brady 15). Following this "thread of love", she moves onto self-love, the theme of narcissism (Hayes-Brady 15). Linking Wallace's work on narcissism with solipsism as a linguistic problem, she tells us that Wallace's idea of narcissism acts as an antagonist to solipsistic entrapment (Hayes-Brady 15). She says that Wallace used narcissism to telescope outward from language, to culture, and politics; defining three communities that all fail because of narcissism; a failure, which she insists, is a necessary part of the project, a part of moving forward. Perhaps slightly wary of her own reading, where the narcissist is the instigator of social change, Hayes-Brady moves on to make room for the other. Introducing the philosophy of Paul Ricoeur, she tells us that Ricoeur's work is present in Wallace's own and that he uses it to explore the border between self and other. The drive, she says, to connect with and yet reject the other is alive in the play of narrative borders that she argues characterise Wallace's work as a whole, those borders of failure. She then tells us, again, that these borders are alive in the voices of Wallace's characters, that they are there to resist closure (Hayes-Brady 16). Having framed narrative and voice with the border of self and other, Hayes-Brady moves on to consider otherness in Wallace's portrayal of race, gender,

and the body. She argues that the fear-based misogyny of *Brief Interviews with Hideous Men* and Wallace's general portrayal of the feminine as alien is done to explore ideas of otherness (Hayes-Brady 17). With this, she sees Wallace finding the space to embody the inaccessible other whose existence challenges the self. In other words, Hayes-Brady sees Wallace using gender and the body to dramatise the gap between individuals.

Hayes-Brady, then, does a significant amount of work for us. Drawing on several post-structural thinkers, she drives home her idea of failure. The idea that, in language, things will never be complete; that we will never bridge the gap to the other. But more than anything, as she tells us, her work

> posits that Wallace's conception of communication, and his articulation of what it meant to be human and alive in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, were predicated on a vision of human interaction that simultaneously repudiated and reinforced the necessity of the boundaried self, at once loathing and depending on the separation of competing subjectivities. (Hayes-Brady 18)

Moving beyond the history of post-structural theory and postmodern thought, Jamie Redgate's book, *Wallace and I Cognition, Consciousness, and Dualism in David Foster Wallace's Fiction,* uses cognitive historicism to read what Wallace meant when he said fiction is about being human.

To start with, he sets out "the key scientific sources for Wallace" (Redgate 16). He then explains the "embodied model of the mind" that he believes informs both Wallace's "fiction and his accounts of himself as a writer" (Redgate 16). Starting with the epigraph to *The Pale King,* which is taken from the poet Frank Bidart, he tells us that "Wallace and Bidart each developed a poetics of embodiment with which to critique postmodern theories

about the death of the author and the dissolution of the self" (Redgate 16). Taking note of the metaphor of the human form from Bidart, Wallace's criticism of the death of the author in "Greatly Exaggerated", and Wallace's citation of Don DeLillo's metaphor of fiction writing as the creation of life he argues that Wallace focuses on the human "to articulate the relationship between mind and body in his characters, and to describe the model of literary influence that informs his writing process" (Redgate 16).

Having established what he sees as the "fundamental importance of the body to Wallace", he turns his attention to the ghosts that populate Wallace's fiction (Redgate 16). Using Wallace's ghosts, he argues that Wallace was not the post-humanist — a development of post-structural-and-post-modern thought that challenges the foundational binaries of the human relationship to the world — that "many critics take him to be" (Redgate 16). Tracing Wallace's ghosts as a symbol of interiority, he tells us that from "his very early stories, [Wallace] always wrote about human beings as having interiority, a ghost-like, soul-like self inside their bodies" (Redgate 16). Interpreting this as Cartesian, he then claims that René Descartes had a major influence on Wallace and that the Cartesian metaphor of the ghost in the machine has been overlooked in Wallace studies (Redgate 17). Setting Wallace's work against postmodern and post-humanist theory — the likes of Thomas Pynchon's Tyrone Slothrop and Katherine Hayles' book *How We Became Posthuman: Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics, Literature, and Informatics* (Redgate 51-87) — he claims that Wallace's "treatment of the soul marks him apart from an earlier generation who viewed the body as post-human, malleable, and hollowed out" (Redgate 17).

After that, he turns his attention to "contemporary issues around selfhood, such as therapy and addiction" (Redgate 17). Focusing on *Infinite Jest* he sets out to challenge the idea that Wallace's therapist characters are caricatures (Redgate 17). Noting Sylvia Plath as an influence, he tells us there is a central metaphor of a glass jar throughout Wallace's

therapy fictions, which Wallace "uses to articulate concerns about entrapment, subjectivity, and medical materialism" (Redgate 17). His glass metaphor is "complimented by a fire metaphor […]" that, he claims, "Wallace uses throughout *Infinite Jest*" (Redgate 17). The two metaphors, he goes on, work together to explain, what he read as, "Wallace's understanding of the soul's role in a materialist universe" (Redgate 17). The idea that though Wallace "understands that mental illness and the mind are material, he also rejects the medical materialist model, recognising that however untrue it is that human beings literally have a soul that suffers from their illness, it does no service to the people suffering to pretend they are not in there […]" (Redgate 117).

Finally, having read this tension between body and soul, he addresses the age-old question of free will. Setting Wallace's work against the likes of Joseph Heller and DeLillo, he claims that "the body is not a boundless, malleable text in Wallace's fiction but a stubbornly material, deterministic entity, in which the interior self is contained" (Redgate 18). Tracing this through *Infinite Jest*, he argues that we need to "reconsider the extent to which Wallace actually champions free will […]" (Redgate 18).

We currently have, then, four interpretations of Wallace's human being and how this force was alive in his fiction. And, while I agree with everything that has been said so far, I also have some issues with each argument.

To start with, we read Wallace's human being as a "bothness", a sense of cynicism and naivete (Boswell 10). Boswell's theory is very persuasive and I have no issue with one side. Not only does his use of cynicism — with its force of scepticism — tap into the history of modernist literature and philosophy, which "called for the death of traditional universals such as God and a new understanding of the self", but it also taps into postmodern and post-structuralist thought, which embraced the potential of irony yet "remained aware of language's limits to connect us" (Boswell 10). That is to say, Boswell's use of cynicism

accounts for the intellectual history that both influenced and frustrated Wallace. I struggle, though, to believe in his use of naivety quite as much. Boswell himself seems to struggle with this side of the argument. Reaching for words like "gooey" and phrases such as "true self" he is forced — eventually — to turn to theology, propping his argument up with Wallace's comments on religion (Boswell 147). To be clear, though, I do not disagree with Boswell's identification of naivety; but I do disagree with how he reads it, where he takes it. I am convinced that there is a naivety in Wallace's work, there is something "gooey", but I do not think this needs to be propped up with Wallace's comments on religion. I believe we can think of Wallace's naivety, his gooeyness, as a psychical force. To me, this true self that Boswell points toward is not something spiritual; but something human, perhaps something infantile, a memory of a life we had before language, a bliss we all lose, a thought that — for some — may be too painful to speak of.

For Dulk, Wallace's human being is a little less complex; their task, in his view, is clear; it is set; become the self. There are, of course, several merits to Dulk's reading. He links many aspects of Kierkegaard's work to Wallace's work convincingly; from the self to the ironic and ethical view, Dulk makes a persuasive argument that Wallace's characters face existential problems and have choices forced on them. But, as far as I see things, Dulk has a bit too much faith in the self. He seems to treat the self like a rising phoenix; as though a self can emerge from existential dread by making the right choices and then rest easy in who they are. Perhaps this is unsurprising. Kierkegaard worked before the death of God and well before post-structuralism raised a challenge to anything absolute. But this is where my issue with Dulk's work lies. I agree with him, he has convinced me that Wallace's characters face fundamentally existential questions, but they live in a very different time to Kierkegaard. Do any of Wallace's character's ever settle into a life where they are content with themselves, a life where they are sure of themselves?

For Hayes-Brady, Wallace's human being lives in the chain of language, in a state where they can never quite say what they mean, even if they mean what they say. As far as I see things, Hayes-Brady gets Wallace's human being pretty much spot on, but even though I feel this way, I disagree quite strongly with how she gets there. I think, with the notion of failure, Hayes-Brady identifies something essential in Wallace's work. I agree with her that there seems to be a central negative in Wallace's work, but I am not so convinced that Wallace parroted Rorty and used this to keep the conversation going. In other words, I am unconvinced that the central absence in Wallace's work needs to become a positive. And this is where I begin to struggle with what she says. Hayes-Brady encloses her work in post-structural linguistics; from Wittgenstein to Rorty and Derrida to Ricoeur, she always finds a way to turn the negative into a positive, to turn this failure into a progression, to turn narcissism into empathy. But, in our real lives — in the human life that exists in language — our negatives, although they may always progress, do not always progress into something positive. I am unsure where the positive is supposed to be found in many of Wallace's characters. And this is the main issue I have with Hayes-Brady's work. As she is so encased in the idea of language, failure, and the negative, this central void must become a positive, it has to become something that moves us forward, and I simply disagree. I believe Wallace's human is not about positive progression but is actually about accepting that this lack is ever-present and learning to live with it.

And for Redgate, Wallace's human being is the soul, the thing trapped in the body. His argument is incredibly persuasive and he addresses the tension between the internal world and the external world with detail unmatched in the field. But I believe he invests too heavily in the Cartesian soul. There are many models of thought that address this particularly human split without leaning on theology. Psychoanalysis, for example, could provide an alternative road to the idea of an internal self. I cannot help but think that Redgate uses

Descartes' soul to separate Wallace's characters from their bodies to strengthen his argument. Creating this absolute inside the body means he does not have to engage fully with the post-structural (or as he frames it post-human) side of Wallace's work. Many of Wallace's characters are hollowed out — Hal, for example, is practically dead inside for most of *Infinite Jest* — and they are also malleable, Hal changes and so do the numerous addicts throughout Wallace's fiction who work, every day, on their sobriety. They may not, as Hayes-Brady has pointed out, be all that successful, but they try. Redgate's perspective of the soul in Wallace's work allows him to read Wallace's therapy fictions in a new and positive light. But, as he sticks to the binaries of soul and body, inevitably, he can't get past the boundary that separates them. He focuses on the medical materialism of Wallace's therapy fictions but what about the emotion in Wallace's therapeutic settings? Many seem to follow the psychoanalytic framework of the talking cure — not the medical materialism of psychiatry — and at no point does the therapist deny that there is a self in their client, suffering. Redgate's reading leads him to reconsider the role of free will in Wallace's work but that may be because he has not fully considered how complicated the self is and how hard their journey through reality can be.

Across the board, then, it seems to me that everyone who has addressed Wallace's statement, that fiction is about what it means to be human, has overlooked the most important part of what he said, the human part. From a bothness that leans on theology, to a self that overlooks the difficulty of choice, a negative that must be positive due to the infinite-and-ironic-progression of a language, and the security of a soul what is it that is actually human in Wallace's human being?

To answer this question, this thesis has three substantial chapters, each reading one of Wallace's novels. I have chosen to focus on Wallace's three novels and use this long-form-chapter structure as it allows me to read with a strong level of detail. By being selective with

Wallace's fiction, I can trace developments, unpick tensions, and read conflicts; I can get to the heart of what makes his characters human.

In "Chapter One, Hey, Let's Get Out of Here" I read how *The Broom of the System* tries to escape the solipsistic force of post-structural-and-postmodern thought Wallace identified, by re-introducing the fragility of the human being. I start by reading how Lenore — the book's protagonist — represents Derrida's deconstruction. Then, reading her lover Rick Vigorous as a reference to Vladimir Nabokov's Humbert Humber in *Lolita*, I excavate the ontological force of his voice through *Being and Time*. Following the development of their relationship, I read how Lenore tires of Rick's voice, how she comes to reject him — how she dismisses the foundations of the force she represents. Finding Lenore in limbo, I follow the development of her new relationship with Andrew Lang. I start by reading how Andrew acts as a reference to the start of John Updike's *Rabbit Run*; and, how Harry Rabbit Angstrom represents the pleasure and reality principle in Sigmund Freud's "Formulations on the Two Principles of Mental Functioning". I read how Rabbit initially privileges pleasure over reality and how Andrew echoes this choice but later reverses his aim, how he comes to choose reality over pleasure. Following the relationship Lenore and Andrew build I read, through Freud's "Moses and Monotheism", Andrew's belief in the father as the creator of legislative function and universal law. And, as the two get closer — creating an intimacy unrivalled in the book — I read how, with Andrew, Lenore comes to accept the father and, through the risk of intimacy, comes to believe in certainty.

In "Chapter Two, Working Through It" I read how *Infinite Jest* also tries to escape the solipsism of post-structural-and-postmodern life by re-introducing the fragility of humanity. To do so, I focus on James Incandenza and his son, Hal. I start by reading how James can be thought of as a force of "schizophrenia" as defined in *Anti-Oedipus*. Touching on the scene where James poses as a professional conversationalist, I read how he — as a "schizophrenic"

living in his world of ontological immanence — tries and fails to bring Hal into his world. James may have been unable to talk Hal into living like him; but, as we will read, that does not mean he was unsuccessful, things are just a bit more complicated. To unpick how Hal comes to live in James' world, I start by reading how he was disturbed by James' suicide. Initially, I read how the condensed grief-and-trauma therapy Hal received shortly after James' suicide follows the post-structural psychoanalytic model of Jacques Lacan, meaning Hal — a linguistic whiz kid — could play games with his therapist, raising a defence against what disturbed him. Returning to read the scene of James' suicide through Freud's "Totem and Taboo", I suggest that what Hal feels — what he hides from in his therapy — is the guilt that creates his superego, a guilt that will force him to follow in his father's footsteps. I then argue that Hal walks his father's path through his use of marijuana. Reading Hal's private daily use of marijuana, through "The Ego and the Id" and "Beyond the Pleasure Principle", I will suggest that he seeks to re-create his father's desire. I will then read how Hal betrays his father by getting high in public on Interdependence day, at the annual game of eschaton. Casting his friends and the gamemaster as the three agencies of the psyche, I suggest that Hal watches his own psychical collapse, that he sees his ego give itself up. Reaching the end of his narrative thread, I read Hal's interview at the University of Arizona as his becoming his father; but, noting the structure of this becoming, I read how Hal's narrative actually creates the force of love, how it asks us to do the work of love.

In "Chapter Three, Can You Hear Me?" I follow Wallace's shift in time. His previous novels were set in the future, but *The Pale King* is set in the past. I read this shift as Wallace turning his attention to the foundations of the solipsistic force of post-structural-and-postmodern-reality, to the ideas of modernism and the traditional values they sought to overthrow. I argue that, in this novel, Wallace looks directly at the fragility that makes us human. I start by reading how Chris Fogle creates, through the modernist values of Friedrich

Nietzsche, a narcissism that leads to a lonely life. I then read how the story Meredith Rand tells her fellow IRS employee Shane Drinion, of how she met her husband, Ed, speaks of the narcissism of traditional values leading to her own effacement. Then, drawing on how the autobiographical section of the novel allows Wallace to tell the truth, I read how Wallace tells us about his experience with these forms of narcissism and how he learnt to relinquishes them.

At the heart of this thesis, then, is the suggestion that, for Wallace, fiction — and therefore being a human being — is about learning how to live.

Just as I will read Wallace's three novels over three chapters, to suggest this thesis, I will be reading in three different ways. The first is pretty simple. Close reading will allow me to address Wallace's novels with a strong degree of detail; reading the precise techniques, dynamics, and content of Wallace's work will allow me to unlock an understanding of what might drive his characters. The second is fairly simple too. Comparative reading will allow me to address the relationship between Wallace's work and other spheres, including theory and philosophy. The third, though, is a bit more complicated.

Strong-misreading is a type of reading devised by Harold Bloom that developed out of a question he had about romantic poetry. *A Map of Misreading* asks, if romantic poets, like Percy Bysshe Shelly, believed in the imagination — with all its connotations of the uniqueness of vision — why do they all return to John Milton as a figure of authority? (Bloom 125-159). His answer is expressed nicely by one of his chapter's title, "The Belatedness of Strong Poetry". Bloom defines belatedness as coming after the event and tells us that the reason romantic poets could not rid themselves of Milton was because they were late for the event. Using a vocabulary taken from Freud's theory of the Oedipus Complex, where — in its most basic form, sons wish to possess their mothers sexually and so wish to kill their fathers — he speaks of the "poetic father" as a scandalous figure who cannot die or

be murdered; for him, in poetry, there is “precursor” (father) and “ephebe” (son) (Bloom 9-80). He says, “A poet, I argue […] is not so much a man speaking to men as a man rebelling against being spoken to by a dead man (the precursor) outrageously more alive than himself” (Bloom 18). A poet, he continues, “dare not regard himself as being *late*, yet cannot accept a substitute for the first vision he reflectively judges to have been his precursor’s also” (Bloom 18, emphasis original). Poetry, then, Bloom argues — again adapting a Freudian language — stems from two drives. The first, he says, comes from the poet's desire to imitate the precursor’s poetry and the second comes from the desire to be original and defend against the knowledge that all they are doing is imitating. Bloom calls this re-inscription misreading and he argues that a poet, who rewrites the precursor's poetry and transforms it through defence, is a strong poet.

In Bloom’s eyes, then, poetry — and all literature — can only imitate previous ideas. In *The Anxiety of Influence*, he articulates this point as a correction to other critical approaches that presume a book possesses a singularity or that a book’s meaning can be found in a non-literary context. He tells us that all criticism that claims to be primary is tautology — where the poem is and means itself — and reduction — where the poem means something that is not a poem (Bloom 70). What he calls “antithetical criticism” must, he argues, “begin by denying both tautology and reduction, a denial best delivered by the assertion that the meaning of a poem can only be a poem, but *another poem — a poem not itself”* (Bloom 70, emphasis original). The other poem, he goes on, is “not a poem chosen with total arbitrariness, but any central poem by an indisputable precursor, even if the ephebe *never read that poem*” (Bloom 70, emphasis original). Source-study, he notes, “is wholly irrelevant here […] an ephebe’s best misinterpretations may well be of poems he has never read” (Bloom 70).

In his more recent work, Bloom has focused on writers who could be called truly original; like the authors of the earliest parts of the bible, Shakespeare, and Freud. In *Ruin the Sacred Truth* he styles the ideas of these authors as “facticity” (Bloom 6-8). That is to say, in his eyes, they have created ideas that are unavoidable in Western culture. An example of facticity can be seen in the effect of Freud’s work on modern Western culture. Whether or not people have read Freud’s work, they tend to speak of themselves in Freudian ways; they talk of their unconscious, what drives them, and their ego! Freud, then, is a facticity, an already-read script in modern culture. And, as he says in *Breaking the Vessels* — whilst making a little quip about Lacan’s interpretation of Freud’s work which will become clear later in this thesis —

> [t]he unconscious turns out alas not to be structured like a language, but to be structured like *Freud’s* language, and the ego and superego, in their conscious aspect, are structured like Freud’s own text, for the very good reason that they are Freud’s texts. We have become Freud’s texts, and the *Imitatio Freudi* is the necessary pattern for the spiritual life in our time. (Bloom 64, emphasis original)

With Bloom’s idea of facticity, then, we can begin to understand how a poet might misread a precursor even if they have not read the precursor’s work themselves; some ideas are written into the lives we lead.

Through strong misreading, then, we are free to think about the ideas that may have influenced an author. And, with this freedom, we can think about how they might turn away from what has come before them, how they may attempt to complete the work of others, how they may write the same ideas but try to break free from repetition, how they can dig deeper into the ideas that have come before them to better understand them, how they will turn

inward to look for new solutions, and address some people directly to and return them to the dead.

So, an influence may not be "True" — it may not even be conscious — but, by reading through this prism we can think of what drives Wallace's work; we can uncover what may have motivated him and expand our understanding of his work.

Chapter One, Hey, Let's Get Out of Here

The Broom of the System was published in 1987 and set three years in the future, in a slightly askew version of Ohio, where the largest tourist attraction is a man-made desert of black sand called the Great Ohio Desert (G.O.D. for short). The novel takes place over two parts and follows Lenore Stonecipher Beadsman, a twenty-five-year-old afraid she is nothing more than a linguistic construct, reluctant heir to a baby-food empire, and switchboard operator.[1] For much of the novel Lenore searches for her ninety-year-old great-grandmother, her namesake Lenore Stonecipher Beadsman Sr., a former student and devotee of Ludwig Wittgenstein who has escaped her nursing home. Aiding Lenore in her search, for the first part of the novel, is her lover Rick Vigorous. An editor for the fraudulent literary magazine Frequent & Vigorous, Rick tells Lenore stories he claims have been submitted to him, stories that are actually his own. In the second part of the novel, though, Lenore breaks off her relationship with Rick and replaces him with Andrew Lang. Young and open to change, Andrew helps Lenore, not to find her great-grandmother, but to find what it means to be human.

As far as Wallace's fiction goes, *The Broom of The System* is, perhaps, his most "philosophical" novel. The title is taken from a lesson that the Wittgenstein-obsessed Gramma Beadsman tries to teach Lenore's younger brother, LaVache. As she sweeps the kitchen floor, Gramma Beadsman asks him "which part of the broom is more *fundamental*", the handle or brush (Wallace 149, emphasis original)? LaVache answers, saying the brush is the essence of the broom. But, Gramma Beadsman tells him he is wrong. The answer itself, she insists, depends on how the broom is being used. If you want to sweep, she tells him, then

[1] As David Hering tells us in *Fiction and Form* the novel was originally titled *Inside* and divided into two parts subtitled "The Broom of the System" and "Inventive Cable". And, even though the title changed, the two-part split remains in the published novel (51).

the brush is the essence of the broom; but, if you want to break a window the essence is the handle (Wallace 149). Gramma presses the idea of meaning as use on LaVache (Wallace 149). Those familiar with Wittgenstein's work will recognise, in Gramma's words, the central force of his late philosophy. "The meaning of a word", he tells us in *Philosophical Investigations*, "is its use in language" (Wittgenstein 43).

Wallace's interest in the relation of language to reality acts as a point of connection between himself and Lenore, who is afraid she is just a linguistic construct. At the most basic level, Lenore is Wallace and *The Broom of the System* is a fictionalised retelling of the intellectual struggle he faced between philosophy and literature. "Think of *The Broom of the System*", he told McCaffery, "as the sensitive tale of a sensitive young WASP who's just had this mid-life crisis that's moved from coldly cerebral analytic math to a coldly cerebral take on fiction and Austin-Wittgenstein-Derridean literary theory" (Burn 41). This transformation, Wallace explains, shifted his "existential dread from a fear that he was just a 98.6-degree calculating machine to a fear that he was nothing but a linguistic construct" (Burn 41). Lenore, afraid she is just a character in a novel, gives voice to Wallace's anxiety about his relationship with language.

Understanding *The Broom of the System* as an autobiographical work helps us grasp some of Wallace's philosophical aims. In both his early and late work, Wittgenstein addressed the idea of solipsism; the philosophy that posits — in its most radical form — that nothing exists apart from your own mind. Solipsism bewitched and bothered Wallace and became a lifelong fascination. In his interview with McCaffery, Wallace said that "one of the things that makes Wittgenstein a real artist to me is that he realized that no conclusion could be more horrible than solipsism" (Burn 44). In *The Broom of the System* Wallace sought to explore solipsism.

The Broom of the System then, falls into the genre of the novel of ideas. Books that, essentially, instruct the reader to interpret them through certain schools of thought. In his essay "The Empty Plenum", he called this style of writing "INTERPRET-ME fiction" (Wallace 74, emphasis original). Such works can, he admitted, often be taxing, draining the reader of the energy to work through what he called the "emotional implications" of the book (Wallace 77). The novel of ideas is most valuable, he tells us, not when the abstruse philosophical ideas are made accessible for the reader, but when the neglected and complex undercurrents are brought to the surface (Wallace 77).

"The Empty Plenum" is an appreciation of David Markson's novel *Wittgenstein's Mistress* — "a work of genius", he tells us — which came out a year after *The Broom of the System* and was also "about" Wittgenstein's philosophy (Wallace 74-5). Wallace reads it as an emotional reckoning with the solipsism of Wittgenstein's early work. In the face of, what he calls "the rabid anti-intellectualism of the contemporary fiction scene" Markson's novel, he goes on, demonstrates the still vital role of the novel of ideas in joining together "cerebration & emotion, abstraction & lived life, transcendent truth-seeking & daily schlepping" (Wallace 74).

To get a better grip of Wallace's ambition in *The Broom of the System* it is worth looking at what Wallace thought Markson had achieved. *Wittgenstein's Mistress,* an experimental novel with a sparing style reminiscent of Samuel Beckett, is narrated by a painter called Kate who might be the last person alive and may have been alone on the earth for many years by the start of the book. But Kate does not really narrate — as in her world there is no audience — instead, she writes into a void; typing statement after statement in simple paragraphs of one or two sentences. Unlike most novels of ideas, there are no cerebral characters or lofty discussions. In fact, Kate's grasp of literature and philosophy is shaky. In fact, intellectual ideas in Kate's hands are "sprayed, skewed, all over the book" (Wallace 76).

Kate ends up alone, at a beach house, writing out her thoughts. She does so with a strange controlled indirection, free-associating through her past and the world she used to live in, the possibility increases that she has lost her mind. The narrative creates an excruciating feeling of loneliness and isolation. Kate's voice is trapped inside her own head and relates to a world that is only a reconstruction in her mind. The text Kate writes, "is itself obsessed & almost defined by the possibility that it does not exist, that Kate does not exist" (Wallace 83).

Part of Markson's achievement with this novel is that it does not require any understanding of Wittgenstein. But the allusion to Wittgenstein in the title, its repetitive citation of the first line of Wittgenstein's *Tractatus* — "[t]he world is all that is the case" — and the stylistic similarities all invite the reader to think about what Markson is up to. "This isn't a weakness of the novel", but "it's kind of miraculous that it's not" (Wallace 85).

Wallace had, of course, read the *Tractatus*. He knew that Wittgenstein's book presented a cold unforgiving logical picture of the world and Markson's novel, as he put it, was like a 240-page answer to the question "what if somebody really had to *live* in a *Tractatus*ized world?" (Wallace 77, emphasis original). Calling the novel "a kind of philosophical sci-fi", he explained that Markson had "fleshed the abstract sketches of Wittgenstein's doctrine into the concrete theatre of human loneliness" (Wallace 108).

The particular form of human loneliness Wallace refers to is the sense of solipsism. Kate seems to be in this state, her world constructed entirely in her head. In the *Tractatus,* Wittgenstein runs into the concern that his argument leads to solipsism and — instead of looking for a way out — he accepts it. As Wallace tells McCaffery in conversation there is "a kind of tragic fall Wittgenstein's obsessed with […] a real Book-of-Genesis-type tragic fall. The loss of the whole external world" (Burn 44).

For Wallace, the most disturbing feature of the *Tractatus* is its treatment of solipsism. Near the end of the book, we are told "[t]he limits of my language mean the limits of my

world" (Wittgenstein 68). What the person cannot talk about, in Wittgenstein's view, is not a fact of the world. The person Wittgenstein is talking about is the Cartesian subject; the metaphysical I with a consciousness that stands opposite external reality.

On the one hand, Wittgenstein cannot make any sense of the philosophical self. Any talk of it, to him, is nonsense. But, on the other hand, he does manage to get hold of a question about the self. He notes the similarity between the I — the external world — and the eye — the visual field. Though we cannot see our own eye, the visual field itself is the eye working; likewise, though the metaphysical I cannot be located in the world, the experience of the world is nothing more than what it is to be an I. In other words, nothing can be said about the I, but the I is made manifest so long as "I am my world" (Wittgenstein 68). This is, he tells us, "how much truth there is in solipsism" (Wittgenstein 68).

I am my world is what Wallace seems to have had in mind when — speaking about the *Tractatus* — he described the "loss of the whole external world" to McCaffery (Burn 44). For Wittgenstein, there is no difference between solipsism and reality. Solipsism, he tells us, "coincides with pure realism" (Wittgenstein 69). For Wallace, this — the dark emotional reality of an anti-metaphysical world — was a harrowing thought. But it was also, for him, what Markson had rendered in his novel. Without even mentioning these ideas, Markson managed to depict them with an uncomfortable clarity. By echoing the *Tractatus'* abrupt sentences and placing Kate in a cold lonely world of her own Markson managed, as he put it in "The Empty Plenum", to "capture the flavor both of solipsism and of Wittgenstein" (Wallace 88). He even felt that Markson had done something Wittgenstein had not been able to do: humanise the intellectual problem, communicating "the consequences, for persons, of the *practice of theory;* the difference, say, between espousing solipsism as a metaphysical position & waking up one fine morning after a personal loss to find your grief apocalyptic,

literally millennial, leaving you the last and only living thing on earth" (Wallace 78, emphasis original). Only fiction could do that.

Solipsism is often evoked in Wallace's writing as a metaphor for isolation and loneliness. The students at the tennis academy in *Infinite Jest* ask the question, "how can we keep from being 136 deeply alone people all jammed together?" (Wallace 112). A problem that Hal — another semi-autobiographical character — adds to by saying "[e]existentialism, individuality, frequently referred to in the west as solipsism" (Wallace 112). Franzen tells us in "Farther Away" that he and Wallace agreed that one of the fundamental purposes of fiction was to combat loneliness. The irksome paradox for him was that as a writer he had to spend most of his time alone and in his own head, creating the feeling, as he wrote in "The Empty Plenum", that "one's head is, in some sense, the whole world, when the imagination becomes not just a more congenial but a realer environment than the big Exterior of life on earth" (Wallace 81-2, emphasis original).

So, could Wallace overcome solipsism? In *The Broom of the System*, Norman Bombardini, the man who owns the building that Lenore works in, complains about — what he calls — "the Great Horror": the idea that there is "an empty rattling personal universe, one where one finds oneself with a Self, on one hand, and cast out in empty lonely space before Others begin to enter the picture at all, on the other" (Wallace 81, emphasis original). His solution — a bit of a spoof on the *Tractatus'* line "I am my world" — is to keep eating until he grows to infinite size (Wallace 292). Bombardini is only a minor character in the book, and fittingly so, as most of *The Broom of the System* is not concerned with the solipsism of early Wittgenstein but with Wittgenstein's rejection of solipsism in his late philosophy. Just as Markson turns the solipsism of the *Tractatus* into artistic expression, Wallace hoped to turn the anti-solipsistic view of *Philosophical Investigations* into an artwork with *The Broom of the System*.

In *Philosophical Investigations* Wittgenstein takes a very different approach to language. In the *Tractatus,* language is logical and structural — a puzzle you can step back from, look at clearly and unpuzzle. But, in *Philosophical Investigations,* language becomes a messy human act; something social, a rich variety of moments that we all have to figure out the same way a child does — by being part of it and grappling with the unspoken rules of how it is used. Wittgenstein's shift turns language from a system of references into something dynamic. This is the point of his mantra "meaning as use"; if we want to understand the meaning of a word, phrase or gesture we should not try to figure out what it represents, but how we can use it in real life (Wittgenstein 43). He called this social practice that determines meaning "language games" (Wittgenstein 23).

Wittgenstein's conception of language as a public phenomenon, where words gain meaning only by their shared use, overturned his earlier conception of the solipsistic "I" — of the idea of a person living entirely in their own head. With the meaning of words in their use, the use of words must, in Wittgenstein's view, follow these rules. There cannot be thought separate from the use of language and language can only operate within a set of social practices. Therefore, there is no privet thought without a corresponding public reality. "An inner process", he tells us "stands in need of outward criteria" (Wittgenstein 201). In other words, I think therefore I am part of a community.

Wallace told McCaffery that *Philosophical Investigations* was "the single most beautiful argument against solipsism that's ever been made" (Burn 44). While the anti-private-language argument is, of course, controversial, Wallace treated it like some kind of mathematical proof. In "Authority and American Usage" he gave a summary of Wittgenstein's argument, saying "[t]he point here is that the idea of a private language, like private colors and most other solipsistic conceits with which this reviewer has at various

times been afflicted, is both deluded and demonstrably false" (Wallace 32). Solipsism and the particular form of loneliness it brought, was dead.

While Wittgenstein may have "solved" solipsism for Wallace, there was a catch, a lingering conundrum with its own frustrating implication. Wittgenstein's account of language in *Philosophical Investigations* seems pleasant, reassuringly every day: language is an ordinary, familiar, social human activity. But, it is also quite extreme. Because, as all thought takes place in language and all language takes place in some game, there is no transcendent non-language-game point where you can step back — as it were — and see if any other language game is better than another. That is to say, there is no way to figure out if one language game does a better job of mirroring reality than any other. In the *Tractatus* Wittgenstein was in the business of stepping back from language, evaluating its relations with reality, and pronouncing which use connected us with something real. But in *Philosophical Investigations* he is in another business entirely, here he seeks to describe, without judgment, merely assembling words for a purpose.

So, In Wallace's view, Wittgenstein had — again — left us unable to connect with the external world. As he told McCaffery, *Philosophical Investigations* "eliminated solipsism but not the horror" (Burn 45). The only difference Wallace seems to see between the *Tractatus* and *Philosophical Investigations* is that, rather than being trapped alone in our private thoughts, we are trapped together in the institution of language. This may feel warmer than solipsism; but, at the end of the day, it is just another form of being sealed off from reality, making for cold comfort. Explaining this to McCaffery, Wallace said, "[u]nfortunately we're still stuck with the idea that there's this world of referents out there that we can never really join or know because we're stuck in here, in language, even if we're at least all in here together" (Burn 44).

For most, *The Broom of the System* portrays these two emotional reactions, the fear of being trapped in language and the relief that at least we are all trapped in it together. I do not dispute the presence of Wittgenstein's philosophy in the novel; it is there clear as day, but I believe there is more to Lenore and the relationships she develops. I believe she transcends language through love.

In this chapter, then, I will read Lenore, her relationship with Rick, and her relationship with Andrew to demonstrate how Wallace sought to escape the solipsism of postmodern fiction, not through another school of post-structural thought, but through human fragility, trust, and intimacy.

Lenore's Decentred Life

Much has been made in the literature about Lenore's name. In *Understanding*, her name, the foremost signifier of who she is, points to someone else: her Wittgenstein obsessed great-grandmother. But what if there is something else in Lenore's name? Wallace said that *The Broom of the System* is "a conversation between Wittgenstein and Derrida […]" (Lipsky 35). If we think about this statement the Wittgenstein side of the conversation can easily be thought of, there is plenty of literature focusing on this. But the Derrida side, that is a little more difficult to think of.

I believe that Lenore's purpose in the novel is not to echo her great-grandmother's Wittgenstein obsession but to act out the Derrida side of the conversation. Lenore is, in the first part of the novel at least, a linguistic construct trapped in a life of deconstruction.

The starting point of deconstruction, if there can be said to be one, is presented in *Of Grammatology* as the discussion of language in the history of philosophy, particularly the hierarchy of speech over writing (Derrida 33). As Derrida says, speech is traditionally

preferred over writing as writing seems to be derived from speech. This means, that speech is perceived as the symbol of mental experience while writing is the secondary symbol of spoken words; consequently, writing is perceived to be more removed from the "mental experience" (Derrida 33). Building on this in *Dissemination,* he accuses Plato of creating the value of speech over writing (Derrida 61-119). Derrida notes how, in Plato's view, speech is closer to the "logos" — to knowledge or reason.

Derrida aims to question the idealisation of speech, how it involves a phantom promise of the natural, pure, and original; instead of writing, which is devaluated as distant, secondary, deceptive. By destabilising Plato's hierarchies, Derrida observes how all forms of language can be understood as forms of writing. He notes, again in *Dissemination*, how speech, spontaneity, the pure origin of thought, is contaminated (Derrida 173-286). Can we be sure our thoughts are not the reproduction of something we acquired? Although thought may seem to be instant, in an instant, it passes into memory, a record or reproduction of the thought. Derrida exposes Plato's ideal of speech as the natural, the pure, and original instance as an impossible phantasy. He shows that the hierarchy, the value of speech over writing, is invalid. According to Derrida, the secondary (writing), seeps into Plato's ideal origin. The ideal as writing, he tells us in in *Dissemination*, "*adds to itself* the possibility of being *repeated* as such" (Derrida 312, emphasise original). Derrida argues, then, that language — speech and writing — always involves delay, deferral of meaning, and ambiguity; there is always a distance. There is no logos. There would be no language without the play in these elements, as language is always escaping us; it is continually being written.

To read this play, Derrida creates the term différance. Différance is an appropriation and re-inscription of Ferdinand De Saussure's concept of the sign. In *Course in General Linguistics*, language is a system of signs (Saussure 75-80). Meaning, Saussure shows, is produced through the relationship between signs. Signs, therefore, are not ideas given in

advance but values emanating from the system (Saussure 131-143). Signs are "purely differential, not positively defined by their relations with other terms of the system. Their most precise characteristic is that they are what the others are not" (Saussure 117). Re-inscribing this in *Margins of Philosophy*, we are told

> the first consequence to be drawn from this is that the signified concept is in and of itself, in a sufficient presence that would refer only to itself [...] every concept is inscribed in a chain or in a system within which it refers to the other, to other concepts by means of the systematic play of différances. (Derrida 11)

So, the meaning of any "present" sign is only the relationship between all the absent meanings that the sign is not (Derrida 12). It is for this situation that Derrida creates différance. Différance is a deliberate misspelling of difference, which in French means both to differ and defer. With this word, Derrida gestures at the features that govern the production of textual meaning. On the one hand, he plays with the idea that words need to differ — that they need a space of their own to mean something — and, on the other hand, he plays with the fact that they need to defer — that they need to appeal to additional words, words written at another time — to mean something. Différance inscribes the passage of the infinite (Derrida 12). His emphasis on the sign's différance leads him to write, in *Of Grammatology*, "there is no outside of the text" (Derrida 157). There is nothing outside the infinitely differing movement of differentiation, nothing outside what the sign is not.

To read différance in *Of Grammatology,* Derrida develops, from Jean-Jacques Rousseau's text, the term undecidable. He writes that there are several hierarchal oppositions in Rousseau's texts, oppositions that intersect between nature and culture (Derrida 109-152). In this intersection, Derrida argues that Rousseau is occupied with the supplementary. With

the idea, for example, that writing is a supplement to speech. Rousseau's supplements, he notes, in their capacity to become the other are "like an aggressor or a housebreaker, threatening some internal purity or security" (Derrida 36). In the idea of the supplement, the contamination is already enfolded. Instead of a logos — a pure origin — in the supplement, we find "reflecting pools, and images" (Derrida 36). Différance is the origin. "For what is reflected is split in itself" (Derrida 36). Every moment is also the loss of an earlier moment; it cannot decide precisely what it is; it is undecidable.

I believe these ideas of Derrida's are the foundation of Lenore's personality in *The Broom of the System*. She is defined by undecidability. She has "feelings of disorientation" (Wallace 61). She has feelings of "identity-confusion" (Wallace 61). And, she feels a "lack of control" (Wallace 61). She "simply felt [...] as if she had no real existence, except for what she said and did and perceived [...] and that these were [...] not really under her control" (Wallace 66).

Her feelings, like Derrida's conception of deconstruction, are double. The text tells us that Lenore has feelings of disorientation and later that she feels as if she had no real existence; that she has feelings of identity-confusion and later she feels she is only what she said and did and perceived; that she feels a lack of control and later how what she perceived was not really under her control. In this sense, she can be thought of as undecidable. There are no pure psychic inscriptions of her feelings; her feelings are reflecting pools; reflecting, they are already split.

The notion of disorientation is associated with symptoms such as confusion (a general lack of clarity, delirium) and disrupted attention (agitation, aggressiveness and restlessness as well as hallucinations). Lenore has a lack of clarity. Nothing is easy for her to perceive, understand, or interpret. Her attention is disrupted. She feels she cannot ground her interest in someone or on something; she cannot ground herself with the idea that a singular thing holds

a particular importance. She feels aggressiveness and restlessness. A hostility to any singular stability, a need to break it free from its singularity. She feels the presence of things that are not there, the presence of traces. Lenore's disorientation creates an anti-logocentric force.

Her disengagement from the singular can be read in the phrase no real existence. The real acts, in this phrase, as a modifier. Existence is existence, no? No. The modifier real acts to create the idea of something preceding existence, something pure, original, natural; it creates the logos. When the text illuminates that she feels there is no real existence, it illustrates that she feels there is no logos.

Identity is the fact of who or what a thing is. Here, the kernel word is fact, a thing known or proven to be true. Identity implies certainty and stability. But confusion is the inability to think clearly or quickly. Lenore's certainty and stability is not certain or stable. Lenore is marked by an openness, by what she is not. In this sense, Lenore's openness feeds her feeling that she exists only in what she said, did, and perceived. Open to what she is not, she becomes only the relationship between all the meanings that she is not. She is the infinite relation of the sign; she is différance; she exists only in the text.

With a lack of control Lenore is undecidable. Every moment is occupied with the capacity to become other, to become what it is not; it is enfolded with contamination. This supplementary other in every of Lenore's moments means her actions are already split. That an other force defines every force of her actions. Lenore feels a lack of control, that her actions are not really under her control, as every one of her actions pulls against itself in its otherness.

Lenore's feelings are, like deconstruction, doubled. The doubled structure of her feelings creates a force of undecidability. Her undecidability is, in turn, driven by her feelings. She lives in the différance of language, in the infinite relation of the sign, and she feels the supplementary force of the other. In this sense, we can think of Lenore as the

Derrida side of the conversation. She is trapped in a cage of self-referential language, living out a solipsistic life of deconstruction.

Deconstructing Dasein

So how does Lenore get herself out of this mess, how does she come to represent the fragility of what it means to be human? To begin to address this question, we will read her relationship with Rick, which takes place in the first part of the novel. In *Understanding*, many of Rick's sections read like parodies of Nabokov's parodic prose and, when he speaks about Lenore, he becomes a shadow of Nabokov's Humbert Humbert, the narrator of *Lolita* (Boswell 25). We are told that this means Rick, and consequently Humbert, are interested in object-centred vision of language and the world (Boswell 29). Not much is made of this identification. But there is much to be said about it. After all, in conversation with McCaffery Wallace name-checks Nabokov as one of his "real enemies […]", a member of the "patriarchy for his patricide" (Burn 48).

Wallace wanted Nabokov dead for his solipsism. But Nabokov's solipsism, due to his postmodern position, is a complex matter tied up with metaphysics. As Brian McHale tells us in *Postmodernist Fiction*, modernism emerged from the crisis of the late nineteenth and early twenty century. With the death of God, Charles Darwin's theory of evolution over-writing the myth of creation, and Freud's conception of the psyche replacing the soul; the idea of objective truth crumbled. Modernist writers, consequently, abandoned the idea of objective realism and took up a new examination of individual subjective experience (McHale 9). They took up an epistemological task, they examined the mechanics of knowing (McHale 10). Through their epistemological task, though, modernists propose new subjective experiences that are — paradoxically — universal, perhaps most famously captured by James Joyce's use

of the epiphany (McHale 11). Postmodernism is, then, a subtle critique and extension of modernism. Postmodernists author's shifted the attention from the epistemological grounds of knowing to an ontological inquiry of it. Where modernists used epistemological enquiry to reach for new universals, postmodernists examine the ontology of the epistemological foundations that were used to find such universals.

With McHale's help, we can put Nabokov's postmodernism in the field of ontology; but this doesn't really help us understand the purpose of Nabokov's work, let alone why Wallace placed it in his crosshairs. Ontology is not a small field of philosophy and to find Nabokov's place in it — to begin to untangle this problem — we should look at his words. He argues in "The Art of Literature and Common Sense", for what he calls, the "supremacy of detail over the general" (Nabokov 373). Claiming that the "capacity to wonder at trifles […] these asides of the spirit, these footnotes in the volume of life are the highest forms of consciousness, and it is in this childishly speculative state of mind, so different from common sense and its logic that we know the world to be good" (Nabokov 374). This goodness of the world, he goes on, is something irrational and concrete, something to be captured by imagination rather than intellect. As he goes on,

> the irrational belief in the goodness of man […] becomes something much more than the wobbly basis of idealistic philosophies. It becomes a solid and iridescent truth […] I can very well imagine that my fellow dreamers, thousands of whom roam the earth, keep to these same irrational and divine standards during the darkest and most dazzling hours. (Nabokov 374)

Nabokov, then, offers a protest against general ideas. He frames common sense and logic as thoughtlessness and vulgarity. Affirming an idiosyncratic irony, he aims to open our world and translate it into another realm of being.

We are told in *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*, that Heidegger is one of the very few "dreamers" who wandered the earth with Nabokov (Rorty 150). And it is in Heidegger's concept of Dasein that Nabokov finds his refuge.

Heidegger's Dasein analyses the Being of beings. In *Being and Time*, "Being is not a being; it is not a specific phenomenon we encounter in our engagement with the world: it is, rather, an abstraction of our encounters with specific beings" (Heidegger 31). Being is "that which determines entities as entities" (Heidegger 31). Dasein is therefore the object of an enquiry that must precede any posing of the question of Being's being (Heidegger 33). The Being of Dasein, then, cannot be understood in the terms applied to other entities (Heidegger 34). We cannot think of Dasein as having a nature or essence that it always manifests; such as the case appropriate for physical objects, that are what they are. Dasein is in activities, character traits, lifestyle, visions of good, in our conception of what it is to flourish as a human being. So, it is in what it is to be a human being, to make it our own existence (Heidegger 34-35). Dasein, consequently, is in how an individual ties themselves to their self-preservation and reproduction; it is an open question that relates itself to its own Being.

After prioritising the question of Being and pointing toward Dasein, Heidegger notes that understating Dasein commits him to understand his enquiry as emerging from a tradition of ontological enquiry. Indeed, he is addressing the Christian conception of the soul as a category for understanding Dasein (Heidegger 46). Not only does he identify how the church's history marks his enquiry, but he also notes that any attempt to advance the inquiry of ontology is to project it into the future (Heidegger 42-43). After he has pointed toward Dasein and how it is entangled with history he adds, that, if the question of the Being of

beings is to be answered, then he must break up the rigid carapace of the tradition that confronts him (Heidegger 49). To do so, he cites Aristotle's concept of the unity-in-diversity of Being. This means Heidegger, following Aristotle, acknowledges the differences between the ontological structures grounding different domains of Being without casting off the possibility of uncovering a unified set of presuppositions grounding every such ontological structure. In search of unity he announces that "we shall point to temporality as the meaning of the Being of that entity which we call Dasein" (Heidegger 38). He notes that Dasein's structures must be interpreted as modes of temporality; consequently, when Dasein understands Being, it does so with time as its standpoint. He then illuminates that if Dasein's constitution understands itself as temporal, as rooted in time, it must understand itself as historical in a specific sense (Heidegger 41).

While objects have a history in the sense that they have occupied a space and time for a certain period, Dasein exists; it lives. Events in its past are not left behind; they are carried forward in memories and scars. Dasein does not have a history; it lives its history; it exists in what the past makes available for it; bound to its historical circumstances. But in its future, Dasein encounters a problem; death. Death creates an existential significance (Heidegger 299-394). Death is always a possibility present to us. This, Heidegger argues, should give each of us the right way to live. Facing death allows us to take responsibility for ourselves; it enables us to create authentic lives (Heidegger 311). By having death as a present possibility, the authentic life creates a desire to avert death. In its aversion, the authentic life creates a path out of the conformity of the social world. Death, for Heidegger, then, allows us to individualise ourselves, to lay claim to our own lives.

Through a strong misreading of Humbert Humbert's introduction of *Lolita* and Rick's introduction of Lenore, I will present how both seek Dasein. Before I start this reading, though, there is a matter concerning languages and realms I need to address. I cannot reach

into the realm Heidegger and Nabokov dwell in without changing my tone. In *Poetry, Language, Thought* we are told "poetry names the very essence of art; it is the bringing into being" (Heidegger 73). And, given that my purpose here is to bring into being the Being of Humbert's Being, I will use a poetic tone.

Humbert's introduction of *Lolita* opens with him saying, "Lolita, light of my life, fire of my loins" (Nabokov 9). There is something uncanny occurring here. As the speaking subject, Humbert presents himself as its object; and, Lolita, as the subject, is presented by Humbert as the object he is addressing. With these words, Humbert folds his subject into his object, his object into his subject, he entwines them. When Humbert creates this grammatical fold, when he entwines his subject and object, he creates an entity that linguistics cannot contain. Lolita is alive beyond Language. Humbert speaks the priority of Being. This priority of Being seeps into the clause, light of my life, fire of my loins to create the force of his Dasein. When Humbert says, light of my life, he points toward his Dasein. Light gives life. He cannot hold it. Yet, it creates his world. It conceives and births his substance and sustenance. It is the thing that allows his every day to be. It is the Being of what his being perceives, his life; it is his Dasein. This force of Humbert's Dasein is then echoed in the next clause, fire of my loins. Fire is something natural, something before human beings knew themselves as human beings. Fire, too, creates Humbert's world. It furthers his substance and sustenance. It is the thing that allowed every day he lives to flourish. It is fire that allowed human beings to prosper, to multiply. It is the Being of his reproduction; it is his Dasein. Fire is his Dasein as it precedes the possibility of Humbert's reproduction. But the Dasein he points toward remains an open question, what happens at night, what happens when the fire goes out? The grammatical fold of Humbert's voice, which prioritised Being, then, contains a gesture that points toward his Dasein, to the Being of his being. But Humbert's Dasein cannot

simply be; it must be the entity of an entity; his Dasein is the entity of Lolita the entity, beyond subject or object.

Prioritising Being and pointing toward Dasein, Humbert says next, "My sin, my soul" (Nabokov 9). Humbert is present and points towards theology; he speaks the words sin, soul; he speaks of the past, the church. He emphasises the idea that he will live forever, in Hell or Heaven.

Pointing toward his Dasein's past, present, and future, Humbert goes on, "Lo-lee-ta: the tip of the tongue taking a trip of three steps down the palate to tap, at three, on the teeth. Lo. Lee. Ta" (Nabokov 9). When Humbert says Lo-lee-ta he breaks up her sign. He breaks up the structure that grounds her as an entity. Humbert opens the difference between her ontological structures. This is alive in the utterance itself. Lo-lee-ta. Humbert shifts the central phoneme, li, to lee; he show us how a difference is alive within her structure; a different name, a diversity in her unity. He then affirms the life of this difference. The tip of the tongue takes a trip of three steps down the palate to tap on the teeth. The tongue moves, but here it takes a trip, a distinctly human activity. It takes a trip as it shifts from li to lee, the phenom is the same, yet somewhere else, it is away from home. It takes three steps, three phonetic steps; three are required in the structure of new life, something is being born here. It is coming into the world through the mouth, tapping, creating a rhythm, beating like a heart. Lo. Lee. Ta. Diversity is born in the difference of her unity.

Humbert continues, "She was Lo, plain Lo, in the morning, standing four feet ten in one sock. She was Lola in slacks. She was Dolores on the dotted line. But in my arms she was always Lolita" (Nabokov 9). When Humbert says, she was Lo, plain Lo, in the morning, he roots himself in time. Lolita is four feet ten, but not forever. She only has one sock, but the other will come. Lolita is a moment in the morning; she creates a Being, a moment against the horizon in which she will have to put on her other sock, later her slacks. When Lolita

stands to attend to legal requirements, the being of her Being changes; she becomes something else, something official, Dolores. When they are together in Humbert's arms, her Being changes again; she is Lolita.

Taking time as his standpoint, Humbert goes on,

> [d]id she have a precursor? She did, indeed she did. In point of fact, there might have been no Lolita at all had I not loved, one summer, a certain initial girl-child. In a princedom by the sea. Oh when? About as many years before Lolita was born as my age was that summer. You can always count on a murderer for a fancy prose style. (Nabokov 9)

When Humbert notes this memory he associates it with a princedom by the sea, a space where the tide is forever alive. This history, for Humbert, lives. Its life is affirmed as he translates it into Lolita, pointing toward the Being that lives uncontained. The Being of Humbert's Dasein is then preserved when he notes the history of his Being. Refusing to hand over numbers, Humbert creates uncertainty, objectless angst. We have nothing. How old was he? How old was she? His voice creates a force that lives beyond him, allowing Dasein to live. Humbert, then, affirms the Being of the Dasein he points toward. He admits he is a murderer. As a murderer, Humbert has experienced death first-hand. His hands carry the possibility of death; they make death present. This deathly aura is the source of his fancy speech. Everything he touches is laced with death. Everything becomes death. Death becomes a present possibility. The death that haunts Humbert is what rips him away from "normal" speech. His language becomes elaborate because, present in the possibility of death, it is his; he speaks for himself, authentically.

Alive in history and dwelling in death, Humbert finally says, “ladies and gentlemen of the jury, exhibit number one is what the seraphs, the misinformed, simple, noble-winged seraphs, envied. Look at this tangle of thorns” (Nabokov 9). When Humbert addresses the jury, he is on the stand; a place he did not choose to be, addressing himself. He is addressing his relationship with Lolita. Humbert, however, is not concerned with the eyes of the jurors and their public morality; he has already confessed to loving the girl child and to how Lolita excites him, he is only concerned with how his relationship with Lolita speaks to itself. Humbert is passive in this activity; he becomes only the body through whom Dasein speaks. This is affirmed when he cites the seraphs, the angels of the highest rank, through which the voice they wished they possessed, God’s voice, spoke. Indeed, Humbert draws on something already delivered, God, to illuminate his Dasein, his authenticity. He notes, at last, his tangle of thorns, he is the son of Dasein and he lives in another realm.

So it can be read that Humbert peruses Dasein when he introduces *Lolita.* Rick’s introduction of Lenore in *The Broom of the System* opens with him saying, “Then who is this girl who owns me, whom I love?” (Wallace 59). In the first clause, Rick, as the speaking subject, presents himself as the object; and, the girl, as the subject, is presented by him as the object he is addressing. Like Humbert, Rick folds his subject into his object, his object into his subject, he entwines them. When Rick echoes Humbert’s grammatical fold, when he, too, entwines his subject and object, he echoes the creation of an entity that cannot be housed in the entity of linguistics, in subject-verb-object. Like Lolita, Lenore is alive beyond language. Like Humbert, then, Rick speaks the priority of Being. This priority of Being seeps into Rick’s words, “whom I love” to create the force of his Dasein. Dasein is the object of an enquiry that must precede any posing of the question of Being’s being. The priority seeps into whom; this whom is subject-verb-object. Whom is the object, as an object, it precedes Rick, it contains a personality, something that will present its being to him, but it is also the object

he addresses. It is the life in this whom that precedes the question of what defines him, love. Dasein is an open question that relates itself to its own Being and that is what Rick creates. This girl, Rick does not dare speak her name; who is she? She is an open question, one that only relates to his Being, to his love.

Prioritising Being and pointing towards Dasein, like Humbert, Rick goes on, "I refuse to ask or answer who she is" (Wallace 59). Dasein is alive; it is tied to self-preservation and reproduction, past, present, and future. If Rick were to ask questions, to give answers, he would be containing, destroying, the Being he points toward. But, by refusing to ask or answer, Rick is, in his silence, still speaking. His silence says she is something beyond me, something with life that brings Being to me. She is the light that illuminates my life, the darkness when she leaves; she is the essence that creates the essence of my life, and I will not contain it; I will not destroy it. If I do, I will destroy my own life. She is the essence of the being of my Being, and I wish to live and continue to live in the life of Dasein. In this silence, then, Rick points toward his Dasein, how his Dasein lives outside him; and, with this outside, he creates another force. This Dasein outside of him, independent from him, creates a life of its own, taking on its own past, present, and future.

Pointing toward the past, present, and future of Dasein as Humbert does, Rick continues, "*[w]hat* is she? This is a thin-shouldered, thin-armed, big breasted girl, a long-legged girl with feet larger than average, feet that tend to point out a bit when she walks […] in her black basketball sneakers" (Wallace 59, emphasis original). Rick's question asks what things specify her. He asks what different ontological structures are alive in the unity of this woman. She has thin shoulders and arms, big breasts, long legs, and large feet; the feet attract a double consideration, they point out, there is a lull in Rick's voice, then they are in her sneakers. Rick focuses on the shoes as the feet root her to the earth. When her feet are still, they create an image of her unity. But, when she walks, with her feet pointing out a little, the

long legs set in motion a rhythm, a rhythm that swings, sways, and rocks her body. Her thin shoulders do not have the strength to hold rigid in the momentum of her gait, neither will her thin arms, or her large breasts. Her body, in motion, rocks back and forth as one would rock a baby back and forth. When Rick watches her walk, life is conceived in every step she takes, born every time her foot falls to the earth, every time it lifts up from it.

With the unity-in-diversity of Lenore's Being, Rick follows Humbert by saying,

> [b]ut what of Lenore, of Lenore's hair? Here is hair that is clearly within and of itself every color — blond and red and jet-black-blue and honeynut — but which effects an outward optical compromise with possibility that consist of appearing simply dull brown, save for brief teasing glimpses out of the corner of one's eye. (Wallace 59)

A glimpse is a momentary view; it is temporal. Rick view's Lenore's hair with time as his standpoint. It is in this moment a colour; at that moment another, it is Dasein he points toward.

Taking time as his standpoint, like Humbert, Rick goes on,

> [t]he hair hangs in bangs, and the sides curve down past Lenore's cheeks and nearly meet in points below her chin, like the brittle jaws of an insect of prey. Oh, the hair can bite. I've been bitten by the hair. And her eyes. I cannot say what color Lenore Beadsman's eyes are; I cannot look at them; they are the sun to me. (Wallace 59)

If Dasein understands itself as temporal, it must understand itself as historical in a specific sense; past but alive, events never left behind, carried forward in memories and scars. Living in what the past made available for it; facing up to its future, death. Rick notes how

Lenore’s hair hangs in bangs. The bangs create the form of her hair. In this attention to her hair’s form, there is an association to the origins of our world. The form of our world hangs on the origin of the big bang. This history seeps into Rick’s next phrase. Lenore’s hair creates the image of the jaws of an insect. Rick notes a life that existed long before humans were a species. Lenore’s hair, the history of life, curves down her cheeks, nearly meeting in points below her chin; this end, this edge, frames her face. Her face is framed by the history of life, the living past that makes her present. It has bitten him. He has scars. Rick is marked by history. He cannot look in her eyes either. They are the sun; they will blind him. Blindness is something present to Rick. It is present to him as a lack. This inability defines his mode of access, it shapes the possibilities that are open to him. Lenore’s eyes create the possibility of loss, of the existential significance of death, which shapes Rick’s actions.

Alive in history and dwelling in death, Rick, like Humbert, finally says,

> [a] kiss with Lenore is a scenario in which I skate with buttered soles over the moist rink of lower lip, sheltered from weathers by the wet warm overhang of upper, finally to crawl between lip and gum and pull the lip over me like a child’s blanket and stare over it with beady, unfriendly eyes out at the world external to Lenore, of which I no longer wish to be a part. (Wallace 59-60)

When Rick tells us that he skates with buttered soles, he illuminates that he is driven by an initial momentum, a momentum that is created by the natural world. There is, in this force, something propelling him, something throwing him. Thrown into Lenore’s mouth, where his Dasein exists, he is sheltered from the weather by the top lip. The idiom to weather the storm means to deal with a difficult situation without suffering too much damage, but Rick does not weather the storm; he shelters from it under Lenore. Lenore bears the brunt of

the battery while Rick hides beneath her, looking out. He is passive. His passivity lives in his affirmation that he will crawl like a child, between lip and gum, pulling Lenore's lips over like a blanket. A child does not yet know how to manage their ego and the external sources of sensations. They are often overwhelmed, hiding behind their parents' legs and burying their faces in blankets. The child looks out at the external world with uncertain eyes. They are passive, allowing the moment to be guided by their parent. Rick is a child of Dasein, Lenore is Dasein's partner. She is the creation of his being's Being; Rick is passive, his conscience is not bound to the external world, but to Lenore, his Dasein, who creates another realm for him.

Humbert takes refuge in Dasein with his introduction to *Lolita* and Rick follows him down the same path into Dasein when he introduces Lenore. But Rick does not just speak about Lenore, he also speaks to her and she responds to his voice. Rick tells her long stories he has made up. In *Understanding,* the stories Rick tells Lenore are weapons of control (Boswell 22). An attempt to reconfigure the reality of their doomed relationship (Boswell 22). It is true that "all of Rick's stories are basically retellings of their love affair" (Boswell 22). But I disagree when he says Rick "wants to confine words to their objects, for in this way he hopes to control the objects themselves" (Boswell 22). In fact, I believe the opposite; that Rick uses words to open objects, stand in the clearing of Dasein, and draw Lenore into another realm. That is not to say Rick is successful though and the significance of their relationship is marked by his failure, by Lenore's rejection — her deconstruction — of Rick's purpose.

As all of the stories Rick tells Lenore in *The Broom of the System* are about their love affair, we only need to read one to show how he tries to carry Lenore into the realm of Dasein and how she tries to deconstruct his attempt.

One of the stories Rick tells Lenore is about a man and a woman who meet at a group therapy session and fall in love (Wallace 102-114). The man, Rick says, “has a problem with incredible flashes of temper that he can’t control. His emotions get hold of him and he can’t control them, and he gets insanely and irrationally angry [...]” (Wallace 105). The woman, Rick continues, “suffers from horrible periods of melancholy […]” (Wallace 105).

Dasein had immense implications for how we think about what it means to be human. Plato, Descartes, Kant et al. all privilege rationality, the detached observer. Love, fear, hope seems profoundly irrational to them; the passions, in their view, often make no sense. Passions disrupt our ability to think; they refuse to submit to better judgment. In *Being and Time*, however, the passions are the condition that makes it possible to “encounter something that matters to us” (Heidegger 177). Dasein means, literally, there-being. Dasein always exists in a there, a meaningful or particular action. Our “there-ness is forever shot through with the tension between the freedom to decide our lives and our subjection to things we cannot decide” (Heidegger 177). This tension manifests in our mood. And moods are “instances of a general structure of our disposedness” (Heidegger 178). Fear is a the best example. (Heidegger 179-182). Fear can overtake us; it changes our body and our perception of our surroundings, it makes everything look different (Heidegger 180). What we noticed before disappears, we notice new things (Heidegger 180). In a moment, a mood can shift our perception of our surroundings (Heidegger 181). If we pay attention to these moments we learn that “moods assail us” (Heidegger 182). They fall upon us suddenly, surprise us, assault us, seize us. In other words, we are affected by situations we find ourselves in. This means, they are not subjective; he says, “they do not come from inside us” (Heidegger 182). Moods, however, “no more objective” (Heidegger 182). Moods “arise out of being-in-the-world” (Heidegger 182). They come from a way of relating ourselves to the things and people around us. All the characteristics that make up a mood show how we are disposed by it.

Disposedness “discloses Dasein in its thrownness […]” (Heidegger 182) — it shows how we are delivered into circumstances beyond our control — it creates “being-in-the-world as a whole” (Heidegger 182). A unified tone, flavour, or feel; and it is our “*submission to the world out of which we encounter something that matters to us* [...]” (Heidegger 177, emphasis original). Mood imposes on us something that matters and create a seeing that takes in and responds to the situation as it unfolds.

Dasein involves us finding ourselves in a particular anti-rational way. We have a there, a structured situation in which we exist. Part of our there-being means we are always disposed by a world we cannot fully control. How we are disposed gives rise to our mood. Our mood is a way of being tuned into the world. It makes things matter to us. It is the basis of action.

So, the character Rick makes up for this story has a problem with “incredible flashes of temper that he can’t control” (Wallace 105). A problem is something regarded as unwelcome. In this sense, it a mood that seizes him. This mood appears in “incredible flashes” (Wallace 105). A positive tone sounds out through these words. Incredible signifies something impossible to believe, something extraordinary. Rick is speaking of something remarkable. A flash is but a moment, brief and sudden. A sudden burst of bright light. It illuminates. A flash allows us to see what was previously concealed by darkness. The man cannot control these flashes; they are something more than him; they dispose him. They are flashes of temper. The choice of this word is strange. Temper is not just the tendency to become angry easily and quickly. It also means to improve the consistency or resiliency of something, a force that acts as a counterbalance. A force of passion for counterbalancing the rational, for improving the state of the world? As Rick goes on, his character’s “emotions get hold of him and he can’t control them, and he gets insanely and irrationally angry […]” (Wallace 105). Once more, an external force acts on the character in Rick’s story, disposes

him. But this time, Rick says that it makes his character insanely and irrationally angry. These words are significant. Insane means, in its informal sense, shocking or outrageous; but, it also means a state of mind which prevents normal perception, behaviour, or social interaction. And irrational means not logically reasonable. Rick's character is insane and irrational as what he does not follow rational thought; he responds to the situation as it unfolds. The man in Rick's story carries his force of Dasein.

Rick uses the woman's melancholia to create Lenore's force of deconstruction. In "Mourning and Melancholia" we are told that melancholia arises when "a person grieves for an unconscious loss; a loss they cannot fully comprehend or identify" (Freud 237). With her Derridean force, Lenore forfeits the idea of a pure and absolute meaning. In différance, she is in an infinite system of differed and displaced meaning. In supplication, every moment she experiences is the loss of an earlier moment. Lenore, then, cannot fully explain, comprehend, or identify what she has lost. And, if she attempts to explain what she has lost, her object is forever escaping her. Her loss is only another moment of loss. Lenore's force of deconstruction, in this sense, means she is lost in a loss she cannot identify or comprehend; she is melancholic. The woman in Rick's story carries Lenore's force of deconstruction.

After Rick has completed this introduction of himself, Lenore, and how they met — after, that is, he has pointed toward the Being of their relationships being — Lenore interrupts. She asks him, "[c]an you please move your arm a little?" (Wallace 105). Lenore's use of can signifies that she is asking if Rick is capable of moving his arm. With this sarcastic tone, Lenore demands that she and Rick disengage themselves.

Rick's introduction of himself frames his interest in Dasein, the phenomenological world, and the destruction of the western tradition of metaphysics presents in *Being and Time* (Heidegger 41-42). His introduction of Lenore frames her interest in différance, and the deconstruction of western metaphysics. Rick creates a tone that wishes to bind him and

Lenore. He is saying, look we aren't so different. It is to this proposition that Lenore demands they disengage. Lenore insists they are different.

Even though Lenore insists they are different, Rick does not pause for thought. He tells Lenore how the therapist hated cities, how he tries unceasingly to get all his patients to move into a series of isolated cabins deep in the woods, cabins he owns (Wallace 106). Rick brings to light his perspective that the therapists they share is selfish and manipulative; telling Lenore should not trust him. Lenore responds to this with an ellipsis. Perhaps unsurprisingly, there is an essay titled "Ellipsis" in *Writing and Difference* that states,

> [s]omething invisible is missing in the grammar of this repetition. As this lack is invisible and undeterminable, as it completely redoubles and consecrates […] once more passing through each point along its circuit, nothing has budged. And yet all meaning is altered by this lack. Repeated, the same line is no longer exactly the same, the ring no longer has exactly the same centre, the origin has played. Something is missing that would make the circle perfect. (Derrida 373)

Lenore's ellipsis breaks open Rick's utterances. Rick tries to make his perspective of the therapist as selfish whole; he tries to make it complete, a perfect circle. The therapist is selfish. Why? He wants money. Why does the therapist want money? Because he is selfish. Rick encloses his view. But with this grammatical sign, Lenore introduces a lack; she introduces uncertainty to the certainty of Rick's view. The lack forces Rick's certainty to play. The play breaks the circle; it opens it, other meanings become possible.

Rick, though, is not disturbed by the possibility of other meanings, of the play that Lenore's ellipsis introduces, or the value it may seek. Instead, he forges on with his story. The man and woman, Rick goes on, fall madly in love; the man's temper begins to fade, as

does the woman's melancholia (Wallace 106). They decide to get married and buy a cabin off the therapist, which is several hours drive from anything (Wallace 106). When they move into the cabin, they have incredible sex all the time and almost instantly have a child (Wallace 106). They try to escape themselves and find comfort in the other. But this, as Heidegger explains, will not work.

The meaning of everyday things in *Being and Time*, is inherently shaped by the fact that they belong to a world we share in common (Heidegger 153-163). Many of our activities, consequently, are activities for others. This creates "a being-with; and being-with is an existential constituent of being-in-the-world […] so far as Dasein is at all it has being-with-one-another as its kind of being" (Heidegger 163). Essentially, Heidegger addresses the role social relations play in making us who we are. He highlights how the meaning of every encounter, of everything we do, is informed by the world we share with others. This raises, for Heidegger, a specific question, can I be myself? Part of the answer can be found in the structure of our shared world. "Activates and entities align us with others to create dispositions and practices" (Heidegger 164). We surround ourselves with a shared world. We take pleasure in what others take pleasure in and we find shocking what others find shocking. This is called "the dictatorship of the one" (Heidegger 164). By organising our world as such, the one provides the basis for decisions; but, it also makes it easy for us to never stand on our own two feet. The one and its conformity creates a state in which we tend to "disburden ourselves" (Heidegger 165). In other words, the conformity of the one leads to a willingness to accept the opinions of others, distancing us from ourselves and the responsibility we hold in making our lives our own.

Rick tells Lenore that the man and woman fall madly in love (Wallace 106). Madly means extreme and not governed by rational thought. The mood of their love is passionate. The characteristics of passionate love foreground the other. Everything they do is for the

other. The other, consequently, creates who they are. One of them will find pleasurable what the other finds pleasurable; one will agree that what the other finds shocking is shocking. Each will conform to the opinions of the other. The man and woman are one. The dictatorship of the one, their relationship, creates conformity between them, it means they are willing to accept the opinions of each other. It distances them from their own responsibilities, his temper and her melancholia. Their state as one is emphasised when Rick says that they have sex all the time and have a child (Wallace 106). In the sexual act, they become one, their bodies entwine. When they have a child, they create one out of themselves, a one who needs and whose needs dictate their actions. The man, the woman, and the child then become one; family. Rick, then, notes how their love can come to control their lives.

Rick then explains how, after a few years, the man's temper and the woman's melancholia begin to re-surface (Wallace 106). At the same time, the son begins to have epileptic-like fits when he cries (Wallace 106). The woman is pregnant again and, when she gives birth, the doctor slaps the bottom of their new daughter to get her to breathe, and the new-born immediately starts having a fit (Wallace 107-108). At this moment, their son falls and bangs his head and starts fitting (Wallace 108). The doctor examines both children and diagnoses "them with an extremely rare neurological condition in which crying […] decimates their nervous systems […]" (Wallace 108). Each fit will do more and more damage (Wallace 108). Both children are in danger of dying whenever they cry (Wallace 108).

In in *Being and Time,* when we confirm the one we become inauthentic (Heidegger 170). We deny the contingency of our lives (Heidegger 171). We fail, Heidegger notes, to realise what is unique about us; our capacity to discover the world in our own way. Death, if we face up to it, offers us the opportunity to be authentic, to take responsibility for our existence (Heidegger 304-311). It is our responsibility to face up to death, as, even though we know it is inevitable, our world creates a web of strategies that allows us to avoid having to

confront it (Heidegger 306). Death is "Dasein's ownmost possibility" (Heidegger 307). Or, in other words, it is what makes us the beings that we are. Unlike the gods, we are mortal; we know our mortality, unlike the animals. Death marks what it is to be human; life and death are tied together. But "we often focus on our demise rather than our death" (Heidegger 285-290). Our demise is the legal, logical, or social outcome of the existential significance of the event of death (Heidegger 287). Essentially, it is a way to avoid facing up to death's existential significance (Heidegger 288). Death is always a possibility present to us (Heidegger 311). This, Heidegger argues, should shatter our inauthentic being-with-others, the dictatorship of the one, and give each of us the right way to live.

Rick tells Lenore that the man and woman lived together for years. They were one, living for each other, living inauthentic lives. But their children change this. When their children go into epileptic-like fits, their limbs thrash around and flail uncontrollably and they are in danger of swallowing their tongues. This is an image of creation and loss. The children thrash; it is violent and convulsive, as though something is trying to break free, a life? But in this life, all ability to live is lost; they cannot communicate, speak or signal; they have died. In the children's fits, life and death are tied together. In the life of the fit, the parents see the demise of their children; they see how the body damages itself, how it decimates the nervous systems; and in its death, they see their death; how they too will be silenced. The children's fits create the present possibility of death in their lives. The presence of death in their lives individualises them. In the face of death, their life in the other is severed. By anticipating their death, they take responsibility for themselves. They realise their decisions are not essential as there is no right way to be human. They are set free to live their lives as their own. It is for this reason that their psychical issues re-surface. They pick up what they once put down, what makes them who they are, their burdens. The possibility of their children's death is present in their lives; the presence of death leads the man and woman to live their

authentic lives, their lives with strife and all. Rick notes how, if he and Lenore were to disburden themselves through family, they would be inauthentic. Effectively, Rick tells Lenore that they must be themselves through and through as death is coming.

Lenore responds to Rick's deathly development with the word "[w]ow" (Wallace 108). But there is no excitement or admiration here; only lack. A lack of punctuation means her voice is neutral. This neutral tone means she is not surprised or impressed by Rick's development. She knew this was coming. This lack shifts the tone of her statement. It is neutral, yes, but its neutrality now becomes patronising. With her Derridean force, Lenore is beyond Rick's consideration of Death.

Once more, Rick does not respond to Lenore's reaction — her patronising remark — instead, he forges ahead with his story. He tells her that the doctor gives the man and woman "a hundred little bottles of a certain special very rare and hard-to-make anti-crying medicine […]" (Wallace 108). This changes their world.

In "The Question Concerning Technology", Heidegger explains how technology changes our sense of the world. Fields that were once a gift from God to be cared for and maintained become mechanised; we lose a sense of stewardship and gain the sense of a challenge, a challenge to make nature do what we want (Heidegger 14). Technology challenges nature in two ways; it exposes and unlocks (Heidegger 15). In its exposing, technology allows us to theoretically grasp things; it opens up the world's secrets, placing them out in the open. And, in unlocking, technology allows us to take what we have exposed and use it in whatever way we want. The result of this is transformation. Objects, that once had fixed properties, are transformed into flexible resources with no determinate properties. Technology reduces people to "functionaries of enframing" (Heidegger 16). To the desire to get the most out of possibilities. This desire, is, in turn, driven by an economy that forever shifts and reconfigures itself to bring all resources into line. As a result, things lack any

inherent significance. The sense of our world, then, in Heidegger's view, loses any fixed character, nature, or essence. We lose something in this transformation. Technology replaces the need for bodily skills. We lose the experience of our Being-in-the-world, we lose Dasein (Heidegger 17).

Medicine exposes, opens up the secrets of the body and places them in the open; it unlocks and allows the children to use the body how they want. They can suppress their tears and continue "living". The medicine obliterates their essence as ill; it turns them into a recourse. When Rick notes that the doctor makes an anti-crying medicine, he illuminates how technology attempts to slow the children's demise, how it tries to hide their death, and how it does so for the sake of the one, the other, conformity. Rick notes, then, how the man and woman's authentic life, their grasp of death — their Dasein — is confronted by a world that tries to steal it away, lock it up, hide it.

Lenore responds to Rick's concern with a question. She asks, "[w]ould you like some of this ginger ale?" (Wallace 109). Her use of would as a model verb creates a request, a suggestion; she sets something in motion. A movement that turns away from what Rick is creating, Dasein; a move toward the world around her, to the ginger ale. In this movement, Lenore defies Dasein for the world around her by turning away. She rejects, that is, the purity and original instance that Rick laments; she shows, in her question, that there is nothing more valuable than the world around her; that there is only the text.

Rick, though, is not discouraged by Lenore's "question", her dedication to the text. He carries on with his story. He tells Lenore how the family are sitting at the dinner table, how the woman is melancholic and the man is unbelievably pissed off (Wallace 109-110). He explains that the son complains about the meal and the man, involuntarily, slaps him; knocking the child out of his chair into the store of anti-crying medicine. All the bottles are broken, both children start to fit. The son worse than the daughter (Wallace 110). The

parents, Rick continues, decide that the man should take the boy to the hospital, the woman should stay at home soothing the daughter and call the hospital to have more medicine made up. The woman, though, can't get through to the hospital, so she calls their old therapist and asks him to go to the hospital and bring her some medicine for their daughter (Wallace 111). While the therapist drives to the hospital, the man gets a flat tire. He is stuck on the side of the road replacing the wheel while the child is slumped in a bad way in the front seat. Meanwhile, back at the cabin, the woman is becoming more and more melancholy. Her melancholia makes her so tired that she staggers back and forth as she clutches her daughter to her breast (Wallace 112).

At this point, Lenore interrupts, she says the word "Jesus" (Wallace 112). She interjects; her interjection alludes to history, to the past symbol of Dasein. She alludes to the idea that what Rick is creating will always be trapped by purity, buy the idea of origin. Lenore speaks of the singular, but her use of the singular marks an opening, a wish to open something new. When she speaks the word Jesus, she asks if they can speak of something else.

Rick does not want to discuss the différance. He continues his story. He explains how the woman can't let go of the baby, or it will cry, and flop epileptically. But she is almost passing out because she's so melancholy. The woman, Rick goes on, succumbs to her melancholy. She lays down holding the baby against her breast, but she falls asleep, rolls over, and crushes the baby. She kills it (Wallace 112).

At this moment, Lenore interrupts again; she says the phrase "[o]h, God" (Wallace 112). Again, she interjects; she alludes to history, to the past symbol of Dasein. Again she alludes to the confinement of purity, the origin. Again she speaks of the singular, marking an opening, a wish for something else.

Rick ignores Lenore's request again. He tells Lenore that the woman wakes up, sees what has happened, and falls into an irreversible coma-like sleep from grief (Wallace 112).

Lenore interrupts once more. She says, "OK, that's enough" (Wallace 112). She is blunt here, no longer alluding; she asks for the end; she asks for a new conversation.

What Lenore wants does not affect Rick. He tells her that the therapist pulls up to the cabin soon after the woman falls into an irreversible coma-like sleep. Finding the woman, he calls the police, who, in turn, send a trooper out to search for her husband (Wallace 113). An officer finds him, fixing the puncture on the side of the road, and informs him of his wife's death. The news, Rick goes on, sends the man into an uncontrollable rage. In his rage, he hits the boy, who fits, and lands on the floor of the car with his head wedged up against the accelerator. The car takes off, dragging the man with it, and plummets over a cliff, killing both (Wallace 113).

In *Being and Time* authentic lives respond to the present possibility of death with anticipation (306-308). An anticipation of death, Heidegger adds, creates a running ahead into death. He suggests, that is, that the authentic life creates a relationship to death that is more than just mental. By having death as a present possibility, the authentic life creates a desire to avert death. In its aversion, the authentic life creates a path out of the one, the inauthentic life. The present possibility of death, then, creates anticipation, a running ahead into death, that wrenches us from away from the one; it allows us to individualise ourselves, to lay claim to our own lives.

With the death of the man, the death of the woman, the death of the daughter, and the death of the son, Rick creates the presence of death, a death that's possibility feeds into every character. This death runs away with itself; it seems unstoppable; death, death, death, death. But with its unstoppable force, it creates anticipation, will there be more death, who else can die? A whole convent of nuns (Wallace 113). The death Rick creates, in its present

possibilities, forces death on Lenore. Ultimately, Rick is trying to wrench her away from what he sees as her inauthentic life; he wants her to become what he perceives as an individual, he wants her to be seized by Dasein so they can wonder the earth together, dreaming forever.

After Rick depicts the character's death — after, that is, he has called Lenore to be seized by Dasein, to join him in his world, and to dream with him — she says, "[h]oly shit" (Wallace 113). Lenore holds up an opposition. While historically, an expression such as Holy Christ would be used to incite shock, the word Christ does not carry such emphatic force in a contemporary and predominantly secular society. Therefore, while the intensifier holy remains, the word used to incite shock, Christ, is replaced with the profanity shit. While "holy" corresponds to a spiritual realm, associated with notions of purity, a clean life leading to eternal bliss, and classically speaking, the colour white, shit has the opposite connotations; it is something produced when locked away from others as it is perceived as dirty, it is the bodily production of debris, flushed away into the guts and veins of the earth, into the sewage system and rivers. In colour, it is a deep and earthy shade of dull brown. In Lenore's utterance, the purity is stained by the dirt; the spiritual is marked by the secular; the mind is marked by the body. Lenore's response displaces the idea that there is anything pure, that there is a pure origin; in doing so, her response dismisses what Rick begs her to seize, Dasein.

Rick, then, begs Lenore to join him in his other world of Being. But she dismisses his plea, she deconstructs his purpose. This back and forth between Rick and Lenore — between Dasein and deconstruction — is alive in all of the stories Rick tells Lenore and in all her responses. Eventually, though, Lenore cannot take it anymore.

Rick tells Lenore his last story as they walk through the Great Ohio Desert. Here, Rick has Lenore where he wants her, in a clearing easily associated with metaphysics, but she is not having it any more. She says "cut the story charade. We're having a talk. […] why

can't we just have a talk without you pretending it's something else, Rick? I find this pretty disturbing" (Wallace 438). Lenore has listened to Rick's stories, she has heard his Dasein and deconstructed it. Heidegger's destruction of Western metaphysics is the foundation of Derrida's deconstruction of Western metaphysics (Dastur 273-299). By deconstructing Rick, Lenore has been deconstructing her own foundations. And, without these foundations, her self-reflexive-linguistic-housing is likely to collapse.

Finding the Father

At the start of the novel's second section, then, Lenore's deconstructive purpose is shaky. She has ripped up her own foundations built on the solipsist force of Nabokov's Dasein, his ontological difference, and with only a small nudge everything could come crashing down around her. Andrew provides this nudge, but he also picks up the pieces, he helps Lenore re-build, and together they share the work of life, with all its difficulties.

In *Understanding*, Andrew acts as a parody of Updike's Harry Rabbit Angstrom (Boswell 25). When Andrew abruptly leaves his wife Mindy, Wallace viciously re-writes the opening of *Rabbit Run* (Boswell 26). And, like Updike's Rabbit, who runs to his basketball coach after leaving his wife, Andrew runs to his old lacrosse coach. The two are tied together (Boswell 26-27). So how does Andrew, influenced by Rabbit — a character marked as one of the most solipsistic characters in recent literary history — help Lenore build a life marked by human fragility? The answer, I believe, can be found in another strong misreading.

"A Sort of Helplessly 50's Guy" in *The Cambridge Companion to John Updike*, tells us that even though Updike was aware of the theoretical developments of his time and worked — like his contemporary Nabokov — with intertextuality and metafictional devices, his subject has always been America (Olster 1). Updike devoted himself to the transcription of American

"middleness with all its grits, bumps, and anonymities, in its fullness of satisfaction and mystery" (Olster 2). Born in 1932, Updike's writing is inscribed by the discourse of the 1950s. By the belief that followed the Second World War and the disbelief that quickly replaced it once the Cold war started and America invaded Vietnam. That is to say, Updike's writing is marked by the replacement of ideology with individual psychology, what William Phillips named the "new Americanism" (Olster 3). Nowhere, Olster notes, are these qualities more clearly displayed than in *Rabbit, Run* (Olster 3). The tensions of Cold War standoffs are translated into the tensions of domestic standoffs; what Updike called the "politico-marital" (Olster 3). Dust balls beneath radiators, pork chops congealing in grease, and overflowing ashtrays are all part of Rabbit's daily life, while in the background Tibetans battle Chinese Communists in Lhasa, and Dwight D. Eisenhower and Harold Macmillan begin a series of talks in Gettysburg. Rabbit is constantly confronted by "a paralyzing sense of reality", but he constantly attempts to escape, most notably through an affair with Ruth Leonard (Olster 3). When the novel ends, though, unable to manage the conflicts in his marriage and having made empty promises to Ruth, Rabbit runs. He takes flight, attempting to escape the reality that paralyzes him, searching in vain for some other pleasure.

Wallace famously attacked Updike in his review "Certainly the End of Something or Other, One Would Sort of Have to Think". In which he declared "No U.S. novelist has mapped the solipsist's terrain better than John Updike, whose rise the 60s and 70s established him as both chronicler and voice of probably the single most self-absorbed generation since Louis XIV" (Wallace 51). He also noted, however, that he was "probably classifiable as one of very few actual sub forty Updike *fans*" (Wallace 52, emphasis original). Wallace's feelings about Updike's work were mixed, but, in this review, he also provided us with a clue as to how to read Rabbit and his re-inscription as Andrew. He tells us that Updike's biggest preoccupations have always aligned with Freud's, death and sex (Wallace51). We are,

however, not concerned with *Towards the End of Time* but *Rabbit Run* and *The Broom of the System*. That is to say, we are concerned with novels that are not so — biographically — close to death. It would make sense, then, to backtrack through Freud's ideas to something that is closer to Rabbit's youthful concerns of pleasure and reality. To then read what purpose this serves in the opening of *Rabbit Run*, which Boswell tells us is rewritten by Wallace. And read what purpose Wallace's re-inscription serves.

In "Formulations on the Two Principles of Mental Functioning", his second attempt to propose a general theoretical hypotheses of the psyche, Freud made the distinction between two regulating principles; the pleasure principle and the reality principle. Taking the unconscious mental processes as his starting point and he notes how these are governed by the pleasure principle (Freud 219). When we think of something we want, though, when we wish for it, its presence as a thought is a non-occurrence of the expected satisfaction, in other words, it causes disappointment and unpleasure (Freud 219). The disappointment experienced sets up the reality principle; it is what forces the psychical apparatus to form a conception of the real circumstance in the external world and to make an alteration to them (Freud 219). The increased significance of external reality, in turn, increases the importance of the senses directed towards that external world and the consciousness attached to them. This is how consciousness learned to comprehend sensory qualities alongside pleasure and unpleasure, and in response, the psyche set up the function of attention (Freud 220). With this, a system of notation was set up too; a record of conscious activity was created and memory was formed (Freud 220-221). The place of repression was then taken by an impartial passing of judgment, which had to decide if a given idea was true or false; if it was in agreement with reality or not, the decision is informed by a comparison with memory (Freud 221). The psyche, then, set up a new task for the body, it was now employed in the alteration of reality, and psychical energy was converted into action (Freud 221). Hand in hand with action,

restraint upon action became necessary, and this was provided by thinking. Thinking was, most likely, originally unconscious. Even though thinking goes beyond the presentation of ideas and addresses the relation between ideas, it did not have the texture of consciousness until it was linked to language. So thinking developed from the unconscious presentations of ideas, and it made it possible for the psyche to tolerate an increased tension between stimulus and the postponement of discharge (Freud 221). With the introduction of the reality principle, one species of thought-activity was split off and remained subordinate to the pleasure principle alone. This is the activity of fantasy, which abandons dependence on real objects (Freud 222). The specifics of fantasising are a consequence of the sexual instinct's trajectory. The sexual instincts that, in children, obtain their satisfaction in the subject's own body at first and later try to find an object, are interrupted by the long period of latency, delaying sexual development until puberty. For this reason a close connection arises, on the one hand, between the sexual instincts and fantasy; and, on the other hand, the ego-instincts and the activities of consciousness (Freud 223). But this means that, in the realm of fantasy, our psychical organisation can be employed to bring about the dominance of the pleasure principle, of what we have already worked so hard to rationalises with the reality principle (Freud 223). Just as the part of the ego concerned with pleasure can do nothing but wish and avoid unpleasure, the part of the ego concerned with reality need to do nothing but strive for what is useful and guard itself against damage. In fact the substitution of the reality principle for the pleasure principle implies no deposing of the pleasure principle but only a safeguarding of it (Freud 223). A moment of pleasure is given up, yes; but only to set out on a new path of a pleasure assured at a later time.

It is the long path of reality that Rabbit walks as *Rabbit Run* opens. He walks home from work. But he stops to watch some children play basketball and sees the ball "rocketing off the crotch of the rim" (Updike 5). The ball rebounds, landing in Rabbit's hands. He

shoots, and the ball “drops into the circle of the rim, whipping the net with a ladylike whisper” (Updike 6). Rabbit was, after all, a basketball ace in high school; famous throughout the state (Updike 7). Once he has sunk his shot, he runs home (Updike 7).

This opening scene sets up the division between reality and pleasure. When we work, we dedicate ourselves to gaining a pay check. The pay check, in turn, is useful; it protects us. However, to gain this protection, we must give up our momentary pleasure, things we could do now, for what we can do when it is received. When Rabbit walks home from work, he is imbued with this force of reality. He does not drive, does not take the bus; Rabbit walks. He moves along at a regular pace, lifting and setting down each foot in turn, never having both feet off the ground at once. His movement is contained, rooted to the ground he is grounded; he is well balanced and sensible. He is the image of work, prudent. But the prudent tone of Rabbit’s walk is cut when he sees the children playing basketball. As Rabbit walks along as the image of reality, he is confronted with children playing. He is pulled into the game as the ball lands in his hands. As Rabbit plays the shot, the ball becomes more than it is; what he thinks of as the ball abandons the confines of it as an object, he fantasizes. The ball becomes the penis, the net a crotch; as the penis penetrates, the net lets out a lady like whisper, a sensual sound. As he notes, “[i]t’s all in how it feels” (Updike 7). As Rabbit plays the child’s game, he fantasizes and his fantasy is closely connected to his sexual instincts. Rabbit leaves the game and now he runs. The game created a new function in Rabbit; he is alive with pleasure. He attends to the stimulus of pleasure; his body is employed to convert it into action, he runs. Now he has moments where his feet don’t touch the ground; he has moments when he is free from reality.

Rabbit runs home. When he arrives, he is met by his pregnant wife, Janice. She sits watching the children’s television show The Mouseketeers, drinking a cocktail, and tells him that she left their car at her parents’ house and their son at his parents’ house (Updike 11).

Rabbit then berates Janice for drinking, for buying a bathing suit in March, for not enjoying her pregnancy, and for not living up to the expectations of a modern housewife (Updike 11-12).

When Rabbit returns home Janice demands his attention, injecting him with stimuli — given Rabbit is alive with pleasure he may well have been hoping things would be the other way round — he must react to her choice of tv show, to her choice to drink, if he likes the bathing suit she has bought, discuss when to collect their car from her parents, and their son from his parents. Rabbit does none of these things, though. He shouts at her. He cannot restrain his action. He does not think about responding to Janice; he does not think. He shouts, possessed by energy that must become action, his anger begs for discharge. Rabbit refuses to enter reality.

Rabbit doesn't hang around at home for long. He sets off to Janice's parents' house to collect the car (Updike 15). When he arrives at their house, only the back is lit up, and he develops a "pure idea" (Updike 19-21). He drives south, out of Brewer, with the intention of never seeing it again. Rabbit "wants to go south to go to the Gulf of Mexico" (Updike 23). He ends up heading east, though (Updike 24). So he adjusts his route, aiming, instead, for Florida (Updike 28). But he forgets the numbers of the routes he has taken and the towns he has passed through; his plan to head south is dashed, and he decides to head back to Brewer (Updike 29). Rabbit does not go home, though. He parks up in front of the Sunshine Athletic Association, hoping to encounter his old basketball coach Mr. Tothero (Updike 36).

As Rabbit sits in his car, he is alone. With no one else around him, he does not need to talk, to verbalise his thoughts; to make them conscious. The idea that strikes him is "pure"; it is not adulterated by anyone else, by any other input, or by any other consciousness. He is struck by his unconscious, which is affected by the potential of the car. His unconscious tells him to drive south, to the Gulf, or Florida. These places are hot. The Gulf of Mexico is,

essentially, one large beach; Florida, a peninsula, is wrapped in beaches. Rabbit's unconscious wishes to be where it is hot, where there are beaches; perhaps the bathing suit Janice showed him earlier made a more significant impression on him than he realised. Rabbit wishes to be around bodies that reveal themselves due to the heat. He wishes to be in a place where clothes, the things that hide the body, create a boundary to bodily pleasure, are absent. Rabbit's unconscious wish is for sexual pleasure, but it is just that, an unconscious wish, a fantasy. He is being governed by the pleasure principle, not by the reality principle. For this reason, Rabbit's attempt to navigate the task reality sets him is inherently doomed. But he remembers a pleasure that was real, he remembers the Sunshine Athletic Association, and his old basketball coach, getting there is a task that his pleasure principle and memory can achieve.

Rabbit's old basketball coach, Tothero, arrives in the morning and lets him into the building (Updike 40). He insists that Rabbit rests. But he wakes him in the evening, shouting "I've got a girl for you!" (Updike 43). Rabbit and Tothero meet Margaret and Ruth for dinner; Ruth remembers Rabbit from his successful high school basketball days, and they return to her apartment to have sex (Updike 58-64). Post-coitus, the two share an intimate embrace, Rabbit whispers the word "hey" to Ruth, and tells her she is pretty (Updike 74). Rabbit finds pleasure, a new action in which his energy can be discharged. He uses pleasure to escape reality, but his dependence on pleasure means he will always be in transit. Shifting from one pleasure to the next, he will always be in flight, running. He will always be concerned, primarily, with himself, with the creation of his own pleasure; trapped in a solipsistic life.

When Andrew enters *The Broom of the System* with his wife Mindy, he does so with an abrupt voice; he tells her, "I think it's maybe time for me to just hop on my horse and git" (Wallace 175). The significance of Andrew's words lies in the idiom he uses. His figure of

speech contradicts the principle of compositionality, the idea that to understand the whole we need to understand the meaning of each part that makes up the whole. The idiom is a lexical item independent from its literal reading. Andrew gives Mindy a phrase that does not depend on the representation of their reality. He displaces his voice, locates it somewhere else, somewhere internal. Andrew's idiom is fixed, it lacks semantic composition, containing a verb but no object, he is — essentially — telling her, I am leaving. He gives her the bare minimum, he does not ground his wish to leave in any reality, does not hand her anything to hold onto, to feel the shape of, and re-work. Andrew's voice lacks any compassion for his wife, a woman who he is supposed to love. He simply does not care about her, all he cares about is himself. Andrew's use of the idiom is solipsistic.

Andrew tells Mindy what drives his wish to leave in his next utterance. "I feel like I need to get the fuck out" (Wallace 175). Lurking in his words is the phrase need out, to fuck. There is an echo here of Rabbit, who needs to escape the paralyzing reality of his home life and does so by trying to drive south in search of bodies.

Melinda, confused by Andrew's abrupt declaration, says, "[y]ou said you loved Scarsdale. You said you loved me" (Wallace 175). Andrew replies, "I think what I unfortunately meant is that I loved fucking you, is basically all. And I just don't think I love fucking you anymore" (Wallace 175). Melinda asks, "why not?" and Andrew tells her that it just isn't wonderful (Wallace 175). Melinda wants to know what he means by not wonderful and he explains,

> [w]e're just missing the wonderfulness. Your leg, for an example. It's all smooth and firm and shapely and all. It looks good and it feels good and it smells good. God knows you keep it real well shaved. It's all beautiful and artistic and all that shit. But see, it's

> just a leg. That's all it is for me now, is a fucking leg. It could be *my* leg, if I shaved my leg. (Wallace 176, emphasis original)

They are, for Andrew, missing the thing that inspires delight and pleasure. What is important here is inspire; to inspire is to fill someone with the urge to do or feel something, especially something creative. The loci of this creative urge is internal. It takes imagination, speculation, fantasy. The wonderfulness they are missing is Andrew's ability to fantasise about Melinda. This is affirmed when Andrew provides the example of her leg. It may be beautiful, artistic, and well-kept, but he cannot fantasise about it anymore. And this is why Andrew is so frustrated that Melinda's leg could be any leg. He has lost the fantasy of her leg; he has lost, in turn, something bound to the sexual instincts. Once Melinda's leg was an object that stimulated a fantasy within his psyche, it was something spectacular, almost magical, mythical. Liberated from the real form of itself, Melinda's leg would have filled Andrew with pleasure. But now, it fills him with unpleasure, disappointment. Mindy's leg has become a symbol of reality and Andrew wants to escape it. There is, of course, something more to Andrews unpleasure here. And that is the absurdity of the situation. The fact he is willing to end a relationship because he has lost a fantasy and now finds Mindy's leg unpleasurable creates a slapstick critique of Updike's misogyny that Wallace identifies in "Certainly the End of Something or Other" (Wallace 51-53).

Perhaps in shock from Andrew's blunt declaration, Melinda asks him, "what am I supposed to do?" and he answers, "[i]t's weird how I'm not worried about that. You got your work […] you've got your goddam voice, still. I know that for an undeniable fact. It comes at me forty times a day" (Wallace 176). When Andrew tells Melinda that her voice comes at him forty times a day, he complains that she forces him to think, that her voice injects stimuli creating tensions, something he must address before he can undertake any action. In other

words, it drags him into reality. He affirms her position, in reality, when he tells her that she has her work. As we read above, work is the conductor of the reality principle. It provides a pay check, which is useful; it protects us. When Andrew notes her voice and work, he highlights her existence in reality. This is why he isn't worried about what she will do; she will be fine as she exists in reality; she can navigate it. The bitter tone Andrew uses to address Melinda's existence in reality also creates a scathing perception of it. He doesn't care about reality; he does not want to be in it, with her at least.

Eventually, Melinda asks Andrew where he will go and he tells her "I think first I'm going home" (Wallace 176). She replies, "[y]ou're going to drive to Texas? Now?" (Wallace 176). But that's not what he means. Andrew tells her, "I said I'm going the fuck *home.* Home" (Wallace 176, emphasis original). Instead of going back to Texas, he goes back to Amherst, where he attended college (Wallace 269). While he is there, he looks for his old lacrosse coach, coach Zandango (Wallace 269).

Here we have a distinct trace of Rabbit's trajectory; he went back to his high school basketball coach, Tothero. This step, for Rabbit, is pivotal, and it is for Andrew too. When Rabbit returns to his coach, Tothero takes him out to meet Ruth; he takes him out in search of pleasure. Rabbit's date with Ruth, organised by Tothero, acts as a launch pad for his solipsistic search for pleasure. Andrew, however, never finds his old lacrosse coach. He sits, by himself, in a local bar called the Flange (Wallace 213-223). While he drinks at the bar, he is approached by Rick, who happens to be in Amherst with Lenore, visiting her younger brother, who attends the college (Wallace 215). Andrew and Rick get chatting; they uncover that they both attended Amherst and were both members of the same fraternity. They talk about their lives, and Andrew tells Rick how he has just left his wife, home, and job. Rick, hearing that an old fraternity "brother" is down on his luck, spontaneously offers him a job at Frequent and Vigorous, his publishing house (Wallace 223-235). Andrew accepts the offer.

He returns to Scarsdale with Rick and Lenore; he retunes for a job. Whereas Rabbit returned for pleasure, for action, Andrew returns for work, safeguarding action. Where Andrew was previously bound to Rabbit's wish for pleasure, in this moment, his aim is reversed; Andrew wishes to re-enter reality.

Andrew, then, is more than just a re-writing of Rabbit. As Boswell tells us, the two are tied together, but — as we have read — Andrew reverses Rabbit's aim. Rabbit privileges pleasure over reality and because of this he is trapped in a solipsistic world. Andrew follows Rabbit's initial steps, privileging pleasure over reality, but at the key moment this is reversed; Andrew turns, not to pleasure, but to reality. He has the potential to free himself from the solipsistic cage he was in, he has the potential to alter reality and this is precisely what he does through his relationship with Lenore.

After Andrew, Lenore, and Rick return to Scarsdale Andrew and Lenore become close. One evening, the two of them set out to attend a performance by the gymnast Kopek Spasova (Wallace 384-388). The performance, which has been organised by her father's business rival Mr Beeberling, is a big event. Spasova is famous for her skill on the uneven parallel bars; above all, she is renowned for her dismount that consists of her landing on "just one finger" (Wallace 165). In short, Lenore and Andrew set out to attend a metaphysical performance. But when they arrive at the venue, there is a large queue. They join the end of the line and, with time on their hands, they start chatting. Lenore tells Andrew that "Kopek Spasova's really supposed to be great" (Wallace 385). He responds, "[a]nd your Daddy told you to go?" (Wallace 385). Lenore tells Andrew, "[d]ad doesn't tell me to do anything" (Wallace 385). Adding, "If I didn't want to go, I wouldn't go" (Wallace 385). The text notes how this makes Andrew grin and reply, "[y]ou sure about that, now (Wallace 385). To which, Lenore asserts, "[o]f course I'm sure" (Wallace 385). Adding, 'if I thought this was going to suck, I wouldn't do it" (Wallace 385). Andrew responds to Lenore's assertion by saying

“[m]y own personal Daddy tell me to do something, I as a rule do it” (Wallace 385). As Lenore points out, though, Andrew’s father told him not to marry Melinda. The text notes that Andrew laughs but looks serious and, as he does so, states, “O.K., usually I do what he says” (Wallace 385).

This conversation about fathers points us towards the important role they play in the psyche. In “Moses and Monotheism” Freud articulates a link between the paternal function and monotheism, an all-powerful God not accessible through the senses. He probes this link between the two; the relationship between the child and the father and the social role of the paternal function of the invisible God stating,

> [u]nder the influence of external factors into which we need not enter here and which are also in part insufficiently known, it came about that the matriarchal social order was succeeded by the patriarchal one — which, of course, involved a revolution in the juridical conditions that had so far prevailed […] but this turning from the mother to the father points in addition to a victory of intellectuality over sensuality — that is, an advance in civilisation since maternity is proved by the evidence of the senses while paternity is a hypothesis, based on an inference and a premise. Taking sides in this way with a thought-process in preference to a sense perception has proved to be a momentous step. (Freud 113-114)

What Freud stresses here is the idea that the father is irreducible to the realm of the senses. That the father, like the monotheistic God, is invisible and hidden. In this monotheistic role, the father creates a legislative function; he establishes the existence of universal law. The father, then, stands as a symbol for the law.

The performance Lenore and Andrew are queuing for is, as noted above, metaphysical. Lenore, anticipating this, tells Andrew, “Spasova’s really supposed to be great” (Wallace 385). Her voice is marked by modifiers. She speaks the words that Spasova’s performance is generally believed, but this may not necessarily be so, to be great; opposed to what is said; however, this may not be true. In this sense, Lenore’s voice contaminates the metaphysical certainty of the event they are about to attend. Her words echo the aim of deconstruction; they act in this moment as a reminder that she is a representative of deconstruction. Her foundations though, as we read above, are now unstable. Following this, Andrew asks, “and your Daddy told you to go?” (Wallace 385). His question is not aimed at the subject or object that Lenore has raised; his words are not aimed at Lenore’s deconstruction of Spasova; he does not try and defend Spasova, either. Andrew addresses Lenore’s father instead. He may be suggesting that Lenore’s motivation to attend Spasova’s performance lies somewhere other than her wish to deconstruct it. He is, perhaps, suggesting that something is acting on her, an invisible force that has created a law she must follow. As Spasova’s performance has been organised by Lenore’s father's business rival, Mr Beeberling, he may be asking if they are there because she feels she must attend the performance and gather information to provide her father. Lenore refuses this, telling Andrew that “[d]ad doesn’t tell me to do anything” (Wallace 385). Adding, “If I didn’t want to go, I wouldn’t go” (Wallace 385). Lenore rejects the idea that her father, that a universal law, has any influence on her. This follows the logic that she carries the force of deconstruction. There is, for her, nothing universal, no monotheism. Lenore’s response makes Andrew grin. His grin is a sign of amusement and enjoyment; Andrew is enjoying something in Lenore’s defence. Andrew may be enjoying a paradox that Lenore overlooks. Lenore, so committed to her force of deconstruction, to the search for meaning bound to language, fails to see the impact family has on how she approaches meaning. Andrew grins because his grounding, in

reality, allows him to see this. He can see the influence the idea of the father has on Lenore's life. He can see how her meaning already has meaning before she comes to explore what meaning means. He voices this when he says, "you sure about that, now" (Wallace 385). Andrew asks Lenore if, in this moment, as she queues for an event organised by her father's business rival, she cannot feel the influence her father has on her. Lenore sticks to her guns; she is sure, she wouldn't be there if she thought it was going to suck (Wallace 385). She doubles down, again echoing the tone of deconstruction. Andrew says, "My own personal Daddy tell me to do something, I as a rule do it" (Wallace 385). Here he speaks of the rule, the law of the father, and his father's Monotheistic role. This was, however, as Lenore notes, not always the case. Andrew married Melinda when his father told him not to. But rather than contradicting Andrew's force of reality, his submission to his father's law, Lenore's identification actually affirms it. Andrew was with Mindy because he was tied to Rabbit's solipsistic search for pleasure. His father knew this was not enough to maintain a relationship in reality. His father knew pleasure would wear thin. This is something Andrew learned for himself. Andrew learnt he was wrong. And, in the process, he learnt that his father was right. He defied his father when he married Mindy but the marriage affirmed his father's law was true.

As Lenore and Andrew queue for Spasova's performance, Lenore outlines her force of deconstruction, and Andrew outlines his force of reality, influenced by the Monotheistic father. But, when Andrew and Lenore reach the queue head, Mr Beeberling himself is selling tickets. He recognises Lenore and chooses to inflate the price to four hundred dollars (Wallace 387). Consequently, the two do not attend the performance, and Andrew suggests they go to the room he rents instead. Lenore agrees, and they set off (Wallace 387).

When Andrew and Lenore enter his room, the text notes that hanging on his wall is a picture of "some man on a black statue of a sperm whale. The kind with those jaws. The man

was down lying in the jaws, with his arm back over his forehead […]" (Wallace 393). Embedded in Andrew's room, then, is a reference to *Moby Dick.* Given that the image that hangs on the wall is of a man in a sperm whale's mouth, it can be considered, that the image references *Moby Dick's* climax. Once Captain Ahab locates Moby Dick, his metaphysical object, he confronts it (Melville 594-624). However, Moby Dick — metaphysics — too vast to be captured, destroys the Pequod and its smaller harpooning vessels (Melville 618). Ahab is dragged under the ocean's surface by a harpoon line entangled round his neck, the crew perish and only Ishmael survives (Melville 620). Andrew once desired sensuality, he attempted to submerge himself in feeling, he tried to hold onto something absolute, pleasure. But he now lives in reality, he lives in the world of the Monotheistic father. This image, that hangs on Andrew's wall, can be considered a reminder. When he looks at it, he can see how his past desire for pleasure, the absolute, dragged him under, drowned him; how a life in reality is the only thing that allows him to keep his head above water, to live.

After Andrew's place in reality has been affirmed, he and Lenore sit on his bed. They start chatting again, and Andrew tells Lenore that he had seen in her purse while they were queueing (Wallace 396). He then asks her why she has so many lottery tickets in it (Wallace 396). Lenore replies that she plays it a lot (Wallace 396). Pressing her, Andrew asks why she plays so often and Lenore answers that she knows she will win one day (Wallace 396). She defends her statement with the syllogism: "One. Obviously somebody has to win the lottery. Two. I am somebody. Three. Therefore obviously I have to win the lottery" (Wallace 396). Despite admitting that her brother has disproved the syllogism, she confesses that she still plays and "gets a kick out of the logic" (Wallace 396).

Lenore's interest in this syllogism provides a trace that leads *Prior Analytics.* Aristotle's logic revolves around the notion of the deduction, which is deduced through syllogism; the book states that a "deduction is *logos*, in which, certain things having been

supposed, something different from those supposed results of necessity because of their being so" (Aristotle 118). Each supposed thing corresponds to a premise, and each result necessarily corresponds to a conclusion. The kernel of Aristotle's logic is the logos, of the words in relation to the objects they describe. Therefore, when Lenore confesses that she continues to play the lottery, she is actually confessing something of far greater importance. She is confessing that she still believes in the value of the logos. Andrew, having spoken about reality to Lenore, has nudged her unstable housing of deconstruction, it has come tumbling down.

After Lenore confesses her wishes for the logos, Andrew continues to press her. He tells her that she seems "wired about words" (Wallace 398). And She says, "I think I just tend to be sort of quiet. I don't think words are like chainsaws, that's for sure" (Wallace 398). In this utterance, Lenore refutes a defining intellectual force of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. The chainsaw, as an object, can alter a landscape: if many are used in unison, they can radically change a landscape. The chainsaw, in this analogy, can be thought to stand as a representation of the linguistic turn. It stands as a representation of those thinkers and artists, such as Wittgenstein, Heidegger, Derrida; Pound, Joyce, Elliot; Barth, Pynchon, Coover, et al., who all, in one way or another, believed that the use of language is central to determining the world we exist in. In this utterance, then, it can be read that Lenore does not believe words have the capacity to change the landscape. Following Lenore's refutation of language, she states that she believes her family are wired about words (Wallace 398). Andrew invites her to expand on how she views her family's linguistic usage. Again, he follows the precedent of reality. He implies that Lenore can communicate what is weird about her family, that she can hand him over an object. Andrew then tells Lenore that Rick had told him that he and Lenore were engaged, which as Lenore exclaims, simply isn't true (Wallace 402). After that, Andrew and Lenore agree that for their relationship to continue, they must communicate

with complete honesty (Wallace 403). Lenore states, "We need it explicit. We need this control thing made explicit. No more games" (Wallace 403). On the one hand, Lenore's announcement that she wants no more games addresses her own voice of deconstruction, which reads the play of the double, the différance; and, on the other hand, her voice addresses Wittgenstein's linguistic philosophy, which — as we read above — has played an important role in Wallace's thought. Lenore does not want either of these. She does not want to live in post-structuralist language. She wants reality. She wants the logos. Following Lenore's dismissal of games, of post-structural language, she says, "I've just felt so *dirty.* So out of control" (Wallace 404, emphasis original). She is in distress and scared, and she feels this because post-structural language has no logos*,* no certainty. However, Andrew can offer her a logos*;* he can offer her the Monotheistic father. He states, "It's okay, just believe I don't want to push you, OK? Just believe it, […] OK? You can believe that 'cause it's true. I wouldn't do anything to you, one bit" (Wallace 405). Andrew does not want to push Lenore, he does not want to force her away from herself, he does not want her to lose herself in language. He does not want her to suffocate in language. He knows what it is to drown; he almost drowned in pleasure. Together they can stay within the law that the Monotheistic father sets out. Together they can understand each other.

Lenore and Andrew, after she admits she desires the logos and Andrew offers her the Monotheistic father, lay on his bed cuddling. Lenore says, "[n]ow this is definitely cuddling, am I right? I think I know cuddling when I see it, and this is it" (Wallace 408). Indeed, this moment is significant. As they cuddle they have their arms wrapped around each other. Physically they bind themselves to one another. When they cuddle they are creating comfort. When they bind to the other they ease and alleviate grief and distress. When Lenore cuddles Andrew, she binds herself to the figure of the Monotheistic law of the father, she binds herself to a figure who arrests her force of deconstruction. This is present in her utterance.

Lenore, for the first time, is certain of something. With this certainty, she overturns the force that once defined her personality, her uncertainty. With her certainty, Lenore and Andrew build a new life. A home for reality, with all its conflicts and emotions, built by the law of the Monotheistic father.

Lenore and Andrew's relationship creates a connection in reality that escapes the solipsistic trap. Together they can share their emotions, feelings, and wishes; they can focus on the fragility of their shared existence. Before they can set off on a journey to explore what it means to be human, though, they have one task ahead of them, escaping the solipsistic novel.

Lenore decides it would be best to distance herself from her ex-lover, Rick. She and Andrew head to Rick's publishing house, where she works as a switchboard operator, so she can quit her job. When they arrive, though, Lenore is confronted by her father, therapist, and Rick who all demand that she leave with each of them. This moment reads like a stage on which several protagonists can voice their final attempt to persuade Lenore to join them. Rick stands at the edge of the room, with his back against the wall. He lingers in the shadows and does not say anything (Wallace 455). Rick's location on the periphery of the room and the fact he does not speak follows his ontological force; he is being-there, mining moods for other stories. Lenore's therapist, Dr. Jay, tells her to leave with him and makes it clear to her he is speaking in the very *strongest* possible terms (Wallace 449, emphasis original). Her father shouts at her, demanding he join her (Wallace 449). Andrew is the only one who speaks to her with compassion. He speaks to her gently; he whispers her name (Wallace 449). The fact that Andrew whispers emphasise the delicate bond they share. But, most importantly, he uses this tone to speak her name. By speaking her name, Andrew undertakes a vital act. He affirms to Lenore her sense of self. He helps her find herself in the onslaught of language. As Lenore stares into space, Andrew asks, "Lenore? You all right?" (Wallace

451). Again, Andrew highlights Lenore's capacity to evaluate her sense of self. Her capacity to be certain. As the barrage of demands continues to fall on Lenore, she closes her eyes; finally opening them to look up at Andrew speaking the last word of the scene. As Lenore gazes up at Andrew, she says, "Hey" (Wallace 457). With this hey, Lenore declares that she has chosen Andrew. But the significance of this choice is embedded in its trace. Lenore's "hey" reverses a moment in *Rabbit, Run.* After Rabbit and Ruth have had sex for the first time, Rabbit looks up at Ruth and whispers the word "hey" (Updike 74). This "hey" spoken by Rabbit, following his first transgression, can be considered as the launch pad of his life-long solipsistic search for pleasure. Given the inverted gender of the voices, Lenore's "hey" at the end of *The Broom of the System* performs the same function, but in this case, reverses its aim. Her hey acts as a launchpad to explore reality with Andrew. Their exploration of reality is presented in their disappearance from the text. They leave the text as the text runs on. They leave behind deconstruction, ontology, and pleasure. They leave behind all these games of the solipsistic text and venture into the real world.

The Broom of the System, then, works not to reframe the post-structuralist force of postmodernism, with its metafictional devices and solipsistic cages from Derrida to Wittgenstein. But to show that life is not a game. Wallace uses Lenore's uncertainty to represent deconstruction, but he tears this down by turning Lenore on Rick, who represents her own foundations, Nabokov and Dasein. Lenore frees herself from these solipsistic other worlds and then she starts a relationship with Andrew. Who, having reversed Rabbit's priority of pleasure over reality through the monotheistic father, guides her towards a world of certainty. It is this certainty, shared between them that allows the introduction of what it means to be human, the fragility we all live with. Together they can share their feelings and emotions, together they can build something, together they can have a life.

Chapter Two, Working Through It

With *The Broom of the System,* Wallace sought a new direction for contemporary fiction. He made his intentions clear, he wanted out of postmodernism's solipsistic hall of mirrors. Building on the foundations he laid in his first novel — such as signification, solipsism, life, and death — in his second novel *Infinite Jest,* published in 1996, Wallace added drug addiction, politics, tennis, and terrorism.

In “An Anguish Becomes Thing”, we are told that the book is really three novels in one (Cioffi 165). The central narrative thread follows Hal Incandenza, a seventeen-year-old lexical prodigy, marijuana addict, and aspiring tennis pro who studies, smokes, and trains at the Enfield Tennis Academy, set up by his father James and run — in the novel’s present, which is five years after James’ suicide — by his mother Avril (Cioffi 165). The second thread is a metamorphosis story, it follows Don Gately, a massive twenty-eight-year-old addict recovering at Ennet House Drug and Alcohol Recovery House, just down the hill from the tennis academy (Cioffi 166). The third thread is a quest narrative that follows the search for the master copy of a film called *Infinite Jest*, a film so entertaining it puts anyone who glimpses it in a cationic state of repeated viewing (Cioffi 166-167).

This quest narrative weaves the other two, largely separate threads, together. James, the author/director of *Infinite Jest*, cast Joelle van Dyne as one of its stars. Joelle, a radio celebrity and an ex-partner of Hal’s older brother, Orin, is an addict herself and a new resident of Ennet House. She meets Gately there and the pair show the potential for love. The world their love blossoms in, though, is not our own. Set in the near future, television has been replaced by rentable cartridges produced and distributed by a tech giant called InterLace. Consequently, commercial advertising has vanished; but the government has a solution for this. Late in the preceding millennium Johnny Gentle, a former Las Vegas singer-

cum-politician is elected as president. He and his team have devised Subsidized Time, whereby calendar years are no longer designated by numbers, but by commercial products. The novel, for example, takes place over the Year of the Whopper, the Year of the Tuck Medicated Pad, the Year of the Depend Adult Undergarment, etc. But this is not Gentle's only achievement. He transforms a huge patch of New England into a massive toxic waste dump called The Great Concavity, the north end of which borders Quebec. And, following the collapse of NAFTA, he founds the Organization of North American Nations. His actions, though, create a group of Quebecois separatists and disenfranchised Canadians; who establish terrorist cells to track down the film *Infinite Jest* so it can be used as a weapon on their neighbour.

Infinite Jest settled comfortably into the canon. In *Understanding* the novel is both a diagnosis and antidote to America's addiction to pleasure (Boswell 69). A book where, at the centre of each character, is Jacque's Lacan's lack. The desire to be whole again, one with the mother (Boswell 74-75). Each character, Boswell goes on, fills this hole in their own way; through drugs, sport, and entertainment. But this hole, he adds, cannot be filled with something else. And, when the characters of *Infinite Jest* try to do so, they enter a state of despair. This despair is similar to that from Kierkegaard's *The Sickness Unto Death*, in which despair involves not wanting to be yourself, not wanting to be a self at all, or wanting a new self (Boswell 80-81). These are, in Boswell's eyes, the issues that riddle Wallace's characters. Self-conscious of the lack in their lives, they try to fill it, which only leads to self-erasure, which leads to despair, which leads — at its bottom — to depression (Boswell 81). With the diagnoses illuminated, Boswell notes how Wallace observes that Barth's self-reflexivity far from being the solution to exhaustion has, only a generation later, become the primary cause of that same brand of exhaustion. The antidote, he argues, is the novel's structure. Wallace withholds, Boswell tells us, a conclusion to his arduous novel. The book

leaves its tensions tangled and unresolved. We never learn if *Infinite Jest* gets disseminated, if Gately survives, or what happens to Hal. And Wallace withholds these answers, Boswell goes on, for a deliberate reason. Wallace wants to raise a question about stasis. About how entertainment soothes, concludes, and solves problems. The book traps us in these tensions. It becomes a death and a birth; an exhaustion and replenishment (Boswell 98-100).

Burn, who maps the novel in *David Foster Wallace's Infinite Jest,* tells us it is an obsessive exploration for an adequate understanding of the self. Wallace chose *Hamlet*, clearly echoed in the title, as one of the templates for his novel (Burn 45). *Hamlet* opens with the question "who's there?" and if Shakespeare's play answers this with an exemplary excavation of the consciousness of the Renaissance man, then *Infinite Jest* attempts a millennial update, cataloguing the twentieth century's endless efforts to understand itself (Burn 45).

I agree more with Burn than Boswell here. For me, Boswell blankets Wallace's characters with Lacan and Kierkegaard, overlooking the tensions that make them live. That is not to say I disagree completely, though. I too believe that Lacan plays a role in the novel, but in a more transitionary fashion; for me, Hal's therapist evokes the ideas of Lacan, but that Hal treats them as empty, as a game. In other words, they are only a moment in Hal's coming of age journey. While the foundations for a reading of *Infinite Jest* as a catalogue of the twenty century's attempt to understand itself have been laid by Burn, his book is only short and there is still much to be done.

In this chapter, building on Burn's work, I will add some detail to our understanding of Hal's story. Following what I believe to be some key events, I will read how Hal's effort to understand himself demonstrates Wallace's attempt to work through the history of poststructuralism and solipsism to introduce the fragility of human life.

James Incandenza, Always Someone Else

To understand Hal's attempt to understand himself, we first have to understand the force, which as we read in chapter one, will have a profound effect on him: his father. By no means has James been ignored in the literature. But most focus on his lengthy filmography included among the book's endnotes. *Understanding* reads James' output as the sign of a postmodernist father, as Pynchon, Barth, and Nabokov all rolled into one (Boswell 92). In "Put the Book Down and Slowly Walk Away: Irony and David Foster Wallace's *Infinite Jest"*, the titles of James' films are read in detail (Goerlandt 309-328). But James is more than just a filmmaker and I believe if we read the rhythm of his career we can consider a strong misreading of him as another solipsistic poststructuralist ontological force; the force of "schizophrenia".

Jeffery Karnicky's, "Kinds of Stasis in David Foster Wallace", has laid the foundation for this reading. Drawing on Deleuze and Guattari's model of "schizophrenia", he argues that *Infinite Jest* works by "breaking down, by pulling one impasse after another from the world, and by pulling one kind of stasis after another from the novel" (Karnicky 97). Karnicky reads many of *Infinite Jest's* main threads — cinema, drugs, tennis, and television — as movements toward stasis. And, while Karnicky covers a lot of other ground, I would like to focus in here. Building on Karnicky's use of Deleuze and Guattari's "schizophrenia", I will read how James' career casts him as a "schizophrenic" and, after that, the impact his "schizophrenia" has on Hal.

Deleuze and Guattari open their text *Anti-Oedipus* by assaulting psychoanalysis' entire application for understanding the world. They say, "a schizophrenic out for a walk is a better model than a neurotic on the analyst's couch" (Deleuze and Guattari 2). The two, after that, cite George Büchner's novella *Lenz* (Deleuze and Guattari 2). In this text, Büchner constructs a text from Jean Frédéric Olberlin's diary in which Oberlin noted the actions of

Jakob Michael Reinhold Lenz, who had a mental disorder. From Büchner's novella, they extract the idea that, to Lenz, "everything is a machine. Celestial machines, the stars or rainbows in the sky, alpine machines — all of them connected to his body […]" that the world, to Lenz, is "the continual whirr of machines" (Deleuze and Guattari 2). They extract from this whirr of machines, that "Lenz has projected himself back to a time before the man-nature dichotomy [...]" (Deleuze and Guattari 2). Back to a realm of logic that removes the barrier between interior and exterior, that collapses dichotomies. They conclude that Lenz "does not live nature as nature, but as a process of production" (Deleuze and Guattari 2). Lenz exists in a world they later call the plane of immanence. A plane where there is no self-contained field, no differentiation between the body and the mind's perception of the external world, a plane that consists only of immanence itself, the ontological substance itself that is present in the momentary flows of surrounding machines. Indeed, the plane of immanence is the ontological itself; it is the formless, self-organising, univocal flows. As they state in *A Thousand Plateaus Capitalism and Schizophrenia*,

> there are only relations of movement and rest, speed and slowness between unformed elements, or at least between elements that are relatively unformed, molecules, and particles of all kinds. There are only haecceities, affects, subjectless individuations that constitute collective assemblages. (Deleuze and Guattari 266)

They argue, in *Anti-Oedipus*, that schizophrenic production in this ontological plane of immanence is a product that exists alongside machines as a process (Deleuze and Guattari 29). That is to say, the machine —the person and or object — has no ontological status in itself; by contrast, the machine — person and or object — can only be considered according to the process — that is the flows of input and output of desire — that produce it. After that,

Deleuze and Guattari turn to elucidate how one can think of a machine when it is disconnected from all flows. They argue, when the machine does not desire, or, in other words, when the person does not engage with the surrounding world, an event occurs whereby the body becomes smooth, inert, and lays alongside the machines around it (Deleuze and Guattari 29). This instant is called the "body-without-organs" (Deleuze and Guattari 29). They argue it is a moment of freedom called anti-production and the equivalent of a death in the unconscious; as they state, "it produces nothing itself — its lack of output is its lack of organs" (Deleuze and Guattari 7). What Deleuze and Guattari outline is the idea that the "schizophrenic" leaps between two ends of the same pole, on the one hand, there is a full body that is stimulated by the flows of desire, its input and output, the desiring-machine; and, on the other hand, when the body recedes from any stimulus of desire, from its inputs and outputs, the body-without-organs is created.

Following the development these two poles of the "schizophrenic", Deleuze and Guattari progress to assert two ideas of the body that fluctuates between the desiring-machine and body-without-organs. They tell us that the body-without-organs and its force of anti-production is capable of encompassing the whole body to make the processes of desire "stop for a moment" (Deleuze and Guattari 7). The force of stoppage that the body-without-organs can stimulate makes the whole process function (Deleuze and Guattari 8). Consequently, they argue that the full body, the desiring-machine, is itself a principle of repetition that aims to produce the body-without-organs; that the desiring machine functions in such a way as to eventually produce the unproductive body (Deleuze and Guattari 108-109). Subsequently, they argue that the force of flows, input, and output that connect the desiring-machine is a production that indirectly aims to produce the anti-production of the body-without-organs, the empty body (Deleuze and Guattari 330). That is to say, desiring-machines function by

engaging flows in the plane of immanence, but it is only when the flows break down and a stoppage occurs that the repressed desire can come into the world as a body-without-organs.

After that, they tell us that the conflict between the desiring-machine and the body-without-organs can be reconciled in the "schizophrenic" if deaths are viewed as intensities,

> [t]he experience of death is the most common of occurrences in the unconscious, precisely because it occurs in life and for life, in every passage or becoming, in every intensity as a passage or becoming […] Every intensity controls within its own life the experience of death and envelopes it. And it is doubtless the case that every intensity is extinguished at the end that every becoming itself becomes a becoming-death! Death, then, does actually happen. (Deleuze and Guattari 330)

These experiences of common deaths can be found in any concluding experience; death is found in any statement such as "so that's what it was!" or "so it's me!" (Deleuze and Guattari 20). They argue that in these deaths there is an experiential quality of immediate and intense sensual pleasure, stating,

> there is a schizophrenic experience of intensive quantities in their pure state, to a point that is almost unbearable — a celibate misery and glory experienced to the fullest, like a cry suspended between life and death, an intense feeling of transition, states of pure, naked intensity stripped of all shape and form. (Deleuze and Guattari 18)

These schizophrenic experiences of intensities are the primary level of existence, the plane of immanence itself (Deleuze and Guattari 18).

Deleuze and Guattari foreground that the "schizophrenic" exists in a world of machinic production, that they fluctuate between the state of a desiring machine and a body-without-organs. For the schizophrenic the flow of a desiring machine stops at a conclusion, at the intensity of a death; they then become a body-without-organs, whereby the lack of their production opens them to the reception of the ontological immanence of all machines surrounding them. The "schizophrenic" exists in a world of ontological immanence.

In *Infinite Jest* James began his career with a doctorate in optical physics (Wallace 63). Following that, he worked for the Office of Naval Research in the field of optical physics (Wallace 63). Whilst working for the Office of Naval Research, James became one of the top-applied-geometrical-optics researchers in the country and made a significant contribution to the creation of cold annular fusion (Wallace 63). Yet, what is, perhaps, most striking about James' contribution to the discovery of cold annular fusion is not the achievement itself, but his reaction to the achievement. Once James became one of the top-applied-geomatical-optics researchers in the country he did not continue his research. He just retired. When James was pursuing his doctorate, and after, while working at the Office of Naval Research, he was a full-body, a desiring-machine. Obsessed with the immanence of a burning question, he laboured to provide a solution, an answer, a conclusion to the issue of cold annular fusion. James himself was a production of the process of his work, and when he finished his work, when he made his contribution to cold annular fusion, James, in essence, let his work in the field of optics research die. James was drawn to the conclusion, that's what that was! His questions were answered; he saw the production of cold annular fusion not as a teleological stepping stone in his work, a path to power, but as a death. His work in the field of optics research was done, through this death, James stopped, he retired, he became, for a moment, a body-without-organs; he revelled not in the achievement of his work but in the sensual pleasure of its stoppage, of its death. He became a body-without-organs.

Having let his work in the field of optics research die, having concluded what he wished to conclude, and achieved his desire for stoppage, James' freedom in the state of a body-without-organs lead him to leap to a new field of work. James turned to patent a wide range of inventions such as rear-view mirrors, light-sensitive eyewear, holographic birthday and Xmas greeting cartridges, videophonic tableaux, homolosine-cartography software, and nonfluorescent public lighting systems and film equipment (Wallace 64). In this period of James' work, his output was considerable. Patenting a range of inventions he was like a machine churning out ideas on the conveyer belt of the world; that is to say, he was a prolific desiring-machine and with his prolific production he experienced an array of commonplace deaths. Each patent had its own life and its own death that enveloped it; each invention had an intensity that was extinguished when it became an object; every becoming of an object, became a becoming-an-object-to-death. The goal of each of James' inventions was the stoppage of death; as James created, his eye always remained astutely fixed on the conclusion of death that provided a stoppage, provided him a moment to become a body-without-organs, to become empty. However, once James amassed a fortune, he retired again. It was, perhaps, the fortune itself that dictated the change. Once James had amassed a fortune, the flow of his inventions must have been disturbed. The personal surplus wealth he possessed annulled the life of the creation. His wealth reduced the life-force of the object consequently abating the death of the object. With no input flow of production, there could be no flow of anti-production that lead to the stoppage of a body-without-organs; James could no longer achieve his pleasurable state of emptiness.

As James could no longer experience a stoppage through his inventions — could not, that is, become a body-without-organs — he moved again to a different line of work. He established the pedagogically experimental tennis academy E.T.A, which re-created his "schizophrenic" force. When James was a child, his father taught him tennis (Wallace 157-

169). During these lessons, his father used a language that was enveloped in a tone of Heideggerian ontology (Wallace 160). His father's Heideggerian tone was present when he instilled in James the idea that to be a successful tennis player is not to think (Wallace 160). The lack of thought James' father foregrounds in relation to tennis can be associated with Heidegger's writing on boredom in *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics: World, Finitude, Solitude* and its privileged relation to Dasein. This Heideggerian tone James associates with tennis can then be linked to a Nietzschean force present in the head coach he employs at E.T.A., Gerhardt Schtitt. Schtitt foregrounds the view that tennis is a creative game over a statistical science. He believes tennis teaches the child "about learning to sacrifice the hot narrow imperatives of the self" (Wallace 82). It could be argued that Schitt's perspective corresponds to the principles outlined in Nietzsche's text *The Will to Power.* So, it can be considered that, in his tennis pedagogy, James united a Heideggerian Being and a Nietzschean Will to Power. This echoes the foundations of Deleuze and Guattari's aim (Holland 4-14). Deleuze and Guattari argue that Being traps desire in representation and represses it; but, when united with the Will to Power, being can be liberated from representation and can enter into Becoming. The tennis pedagogy James set up at E.T.A. was a process of allowing Being to Become. He founded an institution where immanence is privileged. Once James had established E.T.A.'s reputation, he handed control of the institution over to Avril. James, again, began the flow of work, setting up an academy, with the end goal for him being that the academy becomes an-object-to-death, he again set out with the intention to bathe in the slick plain of stoppage, to become, again, a body-without-organs, to glide seamlessly through a blissful ontology of emptiness.

Following the stoppage of desire, once E.T.A. had been established James again moved to another field of work. James entered the field of après-gard film. He became a prolific filmmaker, with his oeuvre containing 78 films (Wallace 985-993). Revelling in a

world of immanence where he found firm ground as a desiring machine, James submerged himself in a world of input and output, he experienced the beatific felicity of regular stoppages; bathing in the torpor of being a body-without-organs following the production of each film; yet, once roused again by the machinic desire for production, he could return to his work, seeing the infinite openings, linkages, and movements that would allow him to mechanically carry on producing. Among James' production of film, however, the flow broke down when he set himself the specific goal of creating a film that allows him to communicate with Hal. As James' wraith states, he "spent the whole […] last ninety days of his animate life working tirelessly to contrive a medium via which he and the muted son could simply conversers" (Wallace 838). The film he was working on during this period was *Infinite Jest.* And it, too, creates a force of "schizophrenia".

In testimonials given by Molly Notkin and Joelle Van Dyne to the Office of Unspecified Services, we learn that the film consisted of a mother who, when pregnant, sits and explains that death is always female and that the woman who kills you is always your next life's mother (Wallace 788). A mother who, later, stands over her new-born's crib begging them for forgiveness (Wallace 939). The film can be considered to create the idea that the body in civilisation is bound to representation, which impairs the True Being of the Real's immanence.

However, the film, as James' will states, was unfinished (Wallace 993). James, as a desiring machine, was confronted with a flow that he could not conclude, he could not reach a point where the film was enveloped in death: James, as a desiring machine, could not reach a point of stoppage, he could not make himself empty again. Overwhelmed by the force of the flow of production, James would have turned on his body. James would have felt penned into a corner by the overwhelming immanence of production without a foreseeable stoppage point, the intensity of which would have been unbearable, and he chose to flee; he chose to

commit suicide. Deleuze and Guattari state, “courage consists […] in agreeing to flee rather than live tranquilly and hypocritically in false refuges” (Wallace 341). When James could not reach a stoppage, he could not turn to the refuge of values, morals, homelands, religions, or any other representation that may have consoled him. Instead, he chose to enter death through suicide as a courageous fleeing. He turned his desire for conclusion away from film to a more radical medium, his body. James’ suicide then, is just once more, a solipsistic act of becoming-of-the-body-without-organs, an emptying of himself.

The Father, the Son, and the Parallax

So, James can be thought of as a “Schizophrenic” and, now that we can think of his force beyond just his filmography, we can start to unpick the impact it has on Hal. Nowhere in the novel is the relationship between James and a Hal laid out as clearly as when James poses as a professional conversationalist to meet him when he is ten years old.

James goes to significant lengths to cultivate an image of himself as a “professional conversationalist” (Wallace 27). He rents an office off the E.T.A. grounds and changes his face with prosthetics (Wallace 27). James puts serious effort into differentiating himself from the figure of Hal’s father. These actions follow the logic that James echoes *Anti-Oedipus*. On the one hand, the creation of himself as a “professional conversationalist” implies the idea of discourse outside the therapeutic setting; and, on the other hand, the prosthetics he applies to his face act to liberate him from the role of Hal’s father. James creates himself as something beyond the structures of analyst and father that Deleuze and Guattari argue, in *Anti-Oedipus*, represses the “schizophrenic” plane of ontological immanence. Also, James schedules to meet Hal on the first of April, April fool’s day (Wallace 27). The choice of this day may appear, on the surface, as a cruel joke; but, James’ choice to meet on April fool’s day can, again, signify his “schizophrenic” force.

In *Anti-Oedipus,* Deleuze and Guattari aim to synthesise Marxist materialism with Freudian psychoanalysis to create a material psychiatry. Their method to create this material psychiatry is essential to James' choice of date. Deleuze and Guattari set the text up "as one big joke: more precisely, as what Freud calls a tendentious Joke" (Holland 24). In "Jokes and their Relation to the Unconscious", Freud notes how tendentious jokes "work by surreptitiously linking two topics or domains that logical, mature thought normally keeps separate through repression" (Holland 24). And that, consequently, "in making a sudden and unexpected link between them, often by means of a lexical shortcut such as a play on words, or *double-entendre*, the tendentious joke produces pleasure by obviating the effort of repression keeping them separate" (Holland 24, emphasis original). That is to say,

> such is precisely the effect of the lexical link Deleuze and Guattari forge […] through their use of the term *desiring-machines:* the normally distinct regimes of the libidinal economy and political economy […] are targeted by a mode of critique that simultaneously produces pleasure and insight by showing that these economies are in fact one and the same. (Holland 24, emphasis original)

James carries this force into his appointment with Hal as a professional conversationalist. He presents himself to Hal as something beyond the role of analyst or father and does so on April Fool's to show that he, as a "schizophrenic", is one and the same as father and beyond father. James hopes, in these actions, to forge a linkage between his plane of immanence and Hal's existence.

When the dialogue opens, James says, "You are here. It's conversation-time. Shall we discuss Byzantine erotica?" (Wallace 29). What does he hope to achieve by opening the dialogue with this subject? Again, the answer to these questions can be found in his echo of

Anti-Oedipus. In *Anti-Oedipus* an essential role is assigned to Byzantine artworks. The pair state, "art, as soon as it attains its own grandeur, its own genius, creates chains of decoding and deterritorialization that serve as the foundation for desiring-machines, and make them function" (Deleuze and Guattari 368). They add,

> take the example of the Venetian School in painting: at the same time that Venice develops the most powerful commodity capitalism [...] its painting apparently molds itself to a Byzantine code where even the colors and the lines are subordinated to a signifier that determines their hierarchy as a vertical order. (Deleuze and Guattari 369)

And summarise, that underneath the Byzantine artform strange liberated flows circulate, flows that "fractured the codes, undid the signifiers, passed under the structures, set the flows in motion and effected brakes at the limits of desire: a breakthrough" (Deleuze and Guattari 369). The logic follows, then, that when James attempts to ground the conversation in Byzantine erotica, he is trying to steer Hal's perception of the world toward the machinic flows that engage the desiring-machine and creates the body-without-organs, he is attempting to steer Hal towards his solipsistic world of the pleasure in being empty.

After James proposes that they discuss Byzantine erotica, and following Hal's query as to how James knew he was interested in Byzantine erotica, James asks, "you think we don't delve full-bore into the psyches of those for whom we've made appointments to converse?" (Wallace 29). Hal then states, "I know only one person who'd ever use *full-bore* in casual conversation" (Wallace 29, emphasise original). Perhaps concerned the façade he is presenting is being questioned, James goes on, "[t]here is nothing casual about a professional conversationalist and staff. We delve. We obtain, and then some. Young sir" (Wallace 29).

James' stern tone appears to quash Hal's fear that the discourse will be anything but formal, professional; and Hal replies by asking, "okay, Alexandrian or Constantinian?" (Wallace 29). James does not answer Hal's question. Instead, he launches into a pique fit, agitatedly uttering, "that you could dare to imagine we'd fail conversationally to countenance certain weekly shall we say maternal […] assignations with a certain unnamed bisexual bassoonist in the Albertan Secret Guard's tactical-bands unit?" (Wallace 30).

As we read above, James asked Hal to discuss the topic of Byzantine erotica in the hope that Hal will identify with him. James' proposition to discuss the topic of Byzantine erotica is loaded, and Hal's response is significant. When Hal asks which period in the history of the Byzantine empire they should discuss, his question carries a historical force. Hal asks which period they should analyse in relation to its discovery, its organisation in the lineage of time, and its presentation grounded in a specific epoch. A significant conflict arises at this moment. Following his *Anti-Oedipal* force, we can imagine that James had hoped to discuss the topic through the lenses of its complexification, its processual enrichment, towards the constancy of its differentiation. We can speculate that James had hoped to use Byzantine erotica to create a breakdown as breakthrough, opening the "schizophrenic" realm, and drawing Hal into the pleasure of emptiness. When Hal suggests the discussion of history he proposes a mode of conversation so distant from James' wish that James is confronted with the full force of his son's rejection; with the fact that Hal has not come to identify with him, that he has not come under his law, that he may still be possessed by a desire for Avril. Perhaps, it is for this reason that James, aware he cannot talk Hal into accepting his law, turns instead to debase Avril, to drag the skeletons out of her closet. But there is more to James' utterance here than just his snide tone and anger. And to understand why James brings Avril's sex life to presence at this moment, some context is needed. In endnote 80, we are told that, by the time Hal is eleven, Avril and James had not been intimate for quite some time, and

Avril had been having several affairs that were kept secret, well hidden from the family (Wallace 999). It can be considered that Hal has, possibly, not experienced one of the vital oedipal situations. In the Freudian model, the father functions as a love object for the mother. That is to say, the father functions as someone who captures the mother's interest more than the child does. The father functions to separate the mother from the child and the child from the mother. With the lack of intimacy in Avril and James' relationship, Hal may have never had to experience the loss of Avril, the separation forced on him by Avril's desire for James. When Hal asks Alexandrian or Constantinian, when he makes present, on the one hand, how far removed he is from accepting James' law; and, on the other hand, how entrenched he is in his desire for Avril, James becomes enraged. His focuses on Avril's sexual behaviour, can be thought to act as a crowbar. Perhaps he is desperately attempting to pry Hal away from Avril, maybe he wants to force Hal to understand that Avril desires something beyond what he can give her; he may be trying to force Hal to understand his separation from Avril.

If James is attempting to pry Hal away from Avril by illuminating her affairs, Hal doesn't see the light. Instead, he just says, "gee, is that the exit over there I see?" (Wallace 30). As James directs the aim of his words towards the object of Avril's infidelity Hal turns his aim away from this object and instead directs his thoughts towards the exit. Hal displaces the object James' utterance aims at, introducing a new object, the exit. Through this displacement, Hal erects, whether consciously or not, a defence mechanism, one that allows him to preserve the blissful thought that Avril is entirely his, to avoid the pain of losing her. All he needs to erect this defence is an ambivalence toward his father.

Perhaps aware that Hal's displacement is a defence, James states, "that your blithe inattention to your own dear […] mother's cavorting's with not one not two but over *thirty* Near Eastern medical attachés […]?" (Wallace 31, emphasis original). In this moment, James offers Hal the rough number of the affairs Avril has had. He does not hold back, he attempts

to show Hal how extensive her desire beyond him is. James directs an anger toward Hal's naivety, and, in doing so, he directs an anger at Hal. James frantically forces Avril's affairs on Hal, and he does so in a tone that directs its force toward Hal's unwillingness to engage in the subterranean world of forces and flows.

Hal responds, however, by asking, "would it be rude to tell you your moustache is askew?" (Wallace 31). Again, Hal displaces the object of conversation; he erects another defence that displaces him from James' aim and preserves his desire for Avril. Hal aims the conversation toward the object of James' askew moustache, perhaps hoping that he does not have to confront the idea that he is not everything to Avril.

There is more to this moment than Hal's displacement, his defence. As James' face begins to disintegrate, he is pulled into an anger and frustration directed toward Avril and Hal; he has been pulled into the Oedipal triangulation. James' façade of being beyond the role of analyst and father is beginning to disintegrate. Hal adds, "as a matter of fact I'll go ahead and tell you your whole face is kind of running, sort of, if you want to check. Your nose is pointing at your lap" (Wallace 31). James' nose slips, it now acts as signpost, pointing toward what is actually driving his words; his genitals; his sexual instincts. James' performance as beyond the Oedipal triangulation begins to fall apart. His performance literally begins to lose face. James, having lost face, having, that is, lost any credibility in this discourse that he is beyond the Oedipal triangulation, does not respond to Hal's comment that his face is falling apart; that he is driven by his libido, but instead states,

> that your quote-unquote "complimentary" Dunlop widebody tennis racquets' super-secret-formulaic composition materials of high-modulus-graphite-reinforced polycarbonate polybutylene resin are organochemically identical I say again *identical* to the gyroscopic balance sensor and *mise-en-scène* appropriation card and priapistic-

> entertainment cartridge implanted in your very own towering father's anaplastic cerebrum. (Wallace 31, emphasis original)

Indeed, in this statement, James' aim shifts. James opens this shift by insinuating that Hal's complimentary Dunlop racquet was not complimentary. That, in fact, Dunlop uses a material identical to one James had to create to implant in his brain. That, perhaps, James offered this material to Dunlop; and, in doing so, secured a trade whereby he would be compensated with free racquets for his son. After James has failed to pry Hal away from Avril and has been drawn into the oedipal triangulation, his statement submits to the rule of the Oedipal triangulation. From Avril's desires to his positive impact on Hal life, his shift in subject voices a jealousy. James' words shift from an anger aimed toward Avril to a plea. James is, effectively, begging Hal to see what he has done for him, that he sees how he is better than Avril.

Hal, however, does not respond to James' appeal for love. Instead, again, Hal displaces James' object. Hal says, "and it strikes me I've definitely seen that argyle sweater-vest before. That's [James'] special Interdependence-Day-celebratory-dinner argyle sweater-vest, that he makes a point of never having cleaned. I know those stains" (Wallace 31). Adding, "Dad […] do I need to call the Moms […]" (Wallace 31). With these words, Hal fortifies his defence against James. By asking if he needs to call Avril, Hal displaces himself from the transference James is attempting to cultivate. Hal's words depict a turning away from James. His turning away shows us how he does not identify with his father but is still harbouring a desire for Avril.

James does not respond to Hal's remarks or answer his question about phoning Avril. Instead, he states, "who requires only daily evidence that you *speak?*" (Wallace 31, emphasis original). Hal speaks to this, saying "are you hearing me talking, Dad? It speaks. It […]

converses with you" (Wallace 31). But, to this assertion from Hal, James goes on to add "praying for just one conversation, armature or no, that does not end in terror? That does not end like all the others: you staring, me swallowing?" (Wallace 31). Whilst Hal insists to James that he speaks, James insists to Hal that he does not speak. The kernel of the issue here falls on how their different perspectives of the world create a parallax. As Hal does not identify with James, he has never submitted to James' "schizophrenic" neologism-dense language that allows the plane of ontological immanence to become. To James, Hal speaks at the surface level of signs; his words do not carry meaning. Whilst both use English; they use it in different ways. James believes his words are infused with the life of things around him; Hal's are representations of the things around him. In James view, Hal's voice has no life, it does not exist. But in Hal's view, James' voice is contaminated with his life, a life he cannot know. This parallax is illuminated as James utters the word "Son?" to which Hal does not reply; Hal's silence summons a feeling of ambivalence; to which James then begs "*Son?*" again Hal remains silent, his response again affirming his ambivalence to this title, to this role, to what it means (Wallace 31, emphasise original).

The Father Gone, The Therapy Terminated, The Law Enforced

James and Hal, then, see the world differently. But, by the time Hal is sixteen, things change. This is, largely, due to James' suicide.

In *Understanding*, everything Hal feels, all his emotions, are mediated by language (Boswell 86). Because of this, Hal has many emotions he cannot access (Boswell 86). Hal's problem, consequently, "stems from his amorphous yet poignant recognition of the Lacanian lack" (Boswell 87). Hal's interior, in this form, is founded on an absence; while his sense of self is compromised in all cases by the tyranny of language (Boswell 87). Due to this, Hal

cannot feel the grief he feels he should feel after James commits suicide (Boswell 87). He cannot even feel the grief he projects for his therapist (Boswell 87).

I agree with many of the points Boswell makes here, but I also have a very different opinion of what is going on. We learn about James' suicide and Hal's therapy through a phone call Hal has with his older brother Orin, who hadn't spoken to the family since before James died and did not attend James' funeral. Orin has been contacted by Helen Steeply, a reporter from *Moment* magazine, who is actually an agent from the O.U.S. trying to track down the master copy of *Infinite Jest*. Helen wants to find out about James' last few days in the hope it will shed light on the location of the master copy and uses Orin to get this information. But, as Orin wasn't around at the time, he wants to know what happened to James from Hal. Hal, cautious of his brother's manipulative behaviour, is reluctant to share the details of his grief with him. But this does not mean that he does not feel at all.

So, in *Infinite Jest*, Orin phones Hal under the pretence of a brief catch-up (Wallace 242). Hal, initially, informs Orin that he is clipping his toenails into a wastebasket several meters away in the middle of the room (Wallace 242). Following this, Orin reveals his true reason for calling. He states, "Hallie, I've got somebody from *Moment* fucking magazine out here doing a quote soft profile" (Wallace 246). To which, Hal responds, "you've got what?" and Orin clarifies, "[a] human-interest thing. On me as a human […]" (Wallace 246). After that, Orin adds, "Hallie, this physically imposing *Moment* girl's asking all these soft-profilesque family-background questions" (Wallace 246). Hal then asks "she wants to know about [James]?" and Orin replies, "[e]verybody […]" (Wallace 246). Orin goes on to say, "[y]ou of all people should know I have zero intent of forthrightly answering any stained-family-linen-type questions from anybody […]" adding, "but you can see how it's all going to get me thinking. How to avoid being forthright about the [James] material unless I know what the really forthright answer would be" (Wallace 247). Hal then says, "this is you asking

me?" and Orin, taking this as permission, asks, "Dad […] put his head in the oven?" (Wallace 248). Hal does not answer the question straight away; he falls into a silence presented by an ellipsis. Hal's silence, however, still has a voice, it speaks of discomfort. Orin responds to Hal's silence in turn, with a silence of his own, again presented with an ellipsis. And Orin's silence, too, has a voice which also speaks of discomfort.

The fact a silence initiates the dialogue signifies they are discussing matters that have been repressed. In *The History of Sexuality,* "repression operated as a sentence to disappear, but also as an injunction to silence, an affirmation of nonexistence, and by implication, an admission that there was nothing to say about such things, nothing to see, and nothing to know" (Foucault 4). Orin's initial question then, which forces them both into a silence, acts to affirm the nonexistence of the matter in their lives; James' suicide is something that has disappeared, something which has been repressed.

Following their silence, their signifier that the matter at hand has been repressed, Hal and Orin's conversation gets going again. Hal says, "the microwave, O. the rotisserie microwave over next to the fridge, on the freezer side, on the counter, under the cabinet with the plates and bowls to the left of the fridge as you face the fridge" (Wallace 248). Hal answers Orin's question in the first two words, the microwave. But he then goes on, un-requested, to add the details of where the microwave was. Orin does not dwell on the detail of Hal's response but, instead, goes on to ask, "who found him?" (Wallace 248). Hal answers this question by saying, "found by one Harold James Incandenza" (Wallace 248). By using the third person, Hal displaces himself from the presence of the scene he must recall. Whilst Hal answers the question, his use of the third person allows him to keep the memory of his actual presence at the scene suppressed. Orin then states his assumption of what killed James, "so burned, then. Just say it. He was really really badly burned" (Wallace 251). To which Hal answers again with an ellipsis (Wallace 251). Again, Hal is unable to follow the rhythm of

the conversation. Again, his silence could signify that he is being forced deeper into the realm of repression. Yet, this time, Orin does not follow with a silence of his own; Orin wants to know. He presses on, saying, “no, wait. Asphyxiated. The packed foil was to preserve the vacuum in a space that got automatically evacuated as soon as the magnetron started oscillating and generating the microwaves” (Wallace 251). Orin presents a persistence and a determination; his assumptions indicate that he is insistent that Hal tell him the details of James’ suicide. Once Hal has asked Orin where his knowledge of microwaves comes from, and Orin explains that he once had a liaison with a subject who modelled at kitchen appliance trade shows (Wallace 251). Hal then asks, “did this *subject* by any chance explain to you how microwaves actually cook things?” (Wallace 251, emphasis original). Hal’s question is delicate and precise. By asking Orin if he understands how microwaves cook things, he turns Orin’s question back towards Orin. He forces Orin to become the subject of his own question. Hal is, once more, displacing himself from the detail in question. Hal goes on to ask, “have you for example, say, ever like baked a potato in a microwave oven? Did you know you have to cut the potato open before you turn the oven on? Do you know why that is?” (Wallace 251). In these statements, where Hal asks have *you*, did *you*, do *you*, he continues to displace himself as the subject. By asking Orin if he is familiar with the method of cooking a baked potato in a microwave, he hands the status of the subject over to him. As Hal uses the example of a baked potato, he condenses the object they are discussing, James’ suicide, displacing it with this new reduced and familiar object, the potato. Hal is once more displacing the events of James suicide. As Hal, on the one hand, displaces himself and hands over the role of the subject to Orin; and, on the other hand, displaces the object of James suicide and replaces it with the physically smaller and more familiar object of a baked potato, he can keep the event of James’ suicide and the sensorial forces of emotions attached to the memory suppressed.

After Hal has painted this image for Orin, he goes on to state the Boston Police Department's (hereafter B.P.D.) "field pathologist said the build-up of internal pressures would have been almost instantaneous and equivalent in kg.s.cm. to over two sticks of TNT" (Wallace 251). This fragment of information that Hal offers Orrin affirms his force of displacement. In Hal's statement, the subject he addresses is the force of internal pressure that would have killed James, yet he leaves this subject floating. Hal uses the B.P.D. pathologist as the object, he grounds the subject in an object that is, again, not himself, displaced from him. Hal, therefore, can speak these words without having any presence in them, without having to engage their content. With these words, Hal again displaces himself from the event of James' suicide and the emotions attached to it. As Hal is removed from the content of the words he speaks, he can give over a fragment of information, the force of pressure in its TNT equivalent. In doing so, Hal raises a defence, remaining detached from the content of the words he uses; he can give over a pregnant description of the force without associating himself with it. In doing so, Hal can plant a seed in Orin's mind that will bloom into the full conception of the composition of James' suicide, the details of which, given the information Hal is able to regurgitate, will create an image so vivid that Orin may be unwilling to ask Hal to dig any deeper into the memory.

Orin does change the trajectory of his voice. Instead of digging any deeper into James' death, he focuses his attention on Hal, stating, "you must have been traumatized beyond fucking belief" (Wallace 252). And Hal replies, "your concern is much appreciated, believe me" (Wallace 252). In his answer, Hal can be seen, once more, to displace himself. He does not affirm that he was traumatized; he does not even place himself in the discourse; he leaves himself outside of the dialogue. Hal places himself outside all that has affected him and instead turns the focus of the dialogue back toward Orin, thanking him. Hal then states that he "was shunted directly into concentrated grief-and-trauma-therapy. Four days a week

for over a month […]" (Wallace 252). Orin then says, "but it helped. Ultimately. The grief-therapy" (Wallace 252). Hal does not answer Orin's question. Instead, he opens a vignette about his therapist, providing a general description of the therapist's appearance (Wallace 252). Again, Hal executes a displacement; Hal does not dwell on whether or not the therapy helped him. Instead, he supplants the object Orin creates with his own. However, Orin remains persistent, and following Hal's vignette, he asks, "but you got through it. You grieved to everybody's satisfaction, you're saying" (Wallace 255). Once more, Hal does not answer this question. Instead, Hal opens another vignette, offering Orin a description of his final session with the therapist that led to their meetings being terminated. Again, Hal does not answer Orin's question but once again displaces the object he wishes to discuss. Orin tries once more, proposing "but you got through it. You really did grieve […]" (Wallace 257). But Hal, once more, adds another paragraph to his vignette, again displacing the object Orin is attempting to discuss. Orin, after that, makes a final attempt to draw out an emotional response from Hal stating, "but you got through it all, and you can thumbnail sketch the overall feeling for me" (Wallace 257). To which, Hal replies, "what I feel is myself gathering my resources for the right foot, finally. That magic feeling's back. I'm not lining up the vectors for the wastebasket or anything" (Wallace 257). Once again, Hal displaces the object at hand, turning his focus on his toenails to smother the possibility of any response relating to James' suicide and his feelings about it. It is not, then, that Hal does not feel; he feels something, he is constantly defending against it and displacing it. Perhaps he feels so intensely he can't look at the memory directly and he cannot give it over to Orin.

So Hal does feel. But his main concern, in the wake of James' suicide, is not his grief-or-trauma; he is concerned with his ranking. As he tells Orin, his therapy was "four days a week for over a month, right in the April-May gearing-up-for-summer-tour-period" (Wallace 251-252). With therapy taking him away from the court, Hal goes on to explain that he "lost

two spots on the 14's ladder […]" (Wallace 252). And, that he would have "missed Indianapolis if … if [he] hadn't finally figured out the grief-and-trauma-therapy process" (Wallace 252).

Even though Hal feels, he clearly did not want to be in therapy. He wanted to get the process over as quickly as possible, so he could preserve his ranking. As he tells Orin, he figured it out, he got it over with. But what is it he figured out? I believe it is as though Hal figures out that his therapist's orientation aligns with what we might call a Lacanian framework.

To begin with, Hal simply cannot work out what the therapist wants. He tells Orin that he tried to figure it out; that he went "down and chewed through Copley Square library's grief section" (Wallace 253). That he read the likes of Hilton Kübler-Ross, slogged through Robert Kastenbaum, and Elizabeth Harper Neeld, but that his therapist was having none of this (Wallace 253-254). All the authors Hal mentions to Orin are real, they have published; so what purpose does their work serve, why does Hal mention it, and why does his therapist reject it? All three authors can be said to have produced works of self-help, but they also commit another "crime". Kübler-Ross is famous for the "grief-cycle", for the five step of grief. Kastenbaum for the "death-system," and Neeld for presenting seven choices in the face of grief. All these works create a structure for the experience of death, which to a post-structuralist is near enough a death itself. Worried that he "couldn't deliver the goods", Hal tells Orin that he went to see Lyle, the resident guru at E.T.A. (Wallace 254). Hal explains to Orin that Lyle told him he had been "approaching the issue from the wrong side" (Wallace 254). That he had gone to the library and "acted like a *student* of grief" (Wallace 254, emphasis original). Whereas what he needed to do was chew through "the section for the grief-professionals *themselves"* (Wallace 254, emphasis original). How could he, Lyle points out, know what a professional wanted unless he knew what they are professionally required

to want (Wallace 254). Hal heads back to the library and, he tells Orin, that by the next day he was a different man (Wallace 255). Hal has decoded the situation, now he can give his therapist what he wants.

Lacan says, over and over again — in *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis* and *Écrits* — that the unconscious is structured like a language. Lacan does not mean that the unconscious is structured exactly the same way as English, some other modern, or ancient language. But instead, that language, operating at the unconscious level, obeys a grammar. Explaining this in "Position of the Unconscious" he tells us that language is not something we control; it lives and breathes independently of any human subject (Lacan 703-721). He notes how, while we can feel that we choose our words, we can also feel that they are chosen for us. We may be unable to think or express something except in a specific way; words occasionally erupt out of us, and we feel we did not choose them. We sometimes use words we don't want to use, words that we do not seek out; they just come to mind; they thrust themselves on us with such force that all we can do is reproduce them (Lacan 705).

In the seminar "Beyond The Imaginary, The Symbolic or From the Little to the Big Other", language that forces itself upon us comes from some Other place than consciousness; it comes from the unconscious (Lacan 192). He suggests, for this reason, the view that language is a process of two chains of discourse (Lacan uses the word chain to remind us of the contextual and grammatical links between each word uttered, the ones before and after; to remind us that no word has any fixed value, no value except for its uses in a particular context) running more or less — figuratively speaking — parallel (Lacan 192). Each unfolding along a timeline with one interrupting and interviewing in the other (Lacan 192). The "upper" chain of spoken words, of enunciation or enunciating, hovers over the "lower" chain of unconscious thought processes, which occurs at one and the same time as the movement of speech but is independent of it (Lacan 197-205). The independent chain of

unconscious thought raises the question, how does thinking occur there? Lacan answers this by telling us unconscious thoughts do not follow what is knowns in linguistics as natural language; a langue that is spoken, but an artificial language, the syntactic rules. He uses a game of heads or tails to explain this (Lacan 192). There is no way to predict the result of a coin toss, but the toss creates a history, a double chain (Lacan 192). The "upper" chain accounts for the number of times the coin has been tossed. The "lower" chain accounts for whether it landed on heads or tails (Lacan 193). The lower chain, with its signs for head or tails, can be coded into a system (double heads, double tails, heads and tails, tails and heads), creating a "numeric matrix" (double heads = 1, double tails = 2, heads and tails = 3, tails and heads = 4) (Lacan 193). We can, then, mark the lower chain of heads or tails with the symbolic system of a numeric matric (Lacan 193). We have a way to group the outcome of coin tosses that prohibits some combinations (Lacan 193). We have a rule. We have grammar (Lacan 198). The upper chain keeps track of the number of tosses; it counts them along a numerical chain, it "remembers" (Lacan 199). The chain records the past and determines what is to come. That is to say, things are remembered for us in the signifying chain (Lacan 199). Here the upper signifying chain, and the lower signifying chain are linked. That is to say, the grammar of its lower counterpart, the unconscious (Lacan 199-200).

Hal describes his next session to Orin by saying he "went in there and presented with anger at the grief-therapist" (Wallace 255). Adding that he "accused the grief-therapist of actually inhibiting [his] attempt to process [his] grief, by refusing to validate [his] absence of feelings" (Wallace 255). Hal accuses his therapist of inhibiting his ability to process his grief. Hal notes that his therapist is arresting his process. He notes that the Other controls his enunciations. Hal says that his feelings are absent. Arguably, feelings give meaning to the manifestation of a person's language. There are no feelings here, no meanings here. But Hal is angry. His anger is aimed at the therapist. His voice is speaking twice. There is an upper

chain and a lower chain. His enunciation, formal and sound, create the upper chain; he is "speaking", but his anger that intervenes in his enunciation creates the lower chain, his unconscious thought.

Establishing the two signifying chains of speaking and unconscious thought, Hal tells Orin that he "called him a shithead" and "asked him what the cock-shitting-fuck he wanted from [him]" (Wallace 255). Adding that his "overall demeanour was paroxysmic" (Wallace 255). Here, Hal's words add another link to his dual signifying chain. His upper chain continues to speak and his lower chain, his unconscious thoughts, adds to what marked it before, anger. But there is a shift here. Hal's upper chain of speech is interceded by his lower chain, his unconscious. Hal asks his therapist what he wants from him; he composes a grammatically sound question. But the question creates a defeatist tone. His speech is defeated; it is empty. At the same time, though, Hal erupts with an onslaught of random profanity. His upper chain, speech, which is concerned with meaning, has been emptied; it is filled with words not concerned with meaning; it is filled with Hal's lower chain, his unconscious.

His unconscious thought is distilled in the name he assigns to his therapist, shithead. The prefix, shit, summons the force of undigested detritus; and its suffix, head, grounds its location. Through the upper chain of speech, Hal's unconscious admits there are un-digested thoughts stuck in his head. Hal states that his overall demeanour was paroxysmic, a sign that tells us he gives himself over to the Other within himself.

Allowing his speech to be interceded by his unconscious thoughts, Hal states that his therapist encouraged him to go with his paroxysmic feelings, and that he then "angrily told [the therapist] [he] flat-out refused to feel iota-one of guilt of any kind" (Wallace 255). Again, Hal adds another link to his signifying chain. He tells the therapist that he is not responsible for anything, but he is still speaking angrily. His voice is marked by what came

before it; it is part of the same “numerical matrix”, but there is another shift here, and it comes with the word guilt. His unconscious is following its grammar. It remembers, and now it points towards what will come.

Following these chains, Hal tells Orin that he asked his therapist, “what, I was supposed to have lost even more quickly to Freer, so I could have come around [the house] in time to stop [James]?” (Wallace 255). His speech adds another link to his signifying chain. His upper chain speaks his lower chain. Marked by the word guilt, Hal now looks to the symbolic order to free himself. He begs for the big Other to protect him. He had commitments, responsibilities; there was nothing he could have done.

Refusing the guilt of his unconscious thought, Hal tells Orin that “by this time I was pounding myself on the breastbone with rage as I said that it just by-God was *not* my fault that —” (Wallace 255, emphasis original). Once more, Hal adds another link to his chains. His upper chain speaks, but his lower chain is in pain. Again, Hal attempts to empty his voice; he emphasises the word not, he intensifies the idea there was nothing he could have done. But if there was nothing he could do, what is he beating himself up for? By beating his breastbone, Hal’s lower chain, his unconscious thought, creates the signifier that there is something within him, some impassioned feeling that he wishes to break out, that he wishes to let free. Hal does not complete his sentence, his syntax fragments at its kernel, not his fault that …? His upper chain — speech — is interrupted by his lower chain of unconscious thought. Hal is confronted by his unconscious.

Breaking eye contact with his therapist, Hal states that he “muttered, [t]hat I’d been hungry” (Wallace 255). It was not his fault that he had been hungry. By following the signifying chain, the grammar of his unconscious, Hal has unveiled the lower cypher that disturbed him. The extent to which it disturbed him speaks in his upper chain. Hal breaks his

therapist's gaze. His cannibalistic desire has violated the laws of civilisation. He hides from his judgment. He mutters to conceal his guilt.

After his upper chain has spoken his lower chain, after he has been confronted with his unconscious thought, Hal adds that he stated "nobody can choose or have any control over their first unconscious thoughts or reactions when they come into a house" (Wallace 255). That it wasn't his fault this his "first unconscious thought turned out to be —" (Wallace 255). Again, Hal falls into silence, a silence that silences his guilt. But after that, he screamed, "*That something smelled delicious!*" (Wallace 255, emphasis original). His upper chain, that he once emptied so it could be filled with random profanity, is now full of the truth. Hal's upper chain is full with the lower chain, he speaks his unconscious. The power of it overwhelms him. Hal then tells Orin that

> it came out between sobs and screams. That it'd been four hours plus since lunchtime and I'd worked hard and played hard and I was starved. That the saliva had started the minute I came through the door. That golly something smells *delicious* was my first reaction. (Wallace 255, emphasise original)

Where once he hid behind the symbolic order, begged the big Other to defend him, Hal now reconciles his role in it. He played, he worked up an appetite, he had cannibalistic desires. Having placed his guilt, the signifier of hunger, in its syntactic coherence, Hal has unveiled the truth; he absolves himself "with seven minutes left in the session" (Wallace 255).

Hal, then, has cracked the code, he has been absolved. But, there is no authenticity to this. He tells Orin that when he left the therapist's office he started to laugh hysterically (Wallace 257). That he was laughing so hard he had to lock himself in the bathroom, stamp

his feet and bang his head against the stalls (Wallace 257). So Hal feels and he didn't really address any of his feelings in therapy, so where did they go?

"Totem and Taboo" describes the primal parricide committed by a horde of brothers who killed and consumed their father (Freud 141). Who, after that, had possession of all the women in their tribe and ruled through terror (Freud 142). Following the murder, the horde was racked with guilt and remorse, as they not only hated their father but loved him too (Freud 143). Not only did the horde come to be racked with guilt and remorse, but they also encountered an impasse. Even though the brothers had killed their father, each now wanted all the women for himself (Freud 143). To prevent their destruction, the horde established the law of incest (Freud 143). They denied themselves sexual access to their mothers and sisters (Freud 143). The murdered father now constituted the ego-ideal, the super-ego. Consequently, the father became more powerful in the psyches of the horde than he had been when alive. In his becoming the murdered father, he became super-ego, he became the law of prohibition. The

> dead father became stronger than the living one had been — for events took the course we so often see them follow in human affairs to this day. What had up to then been prevented by his actual existence was thenceforward prohibited by the sons themselves [...] They revoked their deed by forbidding the killing of the totem, the substitute for their father, and they renounced its fruits by resigning their claim to the women who had now been set free. (Freud 143)

As Hal tells Orin, James used the microwave to commit suicide; and when describing this event, Hal leans on the image of a baked potato, of its rupture (Wallace 251). Giving Orin the details, Hal says that James had to use a wide-bit drill and a hacksaw to make a hole

in the microwave. He adds that, as the B.P.D field pathologist informed him, “the build-up of internal pressures would have been almost instantaneous and equivalent in kg.s.cm. to over two sticks of TNT” (Wallace 251). The field pathologist, Hal continues, “who drew the chalk lines around [James’] shoes on the floor said maybe ten seconds tops. He said the pressure build up would have been almost instantaneous. Then he gestured to the walls” (Wallace 251).

So, James’ head exploded and ended up all over the kitchen walls. In his reference to the baked potato, Hal creates the image of food, something that can be consumed. The idea of food and consumption is affirmed in the tool used for the suicide, the microwave. But there is another force alive here. In his reference to how James put his head inside the microwave, there is an image of penetration. In his description of James head exploding, Hal creates the idea of an ejaculation. Hal builds, what are called in the case study “The Rat Man”, “verbal bridges” (Freud 215). Hal’s verbal bridges lead to, on the one hand, food, and, on the other hand, the sexual forces of the libido. In this sense, Hal wished to murder James and consume him. Hal, then, is racked with guilt and remorse. His guilt and remorse has created a superego in his psyche, perhaps this is why he was so concerned with his ranking after James’ suicide: E.T.A. was James’ world and Hal is desperate to be the best in it, Hal finally feels for James, identifies with him, associates with him.

Observing the Law, Breaking the Law, Becoming the Father

But how does Hal’s use of marijuana fit into his new identification with James and what purpose does it serve? By the time Hal is seventeen, he smokes every day. Each day he follows a routine, descending through a series of tunnels under the E.T.A. grounds to smoke in private. I believe that, with these actions, we can consider a strong misreading where Hal

comes to echo James' force, we can read him striving to enter the solipsistic ontology of a body-without-organs, to become empty.

In "The Ego and the Id" Freud conceptualises the three agencies of the mind. The id represents our unconscious impulses, both inherited and repressed; it consists only of impulses seeking discharge; and pleasure reigns exclusively (Freud 19-27). The ego forms from the id and as encompasses our percept-consciousness; perceptions-and-consciousness include latent ideas, memories, words, and the awareness of our body (Freud 19-27). The ego fades into the unconscious forcing it to take on some unconscious judgments, including censorship of unwanted unconscious impulses (Freud 24). The ego is supported by the resistance; the means by which we keep those impulses at bay (Freud 24).

Even though the ego is the seat of consciousness and rationality, it plays a passive role in life (Freud 25). The ego acts more as a filter, it is lived by uncontrollable forces flowing from the id and the superego (Freud 25).

The superego develops from the Oedipal conflict (Freud 28-32). The simple version of the Oedipal conflict for boys — as we are concerned with Hal here — begins with their desire for their mother (Freud 28). As their desire for their mother grows, they see their father as an obstacle (Freud 29). They want him out the way, so they can replace him and have their mother all to their self (Freud 30). But, because they want his privileges, they wish to be him, they identify with him (Freud 30). The boy's relationship to his father becomes ambivalent, he wants to take the father into himself and destroy him (Freud 31). Eventually, the boy realises their desire cannot be fulfilled; and, in the interest of survival represses them (Freud 32). As they abandon this libidinal wish for their parents, they experience a loss (Freud 32). This loss, in turn, prompts them to internalise their parents to retain them (Freud 33-37). The internalisation forms the core of the superego, which takes over the role the parents played for the child as an ideal, as authority (Freud 37).

When Hal sets out to get high each day, he first enters the “lobby reception area or administrative offices on Comm.-Ad.’s first floor […]” (Wallace 51). It can be thought that the Common Administration building would organise the day to day running of E.T.A. That it manages aspects such as class timetables, meal planning, and dormitories for the students. The space, then, governs the student’s experience. Given that the students daily events experience are shaped outside of their consideration, it can be said that they appear to the students as coming out of the blue. That the daily events have an immediate tone; they are simply there. Due to the tone of their appearance, given that the events are simply there, they become enshrouded in an object like aura. They are given a tangible certainty, a firmness. When Hal enters the administrative office, he is entering a space that organises the perceptions students will receive; perceptions that appear with a tone of immediacy and certainty; he is, then, entering the locus of his conscious world. This can be affirmed if the location of the office is considered. The first floor, in American English, corresponds to the ground floor in British English. Hal enters the building yet remains on the ground, the surface of his world. The emphasis of the spaces being on the surface symbolises how the ego is the surface, how it is attached to the conscious world of immediate perceptions.

After Hal enters the Common Administration building — enters the locus of his conscious world — he takes one of the “two sets of elevators” or the “one [set] of stairs” to the “weight room, sauna, and locker/shower areas on the sublevel below […]” (Wallace 51). In the weight room, students are free to exercise; they are free to discharge the excitations that have stimulated them. In the sauna, students are free to recuperate. In the showers, students can refresh themselves, clean themselves of any dirt that clings to them from exertions or recuperation. They can store, in their lockers, fresh clothing to dress their fresh bodies in. In this space, they can manage their excitations and the image of themselves. This

force of management, in a space that is connected to and sits just below the surface of the administrations building, of the conscious world, creates a force of the ego.

Once Hal has entered this first sub-level — the ego — a "large tunnel of elephant-colored cement leads from just off the boy's showers to the mammoth laundry room […]" (Wallace 51). The tunnel is described as elephant-coloured; another way to phrase this is to say it is grey. After the colour of the tunnel has been described, the material it is made from, concrete, is voiced. In other words, the matter the tunnel is made from is announced. In the phrase "elephant-colored cement" then, lurks the phrase grey matter; a colloquial term for the mind. The tunnel leads to "the mammoth laundry room", the attributive adjective uttered is important. On the one hand, mammoth connotates a large size; but, on the other hand, it also connotates the extinct animal, the woolly mammoth. These connotations bleed into the word's laundry and room. On the one hand, the room is large, yes, but, on the other hand, the word creates a tone that exudes the idea that what is in the laundry room no longer exists. We can think about the process of doing laundry through this lens of what once was. In the process of doing laundry, clothes that have been accessible, usable, are, for a period, lost. They cannot be worn whilst in a state of being washed. Yet, once cleaned and dried, the conditions are filled in which they have been made accessible, usable again. In this sense, the laundry room can be thought of as a space of latency. The elephant coloured cement tunnel — the tunnel of grey matter — leads to the mammoth laundry room, to the realm of latency. The text also illuminates that, on this first sublevel, "two smaller tunnels radiate from the sauna area south and east to the subbasements of the smaller spherocubular, proto-Georgian building [which] serve as student storage space […]" (Wallace 51). In this description of the other tunnel running from the first sublevel, the language, again, is significant. The tunnels lead to the subbasements of a proto-Georgian building, a building that would have been built between the early eighteenth and early nineteenth century. Again, then, a tone of the past

bleeds into the subbasements being considered. The subbasement itself serves as a student storage space. What follows from this is that the subbasement is filled with objects that are surplus, objects no longer deemed valuable enough to be held in the owner's living space. These objects, then, were once experienced, and whilst they may no longer be being experienced, they are imbued with the experiences they once encountered. These objects, then, that were once experienced, but have been stored away, are in a sense coated in a mnemic residue; one that, should a student go searching for an object in this storage space, will act as a stimulus of the past experiences. When Hal descends to this first sublevel, to the realm of the ego, he stands in at the entrance of the psyche, of the grey matter. Tunnels lead to the laundry room, the realm of latency, and two other tunnels lead to storage spaces, to realm of memory.

As Hal stands, still in this first sub-level — the ego — looking down the tunnels that lead deeper into the psyche, the laundry room — latency — and the storage spaces — memory — he will then hunch and follow

> two even smaller tunnels, navigable by any adult willing to assume a kind of knuckle-dragging simian posture, [which] in turn connect each of the subbasements to the former optical and film-development facilities of […] the late Dr. James O. Incandenza […] and to the offices of the Physical Plant, almost directly beneath the centre row of E.T.A. outdoor tennis courts. (Wallace 51)

The image this creates is striking. Hal's form transitions from an erect posture to the hunched knuckle-dragging simian posture, from the upright civilised person to the slumping primordial human governed by instincts. At this moment in his journey, Hal transitions from the first subbasement — the ego — into the realm of primal instincts, of the id. Hal's

transition into the id is affirmed by where this tunnel leads. First, it opens onto James' optical and film-development facilities. When Hal arrives here, it can be said that he enters a space where the objects within it are the remnants of James' life. The objects are coated in the residue of his touch and are still enshrouded in his life. They create a force that infiltrates the particles in the air. In this environment, James' force is still present. This tunnel, in the id, leads to the superego. Second, the tunnel continues past James film studio, it leads to the physical plant almost directly below the centre row of tennis courts. At no point in the text does it come to light specifically what the physical plant is. However, its name and location offer clues that can be used to think of its purpose. In American English, a power station is known as a power plant. The phonetic similarities of these names builds a bridge between these two phrases. The association implied here is that whilst a power plant facilitates the generation of electrical power, the physical plant may facilitate the generation of physical power. The physical plant is, perhaps, a space dedicated to strength training, a space in which the pure forces of the instincts can be unleashed, can be re-enforced, and developed so a student can then ascend to the tennis courts and put the improvements made in the realm of unrestricted instincts to practice in the rules of tennis. When Hal follows this tunnel, he no longer stands as the upright civilised person. He is forced into a primitive posture. He is forced into a state governed by the id. The id is affirmed by where the tunnels lead; James' film studio — the super-ego, and the physical plant — the realm of the instincts.

After Hal has slumped, passed through James' film studio, and entered the physical plant — after he has entered the id, passed the super-ego, and entered the instincts — he holds the bag containing his marijuana and utensils "in his teeth" and follows a "pargeted tunnel […]" (Wallace 51). This tunnel runs between the physical plant and the pump room and "is traversable only via all-fours-type crawling […]" (Wallace 51). Parget is a type of plaster used for waterproofing. The walls of this tunnel are nonporous. Not only do the walls

of this tunnel stop any moisture from the surrounding environment seeping into and disseminating throughout the space they contain, but they also stop any moisture from within the tunnel seeping into the walls and disseminating into the surrounding environments. It can be said that this tunnel resits merging with the space around it. That the Parget creates a resistance. Hal is forced to crawl on all fours to pass through this tunnel, with his bag in his mouth. He is forced to take the form of an infant child. Hal becomes the infant. The fact he carries what is important to him, his marijuana and utensils, in his mouth echoes the role the mouth plays for the infant. The infant uses its mouth to find the teat; its mouth holds on to the teat, and only then can it draw in the nourishing milk of the mother. By holding his marijuana and utensils in his mouth, it is as though, in this stage of his journey, Hal is preparing himself for the nourishment that will come when he draws in the smoke.

Having traversed the resistance, having become an infant again, Hal emerges in the pump room. The text states that the pump room itself is an "unfenistrated oval chamber" which is "maybe about twenty meters directly beneath the centremost courts […] (Wallace 52). An unfenistrated oval chamber about twenty meters underground … this is odd, is it not? One would, surely, assume that a room so deep below the surface would not have windows? So, what is this attributive adjective doing here? It stands as an emphasiser, but what is it emphasising? The primary function of a window is to let light into a space. Perhaps, therefore, by identifying that the room is unfenistrated, it is being said that no light enters the room. But why would this be important? What can letting light into a space signify? The phrase to see the light of day relates to the presence of something. Therefore, it can be considered that this room, which has never seen the light of day, is a space Hal associates with the idea that activities undertaken here will never be present to the external world. This builds a bridge to the repressed described in "The Interpretation of Dreams";

> King Oedipus, who slew his father Laïus and married his mother Jocasta, merely shows us the fulfilment of our own childhood wishes […] Here is one in whom these primaeval wishes of our childhood have been fulfilled, and we shrink back from him with the whole force of the repression by which those wishes have since that time been held down within us. (Freud 263).

Held down within us, never to see the light of day.

Hal's journey to the pump room, then, can be read as a ceremonial journey to the depths of the unconscious. But where is the death that would echo his father's force?

In "Beyond the Pleasure Principle" Freud identifies a compulsion to repeat and suggests it must be fundamental. He suspects that repetitive behaviour, operating in disregard of its effect, may be connected to a drive (Freud 36). Drives repeat something; hunger forces us to attain satisfaction every time it raises its head, when satisfied the drive restores the organism to the state it was in (Freud 37). If drives, as the basic building blocks of the psyche, are driven to repeat, then — perhaps — all living things do this (Freud 37). That all life seeks to restore an earlier state of things (Freud 37). If the drives and, consequently, life seeks to restore an earlier state, then, life cannot have a goal that it has not attained before (Freud 37). It has to aim toward a state it has known, toward something it once was (Freud 37). The original state from which life emerged was inorganic (Freud 38). Meaning, life must follow the imperative to return to the inorganic, to death (Freud 38). That the aim of life is death (Freud 38).

In opposition to the death drive, stand the sexual drive (Freud 50). The sexual drive bring us together and create unions that produce new life (Freud 50). The aim of the sexual drive are compared with the Eros of the classical poets who created a union that binds all

living things (Freud 50). He stresses the dualism of his two instincts, noting how as one tries to push forward with life, the other tries to return to an older state of death (Freud 40-41). But he also realises the sexual drive may not be the only force of life (Freud 51). The ego may play a part too, as the libido can take the ego as its object (Freud 51). The ego is invested with libido, then the drives, which nurture and protect the ego, must express libido too (Freud 51-52). That is to say, the ego — as an expression of but distinct from the sexual drive — supports life; this is the narcissistic drive (Freud 53). Even though the sexual and narcissistic drive under fall under the umbrella of the life drive, there is some conflict between them; a competition between necessity and love (Freud 53).

The death drive is not as easy to observe as the life drive (Freud 54-57). But it can be seen in two forces. In sadism-masochism and the nirvana principle. Sadism is generated from the death drive, which — with the life drive — inhabit the unconscious (Freud 55). Alone, the death drive would insure an unconscious drift toward death. But, the life drive expels it, forcing it out into the external world where it can be seen as destructive action against objects (Freud 55). The death drive, directed by the life drive as sadism, is put in service of the sexual function to control the object (Freud 56). Masochism begins with the death drive and sadism (Freud 56). But, in anticipation of the negative reaction from the external world, we turn our destructiveness inward, towards ourselves; we experience the pain but also the arousal the pain brings (Freud 57). The nirvana principle is the tendency of life in general to keep constant, reduce, or remove internal tensions that arise due to stimuli (Freud 57). The nirvana principle, then, which strives for quiescence, intersects the death drive with its wish to remove all stimulation. In this sense, each release we achieve resembles the release of death (Freud 57).

The death drive, then, manifests a compulsion to repeat: a wish to return to the inorganic state that preceded life, it returns us — plagued by stimuli — to a state of nirvana

(Freud 62-64). It is the repetition compulsion that contains and channels uncontrolled energy coming from stimuli that overwhelm (Freud 63). In its exercise of containment, the repetition compulsion must disregard reality and receive pain (Freud 63). But the repetition of this pain will result in the discharge of excitation and bring about a pleasure that is consistent with death and nirvana (Freud 63).

Hal's daily journey to the pump room, to smoke in secret, is no small accomplishment. The narrator of *Infinite Jest* tells us that Hal smokes "high-resin dope, which stinks" and that because it smells so much, "he uses a one-hitter to smoke it" (Wallace 49). He uses a one-hitter because it is small. Its size means, as the narrator explains, it can be "wrapped in two baggies and then further wrapped and sealed in a Ziploc and then enclosed in two sport-socks in a gear bag along with the lighter […] and the little film-case of dope itself […]", making it "highly portable and odor-free and basically totally covert" (Wallace 49).

I believe that in these actions we can read a conflict between Hal's life drives, his ego, libido and narcissism, and his death drive, his sadism-machoism. The narrator tells us that Hal's marijuana is high-resin, that it stinks. In doing so, they foreground its presence. Hal's marijuana is, very much so, there; it is an undeniable object; an object he dedicates a lot of time to. In other words, it is a love object. Hal's use of a one-hitter is a compromise between the love for his object and necessity. His life drives invests his ego with libido and because of this, he wants the most out of the object. A one-hitter, which is essentially a small pipe, means Hal can revel in the pure sickly-sweetness of his marijuana. But, his ego must also support the life of his love object, and the one-hitter fills this choice too. The one-hitter is small and his life instinct directs his death drive towards it and himself, so he can control it, keep it covert, keep his love alive. As the marijuana Hal smokes smells so strong, the one-hitter itself will stink, too. The one-hitter will be laced with the trace of his love object, it will

be part of it, part of its presence. So Hal wraps it in two baggies. And, as he does so, he undertakes a destructive action against his love object. He contains it, controls it. Not satisfied he is safe, and perhaps anticipating the negative reaction he would receive from the E.T.A. staff for his actions, Hal's death drive turns inward. Death forces him to overwork, to ensure that the presence of his marijuana does not disturb his external reality. He wraps his wrapped up one-hitter in a Ziploc, again attempting to destroy its presence. He then puts the Ziploc in two sport-socks, here, once more, his life drives direct his death drive towards his love object as a destructive force, but his life drives also guides his ego, invested with libido, to undertake a loving action, to preserve. Sports socks are thick, plush. They act, on the one hand, to absorb sweat; and, on the other hand, to cushion the impact on the feet. The sweat acts as another layer of destruction, masking any scent that may escape and the soft cotton acts as a womb keeping his love object safe. Hal's love for his marijuana can be seen in how he keeps it in a film case. Film cases are airtight, they keep oxygen and light out, as it would damage the delicate film. His choice to keep it there is loving, keeping it fresh.

Turning to how Hal actually smokes, the narrator tells us that Hal uses a one-hitter because it has "the advantage of efficiency […]" (Wallace 49). Meaning, "every particle of ignited pot gets inhaled: there's none of the incidental second-hand-type smoke […] (Wallace 49). And that "Hal can take every iota way down deep and hold his breath forever […]" (Wallace 49). As he smokes, Hal's life instinct expels his death instinct outward, he burns away everything that has brought him to this moment, his love object, his marijuana. But his death instinct also turns inward. Hal holds what he has inhaled way down deep for as long as possible. This isn't comfortable. His lungs will burn. He holds it in until there is almost nothing to exhale. Hal is causing himself pain. We learn in footnote a to endnote 269 the effect marijuana has on him. The footnote tells us that when Hal smokes marijuana, he

> lose[es] interest in practical functioning, [and] Marijuana Think[s] [himself] into labyrinths of reflective abstraction that seems to cast doubt on the very possibility of practical functioning, and the mental labour of finding [his] way out consumes all available attention and makes [him] look physically torpid and apathetic and amotivated. (Wallace 1048)

Smoking leads Hal into abstractions so intense that he cannot function. He is left physically inactive, unable to engage with anything. He is left apathetic, empty of feelings or interests. And he becomes amotivated, empty of any reason to do anything. His arousal leads to a resemblance of death, to nirvana.

So each day Hal repeats this ceremonial journey to a space that represents the depths of the unconscious and he creates death. Each day Hal acts to performs a death in the unconscious. A death in the unconscious is exactly what Deleuze and Guattari call the body-without-organs, the solipsistic post-structural force that drove James. Hal, then, is now following in his father's footsteps.

But, Hal's path is not smooth. On November 8th. — Interdependence day — in the Year of the Depend Adult Undergarment, Hal's narrative thread reaches crisis point as the annual game of Eschaton —an elaborate war game played out with old tennis equipment and calculus — descends into chaos (Burn 33). The events reveal the selves students have been taught to hide (Burn 54). The repressed rage and frustration that the younger students have for each other causes a massive fight (Burn 54). Michael Pemulis' blue collar Irish heritage comes out (Burn 54). James Struck collapse and wets himself (Burn 54). But "the most significant interior that is revealed on November 8th undoubtedly belongs to Hal" (Burn 54).

Hal has "some fairly straightforward moments of self-knowledge that afternoon" (Burn 54). As he tells us, Hal suspects he may be a secret snob and he cannot hide his

“contempt for Sleepy T.P.” Peterson’s inability to define the word equivocationary” (Burn 54). But the “scene is ordered so that Hal’s self is also more dramatically exposed” (Burn 54). Eschaton ends with Wallace describing a brief moment that Hal will later regard as completely and uncomfortably bizarre, as Hal feels at his own face to see whether he is wincing (Burn 54). For Burn, this moment is carefully placed to capture Hal’s stark recognition of self-alienation, his divorce from himself, as he reveals by his previously hidden marijuana addiction. He connects Hal’s alienation from himself and his now public use of marijuana through Timothy Melley’s observation on the logic of addiction in *Empire of Conspiracy* (Burn 54). Arguing that Hal’s loss of control over his addiction, as he can no longer control where he smokes, coincides with the “literal manifestation of the disintegration of the last of his inner core of self” (Burn 55).

I agree with many of the points Burn makes here, most importantly the idea that Eschaton acts to make the internal external and that Hal’s self is effaced; but I disagree with how he reads these ideas and the purpose they serve. Again, by considering another strong misreading, I hope to show how the junior students who take part in Eschaton and the senior students who watch on act out the three agencies of the psyche. That Eschaton’s descent into chaos — after Pemulis breaks the rules of the game, reflects Hal’s personal descent into chaos — as he brakes James’ rules. And that, just as the game of Eschaton crumbles, so too does Hal’s ego crumble.

In “The Ego and the Id”, the ego has an interdependent relationship with the other agencies, the id and super-ego (Freud 48-59). The ego is not an autonomous unit, more a way station that three powerful forces pass through; the id — our instinctual urges, external reality, and the super-ego — which as a derivative of the unconscious id, imposes its own compulsion (Freud 55). The ego, as such, is forced to be master and subject of those three forces (Freud 55-59).

As master, the ego tries to control the id with its instinctual impulses as much as it can (Freud 55). Alongside vicissitudes, like repression and sublimation, the ego interposes thinking to delay action and control motility (Freud 55). Enriched by the external world the ego orients the individual there and tests its processes against reality (Freud 55). Ordering events in time, the ego is connected to consciousness and can organise impressions into a series (Freud 55). The ego has no control over the superego, so tries to court its approval and escape its disparagements where it can (Freud 55).

As subject, the ego struggles to serve the same forces; id, external reality, and superego (Freud 56). As a mediator between the id and realty the ego often gives in to the strength of the id (Freud 56). The ego, as derived, is weaker than the id, and, as Freud notes, wants to court the id so the id can love it (Freud 56). The ego, then, attempts to rationalise the id's demands, trying to make them compatible with either the demands of reality or the superego (Freud 56). That is to say, the ego can rationalise what it should not do, such as steal. And, the ego, against its better judgment, can give in to the forces of the external world due to a fear of loss of love or other repercussions, we can do something we know we shouldn't due to a fear of abandonment (Freud 57). But the ego, trying to mediate between the id or external reality, arouses the superego, which tells us we ought not to steal or give into external forces and tells us we us we are a no good wretch for even thinking such (Freud 57).

Freud finds the relationship between the ego and the superego the most interesting and complex of the three interdependent relations. The superego, he tells us, looms apart from and over the ego, replacing and sustaining the relationship the child's ego had to their parents (Freud 57). The relationship between ego and superego takes this shape because of the conditions of its formation (Freud 57). The ego, he tells us, forms from the earliest identifications we make with our parents. Those early identifications retain their potency

through our life because the ego, when still unformed, had no integrity and could not resist the complex raging and unresolved emotions that arise from the Oedipal complex (Freud 57). We internalise the parents we loved and feared, whose abandonment we dreaded above all and who we despised for thwarting our will. The severity of the superego manifest, amongst other outcomes, in anxiety (Freud 58).

The ego, threatened by dangers from the id, external world, and superego, becomes the seat of anxiety (Freud 58). The ego fears being overwhelmed or annihilated by the id and the external world (Freud 58). The ego is also connected to the dread of conscience, the idea that we have done something badly wrong; on which the threat of abandonment looms (Freud 58). But now it is the superego, not the parents, whose abandonment we fear as the superego has replaced the parents as the source of love and protection (Freud 58).

Concluding with a vignette on the fear of death, Freud tells us this anxiety can be understood through the superego. Anxiety cannot be a fear of death as we have never experienced death. Anxiety must be connected to a fear we have experienced, and this experience is abandonment and separation (Freud 59). The dread of anxiety pertains to the ego's part in the separation (Freud 59). Dying, or the expectation of death involves a relinquishment of narcissistic libido: it involves the ego giving itself up and casting itself off (Freud 59). When the ego faces threats from the external world it cannot overcome by itself, all protecting forces are abandoned (Freud 59). The ego gives itself up, it abandons its will to live and lets itself die (Freud 59).

In *Infinite Jest,* every year on May the 8th — Interdependence day — roughly a dozen of the children between twelve and fifteen play a homemade E.T.A. game called Eschaton (Wallace 321-322). The players are organised into theoretical unions of nuclear powers designated AMNAT, SOVWAR, REDCHI, LIBSYR, IRLIBSYR, SOTHAF, and INDPAK; and are free to form theoretical allegiances with each other (322). The unions are then spread

out across an “area of four contiguous tennis courts […] in positions corresponding to their location on the planet earth as represented in *The Rand McNally Slightly Rectangular Hanging Map of the World*” (Wallace 322-323). 400 bald tennis balls, each of which “represents a 5-megaton thermonuclear warhead […]”, are distributed across the unions through a ratio of the unions “yearly military budget as a percentage of [the unions] yearly GNP and the inverse of statego-tactical expenditures as percentage of [the unions] yearly military budge” (Wallace 323). The rules state the tennis balls have to be hit using a lob shot, simulating the launch and descent of inter-continental missiles (Wallace 323). The aim is to hit pieces of tennis gear that are carefully placed within each unions territory to mirror and map strategic targets. “Folded grey-on red E.T.A. T-shirts are […] Major Metro Areas” (Wallace 323). Towels “stand for airfields, bridges, satellite-linked monitoring facilities, carrier groups” (Wallace 323). Red tennis shorts with grey trim are “Conventional-Force Concentrations” (Wallace 323). Black cotton E.T.A. armbands are atomic power plants, uranium and plutonium enrichment facilities, heavy-water plants, and other such infrastructure required for the manufacturing of weapons (Wallace 323). Red shorts with grey trim are “Sites of Strategic Command” (Wallace 323). And socks are either “missile installations or antimissile installations […]” (Wallace 323). A winning Eschaton team are those who have the most “favourable ratio of points for Infliction of Death, Destruction, and Incapacitation of Response to Suffered Death, Destruction, and Incapacitation of Response” (Wallace 323). The ratio itself is calculated and recorded by a “game master and statistician of record” who, this year, is Otis P. Lord (Wallace 323). The game’s tone is presented in the colour of beanie that Lord wears, either black, red, or white (Wallace 323).

As the game begins James Struck, Trevor Axford, Jim Troeltsch, Pemulis, and Hal are all splayed on reticulate-mesh patio chairs under the green *GATORADE THIRST AID* awning of the pavilion, on the south side of the east courts — which is open on all sides — watching

the game (Wallace 329). They are watching because of Pemulis. He is known as “far and away the greatest Eschaton player in E.T.A. history”, and he holds a “power of correction over Lord’s calculation and mandate” (Wallace 322).

As game master and statistician of record, Lord is responsible for observing and recording the movements of the game. But, as he dons a beanie to reflect the game's tone, he is also subject to it. Lord, then, is master and subject of the game, just as the ego is master and subject of the psyche. As an observer of Lord’s actions, Pemulis plays an important role. With his status as far and away the greatest Eschaton player in E.T.A. history he is the senior figure who sets out how one ought to play Eschaton and how one ought not to play Eschaton. Pemulis, then, is a senior authority of the game, just as the superego is a senior authority of the psyche. His role, as superego, can be affirmed if we think about where he sits on the pavilion. Just as the superego looms over the ego, Pemulis’ presence looms over Lord.

As this scene is set, Axford and Struck pass a “hand-rolled psychochemical cigarette”, between them and Hal squeezes his tennis ball (Wallace 329). He is

> [s]truggling with a strong desire to get high again for the second time since breakfast v. a strong distaste about smoking dope with/in front of all these others, especially out in the open in front of Little Buddies, which seems to him to violate some sort of issue of taste that he struggles to articulate satisfactorily to himself. (Wallace 330)

As Struck and Axford pass a joint between them, they essentially flaunt Hal’s love object in his face. But Hal’s love object serves a very specific purpose. As we read above, Hal, through the compulsion to repeat, associates smoking marijuana with a solipsistic death in the unconscious; he smokes to follow James’ law, to become the empty body. But the marijuana being smoked here serves the opposite purpose. Smoking with Axford and Struck would be a

communal act, something that binds them all together, it would be life. To smoke, here, would break James' solipsistic law of death and affirm life. Smoking, then, would be particularly distasteful to Hal in this moment, in front of all the Little Buddies, because they attend a school James set up. They are there to follow James' ideas. Ideas that, should Hal smoke, he would be breaking. Hal decides to "decline all public chemicals" (Wallace 331). He tries to control his id, his instinctual impulses, by repressing his desire; and tries to win the approval of James, his superego. After Hal has made this decision, though, Lord "tear-asses back and forth between Courts 6 and 8 […] ferrying messages which the 18-and-Under guys can tell AMNAT and SOVWAR are making deliberately oblique and obtuse so Lord has to do that much more running" (Wallace 331). And, as Hal and his friends watch Lord, subjected to this back and forth, at

> some point Axford has passed the remainder of the cigarette back over toward Struck without looking to see that Struck is no longer in his chair, and Hal finds himself taking the proffered duBois and smoking dope in public without even thinking about it or having consciously decided to go ahead. (Wallace 331-332)

Hal's ego gives in to his id. Unconsciously he takes the joint. For a moment, this will still his instincts. And this moment of peace is reflected in the game. At this moment, Lord puts on the white beanie that signals a ceasefire and commencement of peace talks between two unions. AMNAT and SOVWAR are discussing peace.

But the game is not over yet. Just as the peace talks between AMNAT and SOVWAR begin, a "few hesitant white flakes appear and swirl around and melt into dark stars the moment they hit court" (Wallace 332). Shortly after the snow starts to fall, REDCHI sends "a towering topspin lob into INDPSK's quadrant, scoring what REDCHI claims is a direct hit on

Karachi and what […] INDPAK claims is only an indirect hit on Karachi" (Wallace 333). Lord, busy brokering "the peace terms AMNAT and SOVWAR are hashing out […] can't even pretend to have seen where REDCHI's strike against INDPAK landed" (Wallace 333). Lord, the game's ego, is unable to record the stats. He looks over to Pemulis, the game's superego, but Pemulis shakes his head to point out that Lord "either sees or doesn't" (Wallace 333). Lord, unable to keep track of the game and having been abandoned by Pemulis, is struck with anxiety. He has "an intense little crying fit" (Wallace 333). Lord's crying fit is made "abruptly worse when J. J. Pen of INDPAK all of a sudden gets the idea to start claiming that now it's snowing the snow totally affects blast area and fire area and pulse-intensity and maybe also has fallout implications […]" (Wallace 333). Arguing that "Lord has to now completely redo everybody's damage parameters" (Wallace 333). Pen's word's, in which he challenges the rules, cause Pemulis to leap out of his chair on the pavilion and pace "up and down just outside the […] chain-link fencing, giving. J. J. Pen the very roughest imaginable side of his tongue" (Wallace 333). Shouting, "[i]t's snowing on the goddam *map*, not the *territory,* you *dick*!" (Wallace 333, emphasis original). But Pemulis does not go on the courts. The courts house the game; they house external reality. Pemulis, as Eschaton's superego, is not part of that external reality. He must stay outside the courts. Only his voice, his rules, can enter the game. And he shouts to protect the game he loves, the game Lord — as ego — is failing to protect.

As Pemulis defends Eschaton Axford, who "knows quite well Pemulis can be fucked with when he's like this […]", shouts "except is the territory the real world, quote unquote, though!" (Wallace 334). Axford takes pleasure in making Pemulis angrier. Here, Axford takes on the role of the id. He is agitation, agitation that causes anger, the potential for destruction, an action of death. After Axford shouts to Pemulis, trying to wind him up, Lord, "trying to please Pemulis", shouts at Axford that "[t]he real world's what the map here *stands*

for!" (Wallace 334, emphasis original). As Lord shouts at Axford, on the one hand, Lord is attempting to please Pemulis, the superego, and on the other hand, he is attempting to bring the influence of Eschaton's superego to bear upon Axford, the id.

We can read this moment as the performance of a psyche under threat from the external world and the instincts. This performance does not go unnoticed; "Hal looks from Axford to Pemulis to Lord" (Wallace 334). Hal looks from id, to superego, to ego. As Hal takes note of the roles his friends are playing, Pemulis continues to defend Eschaton. But, as he does so, more trouble is brewing. Ingersoll, a member of the IRIBSYR union, "has been squatting on his heels […] watching the one-sided exchange between Pemulis and […] J. J. Penn and thinking hard" (Wallace 335). He has decided that "from the duration of the little Sierra Leone summit […] it's pretty clear that SOVWAR and AMNAT are going to come to terms" and his only chance to win is to attack the leaders of SOVWAR and AMNAT's whilst they are in West Africa (Wallace 335). Hal, still holding the joint, watches Ingersoll think. He watches on, "paralyzed and absorbed" (Wallace 335). He "seems to be the only one who sees Ingersoll line up the vector very carefully […] and take a lavish backswing and fire the ball directly at the little circle of […] leaders in West Africa" (Wallace 336). The shot Ingersoll takes is not a lob, as per the game rules. His shot, instead, "flies straight as if short from a rifle and strikes Ann Kittenplan right in the back of the head with a loud *thock*" (Wallace 336, emphasis original). Everyone freezes, shock and silence fall. "No Eschaton Combatant has ever intentionally struck another Combatant's physical person with a 5-megaton thermonuclear weapon" (Wallace 336).

Ingersoll, hitting another person with a tennis ball, breaks the rules of Eschaton as Hal, smoking marijuana in public, breaks James' law. Hal is absorbed in the moment; he is fully engaged in what is happening; he soaks it up, takes it in, it becomes his. As the game of Eschaton freezes, as everyone dwells in the horror of Ingersoll's rule break, Hal is paralysed;

he dwells in the horror of the law he has broken. The players wait to see what unfolds as Hal waits to see what unfolds. No one can move; everyone is anxious.

Pemulis, as superego, breaks the silence. He lets loose a “series of ant-Ingersoll invectives” (Wallace 336). But, as he tries to protect the game, Lord “with near-ceremonial care exchanges the white beanie on his head for the red beanie that signifies Utter Global Crisis” (Wallace 336-337). Eschaton’s ego has spoken. Hal’s ego has spoken. Crisis. Pemulis “tells Lord he cannot believe his *fucking* eyes” (Wallace 337, emphasis original). Desperate now to protect the game he shouts “how dare he don the dreaded red beanie over such an obvious instance of map-not-territory equivocationary horeseshit as Ingersoll’s trying to foist” (Wallace 337). But “[u]nder Pemulis’s wild-eyed stare, Lord clears his throat and calls out to Ingersoll […]” (Wallace 337). Lord and Ingersoll then come to an agreement that as AMNAT and SOVWAR chose to hold their talks in Serra Leon, West Africa became a valid target. Lord ignores Pemulis; the ego ignores the superego; it takes on the external reality; just as Hal’s ego ignored James as superego and took on the external reality. “Pemulis howls that Lord is in his vacillation is appeasing Ingersoll in his effort to fatally fuck with the very breath and bread of Eschaton” (Wallace 337). Pemulis — the superego — tells Lord — the ego — that he is fatally fucking with eschaton's very breath and bread; in other words, that he is disturbing the life and substance of the game, what keeps it alive. Pemulis is telling Lord that his actions are going to kill the game.

As Pemulis tells Lord he is going to kill the game, Pen chimes in to claim that “the vaporized Ann Kittenplan is wearing several articles of gear worth mucho [Indirect Destruction Points]” (Wallace 338). Lord turns to crunch away madly at the numbers, and LaMont Chu asks “how come point-values for actual players have never been assigned?” (Wallace 338). The world is turning to chaos, Lord is overwhelmed. Pemulis “tells Lord to consider what he’s doing very carefully, because from where Pemulis is standing Lord looks

to be willing to very possibly compromise Eschaton's map for all time" (Wallace 338). Whilst Pemulis attempts to guide Lord back to the rules of Eschaton, LaMont Chu continues to pester Lord about point-values and Kittenplan "darts over and extracts a warhead from SOVWAR's […] stockpile and shouts out that OK then if players can be targets then in that case: and she fires a real screamer at Ingersoll's head" (Wallace 338). Other players then "smell that Evan Ingeroll's become fair game for cruelty" and players from REDCHI and AMNAT all start "firing balls as hard as they can at Ingersoll […]" (Wallace 340). Ingersoll, who's hit in the neck and the thigh, begins to cry (Wallace 340).

Lord "attempts to rule that Ingersoll is no longer on the four courts of Eschaton's earth-map and so isn't even theoretically a valid target-area" (Wallace 340). But, "[i]t doesn't matter. Several Kids close in on Ingersoll, triangulating their bombardment […]" (Wallace 340). The world beats the ego, Lord shouts "at the top of his lungs that there's no way AMNAT can launch against itself when he gets tagged right on the breastbone by an errant warhead" (Wallace 340). But he is ignored. He "flicks the red beanie's propeller, never before flicked, whose flicked spin heralds a worst-cast-&-utterly-decontrolled-Armageddon-type situation" (Wallace 340). The ego is beat; it has nothing left to fight the onslaught of the external world. With nothing left, Lord runs "towards [court] 12's open south gate, still flicking furiously at the read beanie" (Wallace 341). The ego flees. Pemulis is "walking backwards away from the south fence back to the pavilion […]" (Wallace 341). As he does so, he meets Troeltsch midway, who is "running to the fence wanting to stop the thing, but Pemulis catches him by his headset's cord and tells him to let them all lie in their own bed" (Wallace 341). The two return to the pavilion, and Pemulis stands "his legs well apart and his arms folded" (Wallace 341). Watching the violence unfold, Pemulis utters, "he hates to say he told them so" (Wallace 341). Lord, the ego of Eschaton, is filled with the dread of anxiety. He attempts to escape, to separate himself from the game; he gives up his prestigious role and

runs away. Lord gives himself up and casts himself off from the love and fear of the superego. Who, at this point, is to be feared, as Pemulis makes sure everyone is being punished.

Through all this, Hal sits "leaning forward, steeple-fingered, and finds himself just about paralyzed with absorption" (Wallace 341). Hal

> finds himself riveted at something about the degenerating game that seems so terribly abstract and fraught with implications and consequences that even thinking about how to articulate it seems so complexly stressful that being almost incapacitated with absorption is almost the only way out of the complex stress. (Wallace 341)

All he can do is "reflect that he does feel a certain sort of intense anxiety" (Wallace 341). Hal, leaning forward, is reaching into the scene in front of him. Absorbed in the moment, he is fully engaged in what is happening; he soaks it up, takes it in, it becomes his. Paralysed, he dwells in the horror of the laws being broken. He feels what he is about to loses. Sitting with his fingers steepled, he creates, with his hands, a steeple, reflecting a church. He creates, with his hands, a site of ritual and repetition that tries to court the approval of one manifestation of the superego, God. Hal, sitting with his hands like this, unconsciously gestures toward the metapsychology of his compulsion to repeat, his ritual journey to the pump room, and the body-without-organs he creates to court the approval of James, his superego. Having broken James' law, by smoking in public — affirming life rather than death — Hal feels himself a no good wretch. He has been overwhelmed by his id and the external world. Now, due to the dread of conscience, feeling he has done something badly wrong, he fears James, his superego, will abandon him. Fearful of this abandonment, Hal feels an intense anxiety. His anxiety relates to the part his ego is going to play in his punishment. He is going to relinquish

his narcissistic libido — his ritual — his ego is going to give itself up, let itself die. Hal's effacement is literalised by the narrator, as they tell us that, "Hal is suddenly aware that Troeltsch and Pemulis are wincing but is not himself wincing […]" and that "for a brief moment […] Hal feels at his own face to see whether he is wincing" (Wallace 342). Hal is no longer in control of himself. Two days after the Eschaton debacle, Hal and several others are summoned to see Charles Tavis and a "urologist in an O.N.A.N.T.A. blazer" (Wallace 527). This has a big impact on Hal, who almost immediately vows to lead a substance-free life (Wallace 527).

The rest of Hal's coming of age narrative thread follows his struggle to lead a substance-free life. That is not to say, though, that he "gets better". Following the Eschaton mess, I believe Hal is driven further into death, into the state of a body-without-organs, into the solipsistic world of James' "schizophrenic" ontology.

As Hal's coming of age narrative comes to a close, he attends an interview for the University of Arizona. The scene opens with his internal voice saying, "I am seated in an office, surrounded by heads and bodies. My posture is consciously congruent to the shape of my hard chair" (Wallace 3). In the first sentence, there is an emptiness to Hal's words. He is seated in an office, but the office in this moment is negligible; no details are presented. He is surrounded by heads and bodies, but the heads and bodies are again negligible; no details are given. Hal's neglect of his surrounding environment creates the tone of a collective assemblage before him that he is detached from. With the second sentence, he adds that his posture is consciously congruent to the shape of his hard chair. And here a fullness begins to enter. Congruent signifies, on the one hand, an agreement or harmony; and, on the other hand, in geometry, it signifies an identical form of shapes that coincide when super-imposed. Given that the chair's shape is mentioned, it follows that its usage relating to geometry is alive here; that Hal is consciously manipulating his body into the chair to create its shape out

of his own body. But this use gives life to the word's other usage. Having manipulated his body so its form is identical to the chair, it can be said that his body agrees with it; that Hal and the chair share a harmony. He is then, in these utterances, on the one hand, the body-without-organs, he is inert, laying alongside the world around him; and, on the other hand, through his harmony with the chair, he collapses the logic that he is outside it, he is harmonious to it, tuned into its presence, he is the desiring-machine. Hal is thinking in the "schizophrenic" rhythm of his father's ontology.

The narrator then tells us that Charles — the current headmaster of E.T.A. — and DeLint — a prorector from E.T.A. — have been received by the University of Arizona's Dean of Admissions, Academic Affairs, and Athletic Affairs (Wallace 3). The Deans then summarise Hal's record; and Charles, not Hal, expands on it (Wallace 4). Charles adds details such as Harold goes "by Hal" and that he is "seeded third in Boys 18-and-under Singles" (Wallace 4). One of the deans asks "[d]id we get all that right Hal?" and the answer, again, comes from Charles, not Hal (Wallace 5). Charles replies, "[y]ou sure did. Bill" (Wallace 5). Charles' role as mediator between the Deans and Hal allows Hal to remain in his state as a body-without-organs; as a desiring-machine creating himself as the process and production of the chair's presence. This, however, does not last. The Dean of Athletic affairs utters "the whole application-interface process, while usually just a pleasant formality, is probably best accentuated by letting the applicant speak up for himself" (Wallace 5). The Dean of Academic Affairs then adds that they need "candidly to chat re potential problems with [Hal's] application […]" and Hal takes note of how the Dean "makes a reference to candour and its value" (Wallace 6). The Dean of Academic Affairs goes on to add that Hal's "verbal scores are just quite a bit closer to zero than we're comfortable with" (Wallace 6). The fact that Hal's verbal skills are close to zero is significant. As we read above, Hal gave his ego up, he lost the capacity to manage how his internal world presents itself in the external world,

and without his ego he is unable to speak. Now, he can only leap from desiring-machine to body-without-organs as James did. James' influence on Hal is affirmed when the Dean of Academic affairs adds, "[t]hen there is before us the matter of not the required two but *nine* separate application essays, some of which of nearly monograph-length [...]" (Wallace 7, emphasis original). The Dean then reels of several titles, including "Neoclassical Assumptions in Contemporary Prescriptive Grammar, Montague Grammar and the Semantics of Physical Modality and Tertiary Symbolism in Justinian Erotica" (Wallace 7). When Hal writes these essays he collapses the logical boundaries between subjects. When he writes, he becomes a desiring-machine leaping from flows and movements between elements that do not share the same form. Hal enters the process of linking molecules and particles of all kinds, he privileges affects and his individuation to create a collective assemblage of the machines around him. Again, he echoes James "schizophrenic" ontology. The Dean of Academic Affairs then informs us that "the adjective various evaluators used was quote stellar" (Wallace 7). Adding that one assessor highlighted their "deliberate use of *lapidary* and *effete*" (Wallace 7, emphasis original). The word lapidary implies that the essays Hal wrote were eloquent, but the use of effete tells the true tale. Effete means both affected and ineffectual. The word implies that something that affected him comes to be ineffectual when presented to someone else. The communal use of the adjective stella from various evaluators harbours a double voice. It implies that the essays are impressive, exceptional; but, it also implies that they relate to the stars, that they are inaccessible. We hold in our hands, at this moment, then, a conflict between Hal's "schizophrenic" thought and the institution.

As Hal's mediator, Charles rushes to his aid in the face of this conflict. He states, "I'm not sure Hal's sure just what's being implied here" and, as the Deans go on to clarify, they are asking to be given a reason why they could not be accused of recruiting Hal based purely on his tennis ranking, given the weakness of his academic skills (Wallace 7). Charles

continues to defend Hal. The Deans, tired of Charles, ask him to leave the room (Wallace 7). And the Dean of Academic Affairs then asks Hal directly,

> please just explain to me why we couldn't be accused of using you, son. Why nobody could come and say to us, why, look here, university of Arizona, here you are using a boy for just his body, a boy so shy and withdrawn he won't speak up for himself, a jock with doctored marks and a store-bought application. (Wallace 10)

Hal, speaking slowly, replies "I am not just a jock" (Wallace 10). "Speaking distinctly", he adds, "my transcript for the last year might have been dickied a bit, maybe, but that was to get me over a rough spot" (Wallace 10). But Hal's response causes a significant disruption, the Deans think he is "having a seizure" (Wallace 12-13). They pry open his mouth to make sure he hasn't swallowed his tongue, one of the Deans perform the Heimlich on Hal, and together they pin him supine to the ground (Wallace 13). It comes to light that Hal had not uttered the words slowly and distinctly. But made "indescribable *sub*animalist noises whilst his body writhed around like an animal with knife in its eye" (Wallace 14). When Hal attempts to summon a simple explanation, to give a clear meaning to his words, he is forced into a psychotic fit; he cannot speak simple words, words detached from the plane of imminent machinic flows he exists alongside. He can only communicate on the plain of immanence, through a "schizophrenic" language. Hal has become his father.

The Purpose of *Hal's* Story?

As I mentioned at the start of this chapter, in *Understanding* Boswell diagnoses Wallace's characters with despair and argues that the antidote comes in the book's structure. Wallace withholds, he tells us, a conclusion to any of the narrative threads, leaves tensions tangled,

and everything unresolved. The book refuses, he adds, to offer a soothing conclusion trapping the reader inside the feverish interior of the novel confronting us with the self in which we are trapped. The book traps us in the tensions of ourselves; becoming a death and a birth, an exhaustion and replenishment (Boswell 98-100).

Just as I agreed with many of the points Boswell made in his diagnosis but disagreed with his view of despair, here I agree with the importance he assigns to the structure but disagree with his view of an antidote. The novel, I believe, does not trap us in the interior self, does not create death and a birth, does not confront exhaustion with replenishment; it teaches us to feel for someone else, it uses life to overcome death, and it replenishes us through a different mode of exhaustion.

While the scene where Hal "interviews" for the University of Arizona marks the end of his narrative thread, it marks the opening of *Infinite Jest*. Hal is taken to a psychiatric hospital and an orderly asks him, "so yo then man what's *your* story? (Wallace 17)". The novel begins after this, its structure is circular, we begin at the end. We start with Hal as his father, as a solipsistic schizophrenic bathing in ontological immanence and someone asking him how he got there. In this sense, the moment frames what will follow, the catalogue of Hal's efforts to understand himself (Burn 45).

Hal tells the story of how he came to be trapped in a solipsistic world of ontology and we read it. He works to understand himself, unpicking the emotional and intellectual knots that have created him; and, as we read, we work to understand these emotional toils and intellectual knots. As Hal works through what made him, through reading we put in our share of the work. We experience the experiences that made him. We take on his strife and relive it with him. Hal's attempt to understand himself becomes ours too. We feel it, we feel for Hal. We learn the work it takes to love someone else.

And the love we develop is a surprise. Meeting Hal at the start of the book — at the end of his narrative thread — we are hardly likely to feel for him; this strange boy who can't speak for himself, screams *sub*anamalisticly, and writes esoteric essays. But, even though we meet him, initially, as a body-without-organs — as an empty frame who reeks of death — as he tries to understand himself he introduces life. He introduces the experiences that have shaped him. He overcomes his state of death by introducing life, life we as readers are bound to.

The act of reading, though, is not an easy task. Fragmented and disordered, Hal's narrative thread comes to us as life does. We need to think and re-think, order and untangle, link and interpret. Hal's narrative thread exhausts us, but not in the post-structural-and-postmodern self-reflexive way. It exhausts us with the detail and complexity of life. But this is how it replenishes us too. Hal asks us to work hard, and when we do, we are replenished with love.

Chapter Three, Can You Hear Me?

So, like *The Broom of the System,* with *Infinite Jest* Wallace worked to find a way out of the solipsistic cage of postmodern language and, again, he looked for the solution in moments of shared intimacy. But, as many of us know — belief and love — whilst wonderful, are often not enough. Life is harder than that and I believe Wallace faced up to this challenge in his third novel.

The Pale King, unfinished and posthumously published, goes against the tide of his other two books. Instead of being set in the future, it is set in the past; from 1985 to 1986, over thirteen months, when the character David Wallace works at the Internal Revenue Service's Regional Examination Centre in Peoria, Illinois. But, despite this shift in time and the inclusion of himself, the book does not feel all that different from his other two novels.

In *Understanding*, this "dramatic shift in approach feeds directly into what is one of the book's more striking agendas" (Boswell 132). More than any of Wallace's other works "*The Pale King* wrestles directly with matters of real-world politics and civics, while the philosophical and ethical issues it engages touch upon a set of concrete historical particulars […]" (Boswell 133). In his view, the novel "zeros in specifically and relentlessly on the Reagan tax cuts of 1981 […]" to build an inquiry into taxes and civic responsibility (Boswell 133). With this, Wallace addresses how citizenship shifted from shared sacrifice to obligation to self (Boswell 137-140).

But there are limits to how far this debate can go; Wallace was "not a political scientist but a novelist", and "the job of the novelist is to express abstract ideas, including irreducibly political ones, in concrete and dramatic form" (Boswell140). In Boswell's view, Wallace does this through Fogle's transformation from wastoid to IRS agent. The source of Fogle's conversion, Boswell believes, is the American pragmatic philosopher William James. James "defined religion to mean the feelings, acts, and experiences of individual men in their

solitude; so far as they apprehend themselves to stand in relation to whatever they consider divine" (Boswell 141). For this reason, religion "is a serious state of mind with a universal message that all is not vanity in this universe, whatever the appearances may suggest" (Boswell 141). Fogle's monologue, he believes, "corresponds directly to the Jamesian formula" (Boswell 141). He even sees it "borrowing some of James' own language" (Boswell 141). Fogle, then, becomes obligated to himself as he learns, through a religious conversion, that "real freedom is the freedom to obey the law" (Boswell 145). There is — of course — no way to know how Wallace might have brought these themes to their full fruition in the finished novel; but, for him, Wallace was "writing a book about, among other things, taxes, civics, and the current impasse over tax cuts versus budget cuts, such that his hopes for the book appeared to be not just aesthetic but, in a very real sense of the term, political" (Boswell 145). Wallace was, Boswell concludes, trying to change the way we talk about these things.

Burn's essay "A Paradigm for the Life of Consciousness" in *David Foster Wallace and the Long Thing*, also notes Wallace's shift in time, but, in his view, things are not as simple as looking at the past. While he agrees with Boswell that "much of the novel's political argument is carefully grounded in contemporary economic policy […]", he also believes that "the novel's 1970s and 1980s are often merged with stylized scenes that could easily be mistaken for the 1950s or even earlier […]" (Burn 152). Despite the often precise references to dates "the novel's telescoped chronology includes a number of references that tie Wallace's accountants to the 1950s" (Burn 153). Reaching even further back; "references to David Wallace as the young man carbuncular connect the book's environment generally to modernism's wastelands, but more specifically to the quintessential early-twentieth-century figure of the clerk" (Burn 153-154). In its "early usage, the title clerk included keepers of accounts", and this figure is one of the building blocks in the book (Burn 154). The Clerk "provides a meeting point at which general notions about morality, identity and class cluster

[…]” (Burn 154). Wallace’s struggle with the contemporary novel, “was driven by a qualified nostalgia for certain values that had supposedly been lost through the decades of modernist and postmodernist innovation, and his fiction is ambivalently torn between desires to march forward and to recuperate tradition” (Burn 154). The clerk is important due to the grey-area they occupy; “not a member of management but not exactly labor either, more independent financially yet with little or no autonomy or republican freedom to act”, they are a symbol “of identity crisis, which is woven into Fogle’s early meandering […]” (Burn 155). This sense of crisis, Burn goes on, feeds the larger theme. With problems swirling around every character, they collect each other up, they all start to move in a circular motion; they create a tornadic feeling (Burn 156). Wallace tried to calm the storm through Claude Sylvanshine (Burn 156). Sylvanshine, with his Random-Fact Intuition syndrome, is “able to leap over the wall of self to experience the minds of those around him” (Burn 159). Linking Sylvanshine’s initials — C. S. — to the abbreviation Freud used for consciousness, he then argues that Sylvanshine represents consciousness; and that, in his struggle to live with Random-Fact Intuition syndrome, Wallace is attempting to “cut conscious down to size […] making a final effort to explore why humans did what they did” (Burn 166).

I agree with a lot of what Boswell and Burn say, but I also disagree with a lot of what they say. For me, Boswell takes Wallace’s shift in time and his focus on the IRS too literally. I agree that this book’s historical setting is significant, but I do not feel that Wallace’s concerns are rooted in the 1980s and trickle-down economics. I also struggle to believe in Boswell’s reading of Fogle’s belief. While I think Boswell taps into something important when he speaks of Fogle’s monologue — namely, the idea of change — the three steps he identifies, from wastoid, to belief, and a decision to follow the rules, feels a bit simple to me. I think Burn gets closer to what is going on when he identifies that the novel's historical setting does not limit it to that time frame but opens it up to a broader history, including

modernism and traditional values. I also agree with Burn when he notes that identity and identity crises are some of the book's building blocks. But, I do not see the clerk as a representation of this grey area and less as one that consciousness can be grafted onto simply because of shared initials.

For me, by shifting to the past, Wallace looks at the root causes of postmodern and post-structural thought, he show us how modernist ideas and traditional values are both driven by narcissism and lead to solipsistic lives. With *The Pale King,* then, I believe Wallace looks directly at the fragility that makes us human. But, I also believe, that with this book, he goes further than he has before; showing us that we need to renounce narcissism if we are to live a full life. In a sense, then, I agree with Boswell. I, too, believe *The Pale King* is trying to change the way we talk about things, but — as I hope to show — I believe those things are ourselves and others, our lives and our realities, the fundamental principles of what it means to be a human being.

Fogle's Lonely Life

As I mentioned above, Boswell reads Fogle's monologue as a religious conversion and Burn reads it as a story of identity crisis that reaches back to the start of the twentieth century and modernism. With their ideas of change, crisis, and history, both Boswell and Burn's readings tap into something essential in Fogle's monologue, but I believe we can add more detail to Fogle's map.

Around the time Wallace published *Infinite Jest*, he wrote a review of Joseph Frank's biography of Fyodor Dostoevsky which was later published in *Consider the Lobster*. Now, in this review, he made some pretty bold statements about how history has shaped contemporary fiction;

> [p]art of the explanation for our own lit's thematic poverty obviously includes our century and situation. The good old modernists, among their other accomplishments, elevated aesthetics to the level of ethics — maybe even metaphysics [...] Such is the modernist legacy that we now presume as a matter of course that "serious" literature will be aesthetically distant from real lived life. (Wallace 271-272)

The year after Wallace wrote this review, he began working on a story that would become "The Soul is not a Smithy". He worked away at this story, for seven years; and, during this time, he had always hoped to include it in *The Pale King* (Hering 123-162). The title, "The Soul is Not a Smithy", as Hering explains, responds to the end *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* where the protagonist, Stephen Daedalus, says, "Welcome, O life. I go to encounter for the millionth time the reality of experience and to forge in the smithy of my soul the uncreated conscience of my race" (Joyce 275-276). For seven years, then, Wallace wrestled with the modernist ideas in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* — ideas about life, epiphanies, and repetition — ideas that run deeper than Joyce; that run back to, arguably, the father of modernism himself, Friedrich Nietzsche. Through a strong misreading, then, I hope to show how Nietzsche's modern principles seep into Fogle's monologue creating a force of narcissism that traps him in a solipsistic life.

The Gay Science announced the death of God and envisaged a new way to live (Nietzsche 32-38). It shifted the idea of faith away from metaphysics and placed it in individuals. Those who accept the death of God have the capacity to become free spirits; to live each day for themselves (Nietzsche 32-38). With this community of free spirits faith has collapsed and that everything built upon it has now be shaken to the core (Nietzsche 279-280). The death of God signifies two things. On the one hand, it names the death of the symbolic God, the Christian God. And, on the other hand, it names the death of the God of philosophers and theologians that acts to give life structure, purpose, and order (Nietzsche

167-169). Our trust in life has gone forever and life has become a problem for us (Nietzsche 167). But this means we can now love life differently (Nietzsche 167). Part of Nietzsche's new love for life is the need for self-knowledge. Self-knowledge, which he says includes learning how to love oneself, is essential as it allows us to endure existence with ourselves. This love for oneself is the finest of all arts, requiring patience and subtlety (Nietzsche 168).

One of the problems facing our new lives, our new task of self-knowledge, though, is that the human is the animal who has developed the ability to make promises. Through the promise, the human animal becomes an animal of time (Nietzsche 169). When someone makes a promise they place themselves in a relationship with time and this can strip us of our freedom (Nietzsche 169). To have control we must learn to distinguish between what happens by accident and what happens by design. To become someone who lives for themselves, lives to know themselves, lives for freedom, we have to become regular and automatic in the image of ourselves (Nietzsche 169). To achieve this, we have to learn to keep knowledge in bounds — we have to learn that we should not want to know everything. Once we realise this, we can go on to become plastic (Nietzsche 169). We can learn, as we are told says in *On the Advantage and Disadvantage of History for Life*, to grow out of ourselves "transforming and assimilating everything past and alien, to heal wounds, replace what was lost and reshape broken forms" (Nietzsche 10). A strong and fruitful health can only come into being when bound by the horizon of forgetting; "cheerfulness, the good conscience, the joyful deed, confidence in the future — all of them depend […] on the existence of a line dividing the bright and discernible from the unilluminable and dark; on one's being able to forget at the right time as to remember at the right time […]" (Nietzsche 10). In *Ecco Homo* we are told that, to know who we are and love who we are, we have to embrace the blunders of life, accepting their meaning and value (Nietzsche 253-255).

Even though Nietzsche declared the death of God to create a new way of living, he still believed in experiences that lie outside the efforts of knowledge. In *The Gay Science* these experiences are called the unveiling of the ultimate beauties (Nietzsche 263-266 and 271-272). Seeing the ultimate beauties does not depend on our knowledge or possession of a good will (Nietzsche 271). Only the rarest of lucky accidents can bring about such a seeing (Nietzsche 271). We need to be standing in the right spot and our soul must pull the veil off (Nietzsche 271). In this unveiling, we see the beautiful in an especially intense manner (Nietzsche 271). We do not see the beautiful things that populate the world for the most part (Nietzsche 271). They are concealed from us because of our immersion in the habits of life and life's givenness (Nietzsche 271). This is what makes the ultimate beauties what they are; seen as precious, rare, and singular moments in life, they have no objective value in such moments (Nietzsche 271). The ultimate beauties do not disclose anything about the world, but are bound up with the desire of our seeing (Nietzsche 271). We cannot, though will the ultimate beauties; we cannot forcefully unveil them ourselves (Nietzsche 271). An unveiling can only occur once, it stands out from the flow of time and the regular course of things (Nietzsche 271). An unveiling is the highest moment of life, something singular because it stands out from everything we have known until then and everything we will encounter after (Nietzsche 271). These moments possess a special intensity; they are what make life worth living (Nietzsche 271). With the unveiling of ultimate beauties, though, Nietzsche is not lamenting the veil or encouraging us to see without veils. He is not telling us that what is behind the veil is the reality of things in themselves. He is telling us that there is a different experience of seeing. Nietzsche simply wants to draw our attention to the idea that there is an element of our knowledge that lies beyond incorporation. The element itself is simple chance, a lucky accident (Nietzsche 271). Life, then, has singular and supreme moments but can only be lived the way we can live it, "covered by a veil of beautiful possibilities" (Nietzsche 272).

We have to incorporate fate and love it (Nietzsche 272). If we do not we risk assigning meaning to our reality where it does not belong, which will lead us astray; making us believe that mystical forces are at work in our lives, such as the power of God (Nietzsche 272). This love of fate that Nietzsche talks of involves learning to live in the forces of chance and accident. It is not a case of searching for the deeper meaning of what happened, but a matter of living life in terms of its artistic transfiguration and knowing that this is what we are doing.

Even though the unveiling of the ultimate beauty is a singular event it can happen more than once and this repetition leads Nietzsche to the eternal return. The Christian-moral-hypothesis placed the centre of gravity outside of life, in a beyond and otherworldly God (Nietzsche 272). But the eternal return seeks to provide a new centre of gravity based in the immanent condition of life (Nietzsche 272). Nietzsche's idea does not appeal to a judgment of goodness as a metaphysical standard. Only we can select what is significant in our lives and the eternal return gives us a means of selection (Nietzsche 273-274). The eternal return does not condemn us to an infinitely repetitive life in which we are powerless to transform ourselves but teaches us to ask the question, do I want this in my life again? The question, Nietzsche says, will come at a critical hour of life and will be spoken by a demon who steals into our minds; it will be the voice of fear and doubt. This voice will confront us as we are, insignificant — as specks of dust — offering no final consolation (Nietzsche 273). But it will transform us. And we will be returned to the life we were living. The demon's voice is the voice of our higher and nobler selves; it inspires us and demands that we challenge our moral laziness or intellectual cowardice (Nietzsche 274). The eternal return, then, does not tell us what our good is but gives us the means to discover it (Nietzsche 274). In this way, we become, "the ones who are new, unique, incomparable, the self-legislating, the self-creating" (Nietzsche 300). Nietzsche's new centre of gravity, the eternal return, offers a new way for us

to become ourselves, for us to live. Becoming who we are, though, is not a simple matter. It requires a stern application of conscientious knowledge. It is a task.

The task of becoming who we are, is complicated by what he calls, in the *Genealogy of Morals,* the '*horror vacui'*, the fear of empty spaces. We try to fill this empty space, this lack at our centre with art, philosophy, religion, and science; that all these ideas are invested in the same aesthetic ideal (Nietzsche 97-166). But, by willing the aesthetic ideal we dwell in self-denial. He tells us that the aesthetic ideal is the protective and healing instincts of a degenerate life. It is the trick for the preservation of life. So, how does this perversion come about? As we are sick with time and memory we dare to create, innovate, and challenge; but with our creation we harm, leaving wounds we are compelled to heal. Nietzsche sees this as dishonesty. The priest is a genius in consolation; they have mastered the art of identifying "which emotions to stimulate in order to conquer the deep depression, the ladened fatigue and the black melancholy of the psychologically obstructed" (Nietzsche 148). There is a great danger in this sickness, this fear and denial; it can become the will to nothingness, not a philosophy but a pathology (Nietzsche 160). From this perspective, the eternal recurrence is re-introduced as the most extreme form of nihilism, as it posits existence without meaning or goal — eternally returning to nothingness (Nietzsche 162).

So, Nietzsche freed us from God and taught us to live for ourselves, he unveiled the importance of epiphanies, and he explained how repetition can allow us to better ourselves or lead us to fall into despair. It is these ideas, the foundations of modernist principles, that I believe drive Fogle's monologue in *The Pale King*.

Fogle tells us that, when he was in high school, he would smoke pot after school, watch TV and eat Tang — an orange-flavoured powered drink — straight out of the jar, just dipping his licked fingers in, over and over again, until it was gone (Wallace 159-160). In his own words, he "was a wastoid" (Wallace 160). Nothing meant anything; he felt like he was

“dead or asleep without even being aware of it […]” (Wallace 160). Pot was not the only drug he took. Sometimes Fogle would get Dexedrine — nicknamed black beauty — from a kid at school whose mother had them prescribed for pep (Wallace160). But the pills made his back ache and gave him “terrible, terrible breath” (Wallace 160). After taking black beauties, his “mouth tasted like a long dead frog in a cloudy jar in Biology” (Wallace 160). Other times he would buy Ritalin from someone in his World Cultures class whose little brother had a prescription the doctor did not keep track of, which he “liked very much […]” (Wallace 160). On Ritalin, Fogle found “sitting and studying for long periods possible and even interesting […]” which he “really, really liked […]” (Wallace 160-161). Unfortunately for Fogle, Ritalin was hard to get his hands on. It turns out, someone in class who steals an occasional pill from their little brother was not the most reliable source (Wallace 161). Besides, none of it mattered after a while, the doctor caught the irregularities in the prescription (Wallace 161).

Fogle, the wastoid, may not appear to be contributing to life around him, but he is learning about himself. While he smokes pot, watches TV, and eats fake oranges; he detaches himself from meaning. He immerses himself in what life gives him. And here, in his habits, there is occasionally a happy accident. Fogle takes Dexedrine — black beauties — and associates these pills with death a death that comes from within him; his breath, he lives on death. The weight of which starts to crush him. His lower back hurts, he cannot stand without pain. Dexedrine leads him to a world of death a world where meaning no longer exists. But with this death comes the possibility for a new life. Fogle also takes Ritalin, which he has a taste for. Ritalin is a bit harder to come by. He can only get his hands on it on the off chance that a classmate has managed to steal some from his little brother without anyone noticing. On Ritalin, Fogle can find meaning in the world. Suddenly he can attend to the world around him; he can zero in on what is in front of him, see it with new clarity. He can sit there far longer than he would typically be able to do; this time he can spend studying, over-writes all

the time he has spent in a senseless world, where he has been asleep without knowing it, where he has lived in death. When he takes Ritalin, though, is beyond his control. It is up to fate; it depends on whether or not someone in his World Cultures class can steal some of his brothers without anyone noticing. Fogle embraces the happy accident, the chance, and lives with it.

After high school, Fogle went off to college; to three colleges, actually: Lindenhurst, University of Illinois Chicago (UIC), and DePaul — where he enrolled twice.

At Lindenhurst, Fogle shared a dorm suite with two others. One was a self-professed Christian and had a "born again girlfriend" (Wallace 212). Fogle tells us that, one day, the Christian's girlfriend saw fit to tell him the story of how she was "born again and became a Christian" (Wallace 213). She tells him that, once, "she was feeling totally desolate and lost and nearly at the end of her rope […]" (Wallace 213). And "she happened, on this one day, to be […] driving aimlessly […] until, for no particular reason […] she turned suddenly into the parking lot of what turned out to be an evangelical Christian church […]" (Wallace 214). There was a service going on and she "wandered aimlessly in and sat down […]" (Wallace 214). The preacher said "there is someone out there with us in the congregation today that is feeling lost and hopeless and at their rope and needs to know that Jesus loves them very, very much" (Wallace 214). The girlfriend then told Fogle that "she had been stunned and deeply moved, and said she had instantly felt a huge dramatic spiritual change deep inside of her […] as though now suddenly her life had meaning and direction to it […]" (Wallace 214). This story does not go down well with Fogle. He sat giving her a "dry, sardonic look […]" (Wallace 214). He asked her what made her think the preacher was talking to her directly and not everyone else in the church, who probably felt the same way she did; as, he notes, probably every American did in the late-Vietnam era of disillusion and directionless (Wallace 214-215). What if, Fogle asks, the preacher's words were meant to be universally obvious so

people can take what they want from them (Wallace 215). He admits now, though, that he was only pretending to ask her a question. What he was doing was giving her a "condescending little lecture on people's narcissism and illusion of uniqueness […]" (Wallace 215).

On the one hand, the born-again girlfriend — with her blind willingness to follow the preacher and repeat their message — acts as a symbol for God; and, on the other hand, as she insists her life was aimless before she found God, acts as an advocate for the idea that God gives structure, purpose, and order to life. But Fogle, who lives in, on the one hand, the meaningless world of death; and, on the other hand, in the ecstasy of chance and accident, isn't having it. We have here, then, a conflict between faiths. The born again Christian believes in God, the meaning and structure they give to life and Fogle believes in the individual, the freedom and potential they have. Fogle gives her a cynical look. He cannot believe that someone in the modern world would still be led astray by a priest. He makes sure he tells her that she has been tricked, seduced. Fogle gives her a lecture about her denial. He tries to shake her world to the core and force her to confront herself. He tries to free her spirit, just like he has freed his own.

Drifting from Lindenhurst to UIC, Fogle remembers rooming in a high-rise with one other guy, a low-level drug dealer and wastoid (Wallace 164-165). The dorm's main window faced a large downtown podiatric clinic, which had a huge raised electrified neon sign that rotated on its pole every weekday from 8:00am to 8:00pm with the name and phone number on one side and a huge outline of a human foot on the other side (Wallace 165). Fogle tells us that he and his roommate had a ritual where they would stand at their window at 8:00pm each night to watch the foot sign go dark and stop rotating when the clinic closed (Wallace 165). The sign's rotation, Fogle tells us, did not stop all at once. It would slowly wind down. The ritual was that, if the sign stopped with the foot facing away, they would go to the UIC library

and study; but, if it stopped with the foot or any significant part of it facing their windows, they would take it as a sign and blow off any homework or responsibilities they had and go to the Hat, the hip UIC pub, and drink beers, play quarters, and tell the other kids about the ritual of the rotating foot (Wallace 165).

With this ritual, Fogle is embracing fate; he lives for it, and each day it influences his day. He lives for the moment he stands at the window; that evening, the next day, and the day after. By taking such a casual approach to his education and responsibilities, Fogle foregoes the notion of an absolute; he takes an approach to life free from fear. He is not thinking about the final judgment of the institution, the outcome of his degree, or the responsibilities he has; these are all beyond and outside him, and he does not need all that. He is happy with how he is, in the moment, living light in fate and existing in reality. The lightness Fogle feels teaches him to play with life. Instead of living for the promise of life after school and responsibilities re-paid, he plays games with friends, dwells in the drunken carnival of wastoid camaraderie, and affirms his love of faith by telling them how he has chosen to live.

At this time, a big part of Fogle's free-spirited lifestyle was a particular drug called Obertrol. Obertrol is, he tells us, chemically related to Ritalin and he would get it occasionally from a guy in the dorm who took them for narcolepsy (Wallace 181-183). He could not get it regularly, as he says, he "had to stumble across it" (Wallace 166). Fogle's "affinity for Obertrol had to do with self-awareness", which he called "doubling" (Wallace 182). If, for example, he was in a room and had taken a couple of Obertol and they had kicked in he didn't feel like he was just sitting in the room but he felt aware he was sitting in the room (Wallace 183). He would find himself in a state of heightened enough awareness to be able to consciously say to himself,

> *I am in this room right now. The shadow of the foot is rotating on the east wall. The shadow is not recognizable as a foot because of the deformation of the angel of the light of the sun's position behind the sign. I am seated upright in a dark green easy chair with a cigarette burn on the right armrest. The cigarette burn is black and imperfectly round.* (Wallace 184, emphasis original)

This amount of information, he admits, may seem tedious. But it did not feel like that to him (Wallace 184). For Fogle, it felt like an "emergence, however briefly, from the fuzziness and drift of [his] life in that period" (Wallace 184). His use of Obertrol, "had to do with paying attention. It wasn't like the normal thing with recreational drugs which made colors brighter or music more intense" (Wallace 184). What became more intense was his awareness of his part in life (Wallace 184). To him, Obertroling "felt alive" (Wallace 184). Most people, Fogle tells us, "are always feeling something or adopting some attitude or choosing to pay attention to one thing or on part of something without even knowing we're doing it" (Wallace 185). In his view, that is how most people live. But, on Obertrol, Fogle can clearly and consciously articulate the world around him (Wallace 185). He does not just drift around having sensations and reactions without being aware of them. Obertrol woke him up to how unaware he normally was. Fogle tells us again that on Obertrol he felt "*alive*" and that he felt like he actually "*owned*" himself instead of renting his body (Wallace 188, emphasise original). It pointed him towards what might be possible if he could become more alive in daily life.

Like Ritalin, Obertrol helps Fogle see, but things go a bit further here. Obertol unveils the ultimate beauties. Luckily for Fogle, seeing the ultimate beauties does not depend on his knowledge or possession of a good will. Only a lucky accident can bring about a seeing and it is a lucky accident that brings about Fogle's seeing. He does not have a reliable source for Obertrol; it is not something he can get from a doctor and it is not something readily available

from a street dealer. His use of it depends on whether or not a guy with narcolepsy — there are some rather obvious connotations of being woken up that seep into the pills purpose here — has some going spare. If he does, Fogle is happy. He does not normally see any of the beautiful things that the world offers. He cannot force an unveiling, cannot see the beauty in the world whenever he wants; it depends on his source. But the world at these moments does not disclose anything in particular to him; an unveiling does not have any objective value. Fogle is in a room; he is the locus. He takes note of the shadow of the foot on the east wall; the foot rotates, the world rotates, Fogle sees time passing. He can recognise the shadow of the foot because of where the sun is; he can see this moment for what it is, a flash of perspective. The chair he is sitting on is green and has a cigarette burn in it; he notices the details. The burn is black and not quite round; Fogle digs into these details. What he sees may not mean much beyond him, but to him, it is one of the rare occasions he will see the detail of life. This rare occasion cannot be repeated, but it will be repeated. He will not see the sun fall on the sign like that again, but he can take an Obertrol again and see the world in that new moment with equal intensity. When Fogle takes Obertrol, then, he finds — for the first time — a life beyond himself.

After Fogle left UIC, he enrolled at DePaul. But, as he tells us, things did not work out too well. He was, essentially, invited to leave; so he took some time off to work afternoon shifts at a local Cheese Nibs factory (Wallace 170). During this time, he stayed at his father's house in Libertyville (Wallace 170). He wouldn't do much during the day, just hang around the house waiting to leave for his shift (Wallace 170). Sometimes, during this period his father — who worked in the city of Chicago's financial department — would be away for a couple of days now and then for a conference (Wallace 171). Fogle tells us about one memory of his father coming home a day or two early from one of these conferences (Wallace 171). He was sitting in the sunken living room with two of his "so-called friends"

(Wallace 171). Fogle and one friend were slumped on the sofa with their dirty feet on his father's special coffee table which he and his ex-wife — Fogle's mother — had saved up for and bought from an antique shop when they were young, which was now covered in rings from all the beer cans Fogle and his friends had put on it (Wallace 171). The other friend was leaning over and in the middle of taking a huge bong hit (Wallace 171). The living room reeked of pot and the carpet was littered with beer cans and Taco Bell wrappers (Wallace 171). They were all "totally wasted" (Wallace 171). It was at this moment that Fogle's father, coming home a couple of days early, entered the room (Wallace 171-172). Fogle's friend coughed out his massive bong hit in surprise, a plume of smoke rolled out across the living room, and they all sat there totally paralysed (Wallace 172). His father put down his bag and case and just stood there, with no expression on his face, and did not say anything for, what felt to Fogle like, a very long time. But then he slowly made a gesture. Putting one arm up in the air a little and looking up he said "*Look on my works ye mighty, and despair!*" (Wallace 172, emphasise original). After that, he just picked up his bag and, without a word, walked upstairs into his bedroom and closed the door (Wallace 172). Fogle doesn't remember what happened after that, but he does remember feeling like "complete shit; not like he had been busted, or was in trouble, he just felt like a spoilt selfish child" (Wallace 172). He could imagine what he looked like to his father, sitting around in his house, wasted, surrounded by litter and pot smoke. For a second or two, Fogle feels he sees what he actually must have looked like to his father standing there treating his living room like that. For an instant, Fogle saw himself through his father's eyes (Wallace 172). This, he continues, was much worse than if his father had been furious or yelled, which he never did (Wallace 172). Fogle was just left there, seeing himself for what he was with his father's words ringing in his ears.

Fogle thought his father would not be home for a few days but fate decided to play a trick on him. He is content, in the moment, with his free lifestyle; living light in the freedom

of his reality where he privileges himself over the responsibilities beyond him. Responsibilities such as not putting his feet or cans on his father's special coffee table, not drinking all his father's beer and leaving the cans littered all over the floor, and not smoking pot — let alone in the house. But for the moment, Fogle does not think about any of this. For now, in his perspective, he is just living freely. But when his father comes in his perspective shifts. Looking and reaching upward, his father recites a line from the poem *Ozymandias*. Looking up and reaching up, Fogle's father speaks to some type of above, some kind of beyond. He speaks to something that offers structure to life; a source of meaning. He draws on this God, grounded in the aesthetics of poetry, to summon a judgment; look at what I have done, and give up hope. There is only death here, bodies woefully empty of purpose. Around the decay of Fogle and his friends lays the wreck of them, their beer cans and Taco Bell wrappers. Boundless and bare, his father sees all Fogle will take, the laws he happily breaks. And he sees his son for who he is, a boy alone in a vast desert. Fogle's father brings an act of judgment into the room. For a moment, there is meaning and it forces Fogle to see what his father sees. He sees his world of complete freedom as negative in the face of judgment. Here he is, a wasted wastoid. With his father's words, he is thrown into time and its finality. Laying in his own filth, he is asked what beauty have you created? Fogle's trust in his free spirit falters.

After this rather awkward moment with his father, it only took a couple of days for Fogle to jump on the Chicago Transit Authority (hereafter, CTA) commuter line down to Lincoln Park and re-enrol at DePaul. He signs up for Intro Accounting and American Political Theory (Wallace 177). His father's technical area, Fogle tells us, was accounting systems and processes which, as he would come to understand, is more like data processing than actual accountancy. But, at this time, he heard accounting and thought accounting (Wallace 177). His father was also particularly frustrated by incompletes, which was his

current status in American Political Theory class (Wallace 177). Fogle acknowledges that he took these classes at least partly to please or try to pay back his father, or to at least lessen the self-disgust he had felt after he walked into the scene in the living room; and, that he got through the classes by knuckling down and also swallowing his pride and getting some extra help to deal with depreciation and amortization schedules (Wallace 177).

So, Fogle decides to make a change; he goes back to school to start a new life. But his new academic dedication is disingenuous, it is an aesthetic ideal — one that will lead him to deny himself. Fogle takes the classes he does — Intro Accounting and American Political Theory — out of guilt, hoping to heal the relationship with his father and make a better future. Where once he was a free spirit who rejected the responsibilities of school, now he knuckles down. Where once he put his faith in fate — in the way the foot faced and his chances of stumbling across some Obertrol — now he swallows his pride, asks for help, and spends his extra time working on the technicalities of accounting. Where once Fogle was full of life, now he is just another part of an institution that seeks to contain knowledge. He lives the will to nothingness, he wants to repress himself into nothing now to live for the future.

But things do not work out how Fogle hopes. After he has been back at DePaul for a while, the Christmas holidays come around (Wallace 198-199). He decides to spend some time at his father's house, he had some intense studying to do for finals and he wanted his father to see him working so hard (Wallace 199). While he is home, they agreed to do some Christmas gift shopping for Fogle's mother together. His father had wanted to do the shopping in the morning, but Fogle overslept, and it wasn't until after lunch that they made it on the commuter line into the city, at which point the trains were very busy (Wallace 199-200). When they reached Washington Square station, they went down the stairs to the subway (Wallace 200). Just as they reached the bottom of the stairs, a train pulled in. Normally, they could have got the train with no problem; but, as the platform was extremely crowded with

Christmas shoppers, the situation became a bit perilous, which was made even more dangerous by the little psychological conflict going on between Fogle and his father. As Fogle tells us, he was walking behind his father, partly because his father walked faster than him in general, but also, as he had overslept, there was

> something impatient about his [father's] rapid stride and hurry through the CTA station, to which [Fogle] was responding by deliberately not increasing [his] own normal pace very much or making much of an effort to keep up with [his father], staying just far enough behind him to annoy him but not far enough back quite to warrant his turning and squeezing [his] shoes over it. (Wallace 201)

Fogle's dawdling caused his father, a man of extreme organisation, personal discipline, and precise schedules who was always on time for everything — in this moment as the train sat there idling — an especially intense anxiety (Wallace 202). He could not face running later than they already were. So, he ran for it (Wallace 202). Barging his way between the crowds and shoving people out the way, he reached the train just as the doors started to close. He shot one arm out and it got trapped; the doors closed too firmly for him to either squeeze through or get his arm out. When the train started to move, he was forced to trot alongside it with increasing speed (Wallace 202-203). Of course, the platform ended. And he was dragged 65 yards into the tunnel, at which point his body impacted the iron bars of a built-in ladder protruding from the tunnel's wall. He did not survive the impact (Wallace 203).

Fogle is a well-practised forgetter. He tells us how his father died and does so in great detail; but, he does not dwell on these details. He is, by his own account, responsible for his father's death. He is the one who overslept; he is the one who made them late; he is the one who was dawdling. If it were not for his actions, they would have set out before it got busy,

his father would have felt comfortable, and there would have been no need to run for the train. But this is not quite how Fogle sees things. Despite the detail of his account, his tone remains neutral; he never makes the leap from his actions to his responsibility. For most of his wayward youth, Fogle has been a lover of fate and the lessons he has learnt pay off here. Whether consciously or not, he chooses to distinguish between accident and design. Despite all the facts pointing towards his father's death being designed by him, Fogle decides to see it as an accident. He sees no fault in the fact that he woke up late, that his actions meant they would face big crowds, and that his dawdling caused his father anxiety. Instead, these are moments that could happen at any time, accidents — pure chance. Fogle's achievement, his ability to forget, means he becomes plastic. He transforms his father's death from murder at his own hands to an experience that heals the wound it creates. His father's death becomes a moment that allows him to recreate himself and fortify himself.

After his father's death, Fogle returns to DePaul (Wallace 222). At this time, he is still enrolled in the classes he chose to appease his father — Intro Accounting and American Political Theory — he is still living in the will to nothingness. But things start to change. He tells us that he can clearly remember sitting slumped and unmotivated on the couch in his dorm room in the middle of the afternoon and makes a point of letting us know that he was not Obertroling (Wallace 222). He was, Fogle goes on, by himself watching the CBS soap opera *As the World Turns* on his roommate's portable TV (Wallace 222). Laying back, slumping on his tailbone, Fogle had the little TV propped up between his knees and was trying to spin a soccer ball on his finger. At the end of every commercial break, the show shows a shot of plant earth seen from space, turning, as the announcer's voice would say, *You're watching As the World Turns* (Wallace 224, emphasis original). Fogle continues to explain that on this particular day, he felt that each announcement was more pointed. After three breaks, after he heard *You're watching As the World Turns* for the third time, he "was

suddenly struck by the bare reality of the statement" (Wallace 224). It was not, he adds, the obvious double entendre that struck him. But, something more literal, which he felt made it harder to see. To explain, he tells us that "it could not have felt more concrete if the announcer had actually said, *You are sitting on an old yellow dorm couch, spinning a black-and-white soccer ball, and watching* As the World Turns, *without ever even acknowledging to yourself this is what you are doing*" (Wallace 224, emphasis original). Once this voice had crept into his head, he realised he was being beyond feckless or wastoid; it was more like he "wasn't even there" (Wallace 224). With the announcer's statement, Fogle realised that he was a "lost soul and it wasn't cool or funny" (Wallace 224).

When Fogle returns to school, then, he settles back into his will to nothingness. He was only taking Intro Accounting and American Political Theory to get into his father's good books after he and his friends had trashed the living room, hoping to reduce the tension between the two of them. And, sure, he did what he needed to do to complete the classes and made a big show of it to his father, but he was not living for himself and fate was happy to show him this. When Fogle got back to school, he kept his usual routine and spent Mondays watching TV. Slouched back on his tailbone, he laid flat propping the TV between his legs. Fogle couldn't move or it would fall, causing a rather unpleasant injury. He lies in this precarious position to paralyse himself, to become as inactive as possible. But that is not his only achievement on the path to nothingness. He watches soap operas, most likely for their denouement, that sweet moment when everything is resolved, where everything becomes still, the bliss of death. And, while he gazes on at this death, he spins a soccer ball on his finger; he practices the movement it takes to achieve stability; he creates a movement toward stillness, a life towards death. Heaven forbid he should do something he is interested in. That would go against his aim to impress his father, would go against his will to nothingness. But he was a free spirit once, a lover of fate, and fate has more in store for him. The announcer

keeps telling him that he is watching as the world turns and eventually these words rupture his will to nothing. Even though he is not Obertroling, Fogle experiences an unveiling. He sees with clarity the reality of what he is doing and how nihilistic it is. The unveiling makes him realise he has been living in the eternal recurrence as the most extreme form of nihilism; that he is trapped in a void, what horror, repeating it again and again. This moment gives him a new perspective on his life; it allows him to ask, what am I doing?

A few days later, Fogle was so focused on an upcoming review of the Federalist Papers that he walked into the wrong classroom (Wallace 216). He had been on his way to room 311 Daniel Hall but ended up in 311 Garnier Hall (Wallace 217). Unfortunately, or perhaps fortunately, he did not realize his mistake until the professor had walked in. Fogle accidentally wound up in an Advanced Tax lecture (Wallace 217). The tone had been much more serious than he was familiar with, and he did not want to disrupt everyone by shuffling out (Wallace 217). One thing that struck him was the professor's presence. He was not, Fogle tells us, "anxious to connect or be liked" (Wallace 227). But nor was he hostile or patronizing. What he seems to be was "indifferent" — not in a meaningless, drifting, nihilistic way — but rather in a secure, self-confident way (Wallace 227). This professor was the first Fogle had seen, at all the schools he had drifted in and out of, who seemed "a hundred per cent indifferent about being liked or seen as cool or likable by the students [...]" and it was not until that moment that Fogle realised "what a powerful quality this sort of indifference can be in an authority figure" (Wallace 228). He sat through the whole lecture; a lot of it went over his head, but he found it exciting. At the end of the lecture, with the semester drawing to a close, the professor said "you will want something of a summation, then" (Wallace 228). He told his students that the accounting profession they aspire to "is, in fact, heroic" (Wallace 230). Continuing, he adds, "exacting? Prosaic? Banausic to the point of drudgery? Sometimes. Often tedious? Perhaps. But brave? Worthy? Fitting, sweet?

Romantic? Chivalric? Heroic? [...] here is a truth: Enduring tedium over real time in a confined space is what real courage is" (Wallace 231). In the world of reality, the professor went on, "there is no audience. No one to applaud, to admire. No one to see you [...] actual heroism receives no ovation, entertains no one. No one queues up to see it. No one is interested" (Wallace231). The professor's summary went on a little longer, but he ended with the statement, "[g]entlemen, you are called to account" (Wallace 235). Fogle's experience in the Advanced Tax lecture had a significant impact. Only a few days later, he got a haircut, bought a dark-grey wool suit, three dress shirts, and a pair of wing-tip shoes (Wallace 235).

So Fogle set out for his American Political Theory class, but his determination to remain focused on the review of the Federalist Papers — so he could pass a previously incomplete class and compensate for his past behaviour — led him to the wrong classroom. How did this happen? How did he miss all the signs, the different streets, the different buildings, the different rooms? Because he wanted nothingness, and with this, the external world fell away. It came rushing back, though, when he saw the unfamiliar face of the professor. His nothingness was ruptured by the new and this moment of chance had quite a lot to teach him. Fogle did not just bumble his way out of the lecture. The professor's secure and self-confident indifference held his attention. As the lecturer, he performed his job; he transferred a body of knowledge to his students. He was not all that interested in what it meant to them or what they did with it. This attitude is a stark contrast to Fogle's other professors, who all, in some way, wanted to be liked. What grabbed Fogle, when he was struck by the professor's indifference, was a world of possibility. A world free from the religious hangover of purpose. The professor did not need certainty to live a full and excellent life; he has broken this habit, he is indifferent to it. Life can be whatever he wants to make it. But what life has the professor made out of his indifference? He told the students that the accounting profession is dull and tedious, but in that, there is something brave, romantic, and

heroic. The account he provides of the accounting profession is one heroic enough to justify the monstrous amount of suffering that is the drudgery of, not only doing one's taxes, but checking everyone else's. The accountant's suffering signifies a promise of life; what social order would there be if he did not do his job and everyone filed phoney tax reports? As the professor notes, there is something heroic about this eternal return of life and suffering. Do not believe in Christ, he tells his students, believe in the eternal return. Do not believe in some metaphysical future, believe in your ability to shape the world around you through the eternal return. This life spoke to Fogle. It calls him to account, he feels a vocation. His is transfigured. He transforms his appearance. He is, to his acknowledgement, just like his old roommate's girlfriend at Lindenhurst, born again.

When he returned to DePaul the following semester, Fogle made an appointment to speak with DePaul's Associate Dean for Academic Affairs about his experience in Advanced Tax and how he wanted to turn his life around and possibly continue his enrolment for an extra year with deferred tuition (Wallace 238). The meeting was awkward, though. Fogle had been threatened with academic probation by the Associate Dean for Academic Affairs not all that long ago (Wallace 238). The Associate Dean thought Fogle's plea and his change of appearance was a joke; some kind of ploy to try and buy himself one more year before having to go out into the real world (Wallace 238). But the real world has a plan for Fogle and it involves him becoming an accountant. Fogle is not exactly sure how he found out, but around this time the IRS launched an aggressive new recruiting-incentive program. He thinks he remembers hearing about it on "WBBM-AM — a very dry, conservative, all-news station" (Wallace 239). But he also thinks he may have seen an advert for it. The memory of the advert is dramatic, he tells us that he remembers sitting at a plastic table in his local Mall's food court, which had star-and-moon-shaped perforations (Wallace 240-241). Through these holes, he thinks he remembers seeing a portion of a local newspaper, the *Sun-Times*, on the

floor (Wallace 241). Fogle thinks the paper was open to the Business Classified section and illuminated by a beam of light from the overhead lighting. And he thinks he remembers catching a glimpse of an advert for the IRS's new recruitment-incentive program underway in the Chicagoland area (Wallace 241).

DePaul's Associate Dean for Academic Affairs, being a caretaker for academic excellence — which is an aesthetic ideal, a will to nothingness — has no interest in Fogle's transfiguration and wish to shape reality by becoming an accountant. He demands that Fogle deny himself, finish up his studies, and move on; he tells him to feel nothing and live for his life after his studies. But fate is more playful than that. Another way for Fogle to become an accountant is presented to him. The memory of how this happened is insignificant, but Fogle's memory of the memories is significant. Whether he heard it on the radio or saw it through an unveiling where symbols for the darkness of his old nihilistic life and the light of a new life in the IRS are apparent doesn't matter. What matters is the memory's plurality. With his wish to transfigure himself, Fogle opens himself to multiple modes of being; he lives in the pain of the Associate Dean's rejection, the awakening of the radio, the dreamscape of the epiphany in the food court, the intoxication of possibility, and the satisfaction of decision. Now the eternal return becomes another reason to be himself. Every low will return, but to return it must pass, and in its passing, it contains the blessing of new life. Fogle opens himself to this rhythm. He may have been told that he could not take the class he needs to for a career in the IRS, but now he hears, sees, and feels every opportunity. His heart beats with the potential for redemption. And now, instead of dwelling in the will to nothingness, he is determined to will the life he wants.

Around the same time as Fogle heard-about-and-saw this new opportunity, the worst blizzard in the modern history of Chicago started to fall (Wallace 239-240). But, after either hearing-about-or-seeing-the-advert for the IRS's new recruitment program, he set out to the

recruiting station to see what the deal was (Wallace 241). In return for a commitment of two to four years, depending on the incentive scheme, the IRS was offering $14,150 for continuing education (Wallace 245-246). This information didn't come cheap, though. Fogle had to sit through a dense three-hour presentation on the IRS, work his way through several handouts, and fill out over twenty forms that could have simply been Xeroxed (Wallace 248). Fogle, and the few others who remained by the end of the presentation, were then each given a "ream-sized stack of stapled packets of materials in a large blue I.R.S. binder" (Wallace 249). The recruiter told them that those who felt they were still interested should go home and read this material closely and return the following day for the next stage of the recruitment process (Wallace 249). The binder of homework was, unsurprisingly, very dry and obscure (Wallace 250). Fogle had to read each line several times to get any sense of what was being said (Wallace 250). He felt that the material they had been given wasn't so much about understanding it right then but just getting through it; a test to see who was truly motivated and serious (Wallace 251). Motivated and serious he was, Fogle chose not to do any of his school work so he could get through the binder (Wallace 251). It wasn't until around 5:00 a.m. that he started to come to the end of it, at which point he found a couple more forms to fill out that had been tucked away at the back (Wallace 251). He filled them out and set off; battling his way through the blizzard, Fogle arrived at the recruitment centre (Wallace 251-253).

Fogle is happy to sit through a long presentation, wade through handouts, and fill out repetitive forms. He is, after all — having worked to appease his father — learned in this low. But there is potential here; returning to this nothingness does not mean it is the same nothingness as before; he can make a new life out of this, the money and his will will facilitate it. But the money is not free and he has to work hard for this new life, one where the eternal return — constantly checking forms, undertaking the most mundane tax checks — can

be lived as affirmation and creation. Before Fogle can reach this high, though, he has a couple of lessons to learn. The first is handed to him with the binder. With each page he reads, Fogle becomes self-legislating; he learns to create himself. He doesn't just skim the language, hoping something will stick. He returns to each dense sentence, re-reading until he has some sense of what it means. Even though Fogle struggles to understand what is being said, he returns to each sentence; he works hard to derive some sense, some meaning, a new way for him to live. For the first time, Fogle accepts the task of a stern application of conscientious knowledge: he accepts the task of becoming who he is. He chooses to work through the binder instead of doing his schoolwork. This moment is significant. At school, Fogle was working for the aesthetic ideal, the will to nothingness; with the binder in front of him, he casts off the need for a future which creates his emptiness. Instead, he labours through the dense language of what is in front of him; he acquaints himself with the laws by which people live; the laws that, even if they do not think of them, influence every financial choice they will make, every mode of their being. In other words, Fogle conquers his need for metaphysical certainty and wills his way towards life. With this choice, Fogle decides to become himself. He wants to work now, not for nothingness, but as a conductor for the orchestra of life. He is determined to take this role on, and with his determination, he finds the final forms, he battles a blizzard, and returns to the IRS recruitment centre. Handing his forms to the recruiter, Fogle starts a new life where each day he will suffer in isolation, destroying himself, reborn with each new form, forging his soul with each one by creating reality, forcing it into the world, bringing this conscience to life.

So Fogle lives a modern life; a life shaped by the death of God, epiphanies, and repetition. He becomes who he is by living for himself. But, as Fogle tells us this story about how he became himself, there is a tone of sadness. Fogle's monologue is precisely that, a monologue; and it is long. The value of his monologue comes from his willingness to suffer

through it; with his ability to sit there and tell this story that touches on, what must be, some of the most painful moments of his life; his wasted youth and his father's death. Fogle is willing, in this monologue, to transform all that he is — everything that has wounded him — into words that explain who he became. Fogle is no coward, he wants to know himself, and for the sake of self-knowledge, he will endure it all, self-loathing, guilt, and melancholy. In this monologue, Fogle tells us how he learnt to love himself, problems and all; he monologues about how he mastered himself. But that is precisely his problem. Fogle has mastered himself and, concentrating so intensely on himself, he creates a solipsistic world. His tone does not change as he speaks about his aimless youth, it does not shake as he speaks about his father's death. Fogle may love himself, but the love he has cultivated for himself isolates him. His narcissism prevents him from being vulnerable. Fogle lives a guarded life; he doesn't tell us how he feels about his life, he doesn't tell us how he feels about anything. There is no mention of love for others or how others love him. Fogle may suffer so he can come to love himself, but his narcissism only creates suffering; a solipsistic world in which he is completely alone.

Rand's Very Sad Story

Of course, Fogle's narcissism and isolation are not the only force in the book and I believe Wallace uses Meredith Rand to introduce another kind of narcissism and another type of loneliness, driven — this time — by traditional values.

Most Friday afternoons, the IRS employees in *The Pale King* meet for happy hour at a bar called Meibeyer's (Wallace 446). One afternoon, Rand finds herself sitting opposite her fellow employee, Shane Drinion (Wallace 450). The two start chatting and Rand decides to tell Drinion her sad story; she tells him about how she self-harmed, wound up in hospital, and built a relationship with a night attendant called Ed who would later become her husband.

In “Subjective Politics in The Pale King”, the overriding arc of the story Rand tells Drinion is that she learnt her real responsibilities are only to herself (Hodge 62). This points us towards her surname, which she shares with Ayan Rand, an advocate for the virtues of selfishness. Hodge is not the only one to have noticed this similarity. She tells us she only considered it after Thomas Tracy — a fellow Wallace scholar and author of works such as *The Formative Years: David Foster Wallace’s Philosophical Influences and The Broom of the System* — pointed it out (Hodge 62). But I believe Wallace is doing more than just repeating Rand’s selfishness here; I believe he is using Rand’s sad story to tell us something much sadder about the narcissism that drives traditional values and the loneliness this creates.

There may not be, then, any concrete reason to read Rand with Rand in conversation with Drinion, as Wallace has no explicit historical relationship to her work, but I feel there is enough belief that the two are connected in some way for a strong misreading to be considered.

By way of summary, there is not too much to say about Rand’s work. She wrote most of her fiction and non-fiction around the middle of the 20th century and it all beats the same drum; with every work, she tells us that reason is the only absolute. Rand believed people should reject almost all institutions — except the few that act to keep a country safe — such as the economy and the military, act in their own self-interest, and use logic to reach the truth. The long and short of it is that Rand believed in an objective world. For her, reality existed independently of consciousness. Our sense perceptions, in her view, mean we have direct and inerrant contact with that reality. And she believed that, through the process of inductive logic, we can be certain of its truth. But are things ever that simple?

Rand’s dialogue with Drinion begins with a bit of back and forth about her beauty and his deadpan personality (Wallace 450-467). Together, they decide that she scares and he bores people. Conveniently for Rand, Drinion’s neutrality creates a space where she can be

herself; an assertive and, as the narrator tells us, “serious bore who won’t shut up when she gets started” (Wallace 491). So, having found someone she can talk at, Rand tells Drinion her sad story.

She starts by saying her husband, Ed, is dying of cardiomyopathy (Wallace 468). Rand asks Drinion if he knows what cardiomyopathy is, and he says, “I think it’s a disease of the heart” (Wallace 468). He is correct and Rand continues to explain to Drinion that Ed had cardiomyopathy before they were married, that he had it before they even met. They met, Rand continues, at Zeller; and, again, she asks Drinion if he knows what Zeller is. He answers, “I think you mean the mental health centre building near the Exposition Gardens on Northmoor” (Wallace 468). Rand confirms that he is correct but calls it a psych hospital instead. She then tells him she spent three and a half weeks there because she used to cut herself (Wallace 468).

Having told Drinion why she was at Zeller, Rand starts explaining what it was like to be admitted. She tells him that the staff did an initial intake interview where they asked her questions from a legal form attached to a white clipboard; questions such as do you ever hear voices in your head? Rand then tells Drinion that she answered these questions with answers such as, “I hear yours right now asking me a question” (Wallace 468). But her answers did not go down too well. She tells Drinion that the staff member admitting her did not think it was funny, that they didn’t even acknowledge she was trying to be funny, and that they just sat there staring at her. She says it was like “sitting in front of a computer and not being able to proceed until she gave the properly formatted answer” (Wallace 468). Rand was admitted and she tells Drinion about the hospital; there were, she explains, “three different kinds of wards, two of which are locked” (Wallace 468). She was put on the third floor — where Ed, the night attendant and her future husband worked — with “rich girls […] who wouldn’t eat or took a bottle of Tylenol when their boyfriend dumped them, et cetera, or stuck their finger

down their throat every time they ate something" (Wallace 468). There were, she adds — mercilessly — "a lot of bafers there" (Wallace 468). Being so neutral, Drinion isn't offended by this language; he just keeps looking at her. He says, Ed "wasn't a doctor, then […]" (Wallace 472). And Rand tells him the "doctors were a joke" (Wallace 472). The psychiatrists, she continues, "came in in the afternoon for like an hour […] and talked more to the Resident Nurses and the parents when they came in […]" (Wallace 468). Any conversation she had with the doctors was weird and stiff. The doctors, she continues, were only interested "in your case, not in you. Like in what your case might mean, how it was like or different than other cases in textbooks" (Wallace 468). Her relationship with the doctors, or perhaps more appropriately the lack of her relationship with the doctors, made her feel "like [she wasn't] a human being, [but] a piece of machinery they could take apart and figure out how it worked" (Wallace 468). She found this scary as they could sign papers to keep her there or move her to a worse ward, to one of the locked ones (Wallace 468). Or, she adds, "they could decide to give [her] meds that turned some of the girls into zombies" (Wallace 468). It was, she goes on, "like one day they were there and the next there was nobody home" (Wallace 468). Rand's biggest fear, though, was having a doctor change her status changed from admitted to committed. As someone admitted, she could be released after seven days if her parents requested it. But, someone who was committed was there until the doctors said so (Wallace 468).

With these initial details, Rand contrasts herself as an individual against Zeller as an institution. Zeller's intake forms are, of course, legal documents; they are legal because, as an institution, it works to contain individuals to ensure a level of persistence and continuity in social purpose. This idea doesn't sit too well with Rand. When the staff member asks her questions from the form; properly secured to a crisp and clean white clipboard, which seems to speak of the sterile aim of the institution and the walls built in the faces of those who do

not share the same body of knowledge, she answers sarcastically. Essentially, Rand uses logic to mock her interviewer. She practically asks, all this money, all these people, all these facilities, and you can't even phrase a question correctly? The essence of her comment is that she is better than the institution. But her narcissism does not get her anywhere. She finds herself sitting there awkwardly. The interviewer is not so much waiting for her to provide some correctly formatted answer — a computerised response empty of human reason — they are simply waiting for an honest answer. Something Rand cannot offer as her drive to love herself, to show herself how great she is, prevents her from knowing herself.

As Rand says, she was admitted and the hospital had three wards, two of which were locked. I assume that these would be divided into a ward for the non-suicidal, a ward for those who are actively suicidal, and one for people struggling with psychosis, with the last two being locked wards. Following this assumption, the third floor, which Rand was assigned to, would be the non-suicidal self-harm ward and it would make sense that out of the three, this was the only one unlocked. Anyway, Rand explains to Drinion that, as she saw things, the third floor was for rich girls with, what she implies to be bulimia or anorexia, but she doesn't put it this way; she calls them barfers. Her use of this term acts to re-enforce her view of herself as an individual as opposed to a collective. Her word choice is malicious; it strips each person in the facility of their own experience and bundles them together. Because of their condition, to Rand, these people are all the same; not individuals suffering with induvial problems but a group of people who all had the same problem, one she is proud not to be a part of. Picking up on Rand's tone, Drinion assumes that Ed is not a doctor, and she turns her attention to the psychiatrists. Unsurprisingly, she wasn't impressed by their work. Rand, so involved in herself, fails to understand how others could understand her better than she could understand herself. This comes up when she mentions that all the conversations she had with the doctors were weird and stiff; they had, in her view, no sense of humour. But Rand thought

she was being funny in her intake interview; and it seems that — to her — funny may mean narcissistic. What kind of conversation can come about when this is the tool she uses? Rand also took issue with the doctors' bedside manner. They acted indifferently towards her; they were not struck by her brilliance; they just kept an eye on the time. As someone who loves themselves so much, Rand took this personally; how could anyone be in her presence, someone so great, and not be impressed with how perceptive she was? How could they not want to get to know her? How could they have other things on their mind? The chances are the doctors would have seen this type of narcissism a thousand times, but this thought never crosses Rand's mind, she is too individual to be like other people. In turn, Rand only fortified her perspective that she was an individual and that Zeller was a collective trying to strip her of her individuality. For this reason, she can only picture the doctors as people interested only in their patients' cases. The work the doctors did to understand their patient's cases became, in her eyes, not an attempt to help; but an attempt to create control. This made her feel like a piece of machinery, something for the doctors to take apart, something to figure out, and she hated this. Her narcissism makes her think she is more than the mechanics of the psyche. Believing in the powers of reason, she thinks she is special; as if endowed with something form "the beyond", and she can't stand being lumped in with the idea that she is just a collection of instincts. Rand was afraid that the doctors would take her apart and decide she needed to be in one of the other wards or that she should be on medication. Either of these situations would have been hell for her. If she were sent to one of the other wards, she would have been locked away and trapped for an undefined period in the institution, although this is highly unlikely given that she was not actively suicidal or psychotic. And, if she were put on medication, she would become a "zombie", she would be brain dead, stripped of her power of reason, her sense of self, her narcissistic drive; although this is highly unlikely too, given that she has only been admitted and has a say in whether or not she would want medication. There

seems to be, then, a flaw in her logic; one created by her narcissism. Why would she be put in a ward she did not belong in, why would she be given medication if she did not ask for it?

After Rand has told Drinion what she thought of the doctors — and indirectly what she thought of herself — she tells him a bit more about how her relationship with Ed started. She explains that “after dinner when all the doctors went home, there was just one nurse and Ed on the ward” (Wallace 475). Painting a picture of him, Rand tells Drinion that Ed did not look healthy. That he looked thin and weak (Wallace 475). Despite looking so weak, at night Ed would lend an ear to anyone who wanted to talk. And Rand, unimpressed with the options of ping-pong and T.V. took him up on this offer. She tells Drinion that she and Ed would go into the conference room and chat one-on-one (Wallace 476). They would sit at the table where the doctors would spread out their files when they spoke to family members and Ed “would lean way back and put his sneakers up on the table” (Wallace 476). Rand explains that she did not know at the time, but this was “because of the cardiomyopathy” (Wallace 476).

Rand takes this moment to tell Drinion about her low opinion of the doctors, again. As far as she saw, “they saw everybody though this professional lens they either didn’t see or twisted it or squished it in so it fit” (Wallace 476). So, Rand tells Drinion that, when she was alone with Ed, she felt like she was really talking to someone. After their initial chats in the conference room, Rand explains to Drinion that she and Ed began to talk in the pink room most nights, a room used to house people on suicide watch. But Rand distracts herself when she mentions the pink room; she was, as she tells Drinion, sent there once, even though she was not suicidal (Wallace 478). She explains to him that a doctor substituting for her usual case doctor kept trying to ask her “about being *abused and neglected* as a child […]” which she insists never happened (Wallace 478, emphasis original). As Rand continues, she got frustrated and “ended up telling him he was a freaking idiot and that he could either believe

me when I told him the truth or just stick it up his stupid fat butt" (Wallace 478). That night, the substitute doctor ordered that she stay in the pink room.

Having made it clear to Drinion that she was not suicidal, Rand goes back to tell him about what she and Ed would talk about. She explains that he explained to her how, in a place like Zeller, it can feel okay to act "crazy or uninhibited […]" (Wallace 479). But, she tells Drinion that Ed also explained to her that this can be seductive, dangerous, and make people worse. It can lead them to become "*institutionalized*" (Wallace 479, emphasis original).

When Rand met Ed in Zeller, he clearly wasn't well. He looked like a wraith. But his ghostly figure, alive in the night, would offer to talk to people and Rand wanted something to do. They had their first chat in the conference room and Ed put his feet on the desk. He had to, Rand believes, because of his cardiomyopathy; he needed to for the circulation, but did he? There are many ways Ed could have kept his legs elevated, but he put his feet on the desk, the desk the doctors use to discuss cases. Of course, something is being said with this action. Look, he tells Rand, I can walk all over these doctors; their rules don't mean anything to me. Here we have, then, another character who seems to believe in the virtues of selfishness, another narcissist. Smitten by his "casual" appearance, Rand starts to think that he is far more intelligent than anyone else in the building. Ed exploits Rand's belief that she is an individual by professing his individuality and willingness to break the rules; his narcissism. Ed's performance had quite an impact on her and it confirmed her perspective of the doctors. Here was Ed, what a guy, a guy who was getting to know her, a guy just trying to help her. And in contrast, there were the doctors, the people who framed her through the lens of abuse and neglect, the ones who were hardly there, the ones who treated her like they treated everyone else. Of course Rand, so desperate to feel like an individual — so determined to fight the collective — would rather talk to Ed than the doctors; it is easier for

her to believe what Ed is saying — that she is special — than it is to accept the reality the doctors are trying to get her to confront, that she is like others.

But her choice is childish and we are shown how childish when she gets distracted and explains to Drinion how she ended up in the pink room for a night. When a doctor, substituting for her case doctor, pushed her to talk about being abused or neglected as a child, she curses like a child. Her words, in this instance, carry her narcissism. Rand is driven, just like children are, by her own satisfaction. Just like young children, she needs to live in a world she is the centre of. She cannot face the idea that there is a reality out there, one beyond her. As, if she did, she would be letting in all the complications that have shaped her. No, it is far easier for her to act like a child, to believe that she is special, to be a narcissist.

Not to worry, though, because Ed was there to affirm her view. He warned her about giving too much of herself to the psychiatrists; don't tell them about what's going on in your head, he says; it is good to keep some things private, he tells her. God forbid you end up like the rest of them, all those awful people who get in touch with their feelings to try and understand themselves, he adds. There is nothing worse than being institutionalized, he tells her. What harrowing advice for someone struggling with the world.

Rand was comfortable with Ed, another narcissist who sees the world like her, and she goes on to tell Drinion more about their conversations. She explains that, each evening, they would sit down and Ed would ask her if they should go intense or just chitchat? She would choose and they would start talking. Drinion asks her if he should "infer that *intense* refers to the cutting behaviour and [her] reason for doing it?" (Wallace 480, emphasis original). But that, Rand says, is not what Ed meant. When Ed said intense, and she agreed, he "mostly just told [her] all these things about [herself]" (Wallace 480). Things, that "nobody else knew" (Wallace 480). She tells Drinion that Ed knowing these things about her without her telling them, got her attention; they made her "sit up and take notice" (Wallace 481). She then asks

Drinion if he is “thinking, like, here’s this messed-up seventeen-year-old falling in love with the therapist-type adult figure that she thinks is the only one that *understands*?” (Wallace 483, emphasis original). And goes on to correct him before he can even answer, saying that if that is his impression, “that’s pathetic […] and however messed up [he] might think [her relationship with Ed] is, it sure wasn’t that” (Wallace 483).

So when Rand and Ed started talking, they did not talk. Ed would just tell her about herself. Ed got Rand’s attention, sure, but at what cost to her? She had been admitted to a mental health facility; her interactions with the doctors have been immature, but this arrested development is only a sign of the help she needs. For whatever reason, Rand did not develop emotionally and, consequently, she does not possess the tools required to manage reality. Just as it does to everyone, life has caused Rand pain; but she never learnt how to handle this pain; her only option so far has been to turn it into suffering through self-harm; which has a negative effect, forcing her to spiral deeper into a repetitive pattern of pain-and-suffering. Rand needs to learn how to manage reality and this can only come from within herself. In Zeller, she is set the task of confronting her secrets, expressing them, and learning how they have manipulated her perception of reality. Ed takes all of this away, and with it, he takes away the potential of Rand establishing a sense of self. She is quick to tell Drinion that her relationship with Ed was not some young girl falling in love with the therapist type figure who thinks is the only one who understands and, in some respects, she is telling the truth. She did not fall in love with the therapist-type figure because, even if she does not realise it, Ed is absolutely not a therapist.

So, if Rand did not fall in love with a therapist-type figure, what type of figure did she fall in love with? Ed, as we have read, was himself a narcissist. When he spoke to Rand he echoed many of her own ideas about the institution. She heard her own voice speaking to her. Rand fell in love with herself. By extending this love for herself beyond herself to just

another figure of herself, Rand is doing little more than reinforcing her narcissism, reinforcing the walls that keep her secrets and her reality at bay. But falling further in love with herself comes at a significant personal cost; her narcissism is a defence against her issues, but if she cannot relinquish this narcissism she will never understand who she is, and she will never be able to build a sense of self.

Changing the direction of the conversation, Rand tells Drinion that Ed taught her the word monopsony and how it related to her in a personal context (Wallace 483). To clarify, she explains that the thing about being as pretty as she is is that "you get treated special, and people pay attention to you and talk about you, and if you walk in someplace you can almost feel the room change […]" (Wallace 483). Rand acknowledges that this is a form of power, but she also notes that it feels like having less power because it is all connected to the prettiness. Her prettiness, she continues, felt like a box, or prison (Wallace 483). She never thought anyone would think of her as anything other than pretty (Wallace 484). Everyone, she adds, has thought of her this way since high school (Wallace 484). From around the age of twelve people were saying how lovely and beautiful she was and it became, she says, "sort of official, socially: I was pretty, I was desirable [...]" (Wallace 484). This was, Rand tells Drinion, what Ed told her about when they had their "intense conversations", her prettiness and its effect (Wallace 484). These "conversations" with Ed were the first time Rand had ever spoken about it. Most guys, she goes on, either put on a show or would get nervous around her. Most women, acted the same too; but they would also judge her without getting to know her or trying to talk to her. Rand found this all very frustrating (Wallace 484). When she was a kid, she was good with numbers; she won the algebra prize in tenth-grand (Wallace 484). But, as she says, no one cared about her inelegance. Her male teachers would get all "googly eyed and nervous or pervy and flirty […]" when she would ask for help (Wallace 484).

Trying to put it in other words, Rand tells Drinion, that her prettiness felt like a trap. That there is a greedy part of her that really likes all the attention. She felt special. But, this special feeling, also lead her to feel like she was just a piece of meat (Wallace 484). Even though she felt special, she felt, too, that she would never be taken seriously and would never amount to anything. The effect her prettiness had on people, Rand continues, scared her; she felt trapped in a box. She knew there was more inside her because she could feel it but she felt that nobody else would ever know (Wallace 486).

When Rand had these "conversations" with Ed, then, he took it upon himself to tell her how she felt about her prettiness. He knew it started early. Sadly, from the age of twelve, people told her she was lovely and beautiful. These comments marred Rand's adolescence. In this period, so vital to determining how she would view and interact with the world as an adult, she was told she was one-dimensional. Pretty, that is all she was. Something beautiful, something not for herself but for other people. The idea that she should live for others, not herself, was reinforced to Rand through school. She was, as she tells Drinion, smart. But this did not change anything and we can hear the frustration in her voice. "I wasn't a ditz", she says, "I won the algebra prize in tenth grade"; starting with herself as the subject, she uses was not to form the negative, which acts to undermine ditz, the object: her voice wants to tear down the perception other people had of her as an object of beauty. With her interest in algebra, Rand was attempting to push the boundary of who she was; she was trying to become something more than pretty, but it doesn't sound like anyone encouraged this potential in her. When she would ask the male teachers for help, they did the opposite; they made things much worse. Rand needed encouragement and support to establish who she was, who she could have been; a mathematical whiz-kid. But others failed her; her male teachers were not interested in helping her develop her knowledge of mathematics, which would help her develop a sense of self; they were too preoccupied with the idea that she was beautiful.

Her teachers are meant to be there to help her, to mentor her skills, and to help her find out who she is. Not only do they fail to do this, but when they display their attraction to her, they also cross an ethical line. The people who are supposed to support her now take part in destroying her. Things were the same among her peers. Boys either hid from her or tried to be what they thought she would want, but they were never themselves. Girls assumed that, because she was so pretty, she would want nothing to do with them. Rand had no relationship in her youth; she had no way of learning who she was. Her beauty, then, does not empower her, but it becomes a cage; a socially determined belief that prevents her from becoming herself.

There was, though, as she tries to explain, something powerful about the importance other people assigned to her beauty. She was treated special, people paid attention to her and talked about her, and when she entered a room she could feel it change. As an object, Rand affected what the people around her thought. Society decides what is beautiful, and it tends to call this “good”. So, the “goodness” of her body becomes more important than their own life. But her “goodness” started to feel like a trap. Her body, which seemed to control everyone around her, started to limit her life. No one would take her, the actual person, seriously. It would not matter how smart she was or how hard she worked. Rand believes people only want her body and her beauty. This thing that is supposed to be “good” is actually “bad” for Rand. Rather than affirming her life, it starts to destroy it. She knows she could be something more than “good”. She could be a person. But she is fractured by the world around her, divide into body and consciousness. Her body became a trap, a cage for her consciousness. Rand’s fear that she would forever be pigeonholed makes sense. Society failed her; it told her she was one-dimensional and forced this on her before she could explore who she was. She never stood a chance; she was forced to become a stranger to herself and, seeing how her beauty changed the world around her, it became the object she hated.

Her hate for her own body, Rand says, is what Ed knew without her telling him, adding that he knew how lonely she was. With this in mind, Rand tells Drinion that for "the first time [she] thought of the scars and the cutting as letting the unbeautiful inside truth come out […]" (Wallace 488). But Ed didn't encourage Rand to think this way. No, tragically, he told her that "it doesn't ultimately matter why [she did] it or what it, like, represents or what it's about […] All that matters is that [she] was doing it and to stop doing it. That was it" (Wallace 488). Ed also told her that the doctors focused on feelings and the idea that if "you knew why you did it you'd magically be able to stop" (Wallace 488). This, Ed insists, "was the big lie they all bought that made doctors and standard therapy such a waste of time for people like [them]" (Wallace 488). Ed told her the idea that she could talk through her feelings to understand the complexities that assailed her was "bullshit" (Wallace 488). Brutally adding "[y]ou only stop if you stop" (Wallace 488). But Ed didn't stop there; Rand says that he insisted she just needed "to talk to somebody with no bullshit" (Wallace 490). Rand cannot remember if Ed told her or if she figured it out for herself, but during one "conversation", she came to believe that she is "really her own core problem, that only she can fix her issues, and she can only do this if she quits wanting to be lonely and feeling sorry for herself" (Wallace 496). She says she realised that she "needed to grow up and quit being childish" (Wallace 499).

Despite Ed's view Rand still wanted to talk to him the following evening. In their next "conversation" Ed had more bad news for her. He told her that she was going to be discharged in a few days; that her parents had found a doctor who would sign off on outpatient counselling (505). When she and Ed spoke that evening, he gave her "a quiz about all the topics they had covered", which was, "both a joke and not" (Wallace 508). Rand tells Drinion that Ed asked her "what have we learned about cutting ourself?" and she answered

> we learned that it doesn't matter why I cut or what the psychological machinery is behind the cutting, like if it's projecting self-hatred or whatever […] We've learned all that matters is to not do it. To cut it out. Nobody else can make me cut it out; only I can decide to stop it. Because whatever the institutional reason, it's hurting myself, it's being mean to myself, which was childish. It was not treating yourself with any respect. The only way you can be mean to yourself is if you deep down expect somebody else is going to gallop up and save you, which is a child's fantasy. Reality meant nobody else was for sure going to be nice to me or treat me with any respect […] the real responsibilities are to myself. (Wallace 508)

But, after Rand has declared her individuality, Drinion says "[a]s I understand it though, your actual experience is that someone else *was* being nice to you and treating you as worthwhile" (Wallace 509, emphasis original). Rand smiles and tells Drinion that she felt like Ed "was exactly the other person he was saying I'd never really find" (Wallace 509). So there was, Drinion notes, "a very intense emotional conflict going on" (Wallace 510). But Rand doesn't want to touch this and starts looking around. Drinion, a bit confused, asks "[i]s there some extra information I need to understand this?" (Wallace 510). And she tells him that she was seventeen and a drama queen. Rand continues, telling Drinion that she just looked Ed up in the phone book when she got out and he lived like ten minutes away (Wallace 510). For Drinion, though, her answer is not really a solution to the problems in her story; his mouth hangs in the "distended position of someone who wants to ask something but isn't sure where to even start […]" but Rand just says "any way that's how I met him" (Wallace 510).

So Rand came to hate her own body and Ed realised this; he told her he knew about it and how lonely it must make her feel. For him, these are surprisingly compassionate remarks, but what he followed up with is horrific. Rand tells Drinion that she remembers thinking

about how her self-harm may have been a way to show people who she really was, not something beautiful but someone in tremendous pain. This thought shows a desire to understand why she cut herself and the fact that she mentions it to Drinion tells us she is still haunted by it. But Ed's narcissism does not falter like hers; he told Rand that it doesn't matter why she self-harms, the only thing that matters is that she stops doing it. When Ed tells Rand this, he is making some assertive claims about identity and reason. There must be, as Rand suspects, many complex forces that do not directly follow the logic of reason leading her to self-harm, but none of these matter in Ed's view because they do not line up. Essentially, Ed says, sure, you cut yourself and you can say you cut yourself because you are lonely, but cutting and being lonely are not the same. In this situation, $A \neq A$ but $A=B$; and this simply does not make sense to Ed. To live without the logic of identity, for him, is to live without using the power of reason. Ed tells Rand that by using reason she can enforce this rule of identity and will herself to stop cutting.

But society determined Rand was beautiful and because of this she was never allowed to discover who she was. By seventeen, all she knew about herself was that she was lonely. Now Ed comes along and tells her the only feeling she has ever had, the only fragment of a self she has ever been able to understand, means nothing. When Ed tells Rand just to stop cutting herself, he is effectively telling her that the only part of herself she has ever been able to communicate is worthless. He tells her the doctors cannot help her. He tells her that she will have to spend ages working through all these complicated aspects of life and she will have to do it for no reason; whatever she discusses with the psychiatrists, he essentially says, will never be true because it will never follow the rule of identity. This comes through in Ed's use of bullshit. Bullshit means talking nonsense in an attempt to deceive. Ed warns her against attempting to understand who she is, he tells her it is a trap. Ed encourages Rand to ignore her feelings, to double down, and love herself more. But this love, the narcissistic

view they share, is love with a negative force; Ed tells Rand she can only stop self-harming if she stops; he tells her no one can help her but herself, he forces her into an isolated world.

So Ed tells Rand to ignore herself, he tells her the doctors are trying to trick her, and that she is completely alone. Again, Ed tells Rand what she wants to hear rather than what she needs to hear. As a narcissist he can tell her, as a fellow narcissist, exactly what she is thinking. Their voices bleed into one. This is why she cannot remember if she realised that she was her own problem or if Ed told her she was her own problem.

Their shared view is driven home by Ed when he tells her she is going to be discharged in a few days. He chooses this moment to tell her that her parents got some doctor to sign off on her discharge. He implies that her parents did not consult her case doctor, but someone else who may not know her properly. Again, he tells Rand what she believes, that she is all alone in this world. Ed then continues to give her a quiz on self-harm. He asks her. “what have we learned about cutting ourself?” (Wallace 510). The “joke” seems to be in the tone of the question, the patronising voice that mocks the severity of the situation, which echoes the tone of her voice when she tells Drinion about her intake. Ed and Rand, then, are happy to make fun of reality to inflate themselves. And, it seems, that this is the moment Rand truly came to believe that self-harm is a choice; something that can be stopped at any time if she just use reason. The moment her narcissism found its home in traditional values.

The story Rand tells Drinion, then, is sad; but it is much sadder than it appears. She sets out to tell Drinion how she self-harmed, spent time in hospital, and met her husband who is dying of heart failure. But the really sad part of the story, the bit that Drinion feels is missing, is the story of her effacement, her adoption of traditional values, and her narcissism.

David Wallace, Telling it Like it is

So, it seems that Fogle's monologue shows us how the modern idea of self can lead to narcissism and isolation and Rand's story shows us how traditional values encourage narcissism and effacement.

As I mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, I agree with Burn that one of the building blocks of the book is the idea of identity crisis; and nowhere, to me, does this feel more apparent than in Wallace's autobiographical sections.

In "Author Here: The Legal Fiction of David Foster Wallace" in *David Foster Wallace and the Long Thing*, Wallace's choice to appear in his own novel by name raises many of the standard questions about the instability of truth and reality that come with the territory of this postmodern technique (Boswell 26). By asking us to weigh the value of fictional truth over that of non-fiction, Wallace creates a nuanced affirmation of fiction as a way to recover the human amid a culture of data (Boswell 26). Wallace put in a lot of work to "kill off" his postmodern forefathers and make room for himself (Boswell 27). But, by making this room for himself, he was forced to reckon with his own influence. So, by taking ownership of his public profile and parodying it, Wallace sought to rid himself of his reputation (Boswell 29).

The problem with this move is that it invites comparison to "another of his dreaded predecessors, Philip Roth" (Boswell 29). David Wallace's appearance in *The Pale King* "betrays vivid echoes of Roth's *Operation Shylock*" (Boswell 29). In *Operation Shylock* Roth takes the author-as-fictional-character device about as far as he can. Playing with fact and fiction in this way allows Roth to get at the idea that truth "does not result from the accumulation of facts, but from the reconstruction of those facts into a narrative in which they can be given context, meaning and significance" (Boswell 31). That, essentially, "the process of creating a narrative fictionalizes the facts. Truth is a fiction, and fiction is the lie that tells a truth" (Boswell 31).

It is “hard to imagine that Wallace, when he put himself in *The Pale King*, was unfamiliar with Roth’s work” (Boswell 31). The connections to *Operation Shylock* are “too direct to ignore” (Boswell 31). In Roth’s preface, he says “I’ve drawn *Operation Shylock* from notebook journals” (Boswell31). And, similarly, Wallace admits in his first autobiographical chapter, titled Author’s Forward, “[m]uch of the book is actually based on several different notebooks I kept during my thirteen months as a rote examiner at the Midwestern Regional Examination Centre in Peoria, Illinois, circa 1985-6” (Boswell 32). Roth’s “affirmation of his book’s accuracy is echoed in Wallace’s repeated insistence in his Author’s forward that all of this is true” (Boswell 32). And the ambiguity Roth creates with his “Note to Reader and Disclaimer is recreated by Wallace when, again in the Author’s forward, he addresses the disclaimer directly by insisting that the disclaimer is there simply to provide him the legal protection he needs in order to inform us that what follows is, in reality, not fiction at all, but substantial true and accurate” (Boswell 32). This Rothian postmodern device, means “that the book is a work of fiction designed to allow Wallace to tell the truth” (Boswell 32).

Consequently, for Boswell, Wallace’s “autobiographical” chapters become just that, autobiographical. In the novel, when Wallace writes about getting suspended from college for writing papers for hire and going to work at the IRS, he sees the moment when Wallace had to withdraw from Amherst because of an emotional breakdown resulting from his depression and anxiety, which lead to a change in direction from analytic philosopher to author (Boswell 37). He also sees Wallace’s lengthy account of the legal wrangling in his foreword as an account of the trail he went through when he tried to publish the collection of short stories *Girl With Curious Hair* (Boswell 37). And, when Wallace writes about his entry into the IRS being absorbed into that of the other David F. Wallace, he sees the moment when Wallace was preparing to publish *The Broom of the System* and his agent, worried about another

David Wallace, advised him to use his middle name; creating the pen name David Foster Wallace, a name which — as he claimed years later — he felt had been forced on him (Boswell 37).

While I agree with Boswell that Wallace's "autobiographical" chapters are designed so he can tell the truth, I disagree that Wallace is writing a coded memoir of his development as a writer. That is not to say I disagree with the data; I too believe that these fictional events correspond to moments in Wallace's real life, but I think the fiction Wallace creates tells a much larger truth about what it means to be a human being, a truth about how living a full life requires the renunciation of narcissism.

To give us the basics of his backstory, Wallace explains in *The Pale King* that the first pieces of fiction he was paid for were papers he wrote for other students at college (Wallace 76). He was not desperately poor at this time but his motivation was financial (Wallace 76). He had had to take out large student loans and these, he notes, were bad for his dream of becoming an artist (Wallace 76). Many of his peers did not face this issue. They did not want to be artists and they were rich. Some of the people he produced work for were, in his own words, "spoiled, cretinous, and/or untroubled by questions of ethics" (Wallace 76). Others, he continues, were under family pressure and failing. And some just "didn't manage their time and responsibilities well" (Wallace 76). The reason did not matter to him, Wallace was happy to do the work. He used it as a way to pay off some of his loans at an accelerated rate. Wallace was serious about this work. As he says, his services were not cheap and he was thorough; he would always demand a large enough sample of the person's previous work to determine how they tended to think and sound, which he saw as good training for his creative writing (Wallace 76). He would then put the money in a high-yield account so it would accumulate interest as he finished his studies. The ethics of all this were, he admits, "grey at

best" (Wallace 76). But, in his view, he was just trying to save some money for what he anticipated to be debilitating post-grad debt (Wallace 76).

Unfortunately, the college's Judicial Board did not share his view. And, at this point, Wallace tells us that "the story gets complex and a bit lurid" (Wallace 76). The standard operating procedure for a memoir would, he adds, be to "linger on the details and the rank unfairness and hypocrisies involved" (Wallace 76). But, he says, "I'm not going to do that" (Wallace 76). Wallace is just trying to explain how he ended up working at the IRS, so he decides that the "whole code-of-AH debacle is probably best sketched in broad schematic strokes […]" (Wallace 76). Breaking the debacle down into a series of logical steps, Wallace begins by noting "(1a) Naive people are […] unaware that they're naive" (Wallace 76). Adding that "(1b) I was […] naive" (Wallace 76). He then tells us, "(2) […] I was not a member of any campus fraternity, and so was ignorant of many of the bizarre tribal customs […]" (Wallace 76). After that, he continues, "(3a) one of the college's fraternities had instituted the […] practice of placing behind their […] bar a two-draw file cabinet containing copies of […] papers that had earned high grades, which were available for plagiarism" (Wallace 76). It turns out, as Wallace notes in (3b), that "three members of this fraternity had tossed papers he had written into the communal file cabinet" (Wallace 79). He then explains in point (4) that the "paradox of plagiarism is that is that it actually requires a lot of care and hard work to pull off successfully, since the original text's style, substance, and logical sequences have to be modified enough so that the plagiarism isn't totally, insultingly obvious […]" (Wallace 79). Clarifying in (5a) that the "type of spoiled […] frat boy who goes into a communal file cabinet for a term paper […] will not know or care about the paradoxical extra work good plagiarism requires. He will, however […] just plunk down and retype the thing, word for word" (Wallace 79). Even more incredibly, Wallace says in (5b), the person who has chosen to plagiarise the work word for word will not even "take the trouble to verify that

none of his fraternity brothers is planning to plagiarize the same term paper for the same course" (Wallace 79). The moral system of a college fraternity, Wallace concludes in point (6), "turns out to be classically tribal, i.e., characterized by a deeply felt sense of honour, discretion and loyalty to one's so-called brothers, coupled with a complete sociopathic lack of regard for the interests or even humanity of anyone outside the fraternal set" (Wallace 79). Ending his sketch there, Wallace says

> I doubt you need a whole diagram to anticipate what came down, nor much of a primer in US class dynamics to understand, of the eventual five students placed on academic probation or forced to retake certain courses vs. the one student formally suspended pending consideration of expulsion and possible referral of the case to the Hampshire County District Attorney, which of these was yours truly, the living author, Mr. David Wallace. (Wallace 79).

Sticking to an outline of what happened, Wallace tells us that the papers he wrote for other students were works of fiction. Trying to write as other people forced him to adopt perspectives, styles, and names that were not his own. This is, essentially, where their value lies. To write these papers, Wallace is forced into his imagination, he is forced to dwell in the lives of others, to communicate what they think. This may have been good practice for him, but it was not his only motivation, he wanted the money too. Again, keeping things tight, Wallace gives us an overview of his financial situation while at college. He may not have been poor but he knew that his loan would have an impact on the possibility of becoming an artist. The debt he accumulates at school would, inevitably, create financial demands in the future that would have to be filled by working; meaning, he would not have time to spend practising his writing. This is why he chose to write papers for others. On the one hand, he

could practice writing; and, on the other hand, he could save some money for the future. Wallace admits that the ethics of this were grey at best, and his use of the word grey is significant. Wallace's grey ethics rejects the idea of a binary, of black and white, right or wrong. He knows the world blends, seeps, and bleeds; he knows that we don't always make the right choice because sometimes our circumstances force us into a situation where making the "right choice" can feel impossible. As Wallace says, he did not write papers for others to help people cheat; he did so he could feel safe in a demanding economic reality. By writing papers for others, by — that is — rejecting the idea of right and wrong and putting himself first, Wallace rejects the metaphysical force of the institution. Rather than knuckling down and putting all his faith in a degree he would be awarded in the future, a degree that will start his "real life" — a structure similar to the Christian life-and-after-life — Wallace chooses to live now. He lives with his awareness of the economic challenges of becoming an artist and he decides to start his real life before the institution tells him it can begin.

The choice he makes, to accept the moral ambiguity of the world and put himself first, seems to align with Nietzsche's idea of the free spirit.

Wallace's Nietzschean view, though, was not shared by his college's judicial board. As he tells us, his story gets a bit complicated here. In this moment, the stars align for the Nietzschean voice he has just set up. In many ways, we have just been primed for an interpretation of his experience being beyond good and evil, of living a human life in all its specific complications. This would be, Wallace admits, the standard operating procedure for an autobiographical work. But this is exactly what he does not do. Wallace says he wants to explain how he came to work for the IRS and, for this reason, he will sketch the debacle in broad schematic strokes.

Wallace starts his overview by telling us that he was naive about the fraternities on campus because he had never been a member of one. He continues to say that he was

unaware of the bizarre tribal customs in fraternities. With the word bizarre, Wallace tells us that he feels he is different from the people who are members of fraternities. And with his next phrase, tribal customs, he tells us why. Tribal customs implies a range of rituals or behaviours that are normally carried out to appease a God or Gods. By telling us he is different to people who cling to metaphysics, Wallace seems to be affirming his Nietzschean alignment. He drives this idea home when he tells us about the file cabinet of papers. When he says that several fraternity members would just copy any paper they found in the file cabinet word for word without checking if anyone else was doing the same. Wallace seems to imply that these fraternity members do not need to think about the reality of what they are doing, that they can just place their faith in some beyond, some divine thing. Wallace goes on to tell us that fraternity members only care about their so-called brothers and have a sociopathic lack of interest or even humanity for anyone outside the fraternity; he mocks their "brotherhood" and points out their faith in an illusion. Here, Wallace falls into a narcissistic trap; he thinks only about himself. Wallace acts as though he is nothing like the fraternity members; but, if he just let go of his narcissism for a moment, he would realise that they are more similar than he thinks. Wallace felt the pressure of reality on his dreams and, to preserve his dreams, he began writing papers; ultimately, he was trying to do what was best for him. While the circumstances may be different, the fraternity members he wrote papers for, who put his work in the file cabinet, used his services because they felt the pressure of reality on their dreams, whatever they may be. Being wealthy or a member of a legacy likely came with the expectation of graduating. College becomes, then, a condition for a "successful life" and pressure comes with this. Even though the locus is different, both Wallace and the fraternity members are under pressure. Wallace dealt with his pressure by using his intellectual skills to work toward financial security. Fraternity members, though, often do not have this opportunity. Typically, they are groups that do not excel academically and, by

grouping together, they deal with their pressure by creating familiar relationships. One is not better than the other in this instance, they are both the same.

So, again, Wallace seems to align himself with Nietzsche's idea of the free spirit. But this time, we can begin to see narcissism emerging with it.

Wallace's view, that he was different to the members of the fraternity who used his papers was, perhaps, reinforced by the university itself. The fraternity members were only placed on academic probation, whereas he was suspended considering expulsion and referral to the District attorney. As he is keeping things brief, Wallace tells us that the harsh punishment he received is down to the class dynamics of the US. I am sure there would have been an economic aspect to the judicial board's choice; but, there is more to their choice than just the economic aspect Wallace implies. Even if Wallace doesn't acknowledge it, the judicial board's decision taught him an invaluable lesson. Like most institutions, his college was founded on the purpose of education for the wider social good. With this intention, the institution sets out a clear set of rules, including one on plagiarism, which ensures the grades achieved reflect the person's capability. Wallace manipulated the institution's traditional values with his modern morals. He broke their rules. And this is why he is being punished to such an extent. By suspending him, the college aims to teach Wallace that life is not centred on him; it challenges the narcissism he was developing.

Wallace, then, seems to be telling us that his youth aligned with a Nietzschean framework. He lived as a free spirit and it made him act like a narcissist. But he is telling us about his past, and these forces do not seem to match his current tone. He is speaking in broad strokes — keeping things short — this is not how Fogle spoke; so what happened?

Neither Wallace nor his family was too happy about him returning home for a semester or two while the college "considered his fate" (Wallace 80). So, he looked for something to fill his time. After this, Wallace explains that — if his story seems vague — it is

because he is giving us a "stripped down, mission-specific version of just who and where I was, life-situation-wise, for the thirteen months I spent as an IRS examiner" (Wallace 80). Having provided a reason for his lack of detail, Wallace tells us that working for the IRS would postpone the collection of his student loan, which — having been suspended — he would have had to start paying back before he could even get his degree (Wallace 80). There are, he adds, other personal reasons why he decided to work for the IRS, but — as several members of his family chose not to sign the legal releases — he cannot tell us about them (Wallace 80). He can, however, talk about why he decided to work there and write a book about it. For one, he needed the money; but, as he says, "it's possible for very different kinds of motives and emotions to coexist in the human soul" (Wallace 83). And he also believed that his time there had "significant social and artistic value" (Wallace 83). To explain, Wallace quotes his colleague DeWitt Glendenning Jr., who once told him, "If you know the position a person takes on taxes, you can determine his whole philosophy. The tax code, once you get to know it, embodies all the essence of human life: greed, politics, power, goodness, charity" (83). To these qualities, Wallace adds one more, "boredom" (Wallace 83). Concerned that he may not be making that much sense, Wallace says, "[i]t might sound a bit dry and wonkish, but that's because I'm boiling it down to the abstract skeleton […]" (Wallace 84). Putting it another way, Wallace tells us that amid the tax cuts of the 1980's the IRS discovered "one of the great and terrible PR discoveries in modern democracy", that "if sensitive issues of governance can be made sufficiently dull and arcane, there will be no need for officials to hide or dissemble because no one not directly involved will pay enough attention to cause trouble" (Wallace 86). No one, he adds, "will pay attention because no one will be interested […]" (Wallace 86). For him, "the really interesting question is why dullness proves to be such a powerful impediment to attention. Why we recoil from the dull" (Wallace 87). He wonders if

> dullness is associated with psychic pain because something that's dull or opaque fails to provide enough stimulation to distract people from some other, deeper type of pain that is always there, if only an ambient low-level way, and which most of us spend nearly all our time and energy trying to distract ourselves from feeling, or at least from feeling directly or with our full attention. (Wallace 87)

And, he simply "can't think anyone really believes that today's so-called information society is just about information. Everyone knows it's about something else, way down" (Wallace 87). This is, Wallace feels, why no one speaks much of the dull, because there may "be more to it […] as in vastly more, right here before us all, hidden by virtue of its size" (Wallace 87).

Wallace is not too happy about having to return home and his parents are not too happy either. Nothing particularly important is happening here; Wallace and his family were probably just enjoying the freedom that college brought them. But, after Wallace tells us this, he tacks on a comment about the college administration and his fate. With this phrase, Wallace highlights that the future of his education is no longer in his hands. Perhaps we would assume this would be an anxiety-inducing situation for him, as he has worked so hard to clear a path to his future. But this assumption would be wrong. Wallace does not reflect on the impact this had on the planned trajectory of his life; he seems, instead, to embrace the idea of fate. He does not try and find a way out of the mess he made; he does not try to justify to us that his ability to see beyond "right" and "wrong" is an ethical necessity; he does not behave as though the institution is against him, as though there is some mystical force at work to prevent him from achieving his dreams. He just lives in the force of chance and accident. He does not fight it, it becomes part of him, a part that allows him to transfigure himself. Avoid the standard operating procedure for a memoir again, Wallace does not dwell

on these details. He actually emphasises his reduced narrative, his mission-specific voice. He is, in this sense, re-writing himself. His lack of detail, his determination to only give us what we need, aligns with the language of identity. Wallace is not concerned with his own perspective of events but is trying to create something we can easily understand. Adding to this basic picture, Wallace tells us that he decided to work for the IRS because it would postpone his student loan repayments. When Wallace says this, his voice is laced with a love of fate. For a moment, he lost what mattered most to him; his chance of becoming an artist; but, in a flash, he found another path to becoming who he wished to be. He cannot tell us too much about his transformation from college kid to IRS employee though, for legal reasons. Once more, in this moment, Wallace seems to re-write himself. When he was at college he detached himself from the ideas of "right" and "wrong" to try and become who he wanted to be. Here, though, by following the legal requirements of this work of fiction he suspends his perspectivism to follow the institution of law. He sets himself aside. He seems to let go of his narcissism.

Another reason Wallace chose to work at the IRS during this period was financial gain. Society is organised by the economy and Wallace, like everyone else, has to make money. He wrote this book, in part, to do that. He wrote the book to make money so he could be a member of society. In this sense, he admits there is something more important than himself, something more important than becoming who he is. By telling us this, Wallace essentially affirms that his view of life is no longer one of perspectivism and that he is willing to follow the rules of identity. It may seem like Wallace undermines the fixed form of identity in his next sentence when, noting another reason he wrote the book, he says that very different motives and emotions can coexist in the human soul; but, by saying this, he actually affirms the law of identity. For those who follow the platonic tradition, the likes of Descartes and Kant, the soul is how fundamental truths are intuitively known. Descartes and Kant

cannot explain the loci of reason with its fundamental truths, so they plug the gap with ontology, with metaphysics, and ultimately theology. So, reason implies the soul which in turn implies that there are universal truths; the word is bound to binaries; to right and wrong to good and evil, it asserts that there is one way to be. It is, in fact, the force that made Rand believe she was so special.

So, when Wallace addresses the different motives that lead him to write *The Pale King,* he is really pointing toward one thing, reason. So, what is the reason he wrote the book? He wrote it because he believed it would have significant social and artistic value. Wallace must cite DeWitt because he believes what DeWitt is saying. And, while DeWitt gestures towards a plurality, ultimately, he reduces the idea of humanity to one aspect; the tax code. Rather than taking on the complexities of what it means to be human, DeWitt — with Wallace in tow — puts forward a reductive view of identity. The tax code is human. Wallace has a bit more to say on the matter, though. To DeWitt's tax code — that is, to the identity of the human — Wallace adds boredom. He tells us that it may sound wonkish, and it does. Ironically, for a force that makes claims of reason — of a metaphysical power creating logical understanding — things are always just a little off. This is because all reason can do is create representations of what is represented — representations of the reality it claims exists external to us; there is, in a sense, no truth to these statements of fact. By admitting that his idea of boredom may sound wonkish, then, Wallace is admitting to something far more significant; he is admitting to a shift from perspectivism to reason. Wallace continues to affirm his voice of reason as he tells us that he is boiling things down to the abstract skeleton. In other words, he doesn't want to give his idea body and matter; he doesn't want to bring it to life because, to do so, would force him to use the practice of perspectivism. But Wallace does explain himself a little; after all, identity is bound to meaning and Wallace's idea of boredom needs to mean something. Drawing on the history of the IRS, Wallace notes how

the institution discovered something awful. That, if an idea is made dull enough, no one will pay enough attention to question it. For him, this creates all sorts of questions around the power of dullness, the pain of dullness, and how we distract ourselves from this deep-rooted pain; all the information of our contemporary world, he adds, must be about keeping this feeling at bay. So, for Wallace, boredom seems to mean dullness and dullness seems to be painful. It feels like he is gesturing towards a lack, toward an understanding that our reality has a hole at its centre. Wallace seems to be suggesting that, at the heart of each of our lives, is a hole. Of course, this truth is painful; the idea that we are empty at our core — that we have no given purpose — seems to conflict with our sense of external reality, which can only be filtered through our ego. It is hard to accept that we are, in fact, insignificant. And it is all too easy, in this information society, to turn away from this truth. Wallace, then, seems to have written *The Pale King* for this reason, to show us the truth of who we are.

Wallace has now started to give shape to his voice. When he embraces his fate and the opportunities it opens for him, he seems to be reminding us, again, that his youth aligned with a Nietzschean framework. But he seems to distance himself from that idea now. He does not write about his family because they did not sign the release, he lets go of his perspectivism and with it lets go of a narcissism that characterised his youth. He affirms this external reality by continuing to use a voice of identity, one that seems to align with Rand's framework. But he seems to distance himself from that idea too. He may be speaking like Rand, but he lets go of the narcissism that characterised her voice. Wallace wants to relinquish the narcissism that leads us to flee from who we really are.

Wallace continues with this idea, the renunciation of narcissism, when he tells us that he arrived for intake processing at his post for the IRS sometime in mid-May of 1985, "quite probably on or very near Wednesday, May 15" (Wallace 87). He adds, to this vague memory, a footnote where he says,

> N.B.: I'm not going to be one of those memoirists who pretends to remember every last fact and thing in photorealist detail. The human mind doesn't work that way, and everyone knows it; it's an insulting bit of artifice in a genre that purports to be 100 per cent realistic. To be honest, I think you deserve better, and that you're intelligent enough to understand and maybe even applaud it when a memoirist has the integrity to admit that he's not some kind of eidetic freak. At the same time, I'm not going to waste time noodling about every last gap and imprecision in my own my own memory. (Wallace 87)

Wallace does not tell us the exact date he arrived for his processing and this, given his voice of identity, is significant. Wallace's use of the phrase quite probably implies that he can use a range of facts to determine when he would have left; he could use deductive logic, the force of reason. But, he does not use reason to determine the exact date. He just guesses. By only guessing the date, the information Wallace gives us is, in a sense, not fixed to its object. In other words, it has a gap — a hole. Wallace, then, may be speaking with a voice of identity but he continues to highlight the hole. He does not tell us the date because he knows it is insignificant and he knows it is insignificant because he knows that he, in the grand scheme of things, is insignificant; he continues to renounce narcissism.

Wallace carries his abandonment of narcissism into the footnote attached to the date. Using the letters N.B. — standing for nota bene, meaning mark well — Wallace calls our attention to what is about to be said. He tells us he will not pretend that he can remember everything in photorealist detail. With these words, he seems to let go of perspectivism, of the idea that his personal view of the world has some significant importance. He will not force his interpretation of everything he has seen on us. Wallace's problem with this type of

perspectivism is that it is just not how the mind works and that we all know it. He is not wrong. So many moments of our lives fall away, never to be thought of again. He then claims that the use of extreme detail, which claims to be realistic, is actually a lie. And, again, he is not wrong. The moments that are meant to be caught in the inscription of perspectivism are not really the moment. They are worked, reworked, and edited. The whole truthful aspect of literature, in this view, is wholly untruthful. We have, then, another hole. Wallace wants to do something different; and, addressing us directly, he lets us know this. He thinks we deserve better, that we — who are human and know that our minds are not cameras designed to capture the beauty of every moment we live — must surely have doubts about the rich narratives that authors create. Wallace wants to speak to us in a different way, and the only way he can do that is by admitting he is not some kind of eidetic freak, by admitting he is not perfect; that he is human.

After Wallace has begun to let go of the narcissism on both sides — after he has admitted to being human — he continues to tell us about his journey to the IRS site in Peoria. He had to get a lift to the bus station on the corner of the local IGA parking lot. He wore a three-piece corduroy suit. And, along with two heavy suitcases, which he had to carry as this was before wheeled suitcases had been invented, he held — under his arm — a dispatch case containing his more personal belongings (Wallace 230). As Wallace paints this picture for us, though, he interrupts himself saying "quick aside here" to explain that despite

> his overall self-indulgence […] Irrelevant Chris Fogle was actually on the money about one thing. Given the way the human mind works, it does tend to be small, sensuously specific details that get remembered over time — and unlike some so-called memoirists, I refuse to pretend that the mind works any other way than it really does. (Wallace 230)

But, as Wallace continues, this doesn't mean that we should confuse him with Fogle, they are, as he says, very different.

> Rest assured that I am not Chris Fogle, and I have no intention of inflicting on you a regurgitation of every last sensation and passing though I happen to recall. I am about art here, not simple reproduction. What logorrheic colleagues like Fogle failed to understand is that there are vastly different kinds of truth, some of which are incompatible with one another. Example: A 100 per cent accurate, comprehensive list of the exact size and shape of every blade of grass in my front lawn is "true", but it is not a truth that anyone will have any interest in. What renders a truth meaningful and worthwhile, & c. is its relevance, which in turn requires extraordinary discernment and sensitivity to context, questions of value, and overall point — otherwise we might as well all just be computers downloading raw data to one another. (Wallace 230)

So, Wallace continues to tell us about his journey. He does not describe the bus stop and why should he? It is hard to imagine that someone reading this book has never seen a bus stop before, hard to imagine that someone reading this book cannot imagine the liminal space it creates, the boredom and frustration that comes with waiting. This is simply what a bus station means, it is its identity and Wallace sticks to it. Neither does he describe the IGA parking lot, and again, why should he? IGA is a fairly familiar grocery store across the U.S. and, like all corporations, it is forced to establish a brand identity — a continuity across sites. If you have seen one, you have seen them all; and, if you haven't seen one, in this age of information — as Wallace called it earlier — a quick google will do the trick. Wallace, then, seems to be embracing his real voice — the one that accepts the hole — the one that

relinquishes his narcissism. He even goes on to tell us just how normal he is. He makes note of his three-piece corduroy suit; he set out, remember, in mid-May 1985, and nothing says 80's business fashion quite like a corduroy suit. Essentially, by telling us that he wore this type of suit, Wallace tells us that he was following what was fashionable at the time — that he wanted to fit in and fade into society, that there was nothing all that remarkable about him.

Having renounced narcissism and established himself as just another person, Wallace notes that Fogle is right about one aspect of the human mind. He agrees that it is the small and sensuous details that get remembered over time and, even though he has refuted Fogle for his narcissism, he refuses to pretend the mind works any other way than it really does. Wallace reassures us he will not act like Fogle. He says about art here not simple reproduction. Big words. But, with the work we have done so far, we are primed to understand them. Fogle's monologue worked to explain how he became who he is; using Nietzschean principles he found truth in his perspective — even if it did not correspond to the external reality around him or in his mind — and he affirmed his truth through the aesthetic creation of narrative so others would love him. Wallace implies that all Fogle does is reproduce an image of his life wishing to be loved. This fundamentally narcissistic act, as far as Wallace sees it, is not art. By telling us, again, that he will not reproduce every sense and thought he has had, Wallace continues to build a locus outside himself; he recognises that the story of how he came to work at the IRS is not wholly his but is also, in part, ours; rather than draw us into a world he creates, Wallace works towards a reality external to himself. Wallace wants to communicate something more than the story of himself by making something that is ours too. This motivation gives his work a social purpose and perhaps this is what he means by art; it certainly echoes his citation of DeWitt above. To affirm the difference between himself and Fogle, Wallace tells us that logorrheic colleagues, like Fogle, fail to understand that there are very different types of truth. Wallace does not hold back here. Logorrheic

marks a pathologically of excessive and often incoherent talkativeness or wordiness characteristic of the manic phase of bipolar disorder. But what purpose does Wallace's use of this word serve? When Wallace calls Fogle — and colleagues similar to him — logorrheic, he implies that they are subject to psychosis; that they may see or hear things that they are convinced are true but are not. What Wallace does here, then, is make a link between the narcissistically driven truth of perspectivism — which, as it is felt and not factual, creates an illusionary reality bleeding into delusion — and psychosis. Perspectivism, he tells us, may be true to a person, but — when one is wholly committed to it — it becomes true in the same way psychosis is true. To make this point a little clearer, Wallace uses the example of a garden. A logorrheic person may find every blade of grass in their garden a moving aesthetic experience, one which is truthful; but, to the people who live in the realm of external reality there is no reason to find every blade of grass interesting, it means nothing. No, these truthful perspectives, Wallace tells us, do not mean anything. The words are not synonymous; perspective can be detached from everyone else — it can be delusionary and psychotic — it does not demand a link to others, a link to a reality that is external to the person; a reality that, as Wallace says, takes extraordinary discernment and sensitivity to context to live in. Wallace tells us that Fogle — and colleagues of a similar narcissistic perspectivism — live psychotic lives, are trapped in solipsistic worlds.

Once Wallace has told us he is just another person — one who trends to remember little fragments of the past and explained that he is different from Fogle — whose narcissism turns flashes of the past into psychosis, he goes on to tell us a bit more about his journey. Wallace explains that, in one of the inner sleeves of his dispatch case, he had a letter from a relative who worked in the IRS's Midwest Regional Commissioner's Office (Wallace 261). He is, now, ashamed that he took it with him, but back then thought that it could be useful if he got stuck in a long line or something (Wallace 262).

At no point does Wallace tell us exactly who the letter was from or what it said. This letter, with its unknown origin and content, becomes something metaphysical. With its generalised description, we can build a bridge from the word letter to language, which is the tool of reason. When Wallace mentions this letter then, it is as if he is speaking of reason itself. And, he has some feelings on the matter. He took the letter because it associated him with someone important, because it endowed him with the force of reason. Even though he was an entry-level employee, with this letter — this force of reason — Wallace allowed himself to think he was special. The letter — reason — also created a force of narcissism and looking back at it now, he feels ashamed. He knows he was wrong, he feels foolish for trying to inflate his worth, for allowing himself to believe he was more than he was.

After he has told us about the bus ride to Peoria, Wallace summarises his first experience arriving at the IRS site. He tells us that there "is an indescribable thrill about seeing one's own printed name on a sign held up at a crowded place" (Wallace 283). The sign was, in his own words, "surprising" — given that he was only set to start an entry-level position — but, as he adds, he did not find it "so surprising that any person could be reasonably expected to have seen it as immediate evidence of some error or confusion" (Wallace 283). There was, after all, "the aforementioned letter" (Wallace 283). Wallace saw the woman, whose name is Ms. F. Chahla Neti-Neti, holding the sign almost immediately (Wallace 286). She was, he notes, standing "in a way that managed to connote weariness and boredom without any actual slumping […]" (Wallace 286). Holding the sign at chest level, she was "staring into space with neither interest nor resignation" (Wallace 286). She was "hard-faced […] with very dark hair and wide-set eyes in which was […] the look of someone who was on duty in the sort of way that involves having really nothing to do but stand there" (Wallace 287).

Wallace tells us that he assumed Ms. Neti-Neti was there for him because of the letter he carried, because of his force of reason. The letter — reason — drives his narcissism; it leads him to believe the external world is for him, which allows him to convince himself that Ms. Neti-Neti is there for him. But, if he questioned this narcissism for just a moment — if he put himself in his relative's shoes — he may have realised that he should try and confirm she is there for him. Why would his relative, who holds a prestigious position, take time out of their busy day to contact a different IRS site just so someone would be there to meet Wallace who was starting an entry-level job? In reality, they probably would not. This case of mistaken identity, though, does not rest solely on Wallace's narcissistic reasoning. Ms. Neti-Neti could have tried to confirm that he was, in fact, the David Wallace she was waiting for. So why did she not ask? Well, as Wallace explains, Ms. Neti-Neti was not all that interested in what was happening. As she stood there with the sign, she looked like someone doing their job without interest. Ms. Neti-Neti was, by this description, indifferent, which can lead us to ask, is she another logorrheic colleague, a character driven by the narcissism of perspectivism?

As Wallace tells us, "Ms. Neti-Neti's greeting was […] verbally effusive and differential […]" (Wallace 289). When he introduced himself, she said, "[y]our reputation precedes you; on behalf of Mr. Glendenning and Mr Tate, we're just so extremely pleased to have you on board […]" (Wallace 289). But, she said this to him "without her face and eyes registering any such enthusiasm or even displaying any affect or interest […]" (Wallace 289). Not only, Wallace continues,

> was it surprising to be greeted in person with such enthusiastic words, but it was doubly surprising when the person reciting these words displayed the same kind of disengagement as, say, the checkout clerk who utters the words "Have a nice day"

> while her expression indicates that it's really a matter of total indifference to her whether you drop dead in the parking lot outside ten seconds from now. (Wallace 289)

So, it seems as though Ms. Neti-Neti might be one of Fogle's, and now Wallace's, logorrheic colleagues. On intake day, her job was to wait in the lobby for David Wallace and let him know that the IRS site in Peoria was pleased to receive him. But, Ms. Neti-Neti must have been told what to say, or at least told to say something that confirms the view of the senior employees. She, herself, is not thrilled to have Wallace there; she makes that clear. And she is not thrilled to have him there because it does not matter to her. Not bothered by the world outside her, Mrs Neti-Neti sees no reason to check if Wallace — who is young enough to still be in college — is, in fact, a senior IRS employee. The discrepancy between the Wallace she was waiting for and the Wallace who approached her was right there in front of her eyes, plain as day; surely there is no way this kid could be a high-level government employee; all she needed to do was ask.

As she led him away, toward the central pod of Level 1 — where ID photos were being taken and cards being printed — she chattered non-stop (Wallace 290). At this point, Wallace does acknowledge that it was hard to comprehend all the personal attention being directed towards a new employee who was just going to be opening envelopes or moving files (Wallace 290). But, instead of following this chain of thought, he assumes that his relative who had helped him get the job had more administrative power than he had originally thought (Wallace 290).

So, because of the letter — his force of reason — Wallace believes the world out there is for him and Ms. Neti-Neti, because of her perspectivism, has a distorted view of the reality beyond her. Ms. Neti-Neti chattered away, speaking non-stop about things that did not

really matter; it is as if she was speaking just to hear the sound of her own voice, to make herself feel more important than someone whose job it was to greet a new employee and escort them to the Deputy Director of Personnel. And Wallace, who even started to question the attention — to feel reality encroach on his narcissism — chose to further inflate his sense of self-worth by reassuring himself that his relative could organise this for him. Each of them, then, with their narcissistic drives, directs their energy towards building worlds that make them feel important. But this stops them from communicating, it bars them from the reality outside their own heads.

Wallace explains that when he and Ms. Neti-Neti got to the central pod on level 1 where IDs were being printed, he was surprised and a little thrilled to find he was exempted from the long slow line and taken to the front of the queue (Wallace 300). But the line he cut, had some "clearly high ranking transfers" in it; and, while he felt gratified, he was also a bit curious about "what kind of suction the distant relative who'd helped [him] arrange for the posting might turn out to have, and what-all personal or biographical information had been relayed about [him] ahead of time, and to just whom" (Wallace 300).

So, when Wallace gets to skip the queue, he may feel good but reality seems to intrude on the situation. It does not make sense to him why he should be treated better than employees senior to himself. But, again, he remedies this by investing more psychical energy into himself. Rather than look reality in the face, he reassures himself that his relative has pulled some strings for him, that — even though he may not be a senior employee — he is an important employee, that people will know who he is. In this moment, then, Wallace uses his narcissism as a defence.

Things should get a little more awkward for Wallace after his ID has been printed, but they do not. Ms. Neti-Neti takes him to meet the Deputy Director of Personnel (Wallace 301-310). Wallace sits patiently in the waiting room, perusing a book. He takes all of this in

stride. Fuelled by his narcissism, Wallace does not see anything strange happening here. He does not think that he, someone who is just going to open envelopes and move things around, getting a personal welcome from such a high official is anything out of the ordinary (Wallace 308).

Now, once Wallace has told us about his arrival, he goes on to explain that at that time the IRS was trying to establish a computerised data system of all employees. But, inevitably, this attempt was riddled with errors and bugs. One bug, Wallace says, is of particular importance to the story he is currently telling us as it caused "ghost redundancies" (Wallace 416). Meaning, if someone was promoted, the system would absorb any file for the person of the same name in any lower position. This meant, in effect, that he, David F. Wallace, did not exist; his file had absorbed into that of the other David F. Wallace (Wallace 416). The ghost redundancy problem had, Wallace goes on, been recognized as early as December 1984 at the IRS's National Computer Centre and they were in the process of fixing it, but they had only done this for the thirty-two most common surnames in the United States (Wallace 416). So he became a ghost redundancy and the IRS, not wanting to incur any legal issues themselves, accused him "of everything from contractual fraud to impersonation of an immersive" (Wallace 416).

Just as Wallace's Nietzschean narcissism got him in trouble at college, his narcissism driven by reason gets him in trouble with the IRS. But, together, these two experiences seem to have taught him something. He has been telling us this story using a voice that respects reality, he did not disclose the details of family members who did not sign the release forms and he has made his story as clear as possible for us.

Through this autobiographic work, then, Wallace seems to be telling us the story of his renunciation of narcissism. Unfortunately, this is all we have. Wallace did not finish his "autobiography" before he left us. But, we can see from the notes and asides left with the

manuscript where he was headed. Wallace noted in his “Embryonic outline” that “David Wallace disappears 100pp in” (Wallace 547). Adding, “David Wallace disappears — becomes creature of the system” (Wallace 547). We can speculate, then, that Wallace was going to work towards the idea that work put him in his place; that it lead him to renounce, on the one hand, his Nietzschean narcissism; and, on the other hand, the narcissism he shared with Rand. Perhaps this is why what he did manage to tell us in his autobiography, feels so considerate and delicate. Wallace renounced his narcissism and learnt how to live a full life. Finally, then, he cracked what it meant to be a human being.

Conclusion, Learning How to Live

With *The Broom of the System,* Wallace started his career by confronting the anxiety that post-structural theory and postmodern fiction had created. He tried to find us a way out of the self-referential cage of language. By building the novel around Lenore, a protagonist who suffers from the extreme uncertainty of deconstruction, he manages to turn uncertainty back on itself. She questioned her relationship with Rick, who referenced the ontology of Nabokov and Heidegger. And, in doing so, she broke free from the history that made her. Lenore's freedom allowed her to meet Andrew, who, by referencing Rabbit but reversing the aim of pleasure, came to live in reality; a reality defined by the father. As Lenore and Andrew fell in love, Wallace found a way for us to be certain in a world that we know is, in fact, uncertain; a way for us to build on life instead of tearing it down.

He continued this work in *Infinite Jest*. Casting James as a "schizophrenic" who dwells in ontological immanence, Wallace, again, places the anxiety of post-structural theory and postmodern ideas at the heart of the novel. Once more, he aimed to move on from these ideas. We meet Hal at the start of the book, which is the end of his coming-of-age narrative. He comes to us as a "schizophrenic" himself, as someone who dwells in ontological immanence. But as his coming-of-age narrative unfolds, we learn everything that has forced him into this state. His father's suicide, his time in therapy, his marijuana dependence, and his use of marijuana in public: this poor boy has been through so much and, by the end of his narrative, when we loop back round to the start of the book, we come to love him; a love that intends to replenish us.

Shifting from the future to the past Wallace took another look at these ideas in *The Pale King*. Rather than focusing on our contemporary issues of solipsism and self-reflexive language, though, he looked at their root causes. By addressing the narcissism of modern

principles through Fogle’s Nietzschean monologue and the narcissism of traditional values through Rand’s story, Wallace sought, in his “autobiography”, to relinquish the narcissistic foundations of our modern lives: he showed us what it takes to live.

Wallace's work is, in effect, moral. He encourages us to believe, love, and relinquish narcissism. He shows us how to build a better life for ourselves and others. He teaches us how to live.

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