"An Anguish Become Thing": Narrative as Performance in David Foster Wallace's "Infinite Jest"

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> On peut juger de la bonté d'un livre à la vigueur des coups de poing qu'il vous a donnés et à la longeur de temps qu'on est ensuite à en revenir.
>
> You can judge a book's quality by the impact of its punches and by the length of time it takes for you to shake them off.
>
> —Gustave Flaubert[1]

Clearly, David Foster Wallace has an interest in performance and its complex dynamic, because *Infinite Jest*, his second novel, thematizes performance. Its tripartite plot, set in the early twenty-first century, revolves around prep school tennis players who aspire to play professionally, to join the "show" (Wallace's term); a group of Québecois terrorists' histrionically violent acts to secure a videotape—perhaps entitled *Infinite Jest*—that will be an ultimate guerilla weapon, for when it is viewed, it causes death; and drug addicts in whom, Wallace suggests, addiction is the ultimate, personal, self-destructive, deconstructing performance. "Thematizing" performance may be too mild a term, in fact, for what Wallace does: he eviscerates performance, showcasing the obsessive practice that must precede it (in the case of tennis), the twisted narrative around it (with terrorism), and its possibly lethal entrapment (in the case of the videotape and with addiction).

Yet *Infinite Jest* is itself a performance: its narrative comprises so many story lines that it reinvents the idea of narrative, and the story lines intersect in such unexpected, often adventitious ways that even "hypertext" fails to describe the work. Perhaps the best label would be "encyclopedic heaping." Toon Theuwis argues at length that the novel is simply "encyclopedic," specifically that "it is an analogy of the time and place in which it was written" (16). Tom LeClair calls it a "prodigious fiction."

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By upending the notion of a traditional story line and by parodying both traditional and postmodernist conventions, Wallace takes the chance that his readers will abandon (in confusion, frustration, despair, disgust) his 1,079 page opus. But its details, language, its local pleasures, its wildly metastasizing inventiveness capture the imagination—captured mine, anyway—enough so that the confusion about genre, tone, structure, about the basic arc of events, let's say, can be put in abeyance. I did not abandon it, though I confess I was tempted to. As I read on, I realized that this novel was having a curious impact on me, was penetrating my consciousness in a way that struck me as unusual.

The novel's impact derives in part from how it is at once an easy, pleasurable novel to read—full of narrative action, excitement, local delights—and at the same time a trying, annoying, difficult novel that is constantly interrupting itself, breaking comfortable routines it has set up, and, in many cases, syntactically reinventing the English language. Essentially, Wallace's art stimulates what has been called *Einfühling* or "empathy" and what Russian formalist critics called *ostranenie* or "estrangement." *Infinite Jest* epitomizes a kind of art described by Bertolt Brecht, an art that "concentrates entirely on whatever in [the] perfectly everyday event is remarkable, particular and demanding inquiry" (97):

> In this new method of practising art empathy would lose its dominant role. Against that the Alienation effect (A-effect) will need to be introduced, which is an artistic effect too and also leads to a theatrical experience. It consists in the reproduction of real-life incidents on the stage in such a way as to underline their causality and bring it to the spectator's attention. This type of art also generates emotions; such performances facilitate the mastering of reality; and this it is that moves the spectator. (102)

The novel, in short, uses alienation effects to create its quirky, highly performative world with which the reader empathizes but from which she must also withdraw.

The world of *Infinite Jest* is ultimately disturbing because it disrupts the reading process itself. It is itself a staggering performance, and any such performance will necessarily be disturbing in that it exceeds normal limits and expectations. Wallace draws the reader in with his own virtuoso, *tour de force* performance, a one-can-only-stand-back-and-clap kind of performance that breaks down reader defenses so that scenes of exquisite horror and pain come in, as it were, under the radar, and hence make an enormous impact. In addition, the novel forces the reader to perform actions that he wouldn't ordinarily have to do while reading, things that draw the reader out of the engagement with the text and into a paratextual mode ("Did I read that correctly? Would what happens to this character be actually, physically possible? Let me re-read it," or "What is an 'intercostal muscle'?" or "I won't think of that scene about the broom," or "I will hide this book for a week"). Part of this "paratextual mode" involves a physical "performance" by the reader, who must consult footnotes or reference works on a continual basis throughout. Reading the work cannot be a passive or static activity, for the reader cocreates the world of the novel nonnoetically, in the manner of a stagehand. At the same time, the multiple plots, per-

haps partly because they are quite actively cocreated by the reader, have the power to "bind" the reader, as Robert Hellenga calls it, so that one is longing to know what will happen to this or that character, what strange new twist will emerge, or how one plot will ultimately intersect with the others. Indeed, the novel has an addictive quality. Finally, reading *Infinite Jest* has the effect of dividing the reader's consciousness to such an extent that the novel stuns and mesmerizes—i. e., it disturbs—by blurring the boundary between a real world and a fictive one.

THE DISTURBING TEXT

I am using the term "disturbing text" to refer not to a genre of literature identifiable by the usual formal elements, but as a way to describe the rather private performance of a text as it enacts itself within the consciousness of the reader. Like drugs, some of which affect some people one way, and some another, texts will elicit a variety of responses. The disturbing text for one reader will be, for others, completely ordinary or unremarkable. Children probably have more experiences of disturbing texts than adults—they are often disturbed by what might seem the most innocuous of books or movies. Some adults, too, will be especially sensitized to certain issues, and will be disturbed, say, by books in which animals are abused, or in which children are maltreated, or by books that depict victims of terminal diseases.

In short, there is an idiosyncratic element—as well as a socially programmed element—to the disturbing text. But the response is unmistakable. It is powerful and longlasting. As my epigraph suggests, Flaubert would certainly say a book has worth if it can inspire such a response, for it takes a long time to recover from the "punches" of a disturbing text. This is precisely the response I had to *Infinite Jest*: it haunted me for days, its images invaded or prevented my sleep, and I at once tried not to think about it and then found myself recurring to various passages either in the text itself or in my recollection of it. There are several famous cases of "disturbed" readers, such as Samuel Johnson (who was deeply disturbed by *King Lear*), Randall Jarrell (who had a similar response to "The Death of Ivan Ilych"), or, more recently, Donna Haraway (who writes about how her reading of John Varley's "Press Enter■" was disturbing). More than bothering readers, these texts cause worry. Indeed, they fulfill the etymology of "to worry," which comes from the Old English *wyrgen*, to strangle. For a few days they strangle normal life.[2]

Yet the disturbing text resists formal description. Something about the text causes mental distress, but the distress seems unrelated to genre, mode, or specifiable textual features. Not even horror stories or violent texts can be depended upon to disturb—some viewers will find them amusing or merely diverting. The repulsive, too, need not be disturbing; it in fact can sometimes even provoke mirth. In some way, readers surround their experience of a text with something like a fictional world only tangentially connected with the words on the page. The "disturbing" aspect of texts results from some combination of reader inference, textual structure, and cultural circumstances. This combination has been as difficult to entangle as it has been resistant to labeling.[3]

Philosophers and critics have given "disturbing texts" varying names. Noël Carroll points out in *The Philosophy of Horror* that texts such as *The Stranger* or *The 120 Days of Sodom* can be "horrific," but are not, generically speaking, horror. When Thomas J. Roberts, in *An Aesthetics of Junk Fiction*, refers to "ugliness in fiction" (57), he alludes to the same kind of works, and he cites novels by Louis Ferdinand Céline and Pauline Réage as paradigmatic examples, but he recognizes that we have no label for such fiction. In *Violence in the Arts*, John Fraser discusses a number of works of the same type. He writes, "[The film] *A Clockwork Orange*, in its general resonances, is a particularly striking example of a genre which has not, so far as I know, been given a name, but which deserves one and I shall call the Violation Movie" (16–17). Arthur C. Danto examines a kind of art, "the art of disturbation," which he claims "seeks to achieve, to produce an existential spasm through the intervention of images into life" (119). Predating all the aforementioned writers, Freud describes the indefinability of this particular feeling—the *Unheimlich*:

> It is undoubtedly related to what is frightening—to what arouses dread and horror; equally certainly, too, the word is not always used in a clearly definable sense, so that it tends to coincide with what excites fear in general. Yet we may expect that a special core of feeling is present which justifies the use of a special conceptual term. (219)

Such works—defined more by emotional reaction of reader or viewer than by formal features—inhabit a generic interstice: such is precisely the case with David Foster Wallace's massive novel as well.

One useful distinction when discussing this type of fiction is that made by Carroll between "entity" (i.e., monster)-based horror stories (his interest), and "event"-based horror tales. The event-based tale's energy, he says, "is spent constructing a psychologically disturbing event of preternatural origins." Carroll goes on, labeling such "event-based" horror stories "tales of dread." The defining characteristic of these tales is the reader's response to them:

> I do think that there is an important distinction between this type of story—which I want to call *tales of dread*—and horror stories. Specifically, the emotional response they elicit seems to be quite different than that engendered by art-horror. The uncanny event which tops off such stories causes a sense of unease and awe, perhaps of momentary anxiety and foreboding. These events are constructed to move the audience rhetorically to the point that one entertains the idea that unavowed, unknown, and perhaps concealed and inexplicable forces rule the universe. (42)

While Carroll, I think, unnecessarily narrows his definition, his general notion accords with mine. Finally, S. S. Prawer's *Caligari's Children: The Film as Tale of Terror*, looks at texts that cause terror: the elicitation of that emotion defines the genre that Prawer analyzes. Ugliness, dread, violation, *Unheimlich*, terror—all these terms describe subjective, emotional responses. And all these authors, while draw-

ing on many different kinds of art, are in fact engaging in a joint project: defining a genre of response.

INFINITE JEST AS PERFORMANCE

Before discussing how the reader "performs" this work or how that performance can be addictive or disturbing, I should at least outline something of how the novel is itself a performance capable of ensnaring the reader. Its plot, first off, demonstrates an inventiveness nearly run amok. In general, *Infinite Jest* is a science fiction novel of a sort insofar as it presents a future world. It's early twenty-first century North America, where the president is an ex-country singer, New England has been ceded to (foisted off on) Canada because the environment is so polluted, huge fans blow radioactive waste north over the border, and the years no longer carry numerical designators but have been named by the sponsors who paid for them. It's the era of "Revenue Enhanced Subsidized Time," and the years covered in the novel are "The Year of the Tucks Medicated Pad," "The Year of the Whopper," "The Year of Glad," and "The Year of the Depend Adult Undergarment."

Infinite Jest has an approximate, if protean, novelistic form, although it lacks an actual climax, its many plots and subplots fail to resolve fully, and the text is peppered with 388 notes. "Notes and Errata" in fact take up almost 100 fine-print pages at the end of the work—about twelve percent of the text—and themselves sometimes have footnotes, as well as lists, diagrams, cross-references to other notes, chemical formulas for drugs, directions for pronunciation, additional narrative information, or comments on the characters' thoughts or actions. Note twenty-four is an $8^1/_2$-page-long filmography of James O. Incandenza, a character who makes up a part of the backstory, or *Vorgeschichte*, of the novel.

To briefly summarize the story is to give some sense of the complexity of its performance. *Infinite Jest* is really three intertwined novels in one. It weaves the stories of 1) a preparatory-school boy named Hal Incandenza (son of the aforementioned filmmaker), who attends Enfield Tennis Academy and aspires to be a tennis pro, even while he fights a marijuana/drug addiction; 2) a drug addict, hit-man, thief—now attempting to reform and attending AA or NA meetings—named Don Gately, who has enormous physical size and strength and a genuine kindness and honesty, except when he is high on drugs or physically confronted; and 3) a legless, wheelchair-bound Québecois terrorist named Rémy Marathe who, somewhat unhappily married to a woman lacking a skull (her brain held in place by a helmet), spends a lot of time not only in elaborate terrorist acts of violence but in negotiation (with a future CIA-like agency) regarding the location of the fatal videotape. Each of these characters clearly has his own set of problems, largely centering on an inability to control destructive (or self-destructive) impulses. And each compels a "traditional" narrative interest, their individual stories mimicking or vaguely resembling recognizable, archetypal situations, such as *Bildungsroman*, metamorphosis, or quest.

Blended with these main narratives are the multiple subplots and local complications of the novel. Hal has two brothers, Orin and Mario, each of whom has a kind

of deformity or handicap (Orin's is more psychological, Mario's more physical). Don Gately has a number of scabrous acquaintances, and some less scabrous, for in fact his story intersects the Incandenzas'. Orin Incandenza's former girlfriend, Joelle van Dyne (whom he refers to as the "Prettiest Girl of All Time" or "P.G.O.A.T."), for example, becomes a resident of the halfway house where Gately works. She had been agonizingly beautiful to behold, though she may (she wears a veil, so one can't be sure) have had her face mutilated with acid. She evidently also acted in a number of James Incandenza's films, including the infamous *Infinite Jest*. The filmmaker himself, we learn, committed suicide by placing his head in a specially, lethally modified microwave oven and pressing the "on" button. Hal discovered his father because he (Hal) had been drawn to the kitchen by the smells of good cooking. Marathe's story also crisscrosses the others': while heading a band of terrorists seeking the lethal vidoetape in order to deploy it against the U.S., he searches for Joelle van Dyne, who might be a lead to the tape. Also wanting to locate any relatives of the filmmaker, he captures and interrogates Orin, whose fate is never resolved but is probably not a happy one. It may also be that he had interrogated Hal, and the tortures have rendered Hal aphasiac and almost epileptic at the novel's opening, from which the whole text, incidentally, is a flashback. (Or perhaps Hal had seen and been rescued from the video *Infinite Jest* or had experimented with a new kind of drug—Wallace leaves it open to speculation.) In an almost parodic, Joycean gesture, Wallace lightly links Gately to Marathe when Gately, driving his supervisor's car around Boston, sends with his spinning tires a "thick, flattened M.F. cup" into the storefront of "Antitoi Entertainment," whose proprietors, the brothers Antitoi, are shortly visited and tortured to death by Marathe and other "wheelchair assassins" (all wearing grinning, smily-face masks) who, if they "had one Achilles' heel it was their penchant for showing off, making a spectacle of denying any kind of physical limitation" (419). We don't find out for over 250 pages that Marathe's own response to the killing of the Antitois is nausea and vomiting (753), or even that it was Marathe himself who had done the torture-killing.

The language Wallace employs has a decidedly performative quality as well. Wallace himself recognizes his own proclivity for "showing off," what he calls in an interview a "desperate desire to please coupled with a kind of hostility to the reader." The interviewer, Larry McCaffrey, asks quite probingly, "In your own case, how does this hostility manifest itself?" and Wallace, displaying considerable self-knowledge, responds:

> Oh, not always, but sometimes the form of sentences that are syntactically not incorrect but still a real bitch to read. Or bludgeoning the reader with data. Or devoting a lot of energy to creating expectations and then taking pleasure disappointing them. (130)

At the time of the interview, Wallace was working on *Infinite Jest* and could have changed its "real bitch to read" sentences. But he evidently chose not to. Examples of such sentences can be found on every page. Yet many have a balance and beautiful rhythm to them as well: Wallace makes us work hard, but the performance is re-

warding. Wallace obviously values the well-crafted phrase, too. He writes in a review of John Updike's *Toward the End of Time* that, despite finding Updike's characters repellent, "I've continued to read Mr. Updike's novels and to admire the sheer gorgeousness of his descriptive prose" (337).

Mr. Wallace's own prose is itself quite distinctive. For example, the following sentence, describing Mario's relationship with Michael Pemulis, is not at all atypical, nor is it particularly lengthy for this book.

> Mario's the only other person sharing the optic-and-editing labs off the main tunnel, and the two have the kind of transpersonal bond that shared interests and mutual advantage can inspire: if Mario's not helping Pemulis fabricate the products of independent-optical-study work M.P. isn't really much into doing—you should see the boy with a convex lens, Avril likes to say within Mario's hearing; he's like a fish in brine—then Pemulis is giving Mario, who's a film-nut but no great tech-mind, serious help with cinemo-optical praxis, the physics of focal length and reflective compounds—you should see Pemulis with an emulsion curve, yawning blasély under his bill-reversed yachting hat and scratching an armpit, juggling differentials like a boy born to wear a pocket protector and high-water corduroys and electrician's tape on his hornrims' temples, asking Mario if he knows what you call three Canadians copulating on a snowmobile. (155)

But the performances of Wallace's sentences are not all syntactic ones; some are semantic performances, replete with the synesthesia and sense imagery of poetry: "If you close your eyes on a busy urban sidewalk the sound of everybody's different footwear's footsteps all put together sounds like something getting chewed by something huge and tireless and patient" (578). Another example comes from earlier in the book: "The day is autumnal and mild, the east breeze of urban commerce and the vague suede smell of new-fallen leaves" (169). Some of the verbal performances consist simply of clever phrasing. Wallace invents expressions such as "the stress and fluorescent hassles of public food shopping" (1021), "the oozing quality of large-group chemical fun and dancing and social intercoursing" (584). He notes "Ruth van Cleve's hair grew her head instead of the other way around" (698), a building's "tensed menace of a living thing that's chosen to hold itself still" (798), a man who "shook like an old machine" (714), the feeling Hal Incandenza has of being "meat in the room's sandwich" (902), the "listener-interest-independent" quality of a character's chatter (700), or the F. Scott Fitzgerald-esque "way a girl's face looks when she's dancing with you but would really rather be dancing with just about anyone else in the room" (437). In general, Wallace's prose takes considerable risks—for example, of losing both his reader's patience and comprehension—but on the whole the mixture of slang and literary language, of sense-imagery and figures of speech, of the trite and poetic, gives his work an energy, an incandescent sparkle, that entertains and delights.

Wallace's vocabulary, though, seems to suggest more showing off, more hostility toward the reader. The novel sends even the relatively well-educated to the dic-

tionary dozens, if not scores of times, to learn meanings of medical terms, such as hyperauxetic, plexor, urimie, dysphoria, leptsomatic, homodontic, colposcope, lazarette, phocomelic, salivious, restenotic, anaclitic; of architectural terms, such as pendentive, bolection, reglet, mucronate, entrepot, palestra; of speech terminology: stretto, apical, lalating, haplology, apocope; of terms zoological: semion, mysticetously, hanuman, remora; of photographic terms, such as acutance, halation; and of miscellaneous obscure words such as parping, rutilant, cunctation, tektitic, brisance, pricket, rutilant, candent, falcate, calotte, mafficking, agnate, pedalferrous, fulvous, erumpent, gonfalonish, strigil, morendo. Some words remain for me elusive and are probably jokes I'm not getting or neologisms of Wallace's: contuded, hulpil, egregulous, ascapartic, gumlet. This is a virtuoso vocabulist at work, performing busily, somewhat aggressively demonstrating his skill.

READER AS PERFORMER

Reading such a narrative, even to oneself, in solitude, is something of a performance. I say this somewhat in defiance of Erving Goffman's well-known definition of performance as "all the activity of a given participant on a given occasion which serves to influence in any way any of the other participants" (15). My idea is counterintuitive in that whilst reading alone there would seem to be only one participant—the reader—and nothing that reader can do in the act of reading will, on the face of it, have influence on anyone but herself. Just the same, I believe the reader is a kind of performer of (or perhaps "in") the narrative of *Infinite Jest*. The novel's performative gestures, its Brechtian alienation effects that interrupt the flow of the narrative and call attention to the work *qua* performance, encourage readers to become conscious of their own performances as readers. Through the constant flipping back and forth between text and notes, between text and dictionaries, between one portion of the text and another (the Don Gately narrative breaks off for almost 200 pages, for example, after Gately is shot, leaving the reader waiting a very long time—eight reading hours, give or take—to discover a main character's fate), one comes to understand that reading this novel is a near-aerobic activity. What Wallace wants to do—and succeeds in doing, I think—is put the reader in the place of the characters, in the world of the Year of the Tucks Medicated Pad, or of the Depend Adult Undergarment: to read this novel, in some sense, is to perform it, as an actor saying lines onstage. It is set up such that the reader's active involvement, the reader's performance of the novel, causes him to mingle the activity of narrative enjoyment and engagement—that feeling of being "stitched in" to a narrative—with other activities of, e.g., understanding what this or that graph or formula or sentence means (a cognitive activity), or of locating a word's meaning in a dictionary or of finding a note in the back of the book (motor activities), or of dealing with a horrifyingly violent visuality (an emotional activity), or of piecing out and following a very complex but engaging plot (let us call this a narrative-reading activity that in this book subsumes the others). One repeatedly asks, "Why am I reading this?" "Why am I looking up this word?" "Why am I bothering with that endnote?" and yet one reads on, captivated by

it just the same, but its sheer performative coruscation, by its way of taking the reader into its world: the reader is worked on—or over—by this novel.

Of course Wallace is not the first to write a novel with endnotes or use an arcane vocabulary or embed narratives and documents within the narrative proper. Sterne's *Tristram Shandy* uses similar devices and is not at all disturbing, or at least not disturbing in the specific sense I mean. Indeed, in some way such devices are by now standard writerly metafictional ploys. From Sterne to Nabokov, or even to Edmund Morris's *Dutch*, there are many instances of canonical and noncanonical narratives that deploy similar devices. But I am concentrating here on *Infinite Jest* because what is singular about it is its peculiar performance of disturbance. What distinguishes Wallace's novel, I think, is that his novel's odd devices are not intended as experimental, ornamental, or even entirely ludic, but they are inextricably woven into the texture of the novel itself, just as character and incident are, in Henry James's famous formulation, one and the same: "What is character but the determination of incident? What is incident but the illustration of character?" (55). A disturbing text clearly includes a number of elements that together make for a certain response, but no single element encountered in another text will necessarily cause a similar response. All the elements of a given text are *sui generis.* In Wallace's novel, for example, differences in degree (i.e., number of footnotes, metafictional devices, etc.) become so great that they approach differences in kind, and their sheer excess renders them more than just devices.

And finally, the kind of performance implicit in the "fiction I surround it with" is, in the case of Wallace's novel, near overwhelming in its complexity. I believe this can be attributed to the novel's ever-mushrooming heteroglossia; to its vast array of associated plots, characters, incidents; to its profusion of genres, documents, and voices; to its mixture of high and low art; to its amorality, its immorality, its moralizing. Tom LeClair gets at the same idea when he mentions "Wallace's multiple points of view, both first- and third-person; stylistic *tours de force* in several dialects; a swirling associative structure; and alternations in synecdochic scale . . . methods [that] produce, not just length, but a prodigious density because parts do not disappear into conventional and easily processed wholes" (35). In short, no reader can surround this world with a single fiction, but must sustain dozens of them as she moves through the novel.

In many ways Wallace's novel is a paradigm example of the dialogic novel described by Bakhtin. Using a Bakhtinian optic, Jackson Cope describes a similar dialogism in Robert Coover's *The Public Burning*: "This act of juxtaposing high and low, turning worlds into a myriad atomic world views whirling in a gathered space to create a world view, one from many, a view of the world never enunciated by the author: this is, of course, the spatial metaphor for the 'dialogic' novel" (75–76). Indeed, *Infinite Jest* could be seen as a collection of numerous short stories all linked by taking place in a relatively circumscribed fictive world. But they range over such a wide area, emotionally and intellectually, that the resultant reader response is, if not a farrago, then an exceptionally dense and varied phenomenological galaxy. While this novel may tend toward pastiche, it ultimately emerges as a unified whole, but the associational gallimaufry it stimulates, the vast array of personal fic-

tions that a reader undoubtedly will bring to it, makes for a highly charged and performative reading.

READER AS ADDICT

The reader's performance of *Infinite Jest* has a kind of pathological quality to it, however: it resembles addiction. To read this novel is to create in oneself the necessity to psychologically perform a part in it. Indeed, the A-effects have an addictive quality for author as well as for the reader (Wallace, discussing the endnotes, in an interview with Michael Feldman: "the problem is, they get kind of addictive"). Yet in addition to "addictive" A-effects, Wallace creates what Noël Carroll calls an "erotetic" narrative, that is, one that keeps opening up interesting, urgent questions that the reader needs to have answered. But the novel's performance is stunning and enthralling on more than the narrative level. On the microlevel of the sentence or paragraph, Wallace's turns of phrase produce the verbal equivalent of a "fix."

This compulsive readibility resonates somewhat plangently, though, for the reader, who must come to a self-conscious realization that his behavior resembles that of the drug addicts Wallace's novel focuses on. The novel as a whole explores the world of the addict, the complex rationalizations, the myriad humiliations, the refusal to see the future, the loss of physical/psychological integrity, the overpowering force of continual need. By making the novel a kind of addiction, a reading experience that modifies ordinary reading behavior in the people who encounter it, and at the same time making it about such behavior in characters, Wallace creates a work that is extraordinarily disturbing. It not only presses the reader into service, as a character in the novel's world, but it forces the reader to recognize the kind of behavior she is engaged in. To read *Infinite Jest* is, in some way, to become the pathologically ambitious tennis player, the desperate show-off, the helpless addict—and to know it.

Crack Wars, Avital Ronell's unusual and provocative treatise that explores the very nature of addiction within a society, also examines the notion of novel as addiction, novel as forbidden drug. He focuses on *Madame Bovary*: "Few other works of fiction have brought out evidence of the pharmacodependency with which literature has always secretly been associated—as sedative, as cure, as escape conduit or euphorizing substance, as mimetic poisoning" (11). Ronell also cites how *Ulysses* was also treated as if it were a drug—either "emetic formula or aphrodisiac philtre" (55), as was Burroughs's *Naked Lunch*. Such works confront the culture, in some sense, by creating an alternative space, a space that stimulates *désoeuvrement*, an "unworking" that poses a threat to all culture. The trouble is, to an extent, that "good drugs [are] always haunted or contaminated by bad drugs" (73), so that if a novel has an addictive effect, if readers feel themselves drawn in and changed, then that novel finds itself in some legal turmoil, for this kind of relationship with a text too clearly competes against prevailing power structures.[4]

That Wallace intended such a strange yet compelling relationship with the text seems quite possible. He wants the reader to somehow fully inhabit his characters' personalities. In his interview with McCaffrey, he confides the following:

> I guess a big part of serious fiction's purpose is to give the reader, who like all of us is sort of marooned in her own skull, to give her imaginative access to other selves. Since an ineluctable part of being a human self is suffering, part of what we humans come to art for is an experience of suffering, necessarily a vicarious experience, more like a *generalization* of suffering. Does this make sense? We all suffer alone in the real world; true empathy's impossible. But if a piece of fiction can allow us imaginatively to identify with characters' pain, we might then also more easily conceive of others identifying with our own. (127)

Wallace stated this in 1993, while he was working on *Infinite Jest*. The problem he evidently faced, in his work-in-progress, was how to make readers identify with—i.e. have "imaginative access to"—drug addicts, and not just dismiss such people as the detritus of our society (as some critics have in fact done with Wallace's characters).

That he was seeking to draw (kidnap? press? force?) the reader into his novel's world is bolstered by his introduction in the novel of a future videotape (actually a "disc-laser cartridge") that is so transfixing, fascinating, and addictive that viewers do not eat or drink while watching it, and eventually die, as the tape plays over and over. Even though the tape may share the novel's title, I doubt that Wallace would want his readers to die while reading his novel, a turn of events that would certainly cut into his royalty checks, but this apparently playful yet convulsive art-as-lethal-weapon element drives one of the novel's three main plots (that involving Marathe and the "wheelchair assassins"). At the same time, though, the videotape provides a paradigm case of "pure pleasure" art—an extension of television, which Wallace sees as destructive. He tells McCaffrey, "It's impossible to spend that many slack-jawed, spittle-chinned, formative hours in front of commercial art without internalizing the idea that one of the main goals of art is simply to *entertain*, give people sheer pleasure" (130). The tape *Infinite Jest*, in its world of the novel, is both a wild exaggeration of television's addictive power and a reminder that the novel, *Infinite Jest*, is replicating this power, at least on one level.

As a narrative about addiction, then, that forces the reader into a narrative-addiction (similar to a drug addiction) in order to "perform" or read it, Wallace's novel creates a weird mixture of effects that has some of the same mesmerizing, disturbing, addictive power as the fatal videotape. To read *Infinite Jest* is, almost, to watch the fatal videotape. Indeed, rendering oneself numb to the external world ("high," "buzzed," "stoned," "whacked," etc.) is essentially a performance for an audience of one; as the reader binds to the book, so the addict isolates himself from social interaction. Not surprisingly, in the world of the novel, the U.S. has been renamed O.N.A.N., an acronym suggesting the self-absorbed disconnection and solitary pleasure-seeking of its citizenry.

FICTIONAL WORLD OR "REAL WORLD"

I have been arguing that one reason *Infinite Jest* has such a curious power over the reader is the fact that the reader is performing (within) its world, having on some

level ceased to draw a dividing line between art and life. But I need to specify a little more what happens in the case of this novel and others works that I am labeling "disturbing texts."

To back up a bit, usually philosophers have suggested that a paradox of sorts occurs when readers experience emotional responses to a text because they know full well that what they are reading is not actual. Noël Carroll summarizes this paradox as follows:

> We are genuinely moved by fiction.
> We know that that which is portrayed in fiction is not actual.
> We are only genuinely moved by what we believe is actual. (87)

These three propositions present a paradox that may be resolved only by showing how one of the propositions is either untrue or incomplete. Some writers, such as Kendall Walton, deny the first proposition, suggesting that we experience "make-believe" sorts of emotions in response to fictions—these are similar to ordinary emotions but ultimately fictional. Others suggest that while reading we are under the impression (or "illusion") that what we read is actually happening before us, and hence deny the second proposition. Noël Carroll denies the third proposition and suggests that we can be moved not just by the actual but also by what we can think of or conceive of as possibly actual: "We can be moved by prospects that we imagine" (88), he writes. My somewhat counterintuitive solution to the paradox is that when reading certain works, such as in this case *Infinite Jest*, we are not under the impression or illusion that what is happening in the text is real; rather, for us it is real, it has become actual.

I have suggested that there is an addictive quality to the *Infinite Jest*—in order to engage its idea one must share some personality trait or proclivity with the addict. In "performing" the novel, then, we become part of its narrative landscape. Hence the novel becomes more real, and emotional response to it becomes more intense. As Ronell remarks, "Literature, which is by no means an innocent bystander but often the accused, [is] a breeding ground of hallucinogenres" (11). The text gives us, as Henry James remarked in 1883 (obviously in reference to another work of fiction), the "illusion of having lived another life" (qtd. in Iser 127). Yet while it in some sense replicates the "feeling" of life, it is also clearly just a performance, an illusion. Wolfgang Iser remarks:

> Here illusion means our own projects, which are our share in the gestalten which we produce and in which we are entangled. . . . [A]s we read, we react to what we ourselves have produced, and it is this mode of reaction that, in fact, enables us to experience the text as an actual event. We do not grasp it like an empirical object; nor do we comprehend it like a predicative fact; it owes its presence in our minds to our own reactions, and it is these that make us animate the meaning of the text as a reality. (127–29)

In short, Iser suggests that we "produce" texts via our own set of reactions to them.

One reaction needed to "get through" *Infinite Jest* is a kind of obsessiveness, one that reminds us how small the distance between ourselves and the characters.

Perhaps the most famous account of emotions in response to texts (in the philosophical writings of the last twenty years or so) is of the fear experienced by "Charles," a fictional character—actually a heuristic device—created by the philosopher Kendall Walton. As Charles watches a horror movie where an animate smile threateningly approaches, he certainly does have all the physical signs of fear, but the question is, Does he feel "genuine" fear? Is Charles "genuinely moved" by the fiction? Here is Walton's formulation:

> Charles is watching a horror movie about a terrible green slime. He cringes in his seat as the slime oozes slowly but relentlessly over the earth, destroying everything in its path. Soon a greasy head emerges from the undulating mass, and two beady eyes fix the camera. The slime, picking up speed, oozes on a new course straight toward the viewers. Charles emits a shriek and clutches desperately at his chair. Afterwards, still shaken, he confesses that he was "terrified" of the slime.
>
> Was he terrified of it? I think not. Granted, Charles's condition is similar in certain obvious respects to that of a person frightened of a pending real-world disaster. His muscles are tensed, he clutches his chair, his pulse quickens, his adrenaline flows. Let us call this physiological-psychological state *quasi-fear*. But it does not constitute genuine fear. (196)

Walton then goes on to claim that Charles is "participating psychologically in his game of make-believe. It is not true but fictional that he fears the slime" (242). But Walton extends his theory to other emotions experienced while reading. "We do not actually pity Willy Loman or grieve for Anna Karenina or admire Superman . . . nor do we feel contempt for Iago or worry about Tom Sawyer and Becky lost in the cave. But it is fictional that we do" (249). Fictional emotions can in fact be quite powerful, can even resemble real emotions, but ultimately, according to Walton, they are tantamount to those experienced when we make up a game and play it within the rules. Walton contends that we do not *really* believe in the actuality of the text-world; instead, we "make-believe" in it. Like children who invent imaginary roles they play, or assign imaginary identities to things (e.g., saying that each tree stump they encounter in the woods is a bear), readers "make-believe" in the fiction they encounter. Children know that the stumps they pretend are bears are not really bears but stumps, yet for the sake of the game, they sustain the pretense.

Noël Carroll's solution is also ingenious, but somewhat different from Walton's. Carroll contends that we feel emotion in response not only to what we believe to be real, but also to the thought of what "could be" real. For example, he suggests that we feel genuine fear while, say, standing on a high balcony, because we entertain the thought of falling. Carroll goes on, quite convincingly, to suggest that, when feeling emotion in response to horror texts, we look for the emotional reaction of the characters in the text itself and model our response around those reactions. Hence, seeing how the depicted "ordinary" humans respond gives the reader some basis for

her "thought of" situation. There is, then, an implied social context to the experiencing of what Carroll calls "art-horror." If, say, a monster appears and the people around accept it as a pleasant pet or a harmless holographic projection, then the "thought of" such a monster actually appearing is tempered by the depicted normal human response.[5] Similarly, if the monster is seen as a dreadful, vicious menace and the characters react to it as such, the "thought of" such an actual monster is based on these normal characters' response and mimics that response. The reader responds to characters or situations as if they were real.

Bijoy Boruah has a similar solution. He focuses on why we grant "reality" to fictions and "not dismiss them as 'mere fictions.'" He suggests that we can have an

> evaluative belief about a character or event without at the same time having an existential belief about the character or event. . . . [T]he evaluative belief is a causally potent factor in the evocation of an emotion. Whereas in the real-life case this potency is actualized when the evaluative belief is combined with the existential belief, in the fictional case this potency is actualized when the evaluative belief is appropriately united with the imagination. (125)

Essentially Boruah splits "belief" into two parts: existential belief is the part that implies the object of belief actually exists. Evaluative belief involves assessing the object itself—it is the portion of belief that we can move into or up to once we are convinced of an object's existence. Therefore the idea that "we know that that which is portrayed in fictions is not actual" (proposition 2, *supra*) no longer is true, for the existential belief has been in some sense compensated for by the imagination. We do know that the text is not "real," but as in Carroll's solution, Boruah's suggests that the "thought of" or "imagination of" a text's situation can allow us to have full emotional response to it and also be simultaneously aware that it does not exist.

All of these philosophers are probably correct that the emotion we (generally) feel in response to fiction is not equivalent to "real" emotion. They suggest, for example, that the emotion is somehow special, truncated, not quite genuine: "make-believe," "quasi-fear," "art-horror." Therefore, it would not be subject to the same conditions as a "typical emotion" (that is, belief in the actuality of its cause). However, I reject this particular turn of the argument, for although I freely admit that the emotions we feel in response to texts tend not to be of the same depth, complexity, or duration as "real" emotions, they *sometimes are*, as in the case of disturbing texts. A spectrum of kinds of texts clearly exists, and where texts fit along the spectrum depends on several factors. On one end of this spectrum are those texts which tend to stimulate "quasi-fear" type of emotions: this is the case with much formulaic fiction (e.g., the genre film with the slime that Walton posits), or with children's stories or fairy tales; perhaps it is the case with some of our experience of "serious" fiction as well. Or it could obtain when a given reader is in a given mood—or with some readers when they are in any mood: the reading community is not heterogeneous, a notion that must factor into any generalizations about reading. At the other end of the spectrum are those texts that stimulate complex emotions remarkably similar to

those experienced in nontextual realms, emotions that might involve mixed, elaborate, sometimes even contradictory feelings, for example.

With regard to the philosophical paradox I started with, there are some cases when the text attains to a less make-believe-ish status: we hypostatize it; we see it as being part of our "real world." Boruah's and Carroll's positions are not, I feel, sufficiently strongly stated: in fact, in the case of the disturbing text, suddenly the text becomes, for the reader, "real," another element of what Emerson called the "not-me" but with the stunningly counterintuitive feature: no distinction is made between the "fictive" and the "real." Jean-Paul Sartre comes close to making this same point in *What Is Literature?*:

> Tintoretto did not choose that yellow rift in the sky above Golgotha to *signify* anguish as to *provoke* it. It is anguish and yellow sky at the same time. Not sky of anguish or anguished sky; it is an anguish become thing, an anguish which has turned into yellow rift of sky, and which thereby is submerged and impasted by the qualities peculiar to things. (3)

The text, in this case a painting, becomes a thing of this world: actuality and artwork have fully merged in the viewer's mind; the artwork affects her in the same way as do "real" objects; it has a truth that deeply stirs the viewer. It is in fact not art, but life.

The final scene of *Infinite Jest* best represents the strange novel that it is, as well as the position that the reader finds himself in. It is the position of an addict who no longer has any options left. It is the position, in fact, of Gene Fackelmann, a coworker of Gately's whom Wallace introduces near the end of *Infinite Jest*. Fackelmann and Gately work together doing collections for a character named Whitey Sorkin. They rough up or otherwise coerce people into paying their bets. But Fackelmann is also a hopeless drug addict, and in the last pages of the book, he and Gately ingest a small mountain of Dilaudid, which unfortunately was purchased with money that Fackelmann had embezzled from Sorkin. When Sorkin learns of the defalcation, he sends another hit-man, named C, who happens to be a sadist, to find and kill Fackelmann; Sorkin gives C *carte blanche* to do with Fackelmann whatever he wants. C brings with him a team of cohorts who administer drugs to Fackelmann and Gately—to Fackelmann so that he can feel pain again (his ingestion of drugs had basically numbed him, and C wants him to feel pain) and to Gately, in order to prevent him from interfering. The last thing Gately sees is C's crew sewing Fackelmann's eyes open. They want Fackelmann to be able to see what is happening to him (C = "see"?), and what is happening will no doubt be horrible indeed.

The reader, who presumably has read over 900 pages of the narrative at this point, is in the same position as Fackelmann: the reader cannot help but look, cannot help but finish the novel at this point. It occurred to me that while there had been terribly gruesome and horrifying passages throughout the book, I always had had the option of passing over them. But a page from the end, when all the plots seemed more or less unresolved, when the slight but dimming hope or promise of a resolution or denouement still lingered, I somehow had given up the option of skipping:

my eyes, too, were as if sewn open. I was no longer witnessing a narrative; I was part of the performance.

Yet how could anyone see a world such as that portrayed in *Infinite Jest*—with its legless wheelchair terrorists, its gigantic mutant infants, its fatal videotape—as "real"? Wouldn't doing so be an utterly eccentric response? In brief, I don't believe that the entirety of the novel is "real"—certainly not its depicted political world or physical features, certainly not the characters themselves or the things that happen to them. What remains as a "real" thing, what continues to disturb, however, is a series of scenes and a series of descriptions, all of them involving various performances that are so graphic, so detailed, that they linger in consciousness, in memory. They take place before one's eyes even after the book is completed. They are so vividly performed by the characters, by the author in conjunction with the reader, in a sense, that they have a psychological actuality similar to that of "actual" things.

Arthur C. Danto adumbrates my notion of the "disturbing text" in his *The Philosophical Disenfranchisement of Art*. Here he distinguishes between a relatively typical kind of art that represents events or people that affect the viewer, and art he calls "disturbatory," which "provide[s] an existential spasm through the intervention of images into life" (119). "Reality" makes up a portion of disturbatory art, and usually the portion of reality included is itself somehow threatening or ugly: "obscenity, frontal nudity, blood, excrement, mutilation, real danger, actual pain, possible death" (121). It is a kind of art in which "the contract that defines our rights as an audience is cancelled" (124). Danto's contract deals with "audience rights," for example, the right not to be injured or spat on or even touched during an art performance or theater event, and it is clear that much performance art violates this contract: the "fictive" ruptures into the "real"; the performance is actuality; we go home with stains of excrement on our clothing or welts on our buttocks, as do some of the audience for *Belle de Jour*, according to Richard Schechner (299). I think something of the same kind of thing happens with disturbing fiction, such as this novel by David Foster Wallace: a novel can break this contract by making readers go places psychologically whither they would not ordinarily venture.

In her study, *Intimate Violence*, Laura Tanner explores the phenomenology of this kind of novel, and the "actuality" of its effect. She discusses what John Fraser might call a "violation" text, what Sartre might call an "anguish become thing":

> The intimacy of the reading experience often allows us to come close to characters and experiences that we might otherwise never encounter; by the same token, however, it can force our intimacy by subtly pushing us into imaginative landscapes of violation from which it is difficult to extricate ourselves. (ix)

Tanner is obviously talking about a psychological extrication that differs from a physical extrication (as one might have to effect at one of the "disturbatory" performance pieces to which Danto alludes). But this psychological extrication is in some ways more difficult, for one cannot escape one's own mind and memories. Once certain images are stuck in one's head, it makes little difference how they got there—they're real regardless of provenance.

CONCLUSION: THE DIVIDED CONSCIOUSNESS

Because *Infinite Jest* casts the reader into a role as performer, the events of the novel take on a much more heightened, vivid quality; their power to touch the reader's emotions becomes greatly enhanced. Unwittingly at first, but then quite self-consciously, the reader assumes a role while reading the novel, and must reevaluate her own position during reading, must in some sense adjust to and cope with the computer-virus-like program that the novel has used to infect her mind. To put it in other terms, to read this novel requires a kind of internalization of it that most novels do not require, and the intensity or depth of this renders the events of this novel somehow more actual—less like fiction—than those of a more typical narrative.

The performative nature of the novel in some way forces the reader into a divided consciousness—one part of consciousness "performs for" the other. My suggestion is that this radical split causes the novel to be disturbing to readers: the book divides us, as it were, between a consciousness "caught up in the story," and a consciousness that, because of the multiple Brechtian alienation effects employed by Wallace, tries to unravel the meaning of the words, sentences, and plot. This second consciousness views the book from a more distanced perspective, but this perspective subsumes the "caught-up-in-the-story" reading consciousness and views that consciousness as having merged with the fictive universe set up by Wallace. Something like this probably happens when encountering any narrative. But *Infinite Jest* seems to encourage such a splitting of consciousness, perhaps because it includes not just the Brechtian A-effects such as "Notes and Errata," an arcane vocabulary, and a tortuous plot, but also because it is itself such a shimmeringly impressive performance on so many levels that the reader is drawn in at the same time he is confounded and repulsed by the work.

What is the effect of this "divided consciousness"? One part of the reader binds to, imaginatively inhabits, the fictive world of text; the other consults the notes, the dictionary. In some sense this split represents the ontological split between the hagiographic and the quotidian. Part of us longs for the aesthetic fulfillment of Wallace's prose, the compulsively interesting, erotetic narrative; the other part longs for fuller explanations of details of the text. The irony is that the part of us engaged with the text does not want explanations or etiology or formulas for drugs or definitions of archaic words, but further traffickings with the text itself. The part of the self not so engaged with the text wants these explanations to somehow explain what it is that the other part of self is doing, wants the notes or definitions or charts to provide insight at once into text and into self.

Coming away from the novel, I felt as if I were leaving a weird and awful country. I felt violated, to an extent, and addicted, along with the characters. I felt as trapped as they felt. In many ways the feeling resembled my feeling when going through a very large exhibit of Francis Bacon's paintings. I felt as though I had been looking at the insides of people's bodies or minds—not really just characters', but people's—and these minds were exploding, or imploding, before me. The novel fluctuated between providing moments of hilarity and insight with moments of extreme despair, even horror. One character is gagged during a robbery but since he has a bad

cold and is unable to breathe through his nose, he breaks bones trying to breathe. He dies horribly. Another character has a sharpened broomstick shoved down his throat, through his body, and then out into the floor, skewering him. It had been a broom he had carefully fabricated and almost perversely loved. Significantly, the nearly two-page sentence describing his death is the longest, and one of the most difficult in the novel—and the effort needed to unravel its meaning and syntax repays one with what reward but a scene of unmitigated horror.[6] Another character, Orin Incandenza, is trapped by his former lover inside an inverted glass bowl, and cockroaches are let in to an opening at the top of the bowl. Yet another character mainlines what he thinks is a drug but what turns out to be Drano, and this causes his eyes to spontaneously enucleate. The examples of characters dying or being injured by what they like the most—what they are addicted to—are multitudinous. So in some sense as we become more addicted to this novel, a response by the way all but necessary to get through it ("submit to the addiction," another blurb-writer, this one for *Book Page*, writes), we sense that we are somehow in danger—in psychological danger, perhaps similar to that of "disturbatory" art, or of people watching the fatal videotape.[7]

Ultimately, Wallace's novel almost ensorcells readers, entangling them in a web created of apparently mutually exclusive roles which they are constantly struggling to reconcile. Its casting of readers makes them spectators as well as performers, and part of what they spectate on is the self wrapped up in narrative. As Herbert Blau remarks,

> It is in this thievish space of private being that, in the very deepest sense, the spectator is constituted and—for Beckett as well as Artaud—the theater gives birth to its Double, the self-reflexive subject of thought, the thinking subject stealing thought away, eye of flesh, eye of prey, bringing death to the bloody show. . . . Which is the vice of representation in the dominion of death, that death can only be *represented.* Which is to say it can only be theater, falsifying theater, that repeats it over and over, an interior duplication of the division, the *sparagmos*, the originary bloody show. (80)

Like Yorick, whose skull Hamlet hefts as he talks of the man of "infinite jest," the reader has also been in a sense dismembered. For this work finally evokes its greatest disturbance not merely by showcasing scenes of horror involving torture, violence, rape, and mutilation, but by its forcing of the reader to perform these scenes, to assume its curious language and its strange world, to dive deeply into these and then apparently come out via A-effects, but not really emerge. And when the reader does emerge into a "real" world, that world has itself metamorphosed into something different—something, perhaps, a little bit more alien.

ENDNOTES

1. Translation from the French is my own.

2. For more detailed documentation of the kind of response associated with the disturbing text, see my 1998 essay "The Phenomenology of the Disturbing Text."

3. My relative, the philosopher Frank Salvatore Cioffi, cites an interesting example of how two readers can have diametrically opposite reactions to a given work. Marius Bewley sees *What Maisie Knew* as being a horror story about the "meaning and significance of evil," while F. R. Leavis sees the work as "an extraordinarily high-spirited comedy." In attempting to account for these widely discrepant readings, Cioffi suggests that what Wittgenstein might call "the fiction I surround it [the text] with" forms the basis for response as much as the text itself (103).

4. It is in some way surprising that Wallace did not get into any legal trouble with Gil Antitoi, "my friend and foe and bane" (11), his adolescent tennis rival in Central Illinois described in Wallace's essay "Derivative Sport in Tornado Alley." Torturing and killing off the brothers Antitoi in the gruesome way that he does in *Infinite Jest* might have a therapeutic value for Wallace (fiction "as sedative, as cure," *pace* Ronell), but paradoxically makes the torture/murder scenes less disturbing, for it moves them out of the realm of the fictive world and into the realm of something else, e.g., revenge or therapy for the author. Wallace's naming a character Katherine Gompert (the name of another classmate) may also have caused some legal difficulty for him, but news of this vanished from various web sites as quickly as it appeared, and I can at present find no reference to it.

5. The "friendly monster" has become a feature of contemporary films. For example, the "Wookie" in the original *Star Wars*; Jar Jar Binks in the most recently released prequel, *The Phantom Menace*; the extra-terrestrial in *E.T.*; or ALF in the television show of the same name are all frighteningly ugly creatures, on the face of it, but they are harmless and even friendly. Other characters do not fear them, and if they do, then that is clearly the wrong response.

6. "Words that are not and can never be words are sought by Lucien here through what he guesses to be the maxillofacial movements of speech, and there is a childlike pathos to the movements that perhaps this rigid-grinned A.F.R. leader can sense, perhaps that is why his sigh is sincere, his complaint sincere when he complains that what will follow will be *inutile*, there will be no point serviced, there are several dozen highly trained and motivated wheelchaired personnel here who will find whatever they seek and more, anyhow, perhaps it is sincere, the Gallic shrug and fatigue of the voice through the leader's mask-hole, as Lucien's leonine head is tilted back by a hand in his hair and his mouth opened wide by callused fingers that appear overhead and around the sides of his head from behind and jack his writhing mouth open so wide that the tendons in his jaws tear audibly and Lucien's first sounds are reduced from howls to a natal gargle as the pale wicked tip of the broom he loves is inserted, the wood piney-tasting then white tasteless pain as the broom is shoved in and abruptly down by the big and collared A.F.R., thrust farther in rhythmically in strokes that accompany each syllable in the wearily repeated *'In-U-Tile'* of the technical interviewer, down into Lucien's wide throat and lower, small natal cries escaping around the brown glazed shaft, the strangled impeded sounds of absolute aphonia, the landed-fish gasps that accompany speechlessness in a dream, the cleric-collared A.F.R. driving the broom home now to half its length, up on his stumps to get downward leverage as the fibers that protect the esophagal terminus resist and then give with a crunching pop and splat the bathes Lucien's teeth and tongue and makes of itself in the air a spout, and his gargled sounds now sound drowned; and behind fluttering lids the aphrasiac half-cellular insurgent who loves only to sweep and dance in a clean pane sees snow on the round hills of his native Gaspé, pretty curls of smoke from chimneys, his mother's linen apron, her kind red face above his crib, homemade skates and cider-steam, Chic-Choc lakes seen stretching away from the Cap-Chat hillside they skied down to Mass, the red face's noises he knows from the tone are tender, beyond crib and rimed window Gaspésie lake after lake after lake lit up by the near-Arctic sun and stretching out in the southeastern distance like chips of broken glass thrown to scatter across the white Chic-Choc country, gleaming, and the river Ste.-Anne a ribbon of light, unspeakably pure; and as the culcate handle navigates the inguinal canal and sigmoid with a queer deep full hot tickle and with a grunt and shove completes its passage and forms an obscene erectile bulge in the back of his red sopped johns, bursting then through the wool and puncturing tile and floor at a police-lock's canted angle to hold him upright on his knees, completely skewered, and as the attentions of the A.F.R.s in the little room are turned from him to the shelves and trunks of the Antitois' sad insurgents' lives, and Lucien finally dies, rather a while after he's quit shuddering like a clubbed muskie and seemed to them to die, as he finally sheds his body's suit, Lucien finds his gut and throat again and newly whole, clean and unimpeded, and is free, catapulted home over fans and the Convex-

ity's glass palisades at desperate speeds, soaring north, sounding a bell-clear and nearly maternal call-to-arms in all the world's well-known tongues" (487–89).

7. For the kind of obsessive behavior the novel inspires in others, see the following web sites: Bob Wake, "*Infinite Jest*: Reviews, Articles, and Miscellany," <http://www.smallbytes.net/~bobkat/jesterlist.html>; Nick Maniatis, "The Howling Fantods," <http://www.geocities.com/Athens/Acropolis/8175/dfw.htm>; Tim Ware, "*Infinite Jest* Online Index," <*http://www.ironhorse.com/~thamer/dfw/*>.

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