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DAVID FOSTER WALLACE SPECIAL ISSUE

'The Realer, More Enduring and Sentimental Part of Him': David Foster Wallace's Personal Library and Marginalia

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This article asks what kind of relationship critics can posit between, on the one hand, David Foster Wallace's personal library and marginalia and, on the other hand, his published works of fiction. The controversy surrounding Maria Bustillos' 2011 reading of annotations in a selection of Wallace's self-help texts – one result of which was the redaction of those texts from the archive – has served to reinforce the conventional critical understanding of authorly marginalia as a form of personal revelation or truth, and, by extension, as a kind of allegorical key to the respective literary oeuvre. However, this article contends that such a straightforward model of interpretation is unsettled by a reading of the marginalia alongside Wallace's novel *Infinite Jest* and his short story 'Good Old Neon.' The article concludes that, once the annotations are placed into this more dynamic relation with the fiction, such seemingly fundamental and potentially 'therapeutic' notions as truth, origin, and the 'inner self' are actually shown to be intertextually and ideologically entangled with a set of popular North American discourses that not only traverse Wallace's library and oeuvre, but continue to shape his reception inside and outside the academy.

Key for Archival Materials

(author of book being annotated, along with any relevant extra information) Fragment of text from the original book, which may have been underlined, [highlighted or bracketed], or marked in some other way by Wallace.

Wallace's annotations on this fragment.

[. . .] 'the link between a proper name and the individual being named and the link between an author's name and that which it names are not isomorphous and do not function in the same way' [. . .]

– Michel Foucault, with underlinings by David Foster Wallace¹

Gobbledegook

– Wallace's marginal inscription on the above²

Introduction: DFW's Family Secrets

In April 2011, the journalist Maria Bustillos published an article called 'Inside David Foster Wallace's Private Self-Help Library' at the popular culture website *The Awl*, detailing the findings of a research trip to the author's archive and personal library, which had been held at the Harry Ransom Centre at the University of Texas at Austin for a little over a year. 'One surprise,' writes Bustillos, 'was the number of popular self-help books in the collection, and the care and attention with which [Wallace] read and reread them':

I mean stuff of the best-sellingest, Oprah-level cheesiness and la-la reputation was to be found in Wallace's library. Along with all the Wittgenstein, Husserl and Borges, he read John Bradshaw, Willard Beecher, Neil Fiore, Andrew Weil, M. Scott Peck and Alice Miller. Carefully.³

¹ Cited in Wallace's review copy of Hix, *Morte d'Author: An Autopsy* (HRC), a 1990 analysis of the question of the 'death of the author' in critical theory. Wallace's 1992 review is reprinted as 'Greatly Exaggerated'.

² Wallace, marginal inscription in Hix, *Morte d'Author* (HRC).

³ Bustillos, 'Inside David Foster Wallace's Private Self-Help Library'.

Based on a selection of the marginalia that Wallace left in these books – especially Miller's *The Drama of the Gifted Child* (1981) and Bradshaw's *Bradshaw On: The Family* (1986) – Bustillos suggests that the author had sought and received recognition as a 'genius' throughout his life, but had also recognized the need to accept his own 'ordinariness' or 'regular guy-ness' in order to survive recurrent battles with alcohol and drug addiction and depression.⁴ Bustillos reads Wallace's annotations as evidence that 'he felt particularly nailed and revealed to himself' by the apparently banal diagnostics of these self-help manuals, in particular with regards to his relationship with his mother, a copy of whose English grammar textbook *Practically Painless English* (1980) is also in Wallace's library (unannotated). Noting several phrases ('the howling fantods') and stylistic elements ('a strangely compelling, idiosyncratic beauty and charm') that the textbook seems to share with Wallace's work, Bustillos contends that Wallace 'identified so closely with his mom, it's as if she got caught in the crosshairs of his self-loathing,' and that, in his marginalia on Miller and Bradshaw, Wallace 'blames his mother for quite a lot of his suffering'.⁵ Miller's thesis, for example, is that the high-achieving child is 'narcissistically disturbed', and unable to be his 'true self' (unable to be 'average'), because the mother has taken him as a 'self-object' and loved him 'excessively, though not in the manner that he needs, and always on the condition that he presents his "false self"'.⁶ Along with many others, the foregoing passage has been marked by Wallace; next to 'You can drive the devil out of your garden but you will find him again in the garden of your son', Wallace has written 'ulp'; another annotation goes into more specific detail: 'She needed me to do "bad" things –lie, be cruel to Amy, etc.– that would anchor me, threaten her love. Why? Dad was too steady, dependable'.⁷ At the end of the article, Bustillos briefly draws a parallel between Wallace's suicide in 2008, at the age of 46,

⁴ Bustillos, 'Self-Help Library'. Likewise, Max's biography frequently places Wallace's standing as a 'great mind' into tension with his apparent inability to deal with the 'ordinary' problems of daily necessity, substance dependency, and so on; see *Every Love Story is a Ghost Story: A Life of David Foster Wallace*.

⁵ Bustillos, 'Self-Help Library'.

⁶ Miller, *Drama of the Gifted Child: The Search for the True Self*, 9–21; according to Bustillos, these passages are marked by Wallace; see 'Self-Help Library'.

⁷ Bustillos, 'Self-Help Library'. Amy is the name of Wallace's sister.

and US society's 'obsess[ion] with "self-help", which involves thinking a whole lot [. . .] about yourself and your own problems [. . .] rather than seeing oneself as a valuable part of a larger valuable whole'.⁸

In one sense, Bustillos' piece said nothing new about the narrative that has grown around Wallace since the commercial and critical success of *Infinite Jest* in 1996. Her case draws heavily on the author's 1996 *Rolling Stone* interview with David Lipsky (which was re-released as the 2010 book *Although of Course You End Up Becoming Yourself*, and has now been made into a Hollywood film),⁹ makes familiar parallels between Wallace and *IJ*'s depressive 'genius' protagonist Hal Incandenza (who endures a difficult relationship with his mother, Avril Incandenza),¹⁰ and reiterates the 'genius/regular guy' opposition found perhaps most visibly in Dave Eggers' 'Foreword' to the 2006 edition of that novel ('[Wallace] is normal, and regular, and ordinary, and this is his extraordinary, and irregular, and not-normal achievement').¹¹ Since the piece, D. T. Max's biography *Every Love Story is a Ghost Story* has outlined the tensions that existed between Wallace and his relatives, especially as a result of his writing, while his long-time friend and rival, Jonathan Franzen, has challenged the popular image of Wallace as a 'benignant and morally clairvoyant artist/saint'.¹² And yet in the summer of 2011, as a direct response to the claims made by Bustillos, the Ransom Centre took the highly unusual step of assenting to a request from Wallace's estate to restrict eleven of the extant self-help books from public access.¹³ As Bonnie Nadell, who acted as Wallace's literary agent throughout his career, has explained:

⁸ Bustillos, 'Self-Help Library'.

⁹ Lipsky, 'The Lost Years & Last Days of David Foster Wallace'; for the subsequent book, see Lipsky, *Although of Course You End Up Becoming Yourself: A Road Trip with David Foster Wallace*. Wallace's family have voiced strong objections to the film adaptation, but they have been unable to prevent it by law. See Flood, 'David Foster Wallace's family object to biopic *The End of the Tour*'.

¹⁰ Toal, for example, quotes from passages that are focalized through Hal in order to evaluate 'Wallace's strategy' and 'Wallace's argument'; see 'Contemporary American Melancholy', 316–21; also Max, *Ghost Story*, 3, 177, 197.

¹¹ Eggers, 'Foreword' to *Infinite Jest*, xi.

¹² Max, *Ghost Story*, 177, 197, 241–42; Franzen, 'Farther Away'.

¹³ Gross, 'Ransom Centre restricts part of Wallace archive'. Bustillos has since responded by stating that '[i]t never occurred to me that Wallace's estate would be in a position to rescind part of the sale of the

In those first months after David died, the Ransom Centre had approached us about buying the archives; Karen [Green, Wallace's widow] had to get out of the house where she and David lived in Claremont and in the craziness of grief and the mess of packing up the books into boxes to send to the archives, we made some mistakes. [. . .] Having a person's library with paperbacks and writing in them as part of the archive is a new thing really and we did not realize how much personal and private information was in them. For the peace of mind and privacy of David's family [the annotated self-help books] are now restricted. [. . .] [The family] are not public figures, their lives are not meant to be discussed on the internet.¹⁴

The Ransom Centre's Director of Public Affairs, Jen Tisdale, has confirmed that, because 'the restricted items contain annotations with sensitive, private information about members of the family', the materials 'will remain restricted during the lifetimes of the specific individuals affected'.¹⁵

This episode highlights the central question that the present article will attempt to address: what kind of relationship critics can posit between, on the one hand, David Foster Wallace's personal library and marginalia and, on the other hand, his published works of fiction? Bustillos' reading of the self-help marginalia would seem to have been confirmed by the ensuing controversy – thus reinforcing the conventional critical understanding of authorly annotations as a form of personal revelation or truth, and, by extension, as a kind of allegorical key to the respective literary oeuvre. Nonetheless, I will contend that such a straightforward model of interpretation is unsettled by a reading of Wallace's marginalia alongside his novel *Infinite Jest* and his short story 'Good Old Neon'. This contention brings into focus a number of the legal,

documents to the Ransom Centre; I wrote what I did under the assumption that these books would remain available to anyone who was interested in seeing them. I was very sorry – or rather, entirely freaked out – to learn that that will no longer be the case'. See 'David Foster Wallace's Self-Help Books Removed From Archive'. Bustillos has also published a follow up essay, 'Philosophy, Self-Help, and the Death of David Wallace'.

¹⁴ Nadell, correspondence with Nick Maniatis, webmaster of *The Howling Fantods*.

¹⁵ Tisdale, cited in Gross, 'Ransom Centre'.

ethical, and interpretive questions that intersect in a contemporary author's archive. Bustillos herself writes that:

[S]ome [of Wallace's marginalia] seem as though they ought to be the privileged communications of a priest or a psychiatrist. But these things are in a public archive and are therefore going to be discussed and so I will tell you about them. [. . .] When I was reading this I felt very bad. Like my hair was standing on end, thinking how this literary sleuthing is also just prying.¹⁶

Many of the existing critical studies on marginalia have tended to focus on this affective quality – their ability to simultaneously compel and disturb their reader –¹⁷ while granting authorly annotations in particular the kind of fetishistic status enjoyed by the scribbles of the Romantic poets.¹⁸ Indeed, if the voluminous marginalia of a figure such as S. T. Coleridge have often been said to place him 'ever at [the] ear' of their readers,¹⁹ we can see this appeal to intimacy manifested in the enticements of Bustillos' title, 'Inside David Foster Wallace's Private Self-Help Library,' with its promise to divulge the deepest and most banal secrets of an author popularly portrayed as a 'visionary' (Zadie Smith), or 'the best mind of his generation' (A. O. Scott).²⁰ But

¹⁶ Bustillos, 'Self-Help Library'.

¹⁷ For discussions of the link between marginalia and forms of affective or bodily immediacy such as 'voice', 'thought', or 'spontaneity', see in particular Jackson, *Marginalia*; and Lipking, 'The Marginal Gloss'.

¹⁸ For Thomas McFarland, for example, 'marginalia as a literary form [. . .] activates that tension between the part and the whole that lay at the base of the Romantic theory of hermeneutics', as well as 'the sense of fragmentariness that paradoxically defines the characteristic Romantic quest for unity'. With a 'true master of the fragment' – McFarland's example is William Blake – the marginal note 'indicate[s] not a fragmentary and erratic power of insight, but exactly the opposite, an organic, coherent, and fully worked-out viewpoint': as such, Blake's marginalia 'throughout are united by the common feature of synecdoche for his entire position' (or what McFarland calls 'the whole of Blake'). See 'Synecdochic structure in Blake's Marginalia', 77–87.

¹⁹ Jackson's notion of marginalia as a form of 'conversation' or 'communication' arises from her years of editing Coleridge's notes; see *Marginalia*, 81–100; and also 'Introduction', xiii–xxiii. In the wake of her father's death, Sara Coleridge wrote that 'he seems ever at my ear, in his books, more especially in his marginalia'; see *Memoir and Letters of Sara Coleridge*, 342.

²⁰ Smith, 'What were you looking at? A host of celebrity critics choose their books of the year'; Scott, 'The Best Mind of His Generation'.

another unforeseeable consequence of the episode has been to actually increase the secrecy around Wallace's self-help marginalia, given that it is now only available in the form of the sample contained in Bustillos' article. The problem is not so much incompleteness: as with many writers' libraries, Wallace's collection had already been divided up after his death, with the majority of his unannotated books going to charity shops;²¹ as the Ransom Centre's Richard W. Oram puts it, this typical instability means that the term 'writer's library' is used by most scholars to refer to an 'intellectual construct' existing 'in a state of fluidity'.²² Rather, despite Bustillos' apparently straightforward aim to 'tell you about [the marginalia],' what her piece offers is a specific interpretation of certain of the marginalia in order to construct (and recapitulate) a generic narrative about Wallace's life and work. What her piece adds to the narrative is just this selection and interpretation of the annotations, written 'in wildly different sizes and styles of penmanship, states of mind':²³ the parataxis here already assumes a link between marginalia and authenticity, manuscripture and mind, which the subsequent controversy has done little to dispel.

In this sense, if Wallace's work has frequently been characterized as a response to postmodernist notions of psychic fragmentation (what Fredric Jameson calls 'the end of the bourgeois ego, or monad'),²⁴ then the present article suggests that his personal library might promise a degree of psychic 'containment', if not quite reunification. This works in a twofold manner, with the archivization of Wallace's library taking part in a broader ideological reinvestment in those 'quaintly romantic' categories of the 'genius' or Great Writer that had supposedly disappeared with postmodernism,²⁵

²¹ Fehrman has outlined some of the practical difficulties specific to the organization and sale of Wallace's library: 'When Wallace's widow and his literary agent, Bonnie Nadell, sorted through his library, they sent only the books he had annotated to the Ransom Centre. The others, more than 30 boxes' worth, they donated to charity. There was no chance to make a list, Nadell says, because another professor needed to move into Wallace's office. "We were just speed skimming for markings of any kind". See 'Lost libraries'.

²² Oram, 'Writers' Libraries: Historical Overview and Curatorial Considerations', 1.

²³ Bustillos, 'Self-Help Library'.

²⁴ For an outline of critical responses to Wallace's work, see Kelly, 'The Death of the Author and the Birth of a Discipline'; Jameson, *Postmodernism; or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, 15.

²⁵ Jameson, *Postmodernism*, 305–07.

while the text of the library itself works in tandem with the oeuvre to show this as simultaneously a sort of 'therapeutic' investment in a certain form of US (white, male, middle-class) normativity.²⁶ Kathleen Fitzpatrick has gestured towards a similar dynamic in her contention that the so-called 'melodrama[s] of beset white manhood' produced by Wallace – as well as the likes of Jonathan Franzen, Jeffrey Eugenides, and Dave Eggers – project 'a cluster of anxieties about being displaced from some possibly imagined position of centrality in contemporary cultural life' such that the white male's *sense* of marginality 'becomes, in a literary culture obsessed with fragmentation and decentring, a paradoxical source of return to dominance [. . .]'.²⁷ However, by looking at the ways in which this rhetoric of 'centrality' and 'fragmentation' is at the same time discursively entangled with popular self-help's more or less explicit idealisation of an 'ordinary', fully functioning US subject, I take this as a more broadly intertextual and ideological problem, rather than an occasion to identify either the intentions and feelings of the author in question, or indeed the genetic 'origins' of his work. Finally, then, my argument opens onto a critique of the early Wallace Studies trope of 'sincerity', the logical conclusion of which can be glimpsed in Oram's description of Wallace's library as a kind of 'shrine' ('the Harry Ransom Centre staff has been surprised at how many users simply wish to commune with [Wallace's books]').²⁸ Through readings of *IJ* and the short story 'Good Old Neon',²⁹ alongside certain of Wallace's library books and marginalia, I contend that the early critical focus on notions of the 'true self' has actually tended to reinforce and reiterate the hegemonic 'encagement in the self' that is the central preoccupation of

²⁶ For Wallace's work as a form of middle-class therapy, see Aubry, *Reading as Therapy: What Contemporary Fiction Does for Middle-Class Americans*, 97–126; Cvetkovich, *Depression: A Public Feeling*, 207–11.

²⁷ Fitzpatrick, *The Anxiety of Obsolescence: The American Novel in the Age of Television*, 201–33.

²⁸ See Kelly, 'David Foster Wallace and the New Sincerity in American Fiction' and 'Birth of a Discipline'. Also Oram, 'Writers' Libraries', 13.

²⁹ Wallace, 'Good Old Neon'. All subsequent references to this text are included parenthetically in the main body of the article (as 'GON').

Wallace's work (*IJ*, 694) – as evinced perhaps most clearly now by the somewhat cruel process of the author's own 'Cobainification'.³⁰

'Not another word': Intertextuality, Empathy, and Disavowal

Notably, the other narrative that has emerged from this controversial episode – Bustillos' intensely 'personal' discoveries, followed by the *post facto* archival restriction – already seems to participate in the recurrent theme of the family secret in Wallace's work, especially as dramatized by the Incandenzas. Dr. Dolores Rusk, a counsellor at the Incandenzas' Ennet Tennis Academy, and aspiring self-help author 'with doctorates in both Gender and Deviance',³¹ suggests that Avril suffers from 'a black phobic dread of hiding or secrecy in all possible forms with respect to her sons' (51). Regarding Avril's possible discovery of his use of 'high-resin Bob Hope', Hal tells his brother Mario that "'it'd *kill* the Moms [. . .]. Not so much the Hope. The *secrecy* of it. That I hid it from her. That she'll feel I had to hide it from her'" (782–84; italics original). Meanwhile, Hal 'hasn't had a bona fide intensity-of-interior-life-type emotion since he was tiny':

[H]e finds terms like *joie* and *value* to be like so many variables in rarefied equations, and he can manipulate them well enough to satisfy everyone but himself that he's in there, inside his own hull, as a human being [. . .]. One of his troubles with his Moms is the fact that Avril Incandenza believes she knows him inside and out as a human being, and an internally worthy one at that, when in fact inside Hal there's pretty much nothing at all, he knows. (694; italics original)

³⁰ Gallagher, 'The Cobainification of David Foster Wallace'. Suggesting that Wallace 'has receded beneath a mountain of marginalia and reinterpretation', Gallagher concludes that 'a Hollywood DFW feels like the final step in the canonisation – or maybe the Cobainification – of David Foster Wallace'.

³¹ '[Rusk] spends her massive blocks of free time in her Comm.-Ad. office doing involved acrostics and working on some sort of pop-psych manuscript the first four pages of which [. . .]' contain '29 appearances of the prefix *self*'; *IJ*, 437; italics original. All subsequent references to this text are included parenthetically in the main body of the article (as *IJ*).

Like the egoistic maternal figure from Alice Miller's book, Avril relentlessly pursues the inner lives of her sons, leading to a situation in which Hal believes that the real secret is the *lack* of a secret – which is to say he is unable to be his 'true self', to be 'average', because of the narcissism of his mother. And, in turn, Bustillos presents evidence from Wallace's marginalia to suggest that 'Hal is so obviously a projection of Wallace himself':

(Miller) [Such a person is usually able to ward off threatening depression with increased displays of brilliance, thereby deceiving both himself and those around him.]

Amherst 80–85

(Miller) [Others are allowed to be 'ordinary' but that he can never be.]

Grandiosity- The constant need to be, and be seen as, a superstar

(Bradshaw) [Shame begets shame to compulsive/addictive behaviour]

DFW comes home broken in '82- not a 'perfect family.' Mom's lie here breaks down.

DFW the 'troubled' one in family—angry, anxious, depressed—acting out, instantiating family's sickness (Why I see myself as 'fucked up?')³²

Thus, while Hal's secrets are always supplementary to the maternal perspective – 'in fact inside Hal there's pretty much nothing at all, he knows' – Wallace's self-help marginalia and its restriction seem to produce a yet more revealing 'inside': the author himself, whose biographical role then comes to supplement the work.

In this last manoeuvre – whereby Hal is reduced to a kind of allegory to which Wallace's marginalia are the key – we see a recurrence of the broader critical tendency to read authorial 'source texts' as 'a clue to [an author's] method of writing', 'provid[ing] unexpected insights into patterns of reading, his process of composition,

³² Bustillos, 'Self-Help Library'.

and even certain habits of mind'.³³ By promising a glimpse of the author as a 'person', annotated personal libraries have often allowed critics to resolve certain interpretative difficulties in the corresponding oeuvre – the 'philosophical system' of William Blake's poetry, for example, is explained by way of a few jottings in his copy of *The Works of Sir Joshua Reynolds*,³⁴ or the 'significant influence' of 'Nietzschean non-conformity' on the work of Sylvia Plath is asserted on the basis of her underlinings in *Thus Spake Zarathustra*.³⁵ Critical interest in the category of the 'writer's library' has grown particularly in line with the post-war boom in the acquisition of literary archives by large, North American institutions, as well as the development of so-called 'genetic' approaches to literature in a host of European universities during the 1970s and 80s;³⁶ in the last decade or so, a range of blogs and websites such as 'Legacy Libraries', which allows participants to compile and browse the catalogues of libraries belonging to famous deceased figures 'from John Steinbeck to Tolkien to Tupac Shakur', have also testified to the popular appeal of 'Dead People's Books'.³⁷ And – as has been illuminated by the Bustillos episode – the Ransom Centre's high-profile purchase of Wallace's archive now participates in this tendency to take an author's marginalia as spontaneous disclosures of 'pure thought' or unambiguous truth,³⁸ an intimate form of writing through which we might finally communicate with 'the voices of the dead'.³⁹

³³ Oram, 'Writers' Libraries', 2–3.

³⁴ For a critique of the problematic uses of Blake's marginalia in criticism of his work, see Snart, *The Torn Book: UnReading William Blake's Marginalia*.

³⁵ Peel, 'The Political Education of Sylvia Plath', 41–45.

³⁶ Oram, 'Writers' Libraries', 6–12; Ferrer and Groden, 'Introduction: A Genesis of French Genetic Criticism'.

³⁷ As Oram also notes, 'Legacy Libraries' was previously known as 'I See Dead People's Books'; see 'Writers' Libraries', 5.

³⁸ Paul Valéry described marginalia as 'part of the notes of pure *thought*'; see Lipking, 'Gloss', 609–10; italics original. Meanwhile, Jackson suggests that 'the assumption that notes are a private matter [. . .] for the reader who has no reason to lie to him- or herself [. . .] remains a central characteristic of the marginal note and a key element in the reader's attitude towards it'; *Marginalia*, 206.

³⁹ Grafton, 'Scrawled Insults and Epiphanies'. As implied by this particular phrase, I am dealing primarily here with the archives and personal libraries of authors who are deceased, rather than those somewhat rarer cases in which the archive of a still-living writer has already been bought and institutionalized (as per the likes of J. M. Coetzee and, more recently, Kazuo Ishiguro).

One of the more problematic consequences of the posthumous iconicity of 'DFW' is exemplified by my epigraphs here: Wallace's well-versed critiques of post-structuralist theory have served to recast complex critical debates as a matter of 'plain old untrendy' common sense.⁴⁰ By comically dismissing Foucault's distinction between the designatory function of an ordinary proper name and an author's name, Wallace's marginal 'Gobbledegook' threatens to subvert an argument about 'the name of the author' by turning it too straightforwardly onto 'the individual being named'; the meaning of the original 'host' text is reconstituted in line with the posterior authority and value of its annotations.⁴¹ And yet, the meaning of Wallace's note is also already being informed by Foucault's distinction: isn't the \$675,000 archive in Austin – like the feature film, the biography, the burgeoning academic industry, the multitudinous magazine articles and fan forums and blogs, and so on – proof enough that 'David Foster Wallace' is no longer functioning anything like an 'ordinary proper name'?⁴² This disjuncture is only emphasized when Wallace inscribes his slanted 'DW's and 'DFW's next to certain passages in the likes of Don DeLillo's *Americana*, Stanley Cavell's *In Quest of the Ordinary*, and R. D. Laing's

⁴⁰ Wallace speculates in his 1993 essay, 'E Unibus Pluram: Television and U. S. Fiction', that the generation of writers that succeeds postmodernism will 'treat of plain old untrendy human troubles and emotions in U. S. life with reverence and conviction'; 81. The author's ambivalence about post-structuralist theory in his essays and interviews has tended to set the tone for critical discussions of his work, a problem that Kelly both highlights and recapitulates in his 'Birth of a Discipline'.

⁴¹ As Greetham writes of the annotations that Coleridge often wrote in books belonging to his friends, 'the core "text" becomes socially merely a "pretext" for the construction of a non-organic, dispersed form of rhetoric that motivates the entire cultural exchange, thus calling into question intention, the originary moment of inscription, and the integrated [literary] "work" [. . .]'; see 'Review', 69–70.

⁴² I am guided here by Rose's approach to reading the work of Sylvia Plath: 'We do not know Plath [. . .]. This book starts from the presumption that Plath is a fantasy. But, rather than seeing this as a problem, it asks what her writing, and responses to it, might reveal about fantasy as such. [. . .] Thus Plath becomes a symptom – or rather, responses to her writing become a symptom – of one part of the cultural repressed (it is not her problem, it is ours). If Plath is a ghost of our culture, therefore, it is above all because of what she leads that culture to reveal about itself'; see *The Haunting of Sylvia Plath*, 5–6. Wallace is clearly a very different kind of 'ghost' to Plath, but the intense popularity of his 'melodramas of beset white manhood' can nonetheless tell us something about the contemporary 'cultural repressed' in the U. S.; see Fitzpatrick, *Obsolescence*, 230–33.

The Divided Self:⁴³ if the 'Nobrow'⁴⁴ admixture of Wallace's book collection seems to promise us access to the bandana-wearing, tobacco-chewing, polymathic Midwesterner who could do Wittgenstein or *Hannibal*, Cantor or *Freakonomics*, Tolstoy or tennis,⁴⁵ then at the same time it discloses this figure as the product of so many textual scraps and fragments. Seen in this light, such characteristic markers actually serve to confound 'the work of getting to the truth about Wallace',⁴⁶ partaking instead in the troubling of univocal identity that is already exemplified by his work's proliferation of characters by the name of 'David Wallace', 'David F. Wallace', 'David Foster Wallace', and so on.⁴⁷

It is not without irony that, in the end, visitors to the library are placed into the position of one such 'Wallace' – the narrator of 'GON' – as he attempts to empathise with the failure of the suicidal protagonist, Neal, to become 'an even marginally normal or acceptable U. S. male':

With David Wallace also fully aware that the cliché that you can't ever truly know what's going on inside somebody else is hoary and insipid and yet at the same time trying very consciously to prohibit that awareness from mocking the attempt or sending the whole line of thought into the sort of

⁴³ See Miley's candid piece about his trip to the library, in which he compares his motives to those of a medieval pilgrim ('David Foster Wallace's annotations are probably about as sacred [. . .] as a piece of the True Cross is to Christians'). He finds many passages that Wallace has marked with his initials (either 'DFW' or 'DW'), suggesting them as proof of 'capital-I Identification'; see 'Reading Wallace Reading'.

⁴⁴ Wallace's style, which moves easily from abstract philosophy to television game shows to Kafka to the Las Vegas pornography industry, has sometimes been held to exemplify what John Seabrook describes as the complete collapse in distinctions between 'high' and 'low' culture in U.S. postmodernism; his *Nobrow: The Culture of Marketing, the Marketing of Culture* is in Wallace's Austin collection. Konstantinou describes Wallace's style as 'Nobrow' in 'The World of David Foster Wallace', 73.

⁴⁵ For a full catalogue of Wallace's library, see 'David Foster Wallace's Library – Library Catalog – The University of Texas at Austin'.

⁴⁶ Miley, 'Reading Wallace Reading'.

⁴⁷ 'David Wallace' appears in 'Good Old Neon', while there are two characters named 'David F. Wallace' in *The Pale King* ('David Foster Wallace' and 'David Francis Wallace'). Indeed, Staes has noted that Wallace actually considered including 'three David Wallaces' in the novel; see 'Work in Process: A Genesis for *The Pale King*', 81.

inbent spiral that keeps you from ever getting anywhere [. . .], the realer, more enduring and sentimental part of him commanding that other part to be silent as if looking it levelly in the eye and saying, almost aloud, 'Not another word'. (181)

As 'Wallace' tries to 'reconcile what this luminous guy had seemed like from the outside with whatever on the interior must have driven him to kill himself' (181), so Wallace's readers now turn to his marginalia for similar answers. Take, for example, the following underlined passage in Wallace's copy of Richard Rohr's *Everything Belongs: The Gift of Contemplative Prayer* (2003):

(Rohr) We are all on overload and understandably confused and conflicted. This prompts many to move 'over and out' into dogmatism, skepticism, or psychic numbness. We desperately need some disciplines to help us know how to see and what is worth seeing, and what we don't need to see.⁴⁸

A few pages later, Wallace writes in the top margin: 'Discipline = Acceptance of Pain'.⁴⁹ This familiar self-help conjunction between self-discipline and 'worthwhile' feeling is frequently marked by Wallace, whether in the form of Paramananda's *Change Your Mind: Practical Guide to Buddhist Meditation* (1996) – 'It is simply a matter of being aware of oneself in a deeper and deeper way. That is all we need to do' – or Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi's *Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience* (1991), which claims to help its reader to 'learn to achieve mastery over consciousness itself'.⁵⁰ As is announced on the front cover of Wallace's copy of Theodore Isaac Rubin's *Compassion and Self-Hate: An Alternative to Despair* (1976), 'You don't have to be perfect! Start liking yourself today!'⁵¹: the typical manoeuvre of such pop-therapeutic

⁴⁸ Rohr, *Everything Belongs: The Gift of Contemplative Prayer* (HRC).

⁴⁹ Rohr, *Everything Belongs* (HRC).

⁵⁰ Paramananda, *Change Your Mind: Practical Guide to Buddhist Meditation* (HRC); Csikszentmihalyi, *Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience* (HRC). The Paramananda citation here is from a longer passage that Wallace has placed in brackets.

⁵¹ Rubin, *Compassion and Self-Hate* (HRC).

discourse is to turn its own apparent status as 'hoary and insipid' cliché ('GON', 181) into a problem with the *reader's* 'perfectionism' or 'over-intellection', which it then paradoxically promises to replace with an alleviative level of mental and emotional autonomy. Incidentally, we might recognize this gesture from the Kenyon College commencement address that would go on to be published as *This is Water* in the year after Wallace's death: 'This, like many clichés, so lame and unexciting on the surface, actually expresses a great and terrible truth'.⁵²

However, if Wallace's 'great and terrible truth' also looks suspiciously like a description of 'the numbing effects of normative white middle-class life' (to cite Ann Cvetkovich's reading of *Water*),⁵³ then it shares the ideological perspective of a contemporary self-help discourse that frequently 'mirrors and reinforces a dominant Christian-inflected discourse in the United States about morality, the law, and family'.⁵⁴ As Marilynn Ivy has argued, the hypothesized 'ideal' of such therapeutic narratives is the white, middle-class subject, who overcomes a range of increasingly widespread US anxieties in the late 1980s and early 1990s (around child abuse, drug addiction, the breakdown of 'family values') by maturing into a 'fully functional, nonaddicted' member of the vital co-constitutive units of family and society.⁵⁵ This, we might say, is the 'even marginally normal or acceptable U. S. male' that Neal fails to become, which has its analogues also in Alice Miller's idealized notions of 'ordinariness' and 'averageness' (constituted by a so-called 'Lost World of Feelings'),⁵⁶ as well as Hal Incandenza's inability to experience 'bona fide intensity-of-interior-life-type emotion' (or, finally, to function in everyday life at all).

'GON' is a painstaking dramatization of this dilemma: a generalized (or 'bourgeois') psychic entrapment within a cycle of 'diagnosis' and 'cure' that is not only recognizably ideological and discursive, but also subject to the assimilatory logic

⁵² Wallace, *This is Water: Some Thoughts, Delivered on a Significant Occasion, about Living a Compassionate Life*, 55.

⁵³ Cvetkovich, *Depression*, 207.

⁵⁴ Ivy, 'Have You Seen Me? Recovering the Inner Child in Late Twentieth-Century America', 239.

⁵⁵ Ivy, 'Inner Child', 227–45.

⁵⁶ Bustillos tells us that Wallace marked this phrase in his copy of Miller; see 'Self-Help Library'.

of late capitalist cultural production. At the beginning of the story, the avowedly 'fraudulent' Neal himself cycles through a host of potentially therapeutic exercises in order to find out 'who I really was inside' – 'hypnosis, cocaine, sacro-cervical chiropractic, joining a charismatic church, jogging, pro bono work for the Ad Council, meditation classes, the Masons,' and so on – before finally trying psychoanalysis (141–43). While it does not take long for Neal to decide that Dr. Gustafson is an 'idiot, or at least very limited in his insights into what was really going on with people', he is nonetheless struck, a little later in his treatment, by Gustafson's claims 'that there were really only two basic, fundamental orientations a person could have toward the world, (1) love and (2) fear, and that they couldn't co-exist', and, further, 'that one of the worst things about the conception of competitive, achievement-oriented masculinity that America supposedly hardwired into its males was that it caused a more or less constant state of fear that made genuine love next to impossible' (158, 164–65). In that 'being unable to really love was at least a different model or lens through which to see the problem', Neal initially feels 'some of the first genuine hope I'd had since the early, self-deluded part of the experiment with Naperville's Church of the Flaming Sword of the Redeemer' (166). And yet, just weeks later, he will hear a throwaway line spoken by one of the therapist characters during a late night rerun of *Cheers* ("If I have one more yuppie come in and start whining to me about how he can't love, I'm going to throw up"), realize that even the audience on this now-syndicated sitcom 'recognized what a cliché and melodramatic complaint the inability-to-love concept was', and then drive his car at high speed into a concrete bridge abutment (168–79). If Wallace's library seems to offer a privileged insight into who he 'really was inside', then it does so strictly within this pattern of hope and self-delusion, whereby a procession of 'different models through which to see the problem' are eventually, and fatally, recognized as so many clichés (Wallace then looks 'like almost everybody else then in their late twenties who'd made some money or had a family or whatever they thought they wanted and still didn't feel that they were happy'; 142). Take, for example, Gustafson's 'basic operating premises' on love, fear, and masculinity which now read, in light of the library, like a sort of 'syndication' or 'rerun'

of annotated passages from Wallace's copies of Rohr's *Everything Belongs*, Susan Faludi's *Stiffed: The Betrayal of the American Man* (2000), and Lewis Hyde's *The Gift: Imagination and the Erotic Life of Property* (1983):

(Rohr) [As Mary Anne Williamson says in her book *Return to Love*, the 'fear' worldview and the 'love' worldview do not know one another.]

(Faludi) The solutions offered to men generally require them to see themselves in ever more isolated terms. Whatever troubles the American man, the outlets of mass culture from Hollywood to pop psychology to Madison Avenue tell him, can be cured by removing himself from society [. . .].

(Faludi) In a culture of ornament [Faludi's term for contemporary U. S. culture] [. . .] manhood is defined by appearance, by youth and attractiveness, by money and aggression [. . .] and by the market-bartered 'individuality' that sets one astronaut or athlete or gangster above another.

(Hyde) [In a modern, industrial nation, the ability to act without relationship is still a mark of the masculine gender; boys can still become men, and men become more manly, by entering into the marketplace and dealing in commodities. A woman can do the same thing if she wants to, of course, but it will not make her feminine.]⁵⁷

My intention here is not so much to consolidate these often generically and politically diverse discourses under the same broad heading of ('bad') self-help, as to emphasize their steadily homogenizing assimilation into a popular discourse of diagnosis/cure – or self-ignorance/self-revelation – that develops largely in accordance with its commercial appeal (the 'true self' in this instance is the one that 'sells', from self-help manuals to *Cheers* and even to therapeutic practice itself).⁵⁸

⁵⁷ Rohr, *Everything Belongs* (HRC); Faludi, *Stiffed: The Betrayal of the American Man* (HRC); Hyde, *The Gift: Imagination and the Erotic Life of Property* (HRC).

⁵⁸ In this sense, the story seems to portray a version of what Lyotard describes as 'legitimation through performativity' – the determination of postmodern 'truth' in accordance primarily with a criterion of

When the story's protagonist and narrator is later shown, 'deep down', to have been all along the metadiegetic projection of Neal's former classmate, the aforementioned 'David Wallace', a diegetic narrator who has recently heard news of Neal's suicide (141, 178–81),⁵⁹ it initially seems that 'GON' will offer a metafictional resolution to the problem of 'who [Neal] really was inside'. However, while critics have tended to read "Wallace's climactic attempt to empathize with Neal as establishing a 'cerebral route to emotional impact',⁶⁰ or even as a '*straightening out*' of postmodern recursivity,⁶¹ Wallace's library recasts this as yet another oscillation between 'hope' and 'self-delusion'. That is, if 'Wallace' is only able to mourn for Neal by 'trying very consciously to prohibit' his own self-critical thought processes, then the library by definition overrides that final command for 'Not another word' – and 'Wallace's 'sentimental' denial of self-awareness suddenly looks much like the stuff of contemporary fridge-magnet wisdom:

(Bradshaw) Intellectuals create the most grandiose denials!

(Rohr) The older we get, the more we've been betrayed and hurt and disappointed, the more barriers we put up to beginner's mind [Rohr's term for a state of childlike innocence]. We must never presume that we see. We must always be ready to see anew. But it's so hard to go back, to be vulnerable, to say to your soul, 'I don't know anything'.

(Csikszentmihalyi) A person can make himself happy, or miserable, regardless of what is actually happening 'outside', just by changing the contents of consciousness.

economic efficiency; see *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, xxiv.

⁵⁹ I am following Genette's differentiation between 'narrative levels': '*any event a narrative recounts is at a diegetic level immediately higher than the level at which the narrating act producing this narrative is placed*'. See *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method*, 227–34; italics original.

⁶⁰ Burn, *David Foster Wallace's Infinite Jest: A Reader's Guide*, 83.

⁶¹ Timmer, *Do You Feel It Too? The Post-postmodern Syndrome in American Fiction at the Turn of the Millennium*, 114–15; italics original.

(Miller) [Intellectualization is very commonly met, since it is a defence mechanism of great reliability.]⁶²

I am not thereby suggesting that a simple nod towards a few annotated intertexts will somehow defuse this story's potential for 'emotional impact', or abate its 'uncompromising difficulty'.⁶³ Rather, I would argue that the underlinings in Wallace's library actually serve to emphasize the force of disavowal that must be enacted by the determinedly empathetic 'Wallace' at the end of 'GON',⁶⁴ while drawing attention in turn to the historically and politically specific conditions of their own identificatory appeal as traces, however slight, of the 'realer, more enduring and sentimental part' of Wallace himself (181). In other words, just as 'Wallace' desperately attempts to take a recognizably discursive construct (Neal) as somehow 'realer' or more 'sincere' than that recognition in itself, the text of 'GON' alerts us to the similar quandaries that will be involved in any attempt to finally locate the 'real' version of Wallace in his personal library and marginalia.

Recovering the 'Origins' of Infinite Jest

If we are tempted to take the library as simply a biographical supplement for a figure named 'Wallace', or to suppose that the restriction of self-help marginalia that followed Bustillos' article 'signal[s] a kind of grim validity to her reading of them',⁶⁵ then the foregoing reading of 'GON' highlights some of the challenges that Wallace's work will pose to any such straightforward notions of self, origin, and truth. In this final section, I look at how this dynamic plays out in *IJ*, particularly with regards to the theme of secrecy within the Incandenza family.

⁶² For the Bradshaw and Miller annotations, see Bustillos, 'Self-Help Library'; see also Rohr, *Everything Belongs* (HRC); Csikszentmihalyi, *Flow* (HRC).

⁶³ Mason, 'Don't like it? You don't have to play'.

⁶⁴ Here I am adopting a psychoanalytical definition of 'disavowal', as a 'mental act that consists in rejecting the reality of a perception on account of its potentially traumatic associations'; see Penot, 'Disavowal', 416.

⁶⁵ Hathcock, 'The Lee Konstantinou Interview'.

We have already seen some of the parallels that exist between Hal and the abjected figures of US self-help discourse, such as Alice Miller's 'gifted child', or John Bradshaw's 'dysfunctional' adults. As with Neal in 'GON', Hal's passage into a functional adult life in the contemporary US is initially blocked by an excess of thinking (the manipulation of 'so many variables in rarefied equations') at the expense of feeling ('intensity-of-interior-life-type emotion') (*JJ*, 694); and, as again with the self-help narratives, Hal's problems with addiction and emotional withdrawal are traced back to the role of a narcissistic mother.⁶⁶ The eponymous film that is produced by Hal's father, James Orin Incandenza, is initially intended as a therapeutic solution to this problem, one which will potentially allow Hal to resolve the thinking vs. feeling equation and thereby complete the trajectory of what Marshall Boswell has described as his 'more or less traditional' *Bildungsroman* plotline,⁶⁷ as Incandenza puts it, the film is his attempt to 'simply converse' with Hal, a 'magically entertaining toy to dangle at the infant still somewhere alive in the boy [. . .]. To bring him "out of himself", as they say' (838–39; italics original). However, while critics have tended to read Incandenza's magnum opus as either an 'interpretive aporia' of 'impossible textuality',⁶⁸ or as 'represent[ing] the novel's core expression of the closed loop of [contemporary US] infantile narcissism',⁶⁹ I argue that Wallace's library refashions the film as a dramatization of the theories and procedures of Bradshaw's 1980s and 90s pop-therapeutic movement of the 'Inner Child' – thus shifting the terms of my

⁶⁶ See also North's discussion of the multiple incestuous subtexts and subplots running throughout the novel, a couple of which feature Avril Incandenza (it is suggested – although never quite confirmed – that she has been having affairs with both her half-brother, Charles Tavis, and her eldest son, Orin); *Machine-Age Comedy*, 174–83. Alice Miller's post-Freudian self-help model, meanwhile, is based on a controversial theory about the normative and generational reiteration of child abuse within the family; see *Drama*.

⁶⁷ Hal's is one of three major narratives that Boswell delineates in *JJ*, the other two being Don Gately's "metamorphosis" story and the "linking plot" [. . .] involving the search for the master copy' of Incandenza's eponymous film. See *Understanding David Foster Wallace*, 122.

⁶⁸ Fest, 'The Inverted Nuke in the Garden: Archival Emergence and Anti-Eschatology in David Foster Wallace's *Infinite Jest*', 144–45.

⁶⁹ Holland, "The Art's Heart's Purpose": Braving the Narcissistic Loop of David Foster Wallace's *Infinite Jest*, 237.

own analysis away from either postmodernist aesthetics, or North American social decline, and towards the seeming inescapability of certain politically problematic but undoubtedly widespread contemporary narratives of the self (more specifically, of the self as a 'secret' inner being that is simply waiting to be discovered or 'recovered' by its owner).

At a late point in the novel, when Hal is attempting to track down his local NA meeting, he instead mistakenly wanders into an 'Inner Infant' support group made up of 'all these middle-class guys in at least their thirties [. . .] sitting there clutching teddy bears to their sweated chests' (800). Immediately noting that '*Inner Infant* sounds uncomfortably close to [E. T. A. counsellor] Dr. Dolores Rusk's *Inner Child*', Hal watches on as the sobbing man at the front of the group, Kevin Bain, is encouraged to "share what [he's] feeling":

'I'm feeling my Inner Infant's abandonment and deep-deprivation issues [. . .], [Kevin] says, drawing shuddering breaths [. . .]. 'I'm feeling my Inner Infant standing holding the bars of his crib and looking out of the bars. . . bars of his crib and crying for Mommy and Daddy to come hold him and nurture him. [. . .] And nobody's *coming!*' (802; italics original)

When Kevin is subsequently asked to "name what your Inner Infant wants right now more than anything in the world", he replies, hysterically: "*To be loved and held!*" before 'repeating "Please, Mommy and Daddy, come love me and hold me" in a kind of monotone of pathos' (803-04; italics original). We can see here a fairly direct satirisation of Bradshaw's 'Inner Child' programme, the first step of which requires the 'dysfunctional adult' to meditate 'until you are an infant in your crib' and, at that point, to '[a]nchor the feeling of being alone and unwanted'.⁷⁰ However, although Mary K. Holland contends that the increasingly uncomfortable and disgusted Hal 'mentally articulates' a 'reasonable critique' of such therapeutic 'oversimplification[s]',⁷¹

⁷⁰ Bradshaw, *Homecoming: Reclaiming and Championing Your Inner Child*, 178.

⁷¹ Holland, 'Loop', 232.

nonetheless this critique remains trapped within the alternative self-help strictures and terminology of Miller's *Gifted Child*:

All through his own infancy and toddlerhood, Hal had continually been held and dandled and told at high volume that he was loved, and he feels like he could have told K. Bain's Inner Infant that getting held and told you were loved didn't automatically seem like it rendered you emotionally whole [. . .]. (805)

What begins to emerge in this scene, then, is not so much the 'solipsistic' or 'narcissistic loop' that Holland (following Christopher Lasch) sees as symptomatic of postmodern US culture,⁷² as a sense that the novel itself is trapped in a movement between self-help paradigms that accept and even propagate 'the premises of an entirely fixed, Christian-inflected, misogynist ideology of the family'.⁷³ That is to say, in both of those heavily annotated self-help texts with which this article began – and whether the 'child' therein is judged to have been damaged by too much love (Miller) or not enough (Bradshaw) – the author or analyst works from a naturalization of the 'idealized white, middle-class, nuclear household',⁷⁴ before ultimately laying the blame on a primary care-giver generally referred to as 'the mother' (who, like Avril Incandenza, is portrayed almost ubiquitously as the all-powerful, primitive, and retributive maternal figure found in certain strands of psychoanalysis).⁷⁵

This airless ideological dynamic is recapitulated one more time by Incandenza's eponymous final film, which seems to share its basic structure with the culminating stages of Bradshaw's therapeutic programme of imaginative self-mediation. In the latter, 'the adult moves back and forth between locating herself as the infant (for example, in the crib) and as the wise and gentle adult who is now looking down at the

⁷² Holland, 'Loop', 222–25.

⁷³ Ivy, 'Inner Child', 240.

⁷⁴ Ivy, 'Inner Child', 245.

⁷⁵ For a socio-historical analysis of the 'so-called dread of the all-powerful mother' in psychoanalytical theory, see Mitchell, *Siblings: Sex and Violence*, 49–52.

infant with love and is "reparenting" the child";⁷⁶ the former, meanwhile – according to the best accounts we have, as anyone who watches it becomes permanently infantilized, going on watching until they die – is shot from a 'crib's-eye view' ('mediated by [a] very special lens' to 'reproduce an infantile visual field'), and portrays 'some kind of maternal instantiation of the archetypal figure Death' who 'lean[s] in over the [. . .] crib and simply apologize[s]': "'I'm so sorry. I'm so terribly sorry. I am so, so sorry. Please know how very, very, very sorry I am'".⁷⁷ As if in a cinematic realization of Bradshaw's therapeutic programme, then, Incandenza's film depicts the remorsefulness of an 'all-powerful' mother (an analogue of his adulterous wife Avril) in order to try and cure their 'damaged' child (788). And yet, if Wallace's library allows us in this way to posit a seemingly significant intertextual connection between *IJ* and Bradshaw's work, the question nonetheless remains – particularly in the wake of the controversy around Bustillos' article – as to *what* this significance might productively be held to be. In genetic criticism, to take one obvious example, such an intertextual overlap might be described in terms of 'exo-' or 'endo-genesis': the critic claims to discover the origin or 'source text' for a certain passage in a given literary work, and then presents textual evidence of the author's 'processing, assimilation, appropriation, or absorption of this external information' to his or her own ends.⁷⁸ In this sense, just as Incandenza wants to recover a state of childhood purity within Hal – an inner or 'true' self that is secret even to himself – so the library promises to divulge the secrets of what has often been described as Wallace's own 'magnum opus'.

Incandenza's film, however, is an unmitigated disaster, leading to his own suicide, the dissolution of the novel's O.N.A.N.ite superstate, and the inversion (rather

⁷⁶ This is Ivy's paraphrase of the method outlined by Bradshaw in *The Family and Homecoming*; see 'Inner Child', 242–43.

⁷⁷ This description of Incandenza's film is patched together from accounts by Joelle Van Dyne, who plays the lead (and only) role as the maternal-Death figure; by Molly Notkin, Joelle's friend and a doctoral candidate in film studies; and by Incandenza's ghost, who describes the key scenes to Don Gately towards the end of the novel (*IJ*, 938–41, 787–95, 838–39).

⁷⁸ Van Hulle, 'Modernism, Mind, and Manuscripts', 230. For a critique of genetic criticism's tendency towards notions of Romantic authority and uncomplicated canonicity, see Jenny, 'Genetic Criticism and its Myths'.

than resolution) of the terms of Hal's *Bildungsroman* (Hal eventually becomes too 'infantile' and emotionally credulous to function in everyday life). Its solipsism-inducing effects are similar to those induced by the tightly individuated form of the novel itself, which paradoxically both opens and closes with Hal's first-person description of his breakdown at the University of Arizona: by coming simultaneously at the end of the *fabula* and the start of the *syuzhet*,⁷⁹ this scene raises the possibility that the next thousand or so pages of the novel are no more than our protagonist's fantastic internal projection (3–17). And this formal enclosure in turn works to dramatize a broader, pop-therapeutic concern with the 'true self' that makes it seem:

as if all the dynamics of human relationships and intergenerational contact could be reinscribed within this contained self, and as if the family – itself a certain erasure of the social and of community in the contemporary U. S. – could now be fully privatized and enclosed within the individual.⁸⁰

The disastrous consequences of Incandenza's origin-seeking film might thus serve as a kind of warning against the critical temptation to treat the library in Austin as one final 'enclosure in the individual', a space where we can not only 'commune' with Wallace himself but also mitigate the myriad complexities of his oeuvre by a 'genetic' appeal to authorial originality or mediation (a move which would once again turn 'DFW' into the 'troubled one in the family', fucked up so we don't have to be).⁸¹

Moreover, if the novel seems in this way to 'enclose' all of its ideological content within the individual known as Hal Incandenza, then Wallace's library might actually provide us with a kind of 'opening up', an important (if empirically bounded)⁸²

⁷⁹ In formalist criticism, *fabula* refers to 'the order of events referred to by the narrative', while *syuzhet* refers to 'the order of events presented in the narrative discourse'; see Brooks, 'Narrative and Desire', 130. In her discussion of the resultant 'narcissistic loop' of *IF*'s narrative, Holland compares Hal to Scheherazade of *One Thousand and One Nights*; see 'Loop', 234.

⁸⁰ Ivy, 'Inner Child', 239–48.

⁸¹ I am referring back here to Wallace's marginalia on Bradshaw, cited in the main text as endnote 27.

⁸² Although Oram has interestingly suggested that an author's library might be seen a kind of 'physical embodiment' of Barthesian textuality (an embodiment of that 'multidimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash'), nonetheless such a manoeuvre still serves

opportunity to attend to the ways in which such apparently naturalized 'bourgeois' dynamics are in fact the product of multiple and intersecting socio-historical discourses, circulating in ways that defy any straightforward notion of source text, genesis or 'origin'.⁸³ We need only to look at the present pop-cultural status of Wallace – as either a literary hero of near-messianic proportions, or a ridiculous fetish, a 'byword for with-it-ness'⁸⁴ – to grasp that the pattern of cyclical and catastrophic consumption traced by his work has had no problem in swallowing up both work and author alike; meanwhile, by investing wholeheartedly in either side of this debate, we risk becoming like Hal, who ('like most North Americans of his generation') 'tends to know way less about why he feels certain ways about the objects and pursuits he's devoted to than he does about the objects and pursuits themselves' (54). As such, rather than treating Wallace's library and marginalia as a series of secrets to be systematically discovered and enumerated, we might recall that, again in the words of Hal, discovering a secret is never so dangerous as the '*secrecy* of it' in the first place (784; italics original): why is it that Hal's devotion to his 'objects and pursuits' is so much more obscure than the objects and pursuits themselves? And, concomitantly, what might the library be able to tell us about the structural and political character of those devotions that we assume to be ours alone, or else a matter of 'plain old untrendy' common sense?⁸⁵

Conclusion: Notes on the Death of the/an Author

Soon after H. L. Hix's discussion of Foucault in *Morte d'Author*, Wallace marks the following summary of Roland Barthes:

to reintroduce a measure of empiricism to what is a specifically anti-empiricist argument – put simply, the 'Death of the Author' becomes merely 'the death of an author', and Barthes' open and 'irreducible' field of textuality is limited to a selection of texts belonging to one individual. See Oram, 'Writers' Libraries', 13–14; for Barthes' specific discussion of the term 'textuality', see 'From Work to Text'.

⁸³ For a related discussion of the ways in which *IJ* describes 'a complex system that binds us into interconnections, thus puncturing the illusion of autonomous selfhood', see Hayles, 'The Illusion of Autonomy and the Fact of Recursivity: Virtual Ecologies, Entertainment, and *Infinite Jest*'.

⁸⁴ Gallagher, 'Cobainification'. See also Lorentzen, 'The Rewriting of David Foster Wallace'.

⁸⁵ I am thinking here of Slavoj Žižek's contention that 'the "secret" to be unveiled through analysis is not the content hidden by the form (the form of commodities, the form of dreams) but, on the contrary, the "*secret*" of this form itself'; see *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, 3; italics original.

(Hix, citing Barthes) The author is no longer 'the past of his own book', standing in relation to it as father to child, nourishing it. Instead, 'the modern scriptor is born simultaneously with the text, is in no way equipped with a being preceding or exceeding the writing, is not the subject with the book as predicate': The text is no longer written by an author once and for all, but 'every text is eternally written *here and now*'.

Cool⁸⁶

Let us say that there are two ways in which we might initially deal with this annotated fragment. In the first, we take seriously Barthes' argument that 'the modern scriptor is born simultaneously with the text, is in no way equipped with a being preceding or exceeding the writing': Wallace's marginal note, 'cool', then becomes just another part of the text as a 'tissue of quotations drawn from the innumerable centres of culture'.⁸⁷ For instance, the presence of the slangy US descriptor 'cool' might tell us something about the potential for literary theory to be assimilated into 'hip' mainstream or middle-class culture, as a commodity item to be admired, mastered, or otherwise utilized above and beyond the explicitly anti-bourgeois, anti-capitalist, anti-individualist implications of Barthes' language and analysis.⁸⁸ And such a potential gives rise to our second possible approach, in which Wallace's annotation, by means of its very 'immediacy' –its Coleridgean promise of 'voice' and 'character'—⁸⁹ seems to turn on its head Barthes' own dismissal of the '*explanation* of a work' through 'the voice of a single person, the *author* "confiding" in us'.⁹⁰ Here in the margins, it would seem, is Wallace himself, that 'being preceding or exceeding the writing', *confiding* in us within the quiet confines of his personal library or 'shrine':

⁸⁶ Hix, *Morte d'Author* (HRC), with Wallace's inscription.

⁸⁷ Barthes, 'The Death of the Author', 146.

⁸⁸ See Cusset, *French Theory: How Foucault, Derrida, Deleuze & Co. Transformed the Intellectual Life of the United States*.

⁸⁹ For Jackson, one of the major merits of Coleridge's marginalia is their ability to convey 'those distinctive qualities of mind and character that we tend to sum up as his individual "voice"'; see 'Introduction', xiii. See also McFarland's related comments on Blake's marginalia in 'Synecdochic structure'.

⁹⁰ Barthes, 'Death', 143; italics original.

the theoretical notion of the 'Death of the Author' is a neat enough idea, Wallace seems to say, but it isn't one that we should take seriously.⁹¹

Such promise of identification or 'sincerity' is central to Adam Kelly's seminal 2010 account of the beginnings of 'Wallace Studies' ('The Death of the Author and the Birth of a Discipline'), which conceives the field as a form of collective grieving: it follows from this logic that visiting the archive now becomes another – even a more appropriate – way to 'honour the dialogic quality Wallace strove for': 'the conversations between the writer and his readers look set to be many, lengthy, and perhaps even infinite'.⁹² Scholarship on Wallace, especially in those years immediately following his death, has necessarily approached the many contradictions and challenges of his work in the shadow of his remarkably identificatory artistic persona – a difficulty that the library and marginalia, by allowing us even more convincingly to imagine the author 'ever at [our] ear',⁹³ has the potential to exacerbate. However, just as the field of Wallace Studies has now begun more consistently and purposefully to consider the historical and ideological limits of the author's own position – as per Kelly's updated account of the field in 2015, and essays by Mark McGurl (2014), Samuel Cohen (2015), and Amy Hungerford (2016) – so I hope here to have adduced the ways in which Wallace's personal library and marginalia oblige us precisely to *question* the 'post-postmodern' reading of Wallace as the white male 'genius' of the educated middle classes, whose work is said to 'succeed where [James] Incandenza's art fails' while opening up 'the possibility of empathy with others'.⁹⁴ In this way, Wallace's annotated library has the potential to intensify and complicate, rather than somehow merely to 'resolve', his work's sustained critique of the contemporary 'encagement in the self' (*IJ*, 694).

⁹¹ As confirmed by Wallace's review of Hix: 'For those of us civilians who know in our gut that writing is an act of communication between one human being and another, the whole question [of the theoretical 'death of the author'] seems sort of arcane'. See 'Exaggerated', 144.

⁹² Kelly, 'Birth of a Discipline'.

⁹³ Sara Coleridge, *Memoir*, 342.

⁹⁴ Boswell, *Understanding*, 170–71.

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The author has no competing interests to declare.

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