“CHAINED IN A CAGE OF THE SELF”: NARCISSISM IN DAVID FOSTER WALLACE’S *INFINITE JEST*

ADAM PIPER
BACHELOR OF SCIENCE, BRIGHAM YOUNG UNIVERSITY—IDAHO, 2008

A Thesis
Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies
of the University of Lethbridge
in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree

MASTER OF ARTS

Department of English
University of Lethbridge
LETHBRIDGE, ALBERTA, CANADA

© Adam Piper, 2012

Abstract

Loneliness, unhappiness, and discord pervade David Foster Wallace's novel *Infinite Jest*. Parental neglect and abuse, drug and alcohol addiction, and obsession with entertainment all work to increase characters' narcissism and self-absorption. This increased narcissism prevents characters from developing meaningful relationships, and this absence of meaningful relationships contributes to the feeling of sadness that plagues the Organization of North American Nations. Rather than confronting reality and working to overcome their sadness by attempting to form meaningful relationships, characters instead seek to escape this sadness through the various fantasies provided by drug-use and entertainment. These fantasies only work to exacerbate characters' self-absorption and narcissism which consequently increases their unhappiness. Certain characters are able to break free of these narcissistic impulses by turning outwards to form meaningful relationships. As these characters break free of the "cage of the self" (777), they experience a sense of meaning and happiness that other characters are without.

Acknowledgements

I wish to express my gratitude for all of the assistance I received throughout the writing of my thesis. I would especially like to thank Dr. Benzon, Dr. McAdam, Dr. Carter, Dr. Ng, and Dr. Monk for their reading recommendations, comments and criticisms, and general support and guidance.

In particular, I would like to thank Dr. Benzon for introducing me to the work of David Foster Wallace, for reading countless drafts of my thesis, for providing positive criticism and feedback, and for her patience and encouragement throughout the writing process.

Table of Contents

Title Page	i
Abstract	ii
Acknowledgements	iii
Table of Contents	iv
Introduction	1
Chapter One	12
Chapter Two	36
Chapter Three	61
Chapter Four	80
Works Cited	109

Introduction

Throughout his writing, David Foster Wallace explores what it means to be human. He explores ideas about values, existential meaning, and belief. He examines what it is that makes people lonely; why when Americans have so much, why they are still seemingly unhappy; how people can overcome sadness; where this sadness comes from; and how people can become less selfish and close-minded. As Greg Carlisle states: "[Wallace] was honing in on what lies at the heart of the American malaise . . . and trying to help us see the black and grained spots on our souls" ("Introduction" 17).

In this thesis, I will argue that many characters in Wallace's novel *Infinite Jest* have become self-absorbed and narcissistic due to the parental neglect or abuse they faced as children. Many characters turn to alcohol, drugs, or entertainment as a means of escaping the painful memories of their childhoods. Consequently, characters become addicted to these substances, and the abuse of these things only works to increase their narcissism by separating them from reality and impeding their ability to form healthy relationships with others. Characters' misery and unhappiness increase as their reliance on alcohol, drugs, or entertainment increases. Conversely, some characters manage to break free of the narcissistic trap by abandoning their addictions to alcohol, drugs, or entertainment and working to build meaningful relationships with others.

In *Infinite Jest,* Canada, the U.S., and Mexico have joined to form the Organization of North American Nations (O.N.A.N.). The O.N.A.N.'s waste disposal program involves heaving the country's garbage, via high-powered catapults, into the upper north-east regions of New England, where high-powered fans then proceed to blow the smell northwards towards Canada. This enormous dumping site is referred to as the

great concavity/convexity and is allegedly inhabited by abandoned monster-size infants as well as a menacing pack of feral hamsters.

The people of Quebec are displeased about the close proximity of the dump to their province, and several terrorist cells are formed to terrorize the U.S. in hopes of achieving separation from the O.N.A.N. The most notable of these terrorist cells is the Quebecois separatist group known as Les Assassins des Fauteuils Rollents (A.F.R.). The A.F.R.'s highest hopes for weaponry are pinned on an extremely addictive film cartridge entitled *Infinite Jest V*, which is so captivating that once its viewers begin watching it, they have no desire to do anything else but watch on endless repeat, eventually dying from personal neglect. The A.F.R. hopes to acquire this film cartridge and implement it as their own weapon of mass destruction by unleashing it on the American population—thus securing for themselves and their province separation from the O.N.A.N.

In the midst of this political turmoil is the Incandenza family. Jim Incandenza, the creator of *Infinite Jest V*, formed the Enfield Tennis Academy (E.T.A.), a prestigious tennis school for young children and adolescents. Here, the children attend school and play non-stop tennis with aspirations of getting to "the Show" or becoming professional tennis players. Jim and his wife, Avril, have three sons, Orin, Mario, and Hal, who have all grown up at the tennis academy. Orin and Hal are gifted tennis players, but Mario has several birth defects that make competing in tennis impossible. Down the hill from E.T.A. is Ennet House: a live-in recovery house for alcoholics and drug addicts. Here, Don Gately, the live-in staffer and previous drug-addict, attempts to help other addicts see how Alcoholics Anonymous can help free them from their addictions.

At least part of the motivation Wallace had for writing *Infinite Jest* stems from what he referred to as the "stomach-level sadness" he felt existed in America at the time (Miller 59). In an interview with Mark Cairo, Wallace said: "It seemed to me that there was something sort of sad about the country . . . that at a time when our lives are more comfortable and more full probably of pleasure, sheer pleasure, than any other time in history, that people were essentially miserable" (55). This seems to be at least one of the central themes explored throughout *Infinite Jest*.

Many of the characters in *Infinite Jest* seem miserable, lost, and confused about their own existence. Each character struggles to discover meaning and happiness. According to Freud, happiness is the end goal for every person. He states: "what do [people] demand of life and wish to achieve in it? The answer to this can hardly be in doubt. They strive after happiness; they want to become happy and to remain so" ("Civilization" 729).

While attaining happiness seems to be the desire for many of the characters in *Infinite Jest*, many things impede their ability to experience happiness. Freud is skeptical of a person's ability to achieve happiness because "Unhappiness is much less difficult to experience. We are threatened with suffering from three directions: from our own body . . . from the external world . . . and finally from our relations to other men" ("Civilization" 729). Freud feels that the most a person can hope for is that they will "learn to tolerate reality, and that reality [will] be sufficiently tolerable to allow moderate amelioration of pain" (Frosh, *Identity* 37). Freud also contends that, while society is necessary for human survival, it entails the bridling of instinctual appetites that he feels

bring people pleasure. For this reason, Freud believes people will always be "dissatisfied in some fundamental fashion" (Mitchell and Black 19).

Bertrand Russell also acknowledges the barriers to achieving happiness: "Most people are not rich; many people are not born good-natured; many people have uneasy passions which make a quiet and well-regulated life seem intolerably boring; health is a blessing which no one can be sure of preserving; marriage is not invariably a source of bliss" (179). For these reasons, Russell sees happiness as something one must achieve rather than something to be inherited as a gift. In contrast to Freud, Russell believes that achieving happiness is a possibility for many people: "Where outward circumstances are not definitely unfortunate, a man should be able to achieve happiness, provided that his passions and interests are directed outward, not inward" (187). Russell believes that happiness is to be found as one directs his interests outside of himself and attempts to form strong relationships with other people: "To like many people spontaneously and without effort is perhaps the greatest of all sources of personal happiness" (122). Many psychologists agree with Russell's philosophies concerning relationships. Timothy D. Wilson states "the number one predictor of how happy people are is the quality of their social relationships" (49). Jonathan Haidt writes: "The condition that is usually said to trump all others in importance is the strength and number of a person's relationships. Good relationships make people happy . . ." (94). Donald Winnicott and Ronald Fairbairn also argue that "complete integration and happiness [are] possible within ordinary life" and that they depend on "alterations in the kinds of relationships that parents form with their children" (Frosh, *Politics* 109).

All of this gives important insight when examining the characters in *Infinite Jest*, who often neglect their personal relationships in favor of outside influences or extreme self-absorption. Characters are often deceived into believing these outside influences or self-absorption will bring them happiness, but in the end they only bring the characters misery as they become increasingly self-absorbed and neglect their personal relationships. This also has devastating consequences on future generations. As parents neglect to form meaningful relationships with their children, their children lack the ability and desire to form relationships with their own children, thus perpetuating familial discontent and the general unhappiness of the O.N.A.N. people.

Still, this is not to say that strengthening one's relationships will immediately or easily bring about happiness. As Daniel Gilbert states, "There is no simple formula for finding happiness" (263). Wilson also notes that happiness is not completely under one's control, stating that "a sizable portion of our happiness is determined by our genetic makeup" (48). For instance, many people suffer from depression. Wallace is perhaps the best example of how strengthening one's relationships may still fail to make one happy. While Wallace believed that true freedom involved "being able to truly care about other people and to sacrifice for them, over and over, in myriad petty little unsexy ways, every day" (*Water* 120-21), he still had difficulty finding happiness because of the depression that plagued his life.

However, the most reasonable place to start when examining why many characters in *Infinite Jest* are dissatisfied with their lives is that the O.N.A.N. has produced a society of self-entitled, self-absorbed narcissists. As Marshall Boswell writes: "nearly everyone in the significantly designated Year of the Depend Adult Undergarment

is a grownup baby in diapers, crawling on all fours in search of something to fill that need for maternal plentitude, for wholeness, or, at the very least, someone or something to blame for his or her own unhappiness" (131). This comparison of the O.N.A.N. people to infants bears an important relation to narcissism. Narcissism shares some deep roots with infancy: "Freud believe[s] that all the infant's libidinal energy [is] initially self-directed, a state that he term[s] primary narcissism" (Mitchell and Black 150). Christopher Lasch elaborates on this when he writes: "the newborn infant . . . does not yet perceive his mother as having an existence separate from his own, and he therefore mistakes dependence on the mother, who satisfies his needs as soon as they arise, with his own omnipotence" (36). These quotations describe how the infant's primary narcissism causes him to turn inwards, to be absorbed with self, and to confuse the service of others with his own omnipotence.

According to Heinz Kohut, an infant's primary narcissism is a natural developmental phase that he will eventually outgrow if his caretakers respond appropriately to his needs. Kohut contends that the feelings of omnipotence, grandiosity, and self-absorption play an important role in the infant's development. However, Kohut believes that when "these tendencies [are] not negotiated successfully, the self [grows] in a distorted or partial way, stuck in part or whole at the infant phase" (Frosh, *Identity* 101). Kohut feels that as the infant consistently experiences small amounts of frustration as he is exposed to the disappointments that naturally accompany reality, the infant will slowly come to realize his unrealistic expectations of himself and his parents. Over time, his inflated view of himself and others will be "whittled down, little by little, to more or less realistic proportions" (Mitchell and Black 159-60). As long as the small amounts of

frustration and disappointment are experienced by the infant in a supportive environment, he will internalize his successful responses to frustration and learn to "soothe himself, rather than collapsing in despair." This process is repeated over time in little ways and eventuates "in a secure, resilient self that retains a kernel of the excitement and vitality of the original, immature narcissistic states."

However, Winnicott recognizes that if the environment in which the infant experiences frustration is unsupportive, the infant's maturation can be impeded:

> the presence of actively abusive elements . . . means that the environment can turn persecutory rather than supportive. The consequences of this are that the internal structures are themselves full of persecutory elements, militating against the structuring of coherent selfhood. Depending on the severity of these conditions, various forms of self pathology can result. (Frosh, *Identity* 4)

This seems to be the case in *Infinite Jest*. Characters have not been raised in supportive and loving environments that allow them to progress from a state of narcissistic infanthood into a more mature adulthood. Rather, many characters are still trapped in a state of narcissistic infancy.

There are several symptoms of narcissism that are worth discussing. One is that narcissists tend to prefer fantasy over reality. Stephen Frosh refers to narcissism as "regressive because it prefers the imaginary over the real" (*Identity* 92). Frosh also states that "Narcissism represents a retreat from reality into a phantasy world in which there are no boundaries" reminiscent of the time when "the mother [offered] the new-born infant an extended period of self-absorption and limitless, omnipotent contentment" (*Identity*

93). One reason why narcissists prefer fantasy over reality is because of the sense of safety it affords them. According to Peter Marin, “Self-absorption . . . insulates Americans against the horrors around them . . . and ‘eases their troubled conscience’” (qtd. in Lasch 25).

Another symptom is that narcissists have difficulty forming meaningful relationships with others. As Otto F. Kernberg relates: “The main characteristics of these narcissistic personalities are . . . extreme self-centeredness and a remarkable absence of interest and empathy for others . . .” (qtd. in Frosh, *Identity* 74). This extreme self-absorption cripples a narcissist’s ability to form meaningful relationships with others. As Jean M. Twenge and W. Keith Campbell state: “narcissists . . . lack emotionally warm, caring, and loving relationships with other people” (19). Again, part of the reason narcissists have difficulty forming relationships is because of fear. Frosh states: “So sticking to the surface, limiting one’s investments in others . . . is safer, not just because it is excitingly, tantalizingly seductive, but also because it protects one against too much pain, even though the cost is that reliance on surface functioning leads to feeling dried up and dead” (48). Frosh also states that if one is narcissistic they “are struggling to preserve a shaky selfhood through the grandiose gratifications achieved by manipulating others . . . [and to] protect that self by avoiding dependency and real interpersonal relationships” (3). On one side, the narcissist craves the attention and approval of others. As Lasch states, the narcissist “depends on others to validate his self-esteem. He cannot live without an admiring audience” (10), but on the other hand the narcissist fears developing genuine relationships because he feels they will make him dependent and weak. It is this “fear of emotional dependence, together with his manipulative, exploitive approach to

personal relations, [that make his] relations bland, superficial, and deeply unsatisfying" (40).

Narcissists typically alternate between "grandiosity and feelings of inferiority" (Frosh, *Politics* 250). Twenge and Campbell state: "The central feature of narcissism is a very positive and inflated view of the self. People with high levels of narcissism . . . think they are better than others . . ." (19). However, Frosh argues that narcissism is more than an over-inflated view of oneself: "Narcissism is not simple self-aggrandizement born out of overvaluation of the self, but is more likely to be a desperate set of strategies for survival in a setting in which the self seems to be in danger of breaking down" (*Identity* 3). While the narcissist is often charismatic and good at manipulating others, his shaky relationships with others often contribute to his insecurity: "His apparent freedom from family ties and institutional constraints does not free him to stand alone or to glory in his individuality. On the contrary, it contributes to his insecurity, which he can overcome only by seeing his 'grandiose self' reflected in the attentions of others . . ." (Lasch 10). For this reason, the narcissist seeks to associate himself with "winners": "The narcissist admires and identifies himself with 'winners' out of his fear of being labeled a loser. He seeks to warm himself in their reflected glow" (Lasch 85). However, a narcissist's extreme self-absorption and "his devaluation of others, together with his lack of curiosity about them, impoverishes his personal life" (Lasch 40) and destroys his ability to form any kind of lasting relationship. Consequently, most "narcissistic people eventually become isolated from their families, friends, and professional colleagues as their self-centeredness becomes apparent" (Twenge and Campbell 281).

Perhaps Frosh describes narcissists best of all when he states: “These people have never been allowed to grow up” (*Politics* 250). This coincides with a statement from Mitchell and Black who state: “the project of childhood is socialization, the transformation of the infant, with his or her bestial impulses, into the adult . . . channeling those impulses and aims into socially acceptable forms of civilized living” (112).

In this thesis, I will argue that parental neglect and abuse, drug and alcohol addiction, and obsession with entertainment all work to increase characters’ narcissism and self-absorption. In *Infinite Jest*, parents often fail to provide their children with the supportive and caring environments that will allow them to mature from infants into adults. Instead, the persecutory or neglectful environments in which the children are raised causes characters to turn inwards and isolate themselves from the further hurt or damage their parents may cause which results in an increase of narcissistic tendencies. In addition, a parent’s poor relationship with his or her children provides a weak example for children. As these children grow older, they mimic their parent’s example. This increased narcissism prevents characters from developing meaningful relationships, and this absence of meaningful relationships contributes to the feeling of sadness that plagues the O.N.A.N. Rather than confronting reality and working to overcome their sadness by attempting to form meaningful relationships, characters instead seek to escape this sadness through the various fantasies provided by drug-use and entertainment. These fantasies only work to exacerbate characters’ self-absorption and narcissism which consequently increases their unhappiness. I will also argue that certain characters are able to break free of these narcissistic impulses by turning outwards to form meaningful relationships. As these characters break free of the “cage of the self” (777), they

experience a sense of meaning and a form of happiness that other characters seem without.

Chapter One

Throughout *Infinite Jest*, parents play a significant role in the development of narcissism in their children. Loving, caring, and emotionally involved parents are remarkably absent from the narrative. In a conversation between Marathe and Steeply, Marathe argues that the misery that abounds throughout the O.N.A.N. is at least partly due to the fact that parents have failed to adequately teach their children: “How to choose any but a child’s greedy choices if there is no loving-filled father to guide, inform, teach the person how to choose?” (320). Jim Incandenza and his wife Avril are the parents to three boys: Orin, Mario, and Hal. However, because Incandenza is the headmaster of the Enfield Tennis Academy (E.T.A.), a boarding school for pre-adolescent and adolescent children, Jim and Avril essentially act as parents to their pupils as well. In this chapter, I will argue that E.T.A. has essentially become an orphanage in which parents can rid themselves of the responsibilities of parenting. This causes their children to feel neglected and to turn to negative outside sources to replace the love and affection that should have been provided by their parents. In addition to those who neglect their children are those who abuse their children. This abuse has a negative impact on their children that diminishes the children’s ability to grow into healthy, mature adults. Having been abused, they either seek relationships similar to that of their former abusive relationships or they seek escape through substance abuse. Also, because Incandenza and Avril do not provide their own sons with the warmth and love necessary for them to break free of the womb of solipsism, Orin and Hal adopt their parent’s narcissism and demonstrate this narcissism through their need to perform and their inability to form genuine relationships with others. The poor parenting present throughout the novel has devastating consequences for

the children of these parents because, as Mitchell and Black write, "Children become a great deal like their parents" (39). If parents themselves are narcissistic, abusive, or neglectful of their own children, it is far more likely that their children will inherit these characteristics as they grow older: "A child with depressed parents, detached parents, or narcissistically absorbed parents might begin to experience depression, detachment, narcissistic self-absorption in herself" (Mitchell and Black 119). Frosh also expresses an object relations perspective when he states: "the self is not completely pre-given, but is actually built up through relations with other people, particularly the mother. . . . it is damage caused to these relationships that leads on to the inadequacies of the self, which in turn produce narcissistic or schizoid symptomatology" (*Identity* 46).

The Enfield Tennis Academy is essentially an orphanage in which parents can escape the responsibility of their children by shunting them into E.T.A.'s care. The way in which many of the children arrive at E.T.A. suggests parental abandonment: "Some kids just get dropped off. Sometimes the parents' cars barely even stop, just slow down, throw gravel as they accelerate away" (519). Parents are anxious to shift their parental responsibility onto a different outside source. Frosh describes how this can be damaging to a child's development: "If the self is constructed through relations with stable objects and dependable people, then it must be unsettled when these objects keep disappearing, to be replaced by new, exciting but equally disposable alternatives . . ." (*Identity* 6). The parents of E.T.A. students—who are to their children the "stable objects" or "dependable people" that Frosh speaks of—willingly substitute the guidance, direction, and loving support which only they can give with the new and exciting but "equally disposable alternative" of E.T.A.

Parental neglect and indifference is further emphasized when several of E.T.A.'s children are injured in the Eschaton debacle. Eschaton is a game comparable to Risk that is played on several tennis courts. The participants in this game attempt to lob tennis balls representing "thermonuclear warhead[s]" (322) onto several pieces of tennis clothing spread throughout the courts. These pieces of clothing represent different countries' military fortresses, government buildings, or civilian cities. However, when a disagreement breaks out among the players, the players begin firing the "thermonuclear warhead[s]" at each other, turning their warlike play into actual combat. This results in several injuries, some of which are quite serious. Although many children have been injured, several parents cannot be bothered to make the trip out to E.T.A. to check on their children's condition: "Todd Possalthwaite's dad was on honeymoon in the Azores, and Otis P. Lord's mother had some inner-ear thing and the Lords couldn't fly" (1046 n. 266). Otis P. Lord is the student who is the most severely injured, who spends some time in the hospital and requires surgery to remove the computer monitor that ends up stuck to his head, yet his parents are not there to provide support.

However, the parents who do make the trip to E.T.A. are not much different from those who do not. Those parents who come spend the morning speaking to headmaster Charles Tavis, who assures them that their children are fine. These parents then get into their cars and leave to go home "before they even recall they'd forgotten to pop in on their injured kid, sign his cast, feel his forehead, say Hey." The parents' affection for their children is revealed to be mere affectation. They feign caring by showing up with the intentions of holding the school accountable, but they demonstrate their neglect when they *forget* to check on their children. Tom LeClair recognizes the orphanage that E.T.A.

has become: "[the] novel starts to cohere as a profound cross-class study of parental abandonment and familial dysfunction. Sent away to the Academy to become top-flight entertainers (or pre-teen failures), the tennis kids play self-destructive games and take recreational drugs to relieve the pressure" (32). With the lack of natural affection from their parents, the children turn to other sources of affection: the love and attention they will receive as they learn to succeed at tennis and the high or feeling of numbness they receive from drug-use. Mitchell and Black describe psychologist Fairbairn's beliefs when they write:

> For Fairbairn, healthy parenting result[s] in a child with an outward orientation, directed toward real people, who [will] provide real contact and exchange. . . . If the child's dependency needs are not met, if the affirmative interactions sought by the child are not provided, a pathological turning away from external reality, from actual exchange with others, takes place and fantasied, private presences (internal objects) are established, to whom one maintains a fantasied connection (internal object relations). (117)

Fairbairn's concept is demonstrated by the children who attend E.T.A. As their parental neglect leaves them feeling rejected, unfulfilled, and unwanted, they turn inwards by dedicating themselves to tennis and attempt to escape the feelings of emotional loss through the fantasy provided by drug-use. While the narrator states that "Competitive junior tennis is meant to be good clean fun" (151), he also notes that "probably about a fourth of the ranking players, over, say, fifteen . . . cannot pass a standard . . . urine scan" (152).

In addition to the parental neglect, many children in the narrative are victims of abuse. In *Infinite Jest*, characters that have been abused often turn to drugs as a means of escape. The narrator offers this statistic: "That over 60% of all persons arrested for drug and alcohol-related offenses report being sexually abused as children" (201). Parents repeatedly take sexual advantage of their children throughout the novel. One girl in AA relates how "she'd been abusively forced to share a bedroom with a drooling invertebrate who by fourteen was Itself getting incestuously diddled on a nightly basis by a smiling biological claims processor of a father" (371) and that this horrific experience "all but like forced [her] to flee and strip and swan-dive into the dark spiritual anesthesia of active drug addiction" (372). As she explains, she began using drugs in hopes of forgetting what had happened. This experience also parallels Matt and Michael Pemulis's experience with their own alcoholic father: "His Da'd begun fucking Matty up the ass when Matty was ten. . . . Matty had complete recall of the whole thing" (684). Like the girl in the AA meeting, Matt would get "*fook*[ed] in *t'boom*" while his brother "Mickey [was] over in the cot by the window always silent as tomb, on his side, face to the wall and hidden" (685). Mitchell and Black describe how one's early relationships can affect his or her later relationships: "Each of us shapes his relationships according to the patterns internalized from his earliest significant relationships. The modes of connection with early objects becomes the preferred modes of connection with new objects" (121). This quotation bears relation to both Matt and Michael. As their father was an alcoholic, Michael reflects his father's alcoholism with his own drug abuse and by becoming E.T.A.'s in-house drug dealer. Also, Michael's associations primarily consist of other adolescent drug-users. As their father molested Matt, as an adult, Matt arguably seeks

similar relationships in his work as a “prostitute” (682). Mitchell and Black describe Fairbairn’s research of abused children when they write: “[Abused] children came to seek pain as a form of connection, the preferred form of connection, to others. Children, and later adults, seek from others the kinds of contact they experienced early on in their development” (115-16). Both Matt and Michael illustrate the negative impact their father has on them which is demonstrated in their current lives and the relationships they seek.

Matt and Michael’s father’s failure to prepare them for the future also hinders their ability to help anyone for whom they are responsible. This is exemplified when Michael Pemulis meets and counsels his Little Buddies. The Big Buddy program is where “the littler kids receive general big-brotherly-type support and counsel from an upperclassman” (66-67). However, when Pemulis meets with his group, he “tells them, the fly agaric ’shroom was both loved and hated for its powerful . . . psycho-spiritual effects.” Although Pemulis is supposed to be the adult and mentor to his Little Buddies, he is unable to give them any counsel or support because his own father failed to advise him. Instead, Pemulis refers them to drugs which were sometimes known for their “pleasant psycho-spiritual effects.” As his father has passed on his substance abuse to Pemulis, Pemulis perpetuates this cycle by attempting to pass on this reliance on substances to his Little Buddies.

This idea of passing on weakness, addictions, or narcissism to future generations is often reiterated throughout the novel. Incandenza’s father, Incandenza Sr., was a “former top U.S. jr. tennis player” (63) and a one time “promising young pre-method actor” who became “a disrespected and largely unemployable actor.” Because of past failures, Incandenza Sr. confides in his son, a young Jim Incandenza, his fear of “dying

without ever being really *seen*" (168). For this reason, Incandenza Sr. attempts to live vicariously through his son or to be seen through his son's potential successes. Incandenza Sr. "somewhere around the nadir of his professional fortunes . . . [decides] to go down to his Raid-sprayed basement workshop and build a promising junior athlete the way other fathers might restore vintage autos . . ." (63). In his essay "On Narcissism," Freud describes how narcissists attempt to have their children "fulfill those wishful dreams of the parents which they never carried out" (556). It is telling that Incandenza Sr. does not attempt to do something with his son until "the nadir of his professional fortunes." His son does not become important to Incandenza Sr. until he has failed in all of his other pursuits. Then his son becomes useful in helping to make Incandenza Sr. seen by attempting to make the boy succeed where he has failed, thus proving Incandenza Sr. a success. It is evident that Incandenza Sr.'s goal is not to build a relationship with his son or to have him excel at tennis because Incandenza Sr. feels it will make his son happy. This is demonstrated by how Incandenza Sr. does everything he can to make the boy feel guilty about the supposed gift of tennis training from his father. Incandenza Sr. wants to make sure the boy understands the tremendous sacrifice on his part in contrast to his own father who never spent time with him: "not as I do you, Jim, not as I take care to bend over backwards way, *way* out of my way to let you know I *see* you" (163). Incandenza Sr. shares with Incandenza that the time they spend together is really "way, way out of" his way, insinuating that the time they spend together as father and son is an inconvenience rather than something that gives his father joy. This is reiterated when he speaks of the fee they will have to pay to play tennis: "It's only five dollars. The court fee. . . . Five dollars each day. . . . when we live in a glorified trailer and have to share a garage with

two DeSotos and what looks like a Model A on blocks and my Montclair can't afford the kind of oil she deserves" (164). Again, Incandenza Sr. attempts to make Incandenza feel guilty for the time and money spent on him. Incandenza Sr. wishes to let the boy know that he is sacrificing repairs and oil for his cars and that their less than ideal living situation is exacerbated by the cost of the tennis fee. The focus is not on building a better relationship between father and son but on Incandenza Sr. conveying to his son how great of a father he is in making these tremendous sacrifices for him. Incandenza Sr. also conveys the acrimony he possesses towards his own father by wishing "he rot[s] in a green and empty hell" (166). Incandenza Sr.'s effort to prove to his son how great a father he is fails, as the narrator describes how Incandenza names his second son after the very man his own father hated: "Mario had been given the name of Dr. James Incandenza's father's father, a dour and golf-addicted Green Valley AZ oculist . . ." (313). Frosh relates the dangers of parents attempting to satisfy their missed opportunities vicariously through their children:

> Children need parents to love them for what they are, not what they represent; internalization of the failure to receive such love leads to a continuing inner emptiness and aching need, accompanied by a surface shallowness employed to ward off any who might come too close, reawaken the memory of infantile dependence, and resurrect the despair and rage behind. Given children of their own, such people, faced with the intensity of a child's demands, repudiate them in the same way in which they themselves were repudiated: they see in the child only what can

> reflect their own glory, only what can support their fragile selves—the child is truly only a narcissistic echo. (*Identity* 99)

Frosh's concept of "a narcissistic echo" applies to Incandenza who never felt his father loved him for the child he was but rather attempted to build him into a star tennis player in the hopes that it would reflect well on his father. This has devastating consequences for Incandenza. As a father, Incandenza feels he cannot communicate with his son, Hal, without deceiving him. Consequently, Incandenza dresses up in a costume and poses as a professional conversationalist in the hopes of genuinely communicating with Hal. In this moment, Incandenza shares with Hal how his own father would essentially ignore him by turning the daily newspaper into "the room's fifth wall" (31). His father's neglect of Incandenza has had damaging effects for both Hal and Orin. Arguably, because of his own father's narcissistic self-absorption, Incandenza confesses to Joelle that he "simply [doesn't] know how to speak with either of his undamaged sons" (743). His father's poor parenting and narcissistic, self-absorbed behavior has left a grown Incandenza also struggling in his relationships with his own sons. Barbara Killinger states: "Many parents who neglect their children do so because they themselves have been damaged and left emotionally crippled" (117-18). Rather than communicating with his sons, Incandenza once again follows his father's example by seeking to escape intimacy and the pressures of relationships through alcoholism. As a young boy, Incandenza sees his father "dragged in the door, under what's called the influence" (169). When Incandenza becomes an adult, he adopts his father's alcoholism. Hal recalls how his father "sits and advises with his flask" (172). Katherine Hayles elaborates on the damaging consequences of the Incandenza family's alcoholism: "Wounded by his father, Himself fails miserably in

nurturing his sons. . . . Son of an alcoholic father, Himself carries on the family tradition with an alcoholism so acute that when he finally goes of the sauce, he kills himself to escape the pain of sobriety . . ." (689). The poor example of Incandenza's own father cripples Incandenza's ability to be a better father to his own children.

In addition to Incandenza's inability to form relationships with his sons is Avril's own narcissistic self-absorption. At first glance, it may seem that Avril is the ideal mother. She seems caring, concerned, and she assures her sons that she is "right [there] for [them] anytime day or night" (763). However, Frosh states: "the mother's attempt to become an ideal parent results only in smothering the child with solicitude. The coupling of this solicitude with a dearth of warmth produces the narcissistic character: exaggeratedly self-important but inwardly devastated. . . ." (*Politics* 169). Similarly, Avril attempts to be the ideal mother in a way that seems more for her benefit than for her children, and she provides little emotional warmth for her sons which contribute to their individual narcissism. While Avril insists that she is there for her sons, her sons recognize Avril's narcissism and her need to always be the center of attention. Hal describes how Avril has "this way of establishing herself in the exact center of any room she [is] in, so that from any angle she [is] somehow in the line of all sight" (521). Orin also describes "Avril as The Black Hole of Human Attention," and when Joelle visits the family for Thanksgiving she observes that "The whole Thanksgiving table incline[s] very subtly toward Avril . . ." (745). Also, throughout the novel, Avril's needs are continually placed above the needs of her sons. Mary K. Holland describes how Avril "extends her emotional energy to her children only so that they [can] reflect it back to her" (226). Holland further states that "Avril's central failure as a parent is her absolute inability to

put her own needs aside to answer for her children's." While Avril often expresses her love verbally, she does not demonstrate this love through her actions. Any action that may be demonstrative of Avril's love seems to have ulterior motives. Even the birth of her first son, Orin, is admitted by the narrator to be "at least partly a legal maneuver" (64). Although Avril "tell[s] [Mario] she love[s] him about a hundred times a day" (737), she refuses to administer to his special needs by changing his childhood diapers: "Mario was involuntarily incontinent up to his early teens. . . . Avril couldn't change diapers" (768). Instead of working to assure Mario—as Hal and his father do by "never once judging or wrinkling their face"—that his incontinence is no cause for concern, Avril instead wishes to be assured by Mario. She comes to Mario seeking assurance that she is still a good mother: "She'd sobbed and asked him to forgive her and to assure her . . ." (768). Avril's concerns for Mario are revealed to be about her needs to feel like a good mother rather than her son's needs to have his diapers changed.

Mario also exemplifies how Avril merely feigns love and interest when he comes to Avril asking how he can tell if someone is sad. In this experience, Avril is more concerned with correcting Mario's grammar than really listening to his concerns. Mario asks "How can you tell if somebody's sad?" (763), and Avril responds with "A quick smile. 'You mean whether someone's sad.'" Also, although Mario has some learning disabilities that prevent him from communicating at the collegiate level that Avril is accustomed to, Avril "refuses to adjust syntax, to speak in any way down to him . . ." (761). Initially, this may appear to be a noble intention; however, it seems that Avril's refusal "to adjust syntax" is more of a thinly veiled attempt by Avril to deny that her son is damaged, physically and mentally. For Mario, unclear about many of the ideas his

mother is trying to communicate, finally says, "Sometimes I get afraid when you forget you have to talk more simply to me" (767). Mario cannot understand the language his mother uses and consequently cannot understand the points she is making. Also, although Avril is adept at being able to describe exactly how one can tell if someone is sad—giving several paragraphs of just how a person can tell another is sad, as well as possible causal factors in the person's sadness—she cannot recognize sadness in her own children: "Mario Love-o, are *you* sad? Are you trying to determine whether I've been sensing that you *yourself* are sad?" (768). Avril is unaware that it is Hal and not Mario that is sad. Hal's sadness, and Avril's ignorance of this sadness, becomes more apparent when Hal describes how his mother simply projects herself onto Hal:

> 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. His Moms Avril hears her own echoes inside him and thinks what she hears is him, and this makes Hal feel the one thing he feels to the limit, lately: he is lonely. (694)

This passage alludes to the story of Narcissus in Ovid's *Metamorphosis* in which Narcissus, lost in the woods and calling for help, is spoken to by Echo, but hears only his own words echoed back to him: "But all he heard were his own words echoed back" (3.381-86). Like Narcissus, Avril, who is similarly obsessed with self, "hears her own echoes inside" of Hal. Avril refuses to come to truly know Hal and instead insists on projecting herself onto him. This leaves Hal feeling alone and unloved because Hal does not feel that his mother really even knows who he is. Frosh writes, "narcissistic pathology

is defined by the inability of the narcissist to deal with intimacy and emotional warmth, and to trust anyone else at all" (*Identity* 105). This seems especially true of Avril. While she continually tells her children she loves them, she does not really make the effort to know them. Also, similar to this statement from Frosh, Avril seems unable "to trust anyone else at all." Avril is consumed with the idea of hiding and secrecy. Avril worries that her sons keep things from her: "Avril suffers [from] a black phobic dread of hiding and or secrecy in all possible forms with respect to her sons" (51). Yet, Avril is continually hiding things from her family. Avril "works tremendously hard to hide her maternal dread of [Hal's] possibly ever drinking like" his father did (50-51). Avril also attempts to hide her various affairs throughout the years. Avril has had affairs with "over thirty" medical attachés (30), as well as "M. DuPlessis," the "pan-Canadian Resistan[ce]" leader. Avril also has affairs with the student "John Wayne" (957), her half brother "C.T.," some man in a "Volvo" (999 n. 80), and it is speculated that she has had an incestuous affair with her own "son," Orin (791). All of these affairs further illustrate Avril's narcissism. Lasch writes: "Chronically bored, restlessly in search of instantaneous intimacy—of emotional titillation without involvement and dependence—the narcissist is promiscuous and often pansexual as well . . ." (40). Avril avoids developing genuine relationships with her family members and instead searches for superficial sexual relationships that eschew emotional attachment or commitment.

Avril also hides the likelihood that Mario is C.T.'s son. Avril's promiscuity and infidelity, her apparent sexual relations with C.T. before Mario's birth, and the striking similarities between Mario and C.T.'s mother—Mario is short, "somewhere between elf and jockey" (313), has "khaki-colored skin" (314), and is a "true homodont" (901), and

C.T.'s mother's wedding photo portrays her "to have been a dwarf" with "khaki-colored cheek[s]" whose "smile in the wedding photo is homodontic"—seem to suggest that Mario is C.T.'s son rather than Incandenza's. The narrator even states this possibility when C.T. awakes early one morning and sees Mario asleep by the radio: "the thing it's not entirely impossible he may have fathered asleep up next to the sound system" (451). Avril, arguably, knows Mario's paternity, or at least that Mario is not Incandenza's son, yet she hides this news from all of the family. Avril's hypocrisy clearly undermines her pleas for an open relationship with her and her sons. Which of her sons will feel a real need to confide in her his secrets when it is so obvious she hypocritically attempts to hide her own?

Avril and Incandenza's failure to develop meaningful relationships with their sons and to make their sons feel loved cripples their sons' ability to mature into adults. Rather, both Orin and Hal have narcissistic symptoms that encourage their self-absorption and isolation. Lasch describes how narcissists generally enjoy showing off their skills in the hopes of garnering themselves the praise and attention of their audience: "The attainment of certain skills unavoidably gives rise to an urge to show them off. . . . to ratify a supremely difficult accomplishment; to give pleasure; to forge a bond between himself and his audience" (104-05). Both Hal and Orin desire to show off their skills in the hopes of monopolizing their audiences' attention.

The most intelligent of all the characters in *Infinite Jest* is Hal. The narrator states that "Hal can summon a kind of mental Xerox of anything he'd ever read and basically read it all over again, at will . . ." (797). While this is an impressive gift, Hal relies on this gift to garner himself praise and attention. Orin observes how Hal uses his intelligence to

gain the approval and love of his mother: "The kid's still obsessed with her approval. . . . He's still performing for her, syntax- and vocabulary-wise, at seventeen, the same way he did when he was ten" (1040 n. 234). Orin refers to Hal's intellectual games with his mother as a type of performance. As a ten-year-old at Thanksgiving dinner, Hal attempts to monopolize people's attention by demonstrating his knowledge of "the freezing-temperature of platinum" (745). As a young man, Hal still seeks this attention by performing for his peers. In the locker room, Troeltsch asks anyone to define the word "acutance" (96). Hal immediately responds: "A measure of resolution directly proportional to the resolved ratio of a given pulse's digital code" (97). His classmates cheer him on in a sardonic way, and Struck says, "We'll be like *vying* for the seats all around Inc tomorrow." However, Hal's intellectual skills are not employed in a way that encourages genuine friendship or love but in a way that establishes Hal as a performer, comparable to a circus freak, and enlists his peers as an audience, there to encourage his performance: Freer shouts, "Do a dictionary-page for us, man, Inc." The narrator admits that "It's all only half-nasty" and that "Hal is placid about getting his balls smacked around." While his classmates' mocking tone may suggest healthy peer rivalry or male locker room bonding, Hal's classmates will scramble for the seats around him in tomorrow's test not because they wish to be close to a friend but because they wish to benefit from his performance. While Hal employs his intellect as a means of garnering him the praise and attention of others, much of the praise he receives is simulated and insincere.

Orin is similarly intent on monopolizing people's attention. This is evidenced in Orin's role as a college and professional punter. Orin describes to Joelle what it is he likes

about punting: "here were upwards of 30,000 voices, souls, voicing approval as One Soul. . . . Audience exhortations and approvals so total they . . . melded into a sort of single coital moan, one big vowel, the sound of the womb . . . (295). Orin describes how the crowd's noise is "spiritual": "30,000 voices, souls, voicing approval as One Soul." However, the crowd is not only "voicing approval *as* One Soul" but they are also voicing approval *for* One Soul, Orin Indandenza. Orin has come to love punting because of the attention, love, and reassurance the crowd gives him. This is further demonstrated when Orin describes how the crowd's individual voices "melded into a sort of single coital moan, one big vowel, the sound of the womb." This excerpt is strikingly similar to Orin's admission of what it is that makes him so drawn to his seduction of various women: "not his but *her* love, that he has it, this love . . . that for one second she loves him too much to stand it, that she must (she feels) have him . . . that there is now inside her a vividness vacuumed of all but his name: O., O. That he is the one" (566). Like the passage above, this passage contains "a sort of single coital moan, one big vowel" which is revealed to be "his name: O." In both of his experiences with football and women the real draw for Orin is that he feels he is the center of attention, "That he is the one." Like an infant, Orin is able to receive incredible amounts of attention and love without having to give anything in return.

While Orin and Hal both attempt to win affection through their performance, this affection is fleeting and superficial. Because of their narcissistic self-absorption, both Hal and Orin have difficulty forming genuine relationships with others. However, this is a problem that is present throughout E.T.A. As Petrus van Ewijk writes, "ETA's programs offer very little opportunity for the students to bond emotionally. It emphasizes

individualism as students are not encouraged to look to each other for support" (133). Hal observes this when he comments to his Little Buddies: "We're on each other's food chain. All of us. It's an individual sport. Welcome to the meaning of individual" (112). In the end, the students are not encouraged to create genuine friendships with one another, and their greatest friendship will be with an inanimate object: "The stick is your friend. You will become very close. Grasp your friend firmly at all times" (173). Instead of developing genuine friendships with others, the boys are taught that their best friend will be the sport or their racquet and that this is the friend they are to grasp firmly and trust at all times.

Dating, intimacy, and love (whether homosexual or heterosexual) are remarkably absent from E.T.A.'s narrative. For most of the residents of E.T.A., dating does not occur. The narrator states that "Coed tables are quietly discouraged" (627), and Hal admits that his goal is "lifetime virginity" (634). The narrator also states that "Some guys here never [come close to dating anyone]. It's the same at all the academies, this asexual contingent. Some junior players don't have the emotional juice left over after tennis to face what dating requires" (635). E.T.A.'s complete and total focus on tennis creates an imbalance in the boys' lives. Excelling at tennis and staying enrolled at the academy typically requires all of their "emotional juice." Essentially, E.T.A. has become a society of workaholics. Barbara Killinger states that "Narcissism plays a key role" in workaholics (22) and that workaholics "gradually become one-sided and emotionally crippled." Narcissists' "obsession with work becomes a relentless, compulsive drive to achieve the control and power they feel is necessary to gain others' approval" (12). This is similar to the students of E.T.A. As the narrator observes, the boys' ability to build loving

relationships or to date is “retarded” (635) by the things they learn at Enfield. Their complete devotion to tennis leaves little room for any kind of socializing or dating. In fact, Hal spends time strategizing how to turn down dates so that he will not be asked again: “Say something like I’m terribly sorry I can’t come out to see *81/2* . . . but you see if I jump rope for two hours then jog backwards through Newton till I puke They’ll let me watch match-cartridges . . . so you can be sure that henceforth Daphne/Kimberly/Jennifer will take her [mating ritual] business somewhere else” (175).

Hal uses tennis as a means of escaping what is typically viewed to be a normal and healthy part of adolescence and maturation. However, dating and developing amorous relationships are not viewed by the pupils of E.T.A. to be healthy or beneficial but seductive “detours of so-called normal American life” in which their “talent . . . can abandon [them]” and compromise their chances of reaching “The Show.” The narrator also states that “students hoping to prepare for careers as professional athletes are by intension training also to be entertainers” (188). Many of the students at E.T.A. are sacrificing or ignoring the opportunities to build intimate relationships on an individual level in order for them to go on to receive the approval of large, but impersonal, audiences. Like narcissists, they will come to depend “on others to validate [their] self-esteem” and will find difficulty living “without an admiring audience” (Lasch 10).

While Hal and many of the students of E.T.A. simply avoid dating or intimate relationships with the opposite sex, Orin is a womanizer who refers to his victims as subjects. However, initially Orin seems interested in forming a genuine relationship with Joelle. For example: “Orin wire[s] Marlon Bain and Ross Read and the strabismic Nickerson that he [is] by all indications in love with somebody” (296). However, Orin’s

attraction to Joelle is based almost solely on looks: “The schoolboy epithet they’d made up to refer to Orin’s twirler was the P.G.O.A.T., for the Prettiest Girl Of All Time. It wasn’t the entire attraction, but she really was almost grotesquely lovely” (289-90). Joelle, herself, also worries that Orin’s attraction to her is based on what she looks like: “Her biggest worry [is] that Orin [is] pulled only by what she looked like” (739). Also, although there is no real narrative of Orin and Joelle’s break-up, it seems evident that their break-up stems from Joelle’s supposed disfigurement with acid. There is no evidence the two are together after the accident and Hal recalls his brother began attempting to have sex with one woman while on a date with another “after the girl Orin had been wildly in love with . . . had been disfigured” (634). It seems evident that after Joelle was allegedly disfigured that Orin severed their relationship and began to see other people. By dating, or being able to catch, the “Prettiest Girl Of All Time,” Orin feels better about himself, his confidence, and his abilities. Dating someone extremely good-looking reflects well on him. Lasch describes how this desire to associate oneself with “winners” is a narcissistic tendency: “The narcissist admires and identifies himself with ‘winners’ out of his fear of being labeled a loser. He seeks to warm himself in their reflected glow” (85). Orin attempts to “warm himself” in Joelle’s “reflected glow” and once she becomes disfigured and is no longer the Prettiest Girl Of All Time, Orin leaves her.

In his personal relationships, Orin never really experiences any kind of happiness simply because he cannot ever receive enough love and attention to satiate his narcissism. He continually seeks additional praise and attention from those he feels neglect him. Orin confides in Joelle one night: “He didn’t have one fucking clue how Himself felt about his

abandoning a decade's tennis for punting, Orin wept. Or about Orin's being truly great at it, at something, finally. Was he proud, or jealously threatened, or judgmental that Orin had quit tennis, or what?" (743). Orin becomes obsessed with gaining his father's approval. This would be understandable if Orin was interested in establishing a genuine relationship with his father. However, Orin manipulates Joelle into becoming a mediator between him and his father, which further suggests his lack of love for Joelle. Joelle admits that she feels she is being used by Orin to get closer to his father: "Orin's idea's real project was developmentally obvious: he thought he could somehow get to his father through her. . . . It made her real uneasy. She theorized that Orin unconsciously wished her to mediate between himself and 'Himself'" (739-40).

In her sophomore year, Joelle begins to study film. Although Joelle prefers "movies where a whole bunch of shit blows up," "Orin in a low-key-way introduce[s] her to art film[s]" (297). In a letter from Marlon Bain to Helen Steeply, Marlon writes, "you have only to watch [Orin] in certain kinds of action to see that there can be such a thing as *sincerity with a motive*" (1048 n. 260). Even though Orin himself is "pretty luke-warm on film and cartridges and theater and pretty much anything that reduce[s] him to herd-like spectation" (297), Orin is interested "in upgrading the P.G.O.A.T.'s commercial tastes." By upgrading Joelle's tastes in film, Joelle will be more impressive to Orin's father and consequently more capable of becoming the mediator between them. Orin introduces Joelle to his father's films "which [have] a major impact on her"; Orin also introduces her to his father who "let[s] the P.G.O.A.T. understudy with Leith"; and consequently Incandenza "take[s] Orin and his beloved out after dailies." Orin is able to at least physically (if not emotionally) get closer to his father through Joelle. However, in

the end, Orin's attempts fail because, like his mother, he is too narcissistic to take a genuine interest in his father's work. As Russell writes: "the man who demands affection is not the man upon whom it is bestowed. The man who receives affection is, speaking broadly, the man who gives it. But it is useless to attempt to give it as a calculation . . . for a calculated affection is not genuine and is not felt to be so by the recipient" (188). Orin's desire to get close to his father is too calculated, manipulated, and insincere for him to develop a genuine relationship. Instead of becoming legitimately interested in his father's work and interests, Orin attempts to connect to his father through a mediator. Ironically, Joelle, who does take a genuine interest in Incandenza's work and life, comes to regard Incandenza as "her true heart's friend" (225). These feelings seem to be reciprocated, for upon Incandenza's death, Incandenza wills Joelle "an absurd . . . annuity" (999 n. 80). In the end, it is Joelle who is legitimately interested in Incandenza's work and Incandenza, himself, who gains the relationship that Orin desires.

Further evidence that Joelle only works to establish Orin's narcissicim and solipsism is found in how Orin watches films that Joelle has taped of him playing football: "Orin liked . . . to make Jiffy Pop and watch her little ten-second clips of him over and over. . . . He sat rapt. It only happened when he watched them alone. Sometimes he got an erection" (297-98). Like Narcissus who is "enchanted by the beautiful reflection that he [sees]. . . . Spellbound by his own self" (Ovid 3.416-20), Orin stares continually at himself in a film of Joelle's. Hence, his erection is symbolic of his own narcissistic love for himself. Joelle is simply the woman on the outside of his love, or the woman holding the camera. She is not in the film and goes unremarked as he watches the films on loop. Also, like the medical attaché and others who fall victim to entertainment or the *Infinite*

Jest V film, Orin (like Narcissus) is captivated by the image of himself. Like Narcissus, who is unable to tear himself away from his image and is "slowly consumed by its hidden fire" (Ovid 3.487-90) until he wastes away and dies, Orin's own narcissism may prove fatal.

After Joelle, Orin's relationships with women become increasingly more and more superficial and shallow. Catherine Nichols writes how Orin attempts "to assuage his own fears of emotional vulnerability through serial womanizing. [And he refers] to his ongoing parade of lovers as 'the Subjects,' [who] he paradoxically requires their attention to continue his solipsistic denial of emotional openness" (10). Orin's own internal narcissistic issues are detrimental to his relationships before and after Joelle. In college, before meeting Joelle, Orin has "already drawn idle little sideways 8's on the postcoital flanks of a dozen B.U. coeds" (289). These "little sideways 8's" are revealing of Orin's character. After copulating with various Subjects, Orin draws an infinity symbol on their "flanks," yet these symbols are sometimes incorrectly interpreted by his Subjects to be the numeral eight: "Not real bright—she thought the figure he'd trace without thinking on her bare flank after sex was the numeral 8, to give you an idea" (47). The numeral eight is often symbolic of "renewal or new beginnings derived from the fact that eight follows the symbolic 'complete' number, seven, and begins a new cycle" (Tresidder 164-65). This infinity symbol that is interpreted by at least one of Orin's Subjects to be an eight, indicates how many of these girls believe they are entering into a new relationship with Orin. This "Not real bright" girl seems to think this as Orin awakes the next morning to find her "sitting up against the reading pillow, wearing his sleeveless Academy sweatshirt and sipping hazelnut espresso and watching, on the cartridge viewing system that

occupied half the bedroom's south wall something horrific" (47). This "Not real bright" girl clearly thinks that they are beginning a new relationship. She has made herself at home, is wearing Orin's clothing, is drinking his coffee, and watching his television. Orin, who is horrified to find her still there in the morning, "lie[s] there, moist and paralyzed, curled fetal on his own sweat-shadow," so he will not have to speak to her. He is already planning to mail "her child an expensive toy and then [have] his phone number changed" so that he will never have to see her again. Orin merely pretends to be interested in his Subjects until he receives their love, and he then leaves them unfulfilled and devoid of any real emotional connection. As Iannis Goerlandt writes: "Because it is a pose, the girls do not receive what they want: the tokens of affection are neither real nor true but simulated and insincere" (310). Hence, Orin's infinity symbol, which he draws on the flanks of his Subjects, is really symbolic of the fact that he will *infinitely* be pursuing various Subjects in a poor attempt to alleviate his need to feel loved. Yet none of Orin's shallow relationships with women leads to his happiness. Instead, his seductions become increasingly more complex and convoluted. Soon it is not enough to merely sleep with his Subjects. Hal describes how Orin must have his subjects fall "so terribly in love with him they'd never be able to want anyone else" (634) and how Orin takes "obscure massage and psych courses and read[s] tantric books" in the hopes of increasing his ability to seduce his subjects. This kind of behavior is theorized by Lasch, who describes how the narcissist makes inordinate demands on his relationships:

> The narcissist feels consumed by his own appetites. The intensity of his oral hunger leads him to make inordinate demands on his friends and sexual partners; yet in the same breath he repudiates those demands and

> asks only a casual connection without promise or permanence on either side. (202)

Orin makes extreme demands on his subjects: he wants them to be "terribly in love with him," while Orin himself refuses to extend any of his own emotion or love back towards his subjects. He merely withdraws from the superficial relationship once he receives what he wants. Orin dedicates his whole life to the pursuit of making women fall in love with him. He even takes classes and studies sex or "tantric books" like others might study religion. As Stephen Hirt writes, "The narrator illustrates Orin's narcissism with his personal addiction, the desperate need to be the sole object of a woman's love: 'the Subject's . . . pleasure in him has become his food' (596). Yet, like every addiction, this desire remains unfulfilled and leaves him empty and alone after each 'success'" (31).

Similar to Hal, whose addiction to marijuana at least partially stems from witnessing his father drinking "Wild Turkey at like 5:00 A.M." (30), part of the reason Orin is so emotionally damaged and obsessed with seducing his subjects is because as a young man he witnessed, and was potentially a part of, the promiscuity of his mother. Mitchell and Black describe Fairbairn's views when they write: "In Fairbairn's view . . . children become powerfully attached to and build their subsequent emotional lives around the kinds of interactions they had with their early caregivers" (116). Orin and Hal have witnessed their parents' alcoholism, sexual promiscuity, and inability to form genuine relationships, and Orin and Hal have adopted these practices into their own lives.

Chapter Two

Narcissism often features an inability to confront reality. Frosh describes a narcissist's preference for fantasy: "Narcissism represents a retreat from reality into a phantasy world in which there are no boundaries" (*Identity* 93). Frosh continues this line of thought: "Narcissism is the regressive tendency, absorption in the oneness . . . which is more generally a refusal to engage with reality. Its consequence is a mixture of terrified withdrawal into an imaginary arena . . ." (*Identity* 94). While there are many ways characters in *Infinite Jest* demonstrate their narcissistic tendencies by attempting to escape reality and envelop themselves in a fantasy world, the two most prominent ways involve drugs and entertainment. In this chapter, I will argue that characters often attempt to escape reality through their drug use. I will argue that there is a significant disconnect between the fantasy world characters inhabit through their drug use and the actual reality of their situations which they are unable or unwilling to see. I will argue that many characters withdraw into a narcissistic trap because of the isolation and consequent self-absorption that drug use causes. While addicts convince themselves that their drug use is temporary and fun, the reality is that drug use cripples their ability to turn outside of themselves to help those they care for or for whom they are responsible. All of this drug use, and the subsequent addiction that follows, cause addicts to employ irony, intellect, and performance in order to maintain the fantasy worlds they have created—which further inhibits their ability to turn outside of themselves and, consequently, worsens their self-absorption. Eventually, addicts who do not attempt to overcome their addictions by accepting and embracing reality experience the same fate as Narcissus whose own self obsession proved fatal.

Like others in the previous chapter, Don Gately's drug use begins as a child when he observes the alcoholism of his mother. It seems evident that at least part of the reason Gately's mother drinks is to escape the reality of her situation, for while she drinks she recites "her P.M. nightly monologue, a litany of complaint and regret" (446) until she eventually passes out. Gately's father broke her "jaw" and abandoned her to raise Gately alone. She has a live-in boyfriend who abuses her "on a regular schedule." Rather than dealing with these problems, Gately's mother attempts to drink herself into oblivion. Haidt describes the different coping styles when he writes: "people cope in three primary ways: active coping . . . reappraisal . . . and avoidance coping (working to blunt one's emotional reactions by denying or avoiding the events, or by drinking, drugs, and other distractions)" (146). While the alcoholism of Gately's mother provides her with a temporary escape from her problems, these problems are always awaiting her when she returns to sobriety. However, Gately's mother's negative coping style affects Gately as he comes to adopt it into his own practice. Ronald Simons and Joan Robertson describe the negative impact a parent's negative coping style can have on their children when they write: "Through their pattern of substance use parents who are problem drinkers often model an avoidant approach to dealing with problems. Therefore, one might expect a relationship between parental problem drinking and an adolescent's reliance upon an avoidant coping style" (274). Gately's mother's use of alcohol as a means of escape influences Gately who each evening waits for his mother to pass out before drinking what remains in the bottle. The narrator describes how this becomes "like a routine" (448). It seems evident that this is an attempt by Gately to escape the reality of his own situation, a situation that involves him watching or listening to his mother's abuse in addition to

witnessing her alcoholism. This is evidenced years later while Gately is sober. Gately begins to experience his mother's alcoholism and abuse for what feels like the first time: "It was more like he started to almost reexperience things that he'd barely even been there to experience, in terms of emotionally, in the first place" (446). Gately does not really remember his youth or these nights spent with his mother until he becomes sober many years later: "This all came burpling greasily up into memory in the space of two or three weeks in May" (448). Frosh states: "Narcissism is almost universally theorized as a defensive response to the inability to construct a secure and stable self, this in turn being a result of 'environmental deficiencies'—notably the inability of the parents . . ." (*Identity* 113-14). Because of his mother's own reliance on alcohol as a negative coping style and her unwillingness to deal with reality, Gately is never able to really construct a "secure and stable self." Instead, like his mother, Gately relies on alcoholism which affords him a fantasy world in which he can temporarily escape his mother's alcoholism and the fact that she is being abused daily. However, this fantasy world damages Gately's ability to deal with reality as he falls further and further into the narcissistic self-absorption that alcohol and drugs afford him.

Like Gately, Hal also begins using drugs as a means of escaping reality. In addition to observing his father's alcoholism, Hal confesses that he began using drugs in order to help him sleep through a recurring "unpleasant dream" (67). In this dream, Hal is playing tennis on a court the size of a football field. During this match his mother sits in the stand with "a delicate fist upraised and tight in total unconditional support" (68). At first, the reason this dream is unpleasant to Hal is unclear. However, throughout the narrative, it becomes apparent that the reason this dream is unpleasant to Hal is because

he recognizes that his mother's love and "total unconditional support" is merely feigned. Hal recognizes that "getting held and told you were loved" does not automatically render one "emotionally whole" (805). Hal has often been told he is loved, but he has not often felt that he is loved. In a conversation with Mario, Hal expresses suspicions that his mother's love for him is feigned. When Mario expresses his love for Hal, Hal responds: "Jesus, it's like talking to the Moms with you sometimes, Boo. . . . Except with you I can feel you mean it" (772). Hal can feel the love of his brother demonstrated through his brother's actions and the time they spend together but does not feel loved by his mother. As Simons and Robertson write: "a loving, nurturing relationship with parents has been shown to be an important vehicle through which children learn to care, to give, and to compromise in relationships with others. . . . the parent-child relationship serves as a model for future relationships" (274). This quotation relates to Hal who observes his father's unwillingness to deal with his poor marriage or to confront Avril about the many affairs she has had. Instead, Incandenza turns to alcohol as a means for escaping what he describes as a "C-" relationship (379). Similarly, Hal also avoids confronting his mother about their shallow and emotionally hollow relationship and instead turns to marijuana to escape this knowledge. Also, having observed his parent's "estranged" marriage (253), and Avril's promiscuity, Hal is skeptical of relationships and determined to make "lifetime virginity [his] conscious goal" (634).

Characters generally experience self-deception when it comes to their drug use. While many characters seemingly believe their drug use is "good clean temporary fun" (53), their drug use is, in fact, causing them increasingly to become more and more isolated and self-absorbed. Russell writes: "self absorption . . . is part of the disease to be

cured, for a harmonious personality is directed outwards" (86). Drug users within the narrative turn inwards and sever or ruin their relationships with others. For instance, the narrator states that "Hal likes to get high in secret, but the bigger secret is that he's attached to the secrecy as he is to getting high" (49). Throughout the novel, Hal's greatest pleasure is, periodically, getting high, alone. He also takes great pleasure in keeping his marijuana use a secret: "Hal is by himself down here and nobody knows where he is or what he's doing" (49). While Hal's temporary separation from others in order to smoke seems inconsequential, one can recognize the potential path Hal is on by examining other characters.

Ken Erdedy, who is a little further along in his marijuana addiction than Hal, "ha[s] tried to stop smoking marijuana maybe 70 or 80 times before" (18). Erdedy intends to hide out in his apartment for a week and "smoke so much so fast that it [will become] . . . unpleasant" (22). Ken hopes that this will cure him of his addiction. Like Hal, who hides in the pump room, Ken prefers getting high in secret and hides in his apartment "putting different messages on his answering device and moving his car away from his condominium and closing his windows and curtains and blinds" (20). While Hal secludes himself for a short period of time from his classmates and faculty, Ken secludes himself for as long as a week or more.

Ken's isolation is also demonstrated in his sexual preferences while smoking. When Ken "smoke[s] marijuana he tend[s] to masturbate a great deal, whether or not there [are] opportunities for intercourse, opting when he smoke[s] for masturbation over intercourse . . ." (21). When Ken smokes, he is so self-involved and isolated he prefers to masturbate rather than making intimate connections with other people. Ken's preference

for masturbation coincides with narcissistic ideology. Freud describes the origins of narcissism when he writes:

> The term narcissism is derived from clinical description and was chosen by Paul Nacke in 1899 to denote the attitude of a person who treats his own body in the same way in which the body of a sexual object is ordinarily treated—who looks at it, that is to say, strokes it and fondles it till he obtains complete satisfaction through these activities. Developed to this degree, narcissism has the significance of a perversion that has absorbed the whole of the subject's sexual life. (545)

Rather than turning outwards to make connections with others, Ken obtains satisfaction through masturbating while high. Ken has "never once had actual intercourse on marijuana . . . the idea repel[s] him" (22). Ken's sexual self-absorption demonstrates the increase of narcissism Ken experiences while using drugs. He cuts himself off from others and focuses his aims on pleasuring himself. Also, while this quote from Freud applies to Erdedy, it can also be used to describe the citizens that populate the O.N.A.N. Stephen Hirt writes: "It is quite telling that in the novel the political system established by the U.S. is called the O.N.A.N., referring to the autoerotic and self-involved act that resembles the mythological Narcissus' love of himself" (27).

Ken further demonstrates his narcissism by the false relationships he builds in order to obtain what he wants. Twenge and Campbell write: "Much of narcissists' behavior in relationships is 'game playing.' They are deceptive and dishonest; they will signal commitment at one time and then pull away the next; they will play people off against one another; and they will avoid real commitment" (215). Ken builds a

relationship with a "woman . . . called an appropriation artist" (23), and then once she "finally obtain[s] 50 grams of . . . marijuana for him . . . [he never] contact[s] her again" (24). Ken also plans to be equally rude and unpleasant to the woman he is currently waiting for to bring him drugs: "He'd be so rude and unpleasant to her that the memory of his lack of basic decency and her tight offended face would be a further disincentive ever, in the future, to risk calling her" (23). Ken's logic for being rude to these people is that it will help him quit using marijuana. Ken believes that he will not call someone he has been rude to. However, Ken demonstrates narcissistic tendencies with his use of others. Like a narcissist, Ken manipulates people until he receives what he wants and then he attempts to sabotage the relationship. Also, Ken is deceived when he convinces himself that doing this will help him to leave the substance behind or quit. The real distance is not being created between himself and the substance but between himself and others. By continually pushing others away, he is digressing further and further into himself and into isolation. This is further exemplified when a friend calls while Ken is waiting for this girl to deliver his drugs: "The telephone console sounded . . . but it was only a friend . . . and he got off the line with the colleague to clear the line and keep it available for the woman so fast that he was sure his colleague perceived him as either angry with him or just plain rude" (26). The phrase "only a friend" undermines the idea of friendship or relationships with others and illustrates Ken's priorities which are to his substance, to satisfying his need, and thus to himself.

Both Hal and Ken can also be compared to Poor Tony who is at the rock bottom of his addiction. Where Hal's and Ken's hiding and isolation are something of a choice, Poor Tony is forced to hide out of necessity. Poor Tony's previous choices and drug use

have destroyed his relationships with others. Poor Tony's most recent experience involves him and two associates attempting to do heroin they acquired from an enemy of Poor Tony's. Although Poor Tony suspects the heroin is "Laced" (134), he is so anxious to get high that he allows both of his associates to shoot up with drugs he expects are fatal. C immediately shoots up and dies of the fatal shot, but Poor Tony's other associate Emil Minty recognizes that Poor Tony is acting strangely and consequently puts off doing the drug until he sees the reaction it has on C. The fact that Poor Tony would have allowed Emil Minty to shoot up with poison leaves Minty questioning whether he should seek some kind of retribution against Poor Tony. Thus, Poor Tony fears he is being hunted by Emil Minty and the police. Consequently, Poor Tony hides in a dumpster, and, having "no way to cop for himself" (300), Poor Tony begins to withdrawal: "Then, wholly friend- and connectionless, Poor Tony, in hiding, began to Withdraw From Heroin" (300). This withdrawal descends him further into isolation where he spends a week incontinent in a bathroom stall with his "entire set of interpersonal associations [consisting] of persons who [do] not care about him plus persons who [wish] him harm" (301). Where Hal and Erdedy avoid their acquaintances, Poor Tony is "wholly friend-and connectionless" because of his self-absorption, his commitment to heroin, and the isolation it has caused. Timothy Jacobs writes: "most of the characters in *Infinite Jest* . . . ignore the spiritual aspects of their lives, the potential for belief in something greater than themselves—that is, they have no belief in anything beyond the 'hot narrow imperatives of the Self'" (270). Addicts' lack of belief in anything outside of themselves leaves a terrible blaze of destruction throughout the novel. As the addicts become increasingly more dependent on their substances, they consequently become more self-involved and self-obsessed,

ignoring anything that once had legitimate value or meaning, and this eventually cripples their abilities to choose and to act.

One woman is so consumed with her addiction that she smokes "Eightballs of freebase cocaine like a fiend all through her pregnancy even though she [knows it is] bad for the baby . . ." (376). Consequently, "the infant emerge[s] all dry and hard . . . with no protective moisture and no afterbirth-material following it out." Because of her addiction, the woman is unable to look outside herself, even for the sake of her baby. As David Hering argues, "the addict can be aware of their imprisonment while unable to free themselves under their own power, going continuously around and around the cycle of addictive and self-destructive behavior" (94). The woman realizes the damage she is doing to her baby but she is unable to break free of her cage of self in order to stop.

As a young man, Gately often breaks into people's home in order to finance his drug addiction. In the middle of a burglary, Gately and his partner Trent Kite discover the house they thought was empty contains a sick man recovering from a cold. Gately proceeds to gag Guillaume DuPlessis with a "faintly greasy-smelling kitchen towel" (58), and this man, once Gately and Kite leave, is unable to breathe and passes "bluely from this life" (59). Before his death, the man pleads: "Do not gag me, I have a terrible cold, my nose she is a brick of the snot, I have not the power to breathe through the nose" (58). Still, Gately gags him, largely because DuPlessis's "speech doesn't even sound like human speech to Gately." Gately is unable to *hear* DuPlessis's pleading. Later on, while in AA, Gately explains how hearing is an ability one must develop: "for like the first sixty days or so I couldn't hear shit. I didn't hear nothing . . . Gene would tell me to just keep coming for a while and sooner or later I'd start to be able to both listen and hear. He

said it's really hard to hear" (365). Gately explains that "hearing the speaker means . . . hearing how fucking similar the way he felt and the way I felt were . . . instead of just thinking I'm not as bad as him." Gately's literal inability to hear DuPlessis's pleading is a symbol of his figurative inability to hear others or those around him. At the point of the robbery, Gately is still trapped within a narcissistic cage of self which cripples his ability to hear.

Drug use also cripples Gately when his work associate is in need. Gately is often described as "laid back and affable" (913), "totally jolly and laid-back and easygoing" (903), and "distinguished by his ferocious and jolly élan . . . [with] his big square chin up and his smile wide . . ." (55). However, when Gately is on drugs he is "this totally taciturn withdrawn dead-like person . . . like a totally different Gately, sitting for hours real low in his canvas chair, practically lying in this chair . . . barely speaking at all . . . [someone who makes] whoever he [gets] high with feel lonely" (893). While Gately is described as "laid back" and "with his big square chin up" when he is not actively using drugs, he is literally "laid back" or "practically lying in his chair" while on drugs. He is in a state of paralysis unable to move or do anything with his head "wobbling on [a] strenghless neck . . ." (935). This is further evidenced when his work associate, Fackelmann, steals a large amount of money from their boss, Whitey Sorkin. Fackelmann, anticipating that his boss will not discover the theft, takes this money and buys "375 sky-blue grams of hydromorphone hydrochloride" or Dilaudid (930-31). Fackelmann plans to sell these drugs at street value and consequently will never have to "strip another apt., forge another passport, break another thumb" (931). However, Fackelmann's boss already knows of Fackelmann's deceit, and it is obvious there will be

a fatal punishment if Fackelmann does not act. However, instead of fleeing for his life or attempting to reconcile with Sorkin, Fackelmann begins to do the drugs: "[Fackelmann] shot up . . . trying to mentally blot out the reality of the fact that he was going to get demapped if he didn't take some kind of decisive remedial action at once" (932). Fackelmann's inability to act becomes literal paralysis as he binges on the drugs he has falsely acquired. Russell explains how people often abuse substances as an escape from their lives: "A man may feel so completely thwarted that he seeks no form of satisfaction, but only distraction and oblivion . . . he seeks to make life bearable by becoming less alive. Drunkenness, for example, is temporary suicide: the happiness that it brings is merely negative, a momentary cessation of unhappiness" (22). This relates to Fackelmann who attempts to evade reality by immersing himself in his fantasy world of drug use. Russell refers to this drunkenness as "temporary suicide . . . a momentary cessation of unhappiness." Ironically, Fackelmann's temporary suicide and his inability to confront his reality is precisely what will lead to his permanent elimination.

Gately also knows what will happen to his friend Fackelmann if he does not do something, but instead of trying to encourage Fackelmann to "take some kind of decisive remedial action at once," Gately plops himself down and binges on the Dilaudid as well:

> the pretense, was the worst thing—the pretense that he was just going to check on poor old Fackelmann, to maybe try and convince him to take some kind of action . . . . Because he knew that the first thing Fackelmann would do when Gately . . . lumbered out to the defurnished living room would be to . . . invite Gately to hunker on down and get right with the planet. (933)

Gately comes to Fackelmann under the guise of friendship and the pretense of helping him, but Gately knows that Fackelmann will offer him the drugs as well, so they are both paralyzed together. This also demonstrates the self-absorbed and narcissistic state of Gately because of his own addiction. Kernberg relates: “The main characteristics of these narcissistic personalities are . . . extreme self-centredness and a remarkable absence of interest and empathy for others” (qtd. in Frosh, *Identity* 74). Gately’s drug addiction increases his narcissism and self-absorption. It cripples Gately’s ability to help his friend. During this time, Fackelmann has a seizure and “Gately [hasn’t] the coordination to go to Fackelmann’s side during the seizure, to help and just be there. He had the nightmarish feeling that there was something crucial he had to do but had forgot what it was” (937). Gately and Fackelmann are so paralyzed by their drug use that they do not take the necessary actions that might save Fackelmann’s life. Instead, Sorkin’s people show up and kill Fackelmann while Gately is forced to observe.

Similarly, Hal’s marijuana use does not seem too problematic, at first. However, Hal soon finds himself in a state of paralysis. When the annual game of Eschaton takes place, Hal and some other upperclass spectators gather under the pavilion to watch. Hal struggles “with a strong desire to get high . . . v. a strong distaste about smoking dope with/in front of all these others, especially out in front of Little Buddies, which seems to him to violate some sort of issue of taste . . .” (329). Hal then makes the conscious decision to decline “all public chemicals” (331). Despite this decision, however, “Hal finds himself taking the proffered duBois and smoking dope in public without even thinking about it or having consciously decided to go ahead” (332). Hal has seemingly lost the ability to choose when he will use marijuana. As Greg Carlisle writes, “Addiction

is infantilizing and negates mental processes (and therefore choice)" (262). Although Hal has made a conscious decision to not partake of drugs in public, he finds himself unable to adhere to this decision when offered the drug. Although he feels some kind of ethical responsibility to not smoke in front of his Little Buddies, "he struggles to articulate satisfactorily to himself" just what this responsibility is (329). This inability to refuse the substance leads to paralysis when a fight breaks out among the Eschaton players:

> Troeltsch says he for his own part wouldn't be just sitting . . . there if any of the Little Buddies under his personal charge were out there getting potentially injured, and Hal reflects that he does feel a certain sort of intense anxiety, but can't sort through the almost infinite-seeming implications of what Troeltsch is saying fast enough. . . . (341)

Having smoked marijuana, Hal is now in a paralyzed state. He is unable to think or reason properly and is unable to take the necessary action in order to "keep his more experienced wing over, look out for," and protect the Little Buddies for whom he is responsible (98). This leads to "some of his Little Buddies [getting] hurt" (457). Similar to Gately, drug use increases Hal's self-absorption, and this ruins his ability to effectively mentor and watch over his Little Buddies.

Addicts become so enwrapped in the fantasy worlds they have created through their drug use that when these worlds are threatened, they attempt to protect them through irony and performance. As the narrator states: "We are shown how to fashion masks of ennui and jaded irony at a young age where the face is fictile enough to assume the shape of whatever it wears. And then it's stuck there, the weary cynicism that saves us from gooey sentiment and unsophisticated naïveté" (694). Irony becomes an intellectual

attempt to hide. For example, in a conversation between Gately and Joelle, Gately asks Joelle why she wears a veil that covers her face. Joelle responds ironically that it is a "Bridal thing" or that she is an "Aspiring Muslim" (533). In the outside world, Joelle's ironic tone would warrant laughter, but Ennet House and the AA program are "Irony-Free zone[s]" (369). Gately does not encourage Joelle's irony and instead responds: "I didn't mean to pry in. You can just tell me if you don't want to talk about the veil" (533). Joelle hides behind a veil to conceal either her disfigurement or her beauty. Although it is easy to recognize that Joelle is in fact hiding behind a veil, as Ewijk explains, the greater difficulty comes in recognizing the mask of jaded irony: "The use of irony as a hip mode of discourse is another way to hide, without actually revealing what the ironist truly believes. . . . the ironic mask is harder to recognize than the ones worn by the members of UHID, making it difficult to distinguish whether irony is in fact used or not" (142). While Gately is able to recognize Joelle's ironic tone when she claims to be an aspiring Muslim or that she wears the veil as a "Bridal thing," it is difficult to recognize whether or not Joelle is being ironic or sincere when she claims to wear the veil because she is "deformed with beauty" (538). Gately clearly thinks that Joelle is still being ironic, but there is a possibility that Joelle is telling the truth. However, it is impossible to know for sure because, at this point, Joelle still insists on hiding behind the use of irony which physically manifests itself in her veil. Mitchell and Black elaborate on the importance of maintaining an honest relationship with oneself and others when they describe Erich Fromm's beliefs:

> Fromm felt that one of the deepest problems in contemporary life was a profound dishonesty, both with oneself and with others, the squelching of

> authentic experience in order to adapt to social conventions. People lie to themselves and one another all the time, Fromm believes, and one of the deepest needs for the patient who seeks psychoanalytic treatment is for an honest response; what is curative in the analytic relationship, what is internalized in a freeing way, is precisely the capacity for a more authentic honesty and engagement. (241)

Similar to Fromm, many characters in *Infinite Jest* lie or use irony to avoid confronting the truth about themselves. In contrast, AA immediately recognizes the erroneous reasoning or ironic attempts of addicts who wish to avoid confronting their true selves. While one may argue that Joelle eventually takes steps to overcoming her own irony and her need to hide, Geoffrey Day seems entirely too comfortable behind his mask of intellect and irony. According to Gene M., one of Gately's former mentors, "It's the newcomers with some education that are the worst . . . They identify their whole selves with their head, and the Disease makes its command headquarters in the head" (272). Geoffrey Day is one such newcomer with education who teaches "social historicity or historical sociality at some jr. college" and devotes his intellect to undermining the AA directives. He uses irony to mock the banal clichés AA subscribes to: "I used to sometimes think. I used to think in long compound sentences with subordinate clauses and even the odd polysyllable. . . . Now I live by the dictates of macramé samplers ordered from the back-page ad of an old Reader's Digest or Saturday Evening Post" (271). Boswell elaborates on characters' mocking of AA directives when he writes: "drug addicts might dismiss AA slogans as banal, clichéd, or vapid. . . . Their vapidity, however, is the source of their truth. And so to accept them without irony, without intellectual

disdain, is to take the first gesture toward genuine openness . . ." (143). Day spends his energy mocking the clichéd directives and attempting to demonstrate how totally banal the clichés are so he will not have to devote his energy to the more worthwhile and difficult pursuit of following them. If Day can convince himself and others that the directives are cliché, inane, and childish, he will then feel justified in returning "Out There." Day refuses to admit that he is similar in any way to the others in Ennet House or the AA program. Instead, Day states that "he just strolled into Ennet House on a lark one day from his home 10+ clicks away in Malden and found the place too hilariously egregulous [sic] to want to ever leave" (272). Day's tone, which is clearly ironic, demonstrates the ironic or intellectual mask he attempts to hide behind so he will not have to confront his disease and work to overcome it. Hyde writes: "Irony has only emergency use. Carried over time it is the voice of the trapped who have come to enjoy their cage" (16). Day has come to enjoy the cage his addiction brings. Not surprisingly, however, Day's intellectual mask and motivations are glaringly obvious to Gately:

> Day is scanning the room for somebody else to engage and piss off so he can prove to himself he doesn't fit in here and stay separated off isolated inside himself and maybe get them so pissed off there's a beef and he gets bounced out, Day, and it won't be his fault. You can almost hear his Disease chewing away inside his head, feeding. (274)

Addicts' attempts to avoid confronting their reality are further demonstrated by their attempts to perform in AA meetings. When people who are new to the program get up to speak, these people often try to impress their audience by performing. However, instead of laughing at any of the jokes the newcomers present, the veterans of AA become

uncomfortable: "He's dying to be liked up there. He's performing. The White Flag crowd can see all this. Even the true morons among them see right through the guy. This is not a regular audience. A Boston AA is very sensitive to the presence of ego" (367). The narrator then explains that "Speakers who are accustomed to figuring out what an audience wants to hear and then supplying it find out quickly that this particular audience does not want to be supplied with what someone else thinks it wants" (367-68). Outside of AA, the world teaches children "at a young age" how to "fashion masks of ennui and jaded irony." While these masks and performances are briefly successful and generally accepted "Out There" (369), these masks fail within AA. This is because AA is not about performance or hiding but about becoming open and honest and shedding the masks of irony, performance, and dishonesty which people have previously worn.

Within the narrative there are many costumes, disguises, and masks. Incandenza disguises himself as a "professional conversationalist" (28); Orin wears a "beak" and "fake red wings'" (65); Joelle wears a "veil" (220); with the rise of videophony a large part of the population succumbs to "*Optimistically Misrepresentational Masking*" (149); Hugh Steeply dresses up as a woman; Lenz wears a "disguise" (276); Avril dresses up in a "cheerleader's outfit" (552); Gately and Trent wear "Halloween mask[s]" (56). All of these disguises are physical manifestations of the larger cultural problem of hiding behind irony, performance, or intellect. However, in order to be healed, characters must shed these masks of irony, intellect, and performance and become, as Gately is attempting to become, as "verbally honest as possible" (370). This corresponds with Fromm's own beliefs of cultivating a more "honest response" and developing the capacity "for a more authentic honesty and engagement."

This idea of using intellect and performance in order to escape confronting oneself, along with the damages such avoidance may cause, is further illustrated in the case of Hal and his grief-therapist. Although Hal is not likely using drugs at the time of his meeting with his grief-therapist, he compares the use of his intellectual gifts, and the accompanying praise and attention he receives for the use of these gifts, with "that same pale sweet aura that an LSD afterglow conferred . . ." (999 n. 76). This suggests that the praise Hal receives for his intellectual performances can be just as addicting, solipsistic, and debilitating as his drug use proves to be.

Hal demonstrates his narcissism as he attempts to use his intellect in order to avoid truly grieving for his father. Hal's unwillingness to turn outwards for help is evidenced in his relationship with his grief-therapist. After finding his father's body (after Incandenza's alleged suicide), Hal is "shunted directly into concentrated grief- and trauma-therapy" (252) where he is meant to grieve for his father. However, as Hal laments to Orin, he "just could not figure out what the guy wanted" (253). Hal becomes obsessed with delivering to the grief-therapist what he thinks the grief-therapist wants, instead of genuinely mourning and grieving for his father. Frosh writes: "the 'fundamental rule' of analysis is that the patient relinquishes her/his power to censor thoughts and, instead, 'free associates,' saying everything that comes into her/his mind, however apparently trivial or embarrassing" (*Politics* 75). Instead of relinquishing his "power to censor thoughts," Hal attempts to deceive the grief-therapist by performing. Hal explains how he goes "down and chew[s] through the Copley Square Library's grief section" and how he goes "in and present[s] with textbook-perfect symptoms of denial,

bargaining, anger, still more denial, depression" (253). Lasch describes Kernberg's conception of the difficulty of analyzing narcissists:

> The shallowness of his emotional life often prevents him from developing a close connection to the analyst, even though he 'often uses his intellectual insight to agree verbally with the analyst and recapitulates in his own words what has been analyzed in previous sessions.' He uses intellect in the service of evasion rather than self-discovery, resorting to some of the same strategies of obfuscation that appear in the confessional writing of recent decades. 'The patient uses the analytic interpretations but deprives them quickly of life and meaning, so that only meaningless words are left. (40-41)

Hal attempts to use his "intellect in the service of evasion rather than self-discovery." However, the grief-therapist recognizes Hal's confessions are void "of life and meaning" and are only "meaningless words." The grief-therapist is not easily deceived, and he makes it clear that Hal is "failing to supply what he want[s]" (253). As Hal relates to Orin his experience with the grief-therapist, it becomes obvious that Hal is not concerned with grieving for his father but in pleasing the grief-therapist. Hal states that the grief-therapist "made it manifestly clear I wasn't delivering the goods," and Hal also states that he had "never failed to deliver the goods before." Hal begins to lose weight, has difficulty sleeping, plays poorly in tennis matches, and gets "B's on two different quizzes" (254). Ironically, "the more obsessed [Hal gets], the worse [he] play[s], and [sleeps], the happier everybody [gets]." The grief-therapist and Hal's family incorrectly interpret Hal's inability to sleep, play, or effectively complete school work as signs that he is beginning

to genuinely grieve. Hal, however, relates to Orin that it is not his father's death that causes lack of sleep and poor performance but his fear and worry that he will somehow flunk grief therapy: "I began to despair. I began to foresee somehow getting left back in grief-therapy, never delivering the goods and it never ending" (254).

Lyle informs Hal that he'd "been approaching the issue from the wrong side. [He'd] gone to the library and acted like a *student* of grief. What [he] needed to chew through was the section for grief-professionals themselves" (254). After speaking with Lyle, Hal relates how he immediately jumps in a cab and says, "The nearest library with a cutting-edge professional grief- and trauma-therapy section, and step on it" (255). After investigating these books, Hal is now armed with the necessary information he needs to successfully deceive the grief-therapist. In his next visit, Hal "present[s] with anger at the grief-therapist" and accuses "the grief-therapist of inhibiting [his] attempts to process [his] grief." As Hal continues to simulate emotions and feelings he has read about how he is supposed to feel and act, the grief-therapist gets "more pleased and excited." The final climatic moment in the story comes as Hal relates how he finds his dead father. Immediately after his father has supposedly killed himself, Hal walks into his parent's house to do laundry, and having just completed a tennis match, and feeling hungry, declares "That something smelled delicious!" (256). However, this delicious smell is not food but his father's microwaved head.

Hal's attempts to deceive the therapist are successful and, at first glance, they seem to cause Hal no real harm. However, it becomes apparent that Hal has avoided mourning or grieving. In speaking with Hal, Orin states, "But you got through it. You grieved to everybody's satisfaction . . ." (255) and "You really did grieve, and you can tell

me what it was like" (256). In response to these statements, Hal changes the subject and avoids responding. Hal is unable to relate to Orin what the grieving process was *really* like because he has not *really* grieved. As Goerlandt argues, "Rather than genuinely grieving over the loss of his father, Hal [has simulated] different stages of overcoming grief to the satisfaction of the professional grief therapist" (313). It becomes apparent that instead of grieving or legitimately mourning his father's death, Hal has attempted to repress these feelings and emotions. Frosh describes the danger repression may cause:

> Because repressed ideas lie outside the consciousness they cannot easily be controlled, but instead are the source of many behaviors and experiences which do not have the character of being willed by the self. In this way, repressed ideas are dynamic not simply in the sense of having to be held back by an opposing force, but also in the sense of being causal, of having a motivating effect on human psychology. (*Politics* 24)

This applies to Hal. In the Year of Glad, Hal's avoidance of grieving for his father has serious repercussions. At this time, Hal is unable to communicate with those around him. When Hal attempts to speak in an interview with several academic deans at the University of Arizona, the deans state that "This boy is damaged" (14). In an attempt to explain to the deans why he has experienced "a rough spot" (10) in the last year, Hal invites them to consider it is because of something he has eaten: "Call it something I ate." This statement has led many critics to speculate that Hal has "consumed the powerful drug DMZ . . . or the mold he apparently ate as a child [has] taken effect" (Goerlandt 323).

However, Hal also refers to his grief-therapist research as "*chew[ing]* through the Copley Square Library's grief section" or how he needed to "*chew* through . . . the section for grief-professionals *themselves*." In Hal's own words, he has chewed through, or eaten, libraries of research. This suggests that the "something [he] ate," that has proven so detrimental to his well-being, is the intellectual knowledge he consumed in an attempt to avoid sincerely grieving. If this is the case, it is his improper use of intellect that has crippled his ability to effectively grieve for his father, and it is this that has caused him to become incommunicable in the Year of Glad. Hal again evokes this idea of eating knowledge when he assures the deans that he "*consume[s]* libraries" (12). Here, Hal also assures the deans that he does "things like get in a taxi and say, 'The library, and step on it.'" This passage draws further comparison to the passage when Hal relates to Orin how he supposedly hopped in a cab and "actually said, 'The nearest library with a cutting-edge professional grief- and trauma-therapy section, and step on it'" (255)—or when he will attempt to deceive his grief-therapist. Similarly, perhaps it is not what Hal necessarily ate but what he thought of eating when he came home that afternoon from tennis and thought that something smelled delicious, only to discover that the delicious smell he wished to eat was actually his father's microwaved head.

When his position with the deans becomes untenable, Hal finds himself "think[ing] of the hypophalangial Grief-Therapist" (16). Arguably, Hal recognizes his own state in the Year of Glad is because he failed to take advantage of the grief-therapist's expertise instead of merely simulating emotion and deceiving him. Boswell recognizes that Hal's incommunicable state in the Year of Glad and his father's death are related when he writes: "The grief [Hal] 'feels' over his father's suicide is one of many

emotions he longs to access directly but cannot, while the decisive fact of his father's suicide and his own muted and self-conscious reaction to it constitute the primary synapses of his particular psychic ache" (149). In a similar vein, Lewis Hyde writes: "Grief that lasts much longer than a year does so because it has been blocked in some way. . . . In fairy tales the person who weeps and cannot stop finally turns into a snake, for unabated grief is not human" (12). This seems to have a significant relation to Hal's own misery and unhappiness in the Year of Glad. His intellect has "blocked" his mourning and grief, and consequently he has not sufficiently or appropriately mourned for his father. As per the passage from Hyde, Hal's grief appears to be inhuman. Several times in the Year of Glad, Hal makes noises that are referred to by the various deans as "Like an animal" (14), or "Subanimalistic noises and sounds," or "Like some sort of animal with something in its mouth," or "A writhing animal with a knife in its eye," or "Sounded most of all like a drowning goat." Hyde also writes: "if you get rid of pain before you have answered its questions, you get rid of the self along with it. Wholeness comes only when you have passed *through* pain" (6). Freud also comments on this idea of repressing pain rather than confronting it when he writes: "a person who is tormented by organic pain and discomfort gives up his interest in the things of the external world, in so far as they do not concern his suffering. Closer observation teaches us that he also withdraws libidinal interest from his love-objects: so long as he suffers, he ceases to love." (550-51). This applies to Hal, who towards the end of the novel feels he needs "to cry for some reason" but cannot (851), who actively hopes "not to have to play" tennis (852), who without marijuana feels "there [is] nothing in the day to anticipate or lend anything any meaning" (853), who questions how others can "care deeply about a subject

or pursuit" (900), and who still seeks to avoid any kind of amorous relationship with the opposite sex by conspiring ways to turn down dates so he "won't be asked again" (175).

Hal attempts to eschew the pain and mourning that should have accompanied his father's death. He tries to feign emotion and circumvent the pain rather than passing through it, and this inevitably leads to a detachment from his inner self and his inner abilities to communicate.

The consequences of avoiding confronting the truth about oneself, denying one's addiction, and refusing to break free of a character's self-absorption and narcissism are manifestly obvious within the narrative. In speaking about AA, the narrator states: "It's all optional; do it or die" (357). This imperative is evinced throughout the novel. Incandenza is unable to overcome his alcohol addiction and allegedly kills himself by putting his head in "a microwave oven" (230). C shoots up with heroin that is laced with Drano and dies "for keeps" (134). Stokely dies "in a Fenway hospice" (300), and "Lolasister [goes] down with hepatitis-G" (300). Trent Kite is tracked down by the A.F.R. and is the recipient of a "fatal technical interview" (721). Poor Tony and Lenz will likely be abducted by the A.F.R. and used as subjects to view the fatal *Infinite Jest V*., and Fackelmann is killed for stealing money from Sorkin.

The narrative is also riddled with the deaths of others who are not even in the story except to mention their death. Gately's previous inmate dies "of a morphine overdose" (462). Calvin Thrust's old friend takes "The First Drink . . . and [falls] off the end of the Fort Point pier" (824). Another Ennet House resident gets kicked out for using drugs in recovery and gets sent back to prison where she is found "one morning in her bunk with a kitchen-rigged shiv protruding from her privates and another in her neck"

(195-96). Joelle also tries to kill herself by having "Too Much Fun" or overdosing on her substance of choice (235) but instead ends up in Ennet House where she begins to recover. Burt F. Smith gets "mugged and beaten half to death" (275) while drunk and is now in Ennet House. Kate Gompert also attempts suicide and ends up in the House but leaves the House once she begins substituting alcohol for marijuana, and it is left to the reader to interpret her fate—which considering her previous attempts at suicide seems grim. Gately's alcoholic mother suffers "her cirrhotic hemorrhage and cerebral-blood thing in late October" (906) and is now a vegetable. Pemulis gets kicked out of Enfield and vanquished to the footnotes where his fate is undetermined. Even those who do not die are seemingly living a life worse than death, as one recovering addict states: "When I was drunk I wanted to get sober and when I was sober I wanted to get drunk . . . I lived that way for years, and I submit to you that's not livin, that's a fuckin death-in-life" (346). This statement from one of the recovering addicts reemphasizes the need for characters to confront the reality of their addictions, their past lives, and to break free of their narcissistic self-absorption before it is too late.

Chapter Three

In addition to poor parenting and drug use, television, film, and entertainment also work to increase characters' narcissism and self-absorption throughout *Infinite Jest*. Entertainment provides characters with an escape from their troubled or mundane lives. However, when this escape is taken to extremes, it can damage characters' abilities to deal with reality. Like narcissism, a character's obsession with entertainment is infantilizing and can impede his ability or willingness to act. Many characters become passive voyeurs whose greatest desires consist of being spectators. Because of this, many citizens of the O.N.A.N. no longer attempt to form relationships with, or assist, others. Instead, characters isolate themselves in their homes and consume large amounts of entertainment. When they do venture outside, their affinity for spectating follows them into the street where they witness the various muggings, fights, and crimes, but do nothing to deter the criminals or assist the victims. Large amounts of entertainment also affect characters' sense of reality as they begin to believe the entertainment they are viewing is either a realistic depiction of how the world actually is or as they confuse the entertainment with reality itself. Also, certain characters, particularly those who inhabit the Enfield Tennis Academy, are being trained to become entertainers. This further contributes to their narcissism as this emphasis on reaching the "Show" robs them of their inner selves, weakens their ability to deal with failure, and damages their ability to find meaning in things unrelated to tennis.

Like drugs, characters use entertainment as a means of escape. Erdedy's drug and television use go hand in hand as he "stares raptly like an unbright child at entertainment cartridges" (22). At the end of the medical attaché's day, "he needs unwinding in the very

worst way" (34), and he "sits and watches and eats and watches, unwinding by visible degrees." When Hal is obligated to quit marijuana and consequently "never quite occur[s] out there" (686) in a tennis match with Ortho Stice, Hal attempts to escape his problems by "watching some cartridges of his late father's entertainments" (687). As a child, Gately also uses television to escape the abusive relationship of his mother and her boyfriend: "he used to pretend to himself that the unviolent and sarcastic accountant Nom [sic] on 'Cheers!' was Gately's own organic father . . . and when he was pissed off at Gately's mother being sarcastic and witty instead of getting down and administering horribly careful . . . beatings" (836). Like alcohol, the television provides an escape for Gately from his mother and her relationship with her abusive boyfriend. Gately imagines his father is Norm from Cheers—a character who deals with his frustration through sarcasm and wit rather than abuse. Eventually, however, instead of providing Gately with imaginative solutions to his abusive father figure, the television provides the escape itself: "When he was a toddler he'd flee the room and cry about it, he seems to recall. By a certain age, though, all he'd do is raise the volume on the television, not even bothering to look over at the beating, watching 'Cheers!'" (841). The abuse affects Gately as a toddler, but as he becomes used to the fantasy television affords him, Gately begins to feel "the whole thing [is] none of [his] beeswax." At this time, the television does not provide an escape in the sense of offering imaginative solutions to the problem, but the television has become the escape itself. The television works to increase Gately's self-absorption by helping him to forget the problems of his mother. As a child, Gately escapes the abuse of his mother through "a steady diet" of television. However, as an adult, "Gately tries especially hard . . . not to explore why it never occurred to him to step

in and pull the M.P. off his mother, even after he could bench-press more than the M.P." (841). Gately laments that he did not intervene on his mother's behalf. He was stronger and possessed the ability to intervene if he wished, but at the time he was too caught up in television's fantasy rather than improving his reality. As Marie Winn writes, "Families frequently use television to avoid confronting their problems, problems that will not go away if they are ignored but will only fester and become less easily resolvable as time goes on" (159). Gately uses television as a means of escaping the problems of his mother's abuse, and the problems persist, eventually leading Gately to mourn his failure to come to his mother's aid.

As characters in *Infinite Jest* use entertainment as a means of escape, this persistent viewing of entertainment can distort their sense of reality, turn them into passive voyeurs or spectators, and cripple their ability to live meaningful and fulfilling lives. The narrator describes the viewing habits of the O.N.A.N. people: "94% of all O.N.A.N.ite paid entertainment [is] now absorbed at home . . . so very much private watching of customized screens behind drawn curtains in the dreamy familiarity of home. A floating no-space world of personal spectation" (620). The O.N.A.N. people isolate themselves in their homes while they watch increasingly large amounts of entertainment. This is similar to the culture Lasch describes when he writes:

> We live in a swirl of images and echoes that arrest experience and play it back in slow motion. . . . Life presents itself as a succession of images or electronic signals, of impressions recorded and reproduced by means of photography, motion pictures, television, and sophisticated recording devices. Modern life is so thoroughly mediated by electronic images that

> we cannot help responding to others as if their actions—and our own—were being recorded and simultaneously transmitted to an unseen audience or stored up for close scrutiny at some later time. (47)

Lasch describes how the many images people consume through television and film can affect the way they view themselves and act in the real world. This relates to the O.N.A.N. people who, because of the television they have watched, develop a "passion for standing live witness to things" (620). The O.N.A.N. people go into the street and enjoy being "part of a live crowd, watching" the various "traffic accidents, sewer gas explosions, muggings, purse-snatchings. . . . Street fights" (620-21). The narrator relates how television has turned the O.N.A.N. people into a group of spectators. They are all anxious to passively spectate and watch, but none is eager to act or to step in to deter any of the muggings, purse-snatchings, or street fights.

This act of spectation is evidenced throughout the novel. Poor Tony steals Ruth van Cleve's and Kate Gompert's purses and although Ruth "shout[s] Help and to Stop The Bitch" nobody attempts to help (720). Instead, one man insists on being recognized as a witness: "Bet your ever-living goddamn *life* I seen it! . . . I'm a witness!" (714). This man insists on being recognized by Gompert as a witness to her and Ruth's robbery, but he is a mere spectator. He failed to act or to come to their aid. Randy Lenz also steals a purse from two Chinese women who "had been strengthless and lightweight" and "flew aside like dolls" (728). No one comes to their assistance or attempts to stop Lenz in his theft. Also, Steeply writes an article for *Moment Magazine* in which Poor Tony steals a woman's purse which contains her "Jarvik IX Exterior Artificial Heart" (142), and as this woman yells "Stop her! She stole my heart!" (143) people on the street merely shake

"their heads at one another, smiling knowingly at what they ignorantly [presume] to be yet another alternative lifestyle's relationship gone sour." This woman gives "spirited chase for over four blocks before collapsing onto her empty chest" and dying. Again, people just watch as this woman has her heart literally stolen. The purse snatches and other violent crimes depicted throughout the novel are likely similar to the images the O.N.A.N. people have viewed on their television sets. This persistent television viewing has leant a psychological numbness to its viewers who no longer feel any need to act against the real life violence they witness around them. Thomas de Zengotita writes of the potential numbness people may experience as a result of continuous television viewing:

> Kids today have been subjected to thousands and thousands of high-impact images of misery and injustice in every corner of the globe before they are old enough to drive. The producers of these images compete with each other to arouse as much horror and pity and outrage as possible, hoping that *this* . . . will mobilize commitment. But what the cumulative experience has actually mobilized . . . [is a] psychological numbness, a general defense against representational intrusion of all kinds—especially painful ones. (135)

The consistent viewing of television in *Infinite Jest* lends a "psychological numbness" to its characters. Arguably, because they have been mere spectators for so long in front of their televisions, the violence they witness there eventually loses its effect. When they now go into the real world they take this numbness with them and are mere spectators or voyeurs in the real acts of violence around them. This can be problematic for the O.N.A.N. society. Freud contends that "a healthy world is one in which people behave

towards one another with enough decorum to allow society to survive" (Frosh, *Identity* 38). However, television increases the O.N.A.N. peoples' self-absorption to the point that they either spend their time isolating themselves from society or viewing society as simply another opportunity for passive spectation.

The continual consumption of entertainment is similar to other addictions in the novel. When broadcast television becomes unavailable to a large percentage of the American population before the advent of InterLace, "millions of citizens . . . [begin] to find themselves with vast maddening blocks of utterly choiceless and unentertaining time; and domestic-crime rates, as well as out-and-out suicides, topped out at figures that cast a serious pall . . ." (415). With the demise of broadcast television, American citizens do not know what to do with themselves. They have relied heavily on television to fill their lives with false meaning and entertainment. When this pleasure is taken away, they go through a severe withdrawal. Crime begins to rise as well as suicides. Without the false meaning, escapism, and entertainment television affords them, they grow depressed and kill themselves in large numbers. With the advent of InterLace, the people are able to retreat back into their routines of mind numbing spectation. Boswell writes: "Johnny Gentle's giant Concavity and InterLace's at home entertainment network [yield] a population of lonely, solipsistic voyeurs . . . overdosing on nonstop entertainment and information, all transmitted instantly by way of the InterLace Dissemination Grid . . ." (124).

This consumption of large amounts of entertainment affects the characters and how they interact with reality. As Frosh writes: "it is no accident that the imagery of the television screen and the mirror dominates thinking about narcissistic states: it is the

surface representation of things, their appearance and visual icon . . ." (*Identity* 65). This seems especially true when examining the rise of video-telephoning within the novel. Video-telephoning, which is more popularly known as videophony, is a failed attempt to combine the "audio-only phone" (145) with a television screen that allows the two conversers to see each other during their conversation. As the narrator relates, videophony fails because of emotional stress and physical vanity. The users of videophony quickly realize their preference for audio-only phone conversations because these conversations allowed one "to presume that the person on the other end was paying complete attention to you while also permitting you not to have to pay anything even close to complete attention to her" (145-46). With audio-only phones, characters get "to believe [they are] receiving someone's complete attention without having to return it" (146). As the narrator states, videophony rendered this "fantasy insupportable." These characters demonstrate their narcissism through their "lack of curiosity about" those they converse with and their dependence "on others for constant infusions of approval and admiration" (Lasch 40).

Also, because characters can be seen by the people they are conversing with, physical vanity becomes a factor: "People [are] horrified at how their own faces [appear] on the TP screen" (147). This leads several entrepreneurs to create "High-Definition Masking" which takes the flattering aspects of various photographs of the consumer and amalgamates them "into a wildly attractive high-def broadcastable composite of a face wearing an earnest . . . expression of complete attention" (148). However, consumers eventually begin demanding "videophone masks that [are] really quite a lot better-looking than they themselves [are] in person." Because these people are now portraying much

better looking versions of themselves to the outside world, these people become "reluctant to leave home and interface personally with people, who, they [fear], [are] now habituated to seeing their far-better-looking masked selves" (149). All of this progresses to the point of "Transmittable Tableau" which is essentially a doctored picture of an "extremely good-looking but not terrifically successful entertainment-celebrit[y]" that is "fitted with a plastic holder over the videophone camera."

The O.N.A.N. citizens' obsession with appearance is arguably at least partially related to their obsession with television viewing. In fact when the citizens are polled about how they feel their unmasked faces look on the TP screen, "71% of senior citizens respondents specifically [compare] their video-faces to that of Richard Nixon during the Nixon-Kennedy debates of B.S. 1960" (147). This suggests that these characters fear their image is as untrustworthy or unlikable as Nixon's appeared to be on television. Also, when it comes time to purchase transmittable tableaus, the pictures used are of "extremely good-looking . . . entertainment-celebrities." Twenge and Campbell write: "Television is one of the major forces pushing the importance of physical appearance in America and around the world. . . . Almost everyone on television is good-looking, placing more value on appearance and raising standards for looks" (155). Twenge and Campbell also write: "Americans' growing obsession with appearance is a clear symptom of a narcissistic culture in love with its own reflection" (141). The O.N.A.N. people become so preoccupied with portraying to their friends a beautiful outer self that eventually the outer self portrayed bears no relationship to their actual selves. Killinger writes: "narcissism becomes a personality disturbance in which the person is overly invested in his or her own image or persona, in how she or he wants to be perceived by

the world" (92). This bears a significant relationship to the users of videophony who become so obsessed with transmitting to their acquaintances a beautiful but unrealistic image of themselves that they eventually refuse to leave the house due to the fear their actual appearance will damage the illusion of their unrealistic videophony image.

Initially, television provides an escape for its viewers, but television also has the potential to fragment reality and invest "lives with artificial perception and arbitrary values" (McLuhan 199). Jim Sr. feels that television is influential in passing on bad behavior: "Well it was because of Brando you were opening that garage door like that, Jimbo. The disrespect gets learned and passed on. Passed down" (157). While it may be difficult to examine any characters who have taken on Brando's "tough-guy" persona, television's influence on behavior is more apparent with the character C. At the end of the novel, C is hired by Whitey Sorkin to kill Fackelmann for his betrayal. One of the first things C does is get "the librarian-type lady [to sew] Fackelmann's eyelids open to the skin above his eyebrows" (979). Gately observes that this is similar to a scene in Stanley Kubrick's film, *A Clockwork Orange*: "The cartridge with the held-open eyes and dropper had been the one about ultra-violence and sadism" (981). Arguably, C receives inspiration from the films he has watched and mimics them in his behavior. Lasch describes Susan Sontag's beliefs when he writes: "The proliferation of recorded images undermines our sense of reality . . . 'reality has come to seem more and more what we are shown by cameras'" (48). Arguably, the more films and violent images C consumes the more he begins to consider them realistic and natural. Similar to the characters in the film *A Clockwork Orange*, C himself is ultra-violent and sadistic. This is further evidenced when Emil Minty describes C cutting off an ear of one of the men they have robbed: "[C] took

off one ear . . . and then C throws the ear away after in a dumster [sic] so yrstrulys' like so what was the exact pernt [sic] to that" (129). In addition to further exemplifying C's violence and sadism, this passage also alludes to Quentin Tarantino's *Reservoir Dogs*—a film in which Michael Madsen's character cuts off the ear of a police officer for no reason. Even Emil Minty questions "the exact pernt [sic] to that." There is no point except C has likely seen these violent images in film and is now mimicking them in his behavior.

These instances of "ultra-violence and sadism" are extreme examples of the way that television potentially influences its audience, but Lasch writes of the more subtle influence of television and the advertising that traditionally accompanies it:

> By surrounding the consumer with images of the good life, and by associating them with the glamour of celebrity and success, mass culture encourages the ordinary man to cultivate extraordinary tastes, to identify himself with the privileged minority against the rest, and to join them, in his fantasies, in a life of exquisite comfort and sensual refinement. Yet the propaganda of commodities simultaneously makes him acutely unhappy with his lot. By fostering grandiose aspirations, it also fosters self-denigration and self-contempt. (180-81)

Here, Lasch illustrates the incredible power television has as a means of advertising for consumer goods. He also illustrates the typical unhappiness that accompanies these fantasies and insatiable consumption. Television conveys to the viewer that the characters observed on the screen are typical Americans, so when these commodities or lifestyles seem to bring these characters happiness, viewers become convinced that if they own a

certain product or mimic a certain lifestyle they will similarly be happy. In a similar vein, Incandenza worries that pornography might likewise influence his adolescent son and give him the wrong idea about sex:

> He said he'd personally prefer that Orin wait until he'd found someone he loved [and had] experienced for himself what a profound and really quite moving thing sex could be, before he watched a film where sex was presented as nothing more than organs going in and out of other organs, emotionless, terribly lonely. (956)

Incandenza realizes the potentially harmful effects pornographic films may have in giving Orin a false idea of reality. Incandenza desires for Orin to experience the reality of sex, so he will likely be more immune to the hollow and empty simulacrum of sex portrayed in pornographic films. As Laramie Taylor writes: "People who watch more sexual television content make elevated estimates of the real-world frequency of sexual behaviors depicted on television, including extramarital affairs, sex without love . . . and using sex for favors" (130). Whether these pornographic films have any negative effect on Orin is uncertain. However, similar to the pornographic films he has viewed, Orin objectifies women, refers to them as his "Subjects," and uses them in an attempt to fulfill his own narcissistic impulses. Frosh states that "Sexuality becomes an item . . . used by the narcissist in the search for closeness, but also employed as a defensive maneuver against facing the emptiness that lurks within" (*Politics* 167-68). Like C, Orin likely mimics the behavior he has previously witnessed and observed in film.

Perhaps the most extreme example of television's ability to disrupt one's sense of reality is exemplified when Steeply's father becomes obsessed with the television series

M*A*S*H. At first, Steeply explains that it began as an attachment or a habit: "That's all it started as. An attachment or habit. . . . so at the start he scheduled his Thursday around the show" (639). Initially, Steeply's father only watches the new episodes of M*A*S*H, but when the broadcast companies begin showing reruns, Steeply's father "start[s] to find the syndicated reruns extremely important" (640). Eventually Steeply's father begins to "withdr[aw] from life." He quits his bowling league and "drop[s] out of Knights of Columbus." As Steeply explains, "Thursdays the jokes and cuteness stopped," and "he got anxious, ugly, if something made him miss even one." Steeply's father begins to neglect his family; to seek "out feature films that also featured the television program's actors" (641); to view "magnetic recordings of the program 'M*A*S*H' through the night" (642); and to miss "whole weeks at a time from work" (643). Steeply's father's obsession and addiction to the television show M*A*S*H eventually disrupts his sense of reality when he begins to send letters to the characters of the show: "The old man'd been trying to correspond with different past and present 'M*A*S*H' personas in letters the family never saw get mailed but whose content, the attorneys said, raised quote grave concern" (645). Wallace writes of television's ability to affect one's sense of reality: "television in enormous doses affects people's values and self-perception in deep ways . . . televisual conditioning influences the whole psychology of one's relation to himself, his mirror, his loved ones, and a world of real people and real gazes" ("E Unibus" 53). Similarly, Frosh writes:

> In a world where oppressions of all kinds link with one another, nothing is felt by the narcissist to truly link with the self; the more acquisitiveness and consumerism take hold . . . 'Selfhood is thus increasingly dependent

> on consumption and less so on secure intrapsychic identifications with other persons' (Richards, 1984, p134). (*Politics* 168)

Television affects Steeply's father's "values and self-perception." Although he is initially a hardworking family man, he eventually neglects his family and work because of his addiction to M*A*S*H. Like the narcissist, Steeply's father's sense of self becomes "increasingly dependent on consumption" while ignoring "identifications with other persons." He begins to view the characters of the show as being more real than the members of his family, and he attempts to communicate with fictitious characters while neglecting to communicate with his family, his friends, and his colleagues. Similar to the narcissist, Steeply's father withdraws from life and isolates himself in his own fantasy world.

Hal and the students of E.T.A. are essentially being transformed into entertainers and commodities. The narrator states: "students hoping to prepare for careers as professional athletes are by intension training also to be entertainers" (188). Also, when deLint is asked by Helen Steeply whether the students at E.T.A. will be "entertainers," he responds, "you bet your ass they will be" (661). Burn elaborates on this idea:

> The pro-circuit that all the players are aiming for is memorably known as 'The Show' in the novel. And, like the shallow TV-selves Wallace describes in his essay, these successful players become 'pictures in shiny magazines' (p. 388), two-dimensional magnets for envy and admiration. The intensive schooling in loss of self at E.T.A., then, is preparation for the TV-like show where the young players will get 'made into statues.'" (46)

The students enter E.T.A. as talented athletes and "are physically conditioned and scientifically coached, like circus animals, for performative success" (LeClair 32). They are slowly transformed into "two-dimensional" versions of their former selves—entertainers or "object[s] people can project themselves onto" (524). This transformation begins immediately. In fact, Tavis ensures seven-year-old Tina Echt that they will successfully transform her into someone who is capable of providing entertainment: "I'm going to predict it's probably hard . . . to see yourself as providing entertainment, engaging people's attention. As a high-velocity object people can project themselves onto" (524). E.T.A.'s transformation of its students into "two-dimesional" entertainers relates to narcissism. As Winnicott argues: "When the mother is unable to provide the kind of good-enough environment necessary for the consolidation of a healthy sense of self . . . [the child] remains stuck in psychological time, with the rest of his personality growing past and around a missing core" (Mitchell and Black 129). This is true of the students of E.T.A. who have been abandoned by their parents to pursue tennis, and who will, as Burn states, experience "intensive schooling in loss of self," or will have the rest of their personalities "growing past and around a missing core." E.T.A. provides the kind of culture written of by Frosh that eschews parent-child relationships: "So the presumed naturalness of contact between mother and child is broken by the rampaging demands of a society that values things more than people, that . . . understands and treats people as things" (*Identity* 46-47). This relates to E.T.A. where the children will become "object[s] [that] people can project themselves onto" (524). Frosh also states that "If you are narcissistic, it is claimed, you are struggling to preserve a shaky selfhood" and that

"[narcissism] is more likely to be a desperate set of strategies for survival in a setting in which the self seems to be in danger of breaking down" (*Identity* 3).

The idea of a narcissist's "shaky selfhood," a self that "seems to be in danger of breaking down," or personalities "growing past and around a missing core," seems most evident with E.T.A.'s tennis star, John Wayne. John Wayne is E.T.A.'s greatest tennis player and is seemingly destined for the "Show." Even his name references one of the most well-known entertainers. The narrator also states that E.T.A.'s John Wayne "will be an all-business entertainer" (263). However, Wayne's skill and ability to be an entertainer seem to have contributed to the "shaky selfhood" Frosh speaks of. Gregory Phipps observes that Wayne "seems to lack any sort of interiority" (77). The narrator also observes that Wayne is a "grim machine" (438). Throughout the novel, Wayne never speaks directly. All of Wayne's conversations in the text are conveyed by second-hand sources. Wayne's life is conveyed like a play-by-play from a sports commentator. Wayne seems to have already made the leap from adolescent to "two-dimensional" entertainer who others can project themselves onto. However, Frosh describes the theories of Kernberg when he writes: "The superficiality of the narcissist, the lack of dependency on, and closeness to, others, is a defense against this agonizing rage, a rage that, once mobilized, threatens to devour the fragile self" (*Identity* 76). Wayne's own rage is demonstrated when he accidentally takes Pemulis's drugs and broadcasts his emotions over WETA where "he demonstrates that he has not only thoughts and emotions but bitter grievances" (Phipps 87). In this broadcast, Wayne does a cruel "imitation of Dr. Tavis," refers to the late James Incandenza as a man "so full of himself he could have shit limbs,"

states that Hal is seemingly "addicted to everything that is not tied down" and makes additional "public castigations of his various peers and instructors" (1074 n. 332).

Hal mentions in the Year of Glad that Wayne "would have won this year's WhataBurger" (16-17). Although Hal does not explain why Wayne did not win, Phipps speculates that Wayne did not win the WhataBurger because "his outburst deprived him of the pent-up anger and intensity which made him an ideal athlete" (88). In addition to Phipps's speculations and similar to Kernberg's theories, it seems likely the reason Wayne did not win the Whataburger is because his enraged outburst potentially devoured his "fragile self."

All of this relates to Hal and his own narcissism. Lasch describes how mass media affects one's ability to thrive in reality when he writes: "The media gives substance to and thus intensify narcissistic dreams of fame and glory, encourage the common man to identify himself with the stars and to hate the 'herd,' and make it more and more difficult for him to accept the banality of everyday existence" (21). E.T.A. intensifies "narcissistic dreams of fame and glory" which consequently make it more difficult for one "to accept the banality of everyday existence." Hal who has often been successful in his tennis pursuits and is second at E.T.A., next to John Wayne, experiences some "self-conscious panic" (896) after almost losing to Ortho Stice. This near loss to Ortho Stice arguably leaves Hal questioning his ability to reach the "Show" and damages his "narcissistic dreams of fame and glory." Similar to this quotation from Lasch, after Hal's dreams of reaching the "Show" are put in question, Hal experiences some difficulty accepting the banality of his existence: "The familiarity of Academy routine took on a crushing cumulative aspect. The total number of times I'd schlepped up the rough cement steps . . .

seen my faint reflection . . . the number of times I would have to repeat the same processes, day after day . . ." (896-97). Lasch also writes: "In a society in which the dream of success has been drained of any meaning beyond itself, men have nothing against which to measure their achievements except the achievements of others" (59). This applies to E.T.A. where the students are ranked according to their success. Hal comments that the students "know where [they] stand entirely in relation to one another" (112). This can cause problems for the students when they begin to experience failure and their rank, and arguably their shallow sense of self-identity, is jeopardized. deLint describes to Helen Steeply the immense pressure the students are under at E.T.A. to win, as well as the pressures that accompany winning: "you awaken to the fact that you are loved for winning only. . . . Pressure such as one could not imagine, now that to maintain you must win. Now that winning is the expected" (677). This coincides with Lasch's explanation of how "glory is more fleeting than ever, and those who win the attention of the public worry incessantly about losing it" (60). Arguably, Hal has attained the hope or assurances that he is heading to the "Show" and will there receive glory. He also receives the glory of being ranked number two at E.T.A. and number four in the country. However, if he were to lose to Stice, his ranking, his glory, and consequently his shallow sense of self would all be jeopardized.

Still, instead of confronting these problems and discovering the reasons behind his "self-conscious panic," Hal secludes himself in a viewing room and spends a large amount of time "lying supine on thick shag" (907). Hal's narcissism, while he is alone in this room, is demonstrated by his extreme self-absorption as he uses film to escape his problems. When Pemulis appears to tell Hal that they have "some really important

interfacing to do" (907), Hal essentially ignores Pemulis's pleas and instead requests that Pemulis insert a cartridge into the viewing system. At this time, Pemulis has been kicked out of E.T.A. and is looking to confide in Hal. Hal likely knows that Pemulis has been kicked out because he relates to Mario his beliefs that "they're going to give Pemulis the Shoe by the end of the term" (783). Still, rather than take the time to speak to Pemulis as he requests, Hal attempts to escape these realities by watching film. Hal also becomes increasingly infantile as he lies in the room watching film cartridges. Hal gets Pemulis to change the cartridge for him: "Will you do me a favor? Get *Good-Looking Men* . . . out for me . . . Cue it up to about 2300 . . . The last five minutes or so" (909-10). Although Hal could certainly do this for himself, he makes Pemulis do it for him as he lies passively on the floor. Hal also recognizes the power of the remote control: "From my horizontal position on the bedroom floor I could use the TP's remote to do everything but actually remove and insert cartridges into the drive's dock" (947). As Hal watches film cartridges, he becomes increasingly more passive and dependent on certain tools and others to do things for him. Winn argues for the passive and infantilizing nature of television when she writes:

> While watching television, young children are once again as safe, secure, and receptive as they were in their mother's arms. They need offer nothing of themselves while watching . . . Just as they're beginning to emerge from their infant helplessness, the television set temporarily but inexorably returns them to a state of attachment and dependence. (133-34)

The "attachment and dependence" television provides for young children is similar to the idea of narcissism. Frosh describes how narcissism "can be symbolized by the early

monad, in which the mother offers the new-born infant an extended period of self-absorption and limitless, omnipotent contentment" (*Identity* 93). Similar to the young infant who experiences "an extended period of self-absorption," according to Winn, when children watch television "[t]hey need offer nothing of themselves." Similarly, Hal offers nothing of himself while he views his father's films. As people come into the room and ask him questions, he responds: "I'm isolating. I came in here to be by myself" (702). As Hal watches television, he attempts to cut himself off from others so that he "need offer nothing" of himself.

Chapter Four

In the three previous chapters, I have argued how poor parenting, drug-abuse, and obsession with entertainment can increase characters' narcissism. This increased narcissism weakens characters' relationships and leads to isolation and misery. In contrast, in this chapter I will argue that characters who break free of their various addictions and accompanying narcissism by turning outside of themselves can experience a more meaningful and satisfying existence. AA is an important vehicle to helping characters overcome their narcissism. AA encourages its members to pray for help to the god of their understanding. Gately explains this AA philosophy is more "spiritual instead of dogmatically religious" (366). In fact, one character's "personally chosen Higher Power is Satan" (352). AA and its emphasis on praying to the god of one's understanding acts as a metaphor for the essential need to turn outside of oneself in order to overcome the "disease." Where parental neglect, drug addiction, or obsession with entertainment cause characters to turn inwards, AA encourages its members to admit that recovery is not something that they can do on their own. Thus, the ones who truly begin to see results in AA are the ones who pray to a god they "believe only morons believe in" (350). This is not because some god necessarily hears their prayers, but because these characters are developing the ability to turn outside of themselves. The characters who are serious about recovery then try hard to be "humble, kind, helpful, tactful, cheerful, nonjudgmental, tidy, energetic, sanguine, modest, generous, fair, orderly, patient, tolerant, attentive, truthful" (357).

In addition, these members recognize that they have a responsibility to "pay it *forward*" (344). AA encourages its members that the cure for their disease lies in turning outside of themselves to serve those around them. This coincides with Russell's

contention: “self-absorption, which is part of the disease to be cured, for a harmonious personality it directed outward” (86). Winnicott also recognizes the importance of forming relationships with others: “The tendency to form, or try to form, relationships is the motivating drive to which most aspects of behavior or experience can be reduced and which gives meaning to pleasure” (Frosh, *Politics* 96). Wallace also recognizes the necessity of turning outside of oneself: “our survival depends on an ability to look past ourselves and our own self-interest” (Lipsky 161).

In this chapter, I will argue that there are certain characters that have discovered how serving others will free them from the cage of narcissism and despair. Where parental abandonment, drug-addiction, and entertainment caused characters to focus on self, grow unhappy, and become insatiable with regards to their addictions, serving others will cause characters to turn outwards, become selfless, and need less. AA certainly presents the greatest argument for how serving others will free someone from the cage of self; however, there are other characters, to varying degrees, who have also realized how serving others can help them live more meaningful and happy lives. The characters I will discuss in this chapter are Lyle, Marathe, Ted Schacht, Mario Incandenza, and Don Gately.

Lyle, the E.T.A. guru, has arguably escaped the cage of self. Lyle occupies his time by lingering in the E.T.A. weight room where he “lives off the sweat of others. Literally” (128). Lyle counsels and advises the E.T.A. students in exchange for being allowed to lick sweat from their arms or forehead: “if you let him lick your arms or forehead, he’ll pass on to you some little nugget of fitness-guru wisdom.” Lyle essentially spends his days attempting to help the students of E.T.A. Lyle attempts to help Rader

overcome his fear of failure by encouraging him to think of a key ring: "Suppose I were to give you a key ring . . . with a hundred keys, and I were to tell you that one of these keys will unlock it, this door we're imagining. . . . How many of the keys would you be willing to try?" (199). When Rader responds "every darn one," Lyle demonstrates how failure is inevitable and not to be feared: "Then you are willing to make mistakes, you see. You are saying you will accept 99% error." Lyle also counsels with Lamont Chu who is obsessed with becoming famous. This desire for fame is crippling Chu's ability to compete. Lyle assures Chu that "fame is not the exit from any cage" (389). Lyle immediately recognizes the "cage" that Chu is in and attempts to help him overcome it. Lyle also tries to help Doucette overcome his "self-consciousness about the big round dark raised mole on his upper-upper lip. . . ." (390). Doucette's self-consciousness is making him want to "play tennis with his hand over his nose and upper lip." Lyle instructs Doucette to speak with Mario who is significantly more disfigured than Doucette but is not self-conscious.

Lyle recognizes the cages the students are in, and he works to help them overcome these cages. When he is unable to help them, he encourages them to speak to others who will: "No type or rank of guru is above delegating" (390). One could certainly argue that Lyle is not the best example of selfless service because he is paid for his services by the sweat of the boys he helps. However, Carlisle contrasts Lyle's actions to the drug addict C who lives off the sweat of others in a negative way:

> Lyle "lives off the sweat of others" in a positive way, exchanging wise advice for literal sweat. C's crew lives off the sweat of others in a negative way by exchanging bloodshed—"wet work"—for money and goods, what

> their victims have figuratively sweated to earn. Lyle takes wet sweat and gives intangible advice; C's crew makes wet blood, takes tangible items, and gives nothing. (102)

While Lyle does receive something for his services, what he receives is arguably less than what he gives. Frosh writes: "Perceiving how others live their lives can make it possible to acquire new insights and perspectives on how one lives one's own" (*Identity* 188). As previously discussed, many of E.T.A.'s students have experienced parental abandonment. Also, because all of the boys are on "each other's food chain" (112), they do not have the kind of relationships that allows them to open up or confide in others.

The students of E.T.A. generally receive very little positive guidance or counsel from their parents, coaches, or friends. In contrast, Lyle provides "new insights and perspectives" on how the students can live their lives. He is a character who truly listens to the students: "it's the way he listens, somehow, that keeps the saunas full" (387). Where Lyle is anxiously engaged in listening to the boys, the addict C robs his victims of the ability to hear by cutting off their ears: "C'd claimed to collect ears and to have a collection of ears" (919). In a setting where many of the students feel abandoned and alone, Lyle works to help the boys feel "unalone" (388).

Lyle certainly seems to be one of the characters who has realized the serenity and happiness that can come through serving others. The narrator describes his smile as one that "could sell things" (127). However, while Lyle appears to be content and happy, it is difficult to interpret the true extent of his happiness simply because the narrator fails to give any in depth descriptions into Lyle's character.

Like Lyle, Marathe also recognizes that true happiness comes only through serving others. In a conversation with Steeply, Marathe argues that the moral decline in America is because its citizens are choosing "nothing over themselves to love" (318). Marathe also describes how the American citizens "all stumble around in the dark" (320). Marathe recognizes that the American citizens are unable to find happiness because they have placed aside belief for the continual pursuit of pleasure. Marathe recognizes that this perpetual pursuit of pleasure is often what leads to narcissism and unhappiness. Marathe's philosophies are evidenced in the story he relates to Kate Gompert towards the end of the novel. Marathe meets with Gompert in a bar where they begin conversing about Gompert's depression. In this conversation, Marathe explains to Gompert how she can live a happier and more meaningful life. He tells her of a time when he himself was incredibly depressed and unhappy: "Katherine, I am, in English, *moribund*. . . . I feel I am chained in a cage of the self, from the pain. Unable to care or choose anything outside it. Unable to see anything or feel anything outside my pain" (777). Marathe's past feelings are very similar to Gompert's own. Gompert states: "I'm so totally Identifying it's not even *funny*." Marathe describes how one day, on top of a hill, he notices a lady in the middle of the road "staring in terror at one of the hated long and shiny many-wheeled trucks" (778). This woman is paralyzed with fear and is unable to move out of the way of the truck. Marathe relates: "But the great gift of this time . . . is I do not think of me. . . . without thinking I release my brake . . . I schussch at enough speed to reach [her] and sweep her up into the chair . . . just ahead of the nose of the truck" (778). At this point, Gompert no longer identifies with Marathe's experience. She feels that Marathe's experience is too unique for her to experience herself: "You saved somebody's freaking

life, Ramy. I'd give my left nut for a chance to pull myself out of the shadow of the wing that way, Ramy" (778). Gompert mistakes the experience itself as the means for pulling oneself out of depression rather than the much simpler idea of choosing to love someone outside of herself. Again, Marathe attempts to explain his exit from the cage: "You are not seeing this. . . . she saved my life. . . . I was allowed to choose something as more important than my thinking of my life. . . .When I crawled back to my [wheelchair] . . . I realized the pain of inside no longer pained me. I became, then, adult" (778). Marathe recognizes that the way to overcome infantile selfishness is by choosing to love someone outside of oneself. Twenge and Campbell recognize the importance of this idea when they write: "helping others has benefits for the self as well—not only in becoming less narcissistic, but also in becoming happier. Research consistently finds that people who focus on status and materialism are more likely to be depressed, and those who focus on close relationships are happier" (285). While Marathe laments the loss of his legs, honor, and national leaders, he experiences depression. It is only when he chooses to love this woman "above [his] lost legs and [his] half of self" (779) that he begins to feel alive and happy. Carlisle similarly describes this when he writes: "When Marathe made a selfless choice he equated that choice with becoming an adult (as opposed to the no-choice of incessantly succumbing to infantile pleasures)" (387).

However, despite Marathe's open and honest admonition to Gompert of how she too can overcome her depression, Gompert does not recognize Marathe's love for his wife: "This is love? it's like you were *chained* to her" (780). Gompert also misinterprets Marathe's story as a poor attempt at seduction. To which she responds, "I'm a *shitty* lay. As in *sex-partner*" (782). She has long ago ceased to identify with Marathe and is too

content to remain in her cage of self. Instead of really listening to, and identifying with, Marathe's cure for her depression, like AA instructs her to do, she instead begins drinking while in the bar and feels like this is the answer to her depression: "why was I spending all that time doing one-hitters when this is really what *I* call feeling *better*" (775). Instead of accepting the cure to her depression that Marathe offers her, Gompert substitutes alcohol for marijuana and does not show "up back at [Ennet] House" (824).

Another character who seems to be separated from the hedonistic beliefs of the O.N.A.N. population is E.T.A. resident Ted Schacht. This separation is manifested symbolically in his physical separation from the E.T.A. players. After a rigorous workout where the seniors gather in the locker room to complain about the day's drills, Schacht is notably separated from his teammates "over in one of the stalls off the showers" (95). Hal observes that Schacht is separated from the rest of them and even observes that there is something "humble, placid even, about inert feet under stall doors" (103), and he feels that the posture is "almost religious."

Schacht suffers from "Crohn's Disease . . . and ha[s] developed of all things arthritic gout . . . which ha[s] settled in his right knee and cause[s] him terrible pain on the court" (103). Because of his gout and Crohn's Disease, Schacht has "stopped dreaming of getting to the Show" (269). Also, Schacht's father has "died of ulcerative colitis" (308). Schacht certainly has reasons to be displeased with his current circumstances. In a setting of elite athletes, he has lost the ability to compete. He suffers physical pain from his knee, the embarrassment of having to constantly use the bathroom, and the emotional pain of his father's death in "the Year of the Trial-Size Dove Bar"

(308)—the same year Hal's own father passed away. Yet, despite these circumstances, Schacht is described as being "blandly happy" (268).

Where Hal attempts to escape the grief of his father's death through his own intellect, and attempts to escape the pressures of athletic or academic success through marijuana use, Schacht accepts his circumstances and escapes self-pity by turning outwards. As Hyde writes, "The way out of self-pity and its related moods is to attend to something other than the self. . . . The point is that the self begins to heal automatically when it attends to the non-self" (17). Instead of focusing on the several reasons Schacht has for being unhappy with his situation, he instead accepts his circumstances and seeks to help others. Where many of the characters in the narrative are infantile and insatiable in attempting to satisfy their addictive needs, Schacht is described as being "one of these people who [doesn't] need much" (268). Schacht arguably heals himself by "attend[ing] to the non-self," or by serving others.

When he and his peers go to bars, Schacht remains sober and voluntarily takes on the responsibility of making sure his peers get home safely by "cheerfully wordlessly [driving] the tow truck on occasions when the rest of the crew are . . . incapacitated" (270). While many of the characters make excuses or rationalize their addictions, Schacht recognizes the harmful effects of drugs on his classmates. Schacht observes that "Pemulis is physically 'drine-dependent" (267), and "that there's like a psychic credit-card bill for Hal in the mail" (270), and while Schacht does not entirely abstain from drug-use, he admits that the way his peers ingest substances "gives [him] the creeps" (268).

In addition to driving his inebriated classmates around, Schacht is eager to help Pemulis. When Pemulis is "sick into a tall white plastic spare-ball bucket" (262) before

the Port Washington tournament, it is Schacht who comforts him by kneeling beside Pemulis and "lightly [stroking] the sides of Pemulis's head." Schacht also recognizes Pemulis has "some kind of vested emotional interest in attending the WhataBurger" (267), and he plans to get "one of the twelve-year-olds he Big Buddies to go . . . empty Pemulis's bucket on the sly" because "nervous incapacity of any kind gets noted and logged." Schacht sincerely tries to help Pemulis achieve his desired goals. Lasch describes the idea of emotional maturity when he writes:

> The best hope of emotional maturity, then, appears to lie in a recognition of our need for and dependence on people who nevertheless remain separate from ourselves and refuse to submit to our whims. It lies in a recognition of others not as projections of our own desires but as independent beings with desires of their own. More broadly, it lies in acceptance of our limits. The world does not exist merely to satisfy our own desires. . . . (242)

Similar to this quotation from Lasch, Schacht recognizes the importance of strengthening his relationships with his friends. While he disagrees with their various drug consumptions, he "cheerfully" and "wordlessly" drives them home when they are intoxicated. He realizes that their desires are different from his own. In contrast to narcissists who prefer fantasy over reality, Schacht has accepted his own limits. He knows he will not play professional tennis because of his knee, and he instead aspires to become a dentist.

Schacht's magnanimous nature is further demonstrated in his professional aspirations. With the abnegation of his professional tennis career, Schacht desires to be a

dentist. Schacht admires how Hal “carries Visine AC, mint-flavored floss, and a traveler’s toothbrush in a pocket of his Dunlop gear bag” (101). Schacht who is “big into oral hygiene, regards Hal’s bag’s floss and brush as an example to them all.” However, Hal’s motivations for carrying a toothbrush and floss are mere pretense. He is not concerned with taking care of his teeth but in hiding his marijuana use. Despite his constant brushing, Hal experiences pain with a tooth throughout the book: “[Hal] is feeling the icy electric keening of some sort of incipient carie in the left-molar range” (410); “Hal’s tooth gives off little electric shivers with each inbreath” (458); and “Hal’s tooth hurts” (453). Eventually, Hal visits the dentist to have the tooth removed: “Hal had felt the cold stab in the gum and then the slow radial freeze” (526).

There is a strong “association between teeth and power,” and the loss of teeth is generally a symbol of “castration or impotency” (Tresidder 467). This seems to be especially true within *Infinite Jest*. Hal loses his tooth on the same day that he is forced to quit marijuana. The removal of his tooth coincides with the loss of power he experiences in relation to his marijuana use. He quickly realizes that “Bob Hope had somehow become not just the high-point of the day but its actual meaning” (853).

Where Pemulis encourages his Little Buddies to surrender their *power* to substances by teaching them about the benefits of “fly agaric ’shroom” (67), and where Hal is *powerless* to help his Little Buddies because of the “dope” (332) he smoked during the Eschaton game, Schacht teaches his Little Buddies how to symbolically retain their *power* by teaching them about proper oral hygiene: “Ted Schacht in V.R.3 at his giant plasticene oral demonstrator, the huge dental mock-up, white planks of teeth and obscene pink gums, twine-size floss anchored around both wrists . . .” (117).

However, despite all of Schacht's good intentions, and the evidence that he is on the right track, it seems evident that he is in no real position to help Hal with regards to Hal's addiction. Around the time of Hal's marijuana withdrawal, Hal begins to have terrible nightmares in which he is losing his teeth:

> Hal Incandenza had this horrible new recurring dream where he was losing his teeth. . . . Everything in there loosened by a great oral rot that the nightmare's Teddy Schacht wouldn't even look at, saying he was late for his next appointment . . . a general atmosphere of the splintering teeth being a symptom of something way more dire and distasteful that no one wanted to confront him about. (449)

In this dream, it is evident that Schacht is unable to help Hal with his teeth or the powerlessness he feels due to his dependency on marijuana. After all, Schacht does not know anything about how to overcome addiction. However, there is hope for Hal, and this symbol of teeth will be further addressed when I discuss Don Gately.

In *This is Water*, Wallace writes, "The really important kind of freedom involves attention, and awareness, and discipline, and effort, and being able truly to care about other people and to sacrifice for them, over and over, in myriad petty little unsexy ways, every day. That is real freedom" (120-21). Of all the characters in *Infinite Jest*, Mario Incandenza seems to exemplify these traits. He is described as being "a born listener" (80) who takes "kindness and cruelty the same way, with a kind of extra-inclined half-bow" (316). Like the residents of AA who are encouraged to pray to the god of their understanding, Mario's "nighttime prayers take almost an hour and sometimes more and are not a chore" (590).

Like Schacht who has lost the ability to compete, Mario is the “only physically challenged minor in residence, unable to even grip a regulation stick or stand unaided behind a boundaried space” (314). However, despite Mario’s physical challenges, he does not subscribe to self-pity. Instead he has an “involuntarily constant smile.” Carlisle describes this smile when he writes, “An ‘involuntarily constant smile’ is a warning danger in the novel; but not in Mario’s case, because Mario transcends the self-absorbed pleasure-seeking that leads to dangerous passivity” (194). Unlike many of the other residents at E.T.A. who are self-absorbed and obsessed with improving their skills in hopes of getting to the Show, Mario’s “designated function around Enfield Tennis Academy [is described as being] filmic” (54-55). Mario is assigned by Coach Schtitt to film the others players’ “strokes” or “footwork,” so the staff can show these films to students and describe how to improve: “The reason being it’s a lot easier to fix something if you can see it” (55). Mario’s main job at E.T.A. is helping others fix themselves. When Eric Clipperton begins carrying a Glock around, held to his temple in play, this tactic keeps Clipperton “from being treated as real” (431). Consequently, all of the players at E.T.A. ignore Clipperton, except for Mario. Clipperton’s “only even remote friend on the jr. tour is eight-year-old Mario Incandenza” (410). Mario is a friend to the friendless. While Mario at this young age is unable to prevent Clipperton’s suicide, he insists on cleaning up the mess Clipperton’s suicide causes: “Incandenza did let Mario insist that no one else get to clean up the scene in Subdorm C. . . . It took the bradykinetic Mario all night and two bottles of Ajax Plus to clean the room with his tiny contractured arms and square feet” (433-34). Mario is anxious to serve others, and this willingness to look outside of himself lends Mario a cheerful disposition. Even while mourning Clipperton’s

death, Mario maintains his cheerful demeanor: "[Mario's] perfectly even smile never [falters] even through tears at Clipperton's funeral" (433).

Mario is also admired and respected by Hal. In fact, "Hal almost idealizes Mario . . . . Mario floats, for Hal. He calls him Booboo but fears his opinion more than probably anybody except their Mom's" (316). Mario seems to understand the great joy that comes from serving others and even encourages Hal to help him at an age he has ceased needing help: "Avril remembers Mario still wanting Hal to help him with bathing and dressing at thirteen—an age when most unchallenged kids are ashamed of the very space their sound pink bodies take up—and wanting the help for Hal's sake, not his own" (317). Mario asks for help from Hal, not because he is thinking of himself but because he knows that Hal's serving him will be good for Hal and their relationship.

Like AA, which encourages its residents to tell the truth, "Mario doesn't lie" (871), and he encourages Hal that the way out of his cage will be found by telling the truth. For almost a year, Hal has been hiding his marijuana use from both Mario and his mother. Hal fears "Something terrible will happen if [his mom] finds out [he] hid it from her" (784). Hal confesses his secret marijuana use to Mario and confides in Mario this fear of his mother. Mario assures him the way out of this fear is to tell the truth which is evidenced in this conversation between Hal and Mario:

> "Hal if I tell you the truth, will you get mad and tell me be a fucking?"
>
> "I trust you. You're smart, Boo."
>
> "Then Hal?"
>
> "Tell me what I should do."
>
> "I think you just did it. What you should do. I think you just did." (785)

Mario encourages Hal that the cure to his fear and solipsism lies in his becoming open and honest and in telling his mother the truth.

Mario's kindness is further manifested in the experience of Barry Loach. As a young man, Barry Loach dreams of becoming an athletic trainer. However, Loach's mother's "most fervent wish [is] that one of her countless children [will] enter the R.C. clergy" (967). All of Loach's older siblings choose their careers, and none choose to enter the clergy until the son, just older than Loach, chooses to enter "Jesuit seminary." Loach is experiencing relief that he is now able to pursue his dreams of becoming an athletic trainer, when his brother suffers "a sudden and dire spiritual decline." One of the reasons for this brother's decline is that "he'd come to expect little better than self-interested #1 looking-out from human beings" (968). Not wishing to let his mother down, but also not wishing to give up his aspirations of becoming an athletic trainer, Loach and his brother make a deal in an attempt to prove that "the basic human character wasn't as unempathetic and necrotic as the brother's present depressed condition was leading him to think" (969). The challenge the two brothers devise is that Loach is "to not shower or change clothes for a while," to stand outside the "T-station," and to "simply ask passersby to touch him." Loach does this and soon "weeks and then months" go by without any success as "passerby after passerby [interpret] his appeal for contact as a request for cash" (970). The narrator states that "Loach's own soul [begins] to sprout little fungal patches of necrotic rot, and his upbeat view of the so-called normal and respectable human race [begins] to undergo dark revision." This is until Mario, who is downtown filming with his father, "extend[s] his clawlike hand and touch[es] and heartily shake[s] Loach's own fuliginous hand, which [leads] through a convoluted but kind of

heartwarming and faith-reaffirming series of circumstances to Barry Loach, even w/o an official B.A., being given an Asst. Trainer's job at E.T.A." (971). Thus it is Mario who "save[s] [Loach] from the rank panhandling underbelly of Boston Common's netherworld and more or less [gets Loach] his job" (316). Mario is always reaching out to touch and rescue others, literally and symbolically, from their despair.

Arguably, Don Gately is the character that changes the most throughout the narrative. AA, with its emphasis on spirituality, is the vehicle that propels this change. As an active drug addict, Gately comes into "Ennet House only to keep out of jail, and [doesn't have] much interest in or hope about actually staying clean for any length of time . . ." (464). Gately also doesn't have any "God-or J.C. background" and views prayer as the "limpest kind of dickless pap" (466). In the beginning, Gately is extremely cynical of the AA program and is unmotivated to leave his addictions.

However, Gately is able to escape his drug addiction because of the help of the Ennet House director, Pat, who goes out of her way to give him "extra attention and help" (466). The main reason AA proves so successful is because it teaches its pupils to turn outside of themselves. As Ewijk observes, "The individual is asked to believe in and pray to something beyond the self" (137). Where their previous addictions cause them to turn inwards and focus on self, AA counsels them to turn outwards and ask for help. Where addiction often leads to isolation, AA "is intensely social" (362).

Although Gately does not really believe AA will work, and although he has no real belief in any god, he accepts the counsel of his sponsor Gene M. to treat AA as that of baking a cake: "It didn't matter one fuckola whether Gately like believed a cake would result . . . if he just followed the motherfucking directions, and had sense enough to get

help from slightly more experienced bakers . . . a cake would result" (467). Although Gately is skeptical about the process, he tries it: "he treat[s] prayer like setting an oven-temp according to a box's directions" (467). After about "five months Gately . . . realize[s] that quite a few days [have] gone by since he'[s] even thought about Demerol or Talwin or even weed." Although Gately is unable to explain just how prayer or AA works, he quickly discovers that they do work.

Gatley also follows AA's admonitions to share his story which Gately unknowingly acknowledges as forgetting himself: "It seems like every time he forgets himself and publicizes how he's fucking up in sobriety Boston AA's fall all over themselves to tell him how good it was to hear him" (444). Rather than rationalizing or covering up his faults like he would do while using drugs, in AA, Gately "*forgets himself"* as he openly acknowledges his weaknesses and faults. Although Gately is confused and unable to explain just how AA works, he finds the testimonies of Gene and Pat to be true: that, if one simply follows the directions, he or she will find the exit to their cage.

Gately is also encouraged to reach out and connect with others, as Ewijk writes: "With the help of AA, Gately is not only able to remain sober, but he is also constantly urged to reach out and connect with other members. AA is convinced that this will help him battle his addiction and realize that he is not alone in his fight" (134). This coincides with object relation theorists who believe that "the defining drive of the human being is to make contact with others—to form relationships—and that it is in the context of this drive that each individual's psychological structures are formed" (Frosh, *Politics* 179). By turning outside of himself to form new relationships, Gately is attempting to fix his

"psychological structure" which was solely about himself. Gately demonstrates this by attempting to pass on the gift of sobriety by helping others overcome their own addictions. The narrator describes how groups attend commitments:

> Giving it Away is a cardinal Boston AA principle. . . . Sobriety in Boston is regarded as less a gift than a sort of cosmic loan. You can't pay the loan back, but you can pay it *forward*, by spreading the message that despite all appearances AA works, spreading this message to the next new guy who's tottered in to a meeting and is sitting in the back row unable to hold his cup of coffee. (344)

This is one way in which AA pupils escape themselves by serving others. They spend their free time attending commitments where they share what they have learned, "that despite all appearances AA works." This willingness to share can, and does, have a positive influence on other addicts within the novel. Mitchell and Black write: "One person's excitement and enthusiasm can arouse excitement and enthusiasm in others . . . .When people are in tune with each other, affective resonance operates like tuning forks spontaneously reverberating at the same pitch" (105). Gately willingly shares his experience with AA which encourages other addicts to give AA a genuine attempt. By noting the changes in Gately's life, the assistance he receives from AA, and how these contribute to Gately's reformation, one is able to see the benefits of serving others.

One way Gately's change is evidenced is by his caring for, and protection of, those weaker than himself. Previous to his Ennet House residency and his admittance into the AA program, Gately rarely went out of his way to help others. In fact the last section of the novel, in which parts of Gately's life are recounted, demonstrates Gately's

unwillingness to help others. As Gately lies in the hospital bed, he remembers many of the people he has failed to help throughout his life. For instance, when Incandenza appears to Gately as a wraith, Gately experiences "a painful adrenal flash of remorse and entertain[s] the possibility that the figure represented one of the North Shore violin playing kids he'd never kept his savage pals from abusing" (829). Gately also remembers a time when "two of his Beverly High teammates [beat] up a so-called homosexual kid while Gately walked away, wanting no part of either side" (973). Also, when Gately is a young boy, his neighbor, Mrs. Waite, is rumored to be a witch by the neighborhood children and is ostracized by the parents of the children. When Mrs. Waite brings Gately a birthday cake for a neighborhood birthday party that she was not invited to, the cake is set aside while the kids argue about the contents of the cake: "He didn't join in the delicious whispery arguments about what kind of medical waste or roasted-kid renderings were in the cake, but he didn't stand up and argue with the other kids about the fact of the poisoning either" (849). Shortly after this, Mrs. Waite hangs herself and is "found by a frustrated meter-reader." Another example is evidenced when Gately's friend Fackelmann steals from Whitey Sorkin. Rather than helping Fackelmann escape or make amends with Sorkin, Gately begins to use the drugs Fackelmann has acquired with the stolen money. Gately also remembers a time when his mother's boyfriend would tear the wings off flies, and, as Gately remembers this, "What makes Gately most uncomfortable . . . is that he can't remember putting the maimed flies out of their misery" (843). What bothers Gately even more though is that although the "M.P'd beaten his mother up on an almost daily basis" (840), Gately "tries especially hard now not to explore why it never occurred to him to step in and pull the M.P. off his mother" (841). All of these

experiences demonstrate Gately's previous narcissistic tendencies of "extreme self-centredness and a remarkable absence of interest and empathy for others" (Frosh, *Identity* 74).

Throughout Gately's life, he neglects to protect those that are weaker than him. Yet, these memories, which come to him as he lies incapacitated on the hospital bed, are ironic. The reason he is in the hospital—suffering intense pain, struggling not to succumb to painkillers for fear it will potentially trigger a relapse, and possibly on the verge of death—is because he was "wounded in service to somebody who did not deserve service" (855). Gately was wounded while protecting Randy Lenz, a character that Gately "pretty much wants to beat up on sight" (276). The reason Lenz needs protection is because while high he intentionally killed a dog belonging to several large Canadians. Thus, even though Gately does not like Lenz, and even though Lenz is undeserving of protection, Gately willingly protects Lenz: "He says he's responsible for these people on these private grounds tonight and is part of this whether he wants to be or not, and can they talk this out because he doesn't want to have to fight them" (612). A fight ensues between the three angry Canadians who wish to punish Lenz for killing their dog and Gately who wishes to protect Lenz for whom he feels responsible.

Lenz immediately commences to use "Don Gately like a shield" (611). Gately's actions of protecting Lenz demonstrate the change that has taken place in Gately's life. Although Lenz certainly does not deserve Gately's help or protection, Gately has realized his responsibility to turn outside of himself to help and serve others. He no longer stands passively at the side, a spectator, while others are hurt. Gately is now a protector and defender of those weaker than himself.

Gately is "respected and well-liked by almost all the residents" (595). It is this affinity and respect for Gately that allows him to have a positive impact on other characters which further demonstrates the change in Gately. When several residents complain that there are "brainwashy elements to the AA Program," Gately generally "shrugs and tells them that by the end of his oral-narcotics and burglary careers he'd sort of decided the old brain needed a good scrub and soak anyway" (369). Gately's positive attitude seems to have an influence on Bruce Green. When Lenz ridicules the program's cultish aspects, "Green opines that if Boston AA is a cult that like brainwashes you, he guesses he'd got himself to the point where his brain need[s] a good brisk washing" (562). Green's sincere recounting of Gately's beliefs demonstrates the positive effect Gately's influence has had on Green. Gately is also a friend to Green. He "plays cribbage with Green and feels like he's taken Green under the old Gately wing and is probably the closest thing to a sponsor the kid's got" (602). Green also demonstrates his willingness to look outside of himself when he puts his own safety aside to protect Gately. As Gately protects Lenz from the three large Canadians, one of the Canadians shoots Gately in the shoulder. While this Canadian prepares to take another shot at Gately, "good old Bruce Green's [gets] the Nuck from behind . . . [and forces] the cocked elbow down and the Item skyward away from Gately's head . . ." (613). Similar to Gately who rushes to protect Lenz, Green demonstrates his own selflessness when he puts his personal safety aside to come to Gately's aid. Nicholas A. Christakis and James H. Fowler write of the importance of altruism and reciprocity in society:

> Altruism, for example, is a key predicate for the formation and operation of social networks. If people never behaved altruistically, never

> reciprocated kind behavior, or, worse, were always violent, then social ties would dissolve, and the networks around us would disintegrate. Some degree of altruism and reciprocity, and indeed some degree of positive emotions such as love and happiness, are therefore crucial for the emergence and endurance of social networks. (296)

AA encourages this idea of altruism and reciprocity that is so essential for the formation of a healthy society. This is further evidenced with Joelle van Dyne.

Gately's greatest impact seems to be on Joelle. When Joelle is first introduced in the narrative, she is in the womb of solipsism and preparing to commit suicide: "the hours before a suicide are usually an interval of enormous conceit and self-involvement" (220). When Gately and Joelle converse about Joelle's veil, Joelle hides behind irony, her veil, or other manipulative tactics to avoid giving Gately a sincere or honest answer. Gately encourages her to stop hiding: "if you don't want to answer it just say so, but don't try and go around the side and think you can distract me into forgetting I asked it" (537). Gately encourages Joelle to become open and honest because he knows that complete honesty is required for recovery: "Gately's found it's got to be the truth, is the thing" (369). Eventually, Joelle takes Gately's counsel and finds herself honestly sharing her problems about the program in an AA meeting: "I took a page out of your manual and shared my complaint about the 'But For the Grace of God,' and you were right, they just laughed" (858). More importantly, however, as Joelle takes Gately's advice and openly shares her problems with the program, through this experience she comes to certain realizations: "I hadn't realized til I found myself telling them that I'd stopped seeing that 'One Day at a Time' and 'Keep It in the Day' as trite clichés." As Gately encourages

Joelle to follow the AA program, Joelle begins to develop belief or faith in the program. When Gately is injured, Joelle attends the meetings alone where she experiences a certain breakthrough:

> This always happens when you don't expect it, when it's a meeting you have to drag yourself to and are all but sure will suck. . . . Something has taken the tight ratchet in Joelle's belly and turned it three turns to the good. It's the first time she's felt sure she wants to keep straight no matter what it means facing. No matter if Don Gately takes Demerol or goes to jail or rejects her if she can't show him the face. It's the first time in a long time—tonight 11/14—Joelle's even considered possibly showing somebody the face. (710)

Joelle has developed the will and the desire to follow the AA program, and she is even considering coming out of hiding by revealing her face. She shares this new found belief with Gately: "I can really do this. I can do this for one endless day. I can. Don" (860). This certainly demonstrates Joelle's own new-found strength and belief in the program, a belief that was discovered because of Gately's help. Also, similar to Green, who arguably saves Gately's life, Joelle is also now of help or service to Gately. Joelle shares her belief in the program with Gately while he is vulnerable, in intense pain, and considering asking the doctors to give him drugs for the pain. Joelle arguably saves Gately from a potential relapse by convincing him that their staying clean is possible. Joelle's own faith in her ability to succeed convinces Gately that he can be successful as well: "He could do the dextral pain the same way: Abiding. No one second of it was unendurable." Also, while

many characters work to assure Gately that he is "basically dumb" (905), Joelle works to assure Gately that he is "way brighter than [he] thinks" (536).

As Madame Psychosis, Joelle sits alone in a radio station broadcasting her voice, unable to hear her viewers. She also spends the time at her friend's party isolating herself and planning her suicide. However, when she enters Ennet House, she enters a community which encourages her to take interest in her fellow residents, to share her experiences, and to learn how to listen. AA and Ennet House encourage her to turn outwards rather than being content to focus inwards. As Joelle contemplates suicide, she thinks only of her own self and pain, but, as she visits Gately in the hospital, her concern is for Gately and his welfare.

I previously discussed the symbol of teeth when I discussed Hal. This symbolism is also evidenced with regards to AA. While Hal loses his power to marijuana, and this loss of power is symbolically manifested in the pain and removal of his tooth, AA encourages its pupils to surrender their power or will to the program itself and to a Higher Power. The founder of Ennet House used to have prospective residents attempt to eat rocks "to demonstrate their willingness to go to any lengths for the gift of sobriety." When the current Ennet House director Pat M. was admitted into Ennet House, she "demonstrated her willingness to try and eat a rock" (465). In this experience, Pat chipped "both incisors." Pat M.'s willingness to eat a rock, and the chipping of her front teeth, is symbolic of her conscious decision to surrender her power and will to that of the program. As Carlisle recognizes, "total surrender to addiction is via compulsion, whereas total surrender to sobriety is via an active choice, which requires discipline and sacrifice" (106). Hal's tooth rots which causes him pain, and his tooth is consequently pulled. In

contrast, Pat M. chooses to sacrifice her teeth as a symbol of her willingness to surrender her power to that of the program.

Like Hal, Joelle also worries about her teeth: "Joelle has begun to wonder obsessively about her teeth. Smoking 'base cocaine eats teeth, corrodes teeth, attacks the enamel directly" (723). Like Hal, Joelle also experiences a weird dream about her teeth:

> Joelle dreams that Don Gatley . . . is ministering to her teeth. . . . The countless rows of the teeth are all . . . tinged at the tips with an odd kind of red, as of old blood, the teeth of a creature that carelessly tears at meat. These are teeth that have been up to things she hasn't known about. . . . he probes with a hook and says he assures her that these can be saved. (724)

In Hal's dream, Ted Schacht, an aspiring dentist, tells him he cannot help him with his teeth because of another appointment. However, Gately as a dentist assures Joelle that her teeth can be saved. Schacht likely does not possess the skills required to figuratively fix Hal's teeth because he is not a recovering drug addict. However, there is hope for Hal. Hal will eventually meet Gately, and there is hope that Gately will, similar to Joelle, be able to fix his teeth or help him overcome his own addictions.

In conclusion, I believe it is important for my argument to refute the claims made by Mary K. Holland in her essay "The Art's Heart's Purpose" in which she criticizes Wallace and posits that Gately's suffering at the end of the novel is nothing more than an "ironic trap":

> His greatest accomplishment in the novel will be to construct not a character strong enough to escape the ironic trap that the novel has set, but rather one earnest enough to suffer the irony and brave enough to struggle

> heroically to escape it, but still doomed, almost sadistically so, by an author who cannot overcome his own ironic ambivalence. (220)

It is important to the novel's central theme of serving others to reveal just how erroneous Holland's arguments are. Holland sees Gately's pain and suffering at the end of the novel as an "ironic trap." It is certainly evident that some efforts were made to describe in detail the immense suffering that Gately undergoes at the end of the novel. The narrator repeatedly states the physical pain Gately is in: "The whole right side of himself hurt so bad each breath was like a hard decision" (818); "his right side hurts so bad he can barely hear" (828); and "The dextral pain's so bad he wants to throw up" (887). While in this pain, Gately refuses to take any kind of narcotic pain killers for fear it will be considered a relapse. Even more agonizing to Gately is that he is suffering without really knowing if painkillers would really be considered a relapse. Both his sponsor and Ennet House director tell him it is not necessarily a relapse if he chooses to accept painkillers: "That codeine or maybe Percoset or maybe even Demerol wouldn't be a relapse unless his heart of hearts that knew his motives thought it would be" (818). Perhaps even more infuriating is fellow Ennet House resident, Doony Glynn, who is admitted to the hospital around the same time as Gately, immediately accepts "a megadrip of Levsin-codeine diverticulitis compound" (893). Gately is certainly in a position to rationalize taking pain killers: he is in intense pain, his sponsors assure him it will not be a relapse unless he feels it is, and his fellow resident has immediately accepted drugs for his pain.

Gately also suffers the pains of humiliation as an attractive nurse administers an enema: "This nurse looked like something out of a racy-nursewear catalogue. . . . he got

ready to just fucking die of mortification. The nurse stood there and twirled the bedpan on one finger and flexed the long Fleet cylinder . . ." (895).

Gately is also haunted by his past and all of the people he failed to help, and he is also haunted by Incandenza's ghost: "A tall and slumped ghostish figure appeared to Gately's left" (809). Gately also begins to question whether or not AA's God is in fact as loving as AA promises him: "it's a bit hard to see why a quote Loving God would have him go through the sausage-grinder of getting straight just to lie here in total discomfort and have to say no to medically advised Substances and get ready to go to jail . . ." (895). After all the suffering Gately is experiencing, his supposed reward for this devoted suffering will be jail because at least one of the Canadians is thought to be dead. Also, Lenz has "screw[ed] off into the urban night leaving Gately maybe holding the statutory bag" (821); the gun with which he was shot is "missing" (826); and the residents he just finished protecting at Ennet House now fear signing depositions or being "eyewitness[es]" (894). Also, the A.D.A., who Gately previously offended with a prank that had damaging effects on the A.D.A.'s wife, is now waiting outside of Gately's hospital room. Gately believes the A.D.A. is waiting to take him into custody: "He imagined the A.D.A. with his hat off earnestly praying Gately would live so he could send him to M.D.C.-Walpole" (973).

Through all of this, Gately is unable to ask questions or speak because he has unknowingly been intubated: "the drowned panic of not being able to ask questions or have any input into what somebody's saying is so awful it sort of dwarfs the pain" (826). It is certain that Gately experiences extreme pains of every kind while in the hospital. While it is understandable why Holland would suggest that Gately's pain is an ironic trap,

Gately is not sadistically "doomed" as Holland posits. Rather Gately's intense pain and suffering illustrates how healing comes through fierce devotion, commitment, and resolve. Healing comes only as one willingly passes through pain. This is evidenced when the narrator states: "they tell you how it'll all get better and better as you abstain and recover: they somehow omit to mention that the way it gets better and you get better is through pain. Not around pain, or in spite of it" (446). This passage from *Infinite Jest* is very similar to Hyde's who writes: "if you get rid of pain before you have answered its questions, you get rid of the self along with it. Wholeness comes only when you have passed through pain" (6). Where Hal tries to escape the pain of his father's death by deceiving his grief therapist and arguably gets "rid of [his] self" in the process, Gately willingly attempts to pass through his pain. Thus, Gately is not stuck in the "ironic trap" that Holland suggests, but he is passing through the pain that will allow him to make the final break from his cage of self and addiction. This pain that Gately experiences has a purpose, in contrast to the former pains of addiction: "these Boston AAs [tell you] to remember the pointless pain of active addiction and . . . that at least this sober pain now has a purpose. At least this pain means you're going somewhere, they say, instead of the repetitive gerbil-wheel of addictive pain" (446).

Gately's pain is not an "ironic trap" nor is Gately "doomed, almost sadistically so." The intelligent reader recognizes that Gately survives his duration at the hospital, for he eventually meets up with Hal. In his interview with the deans, Hal remembers digging up his father's head with Gately: "Donald Gately and I dig up my father's head" (17). Also it is clear that Gately will not be going to jail, for the man responsible for sending him to prison, the A.D.A., is also trying to recover from his own addictions. The A.D.A.,

also in AA, is attempting to forgive Gately for the prank that has caused him and his wife so much pain. Although the A.D.A. is still struggling to forgive Gately, he admits that he "already tossed the file" (962) that would send Gately to prison. Thus the A.D.A. is not sitting outside the hospital room praying that Gately will survive so that he can send him to prison as Gately supposes, but he is praying for the ability to forgive Gately so that he may recover from his own addictions.

Further evidence that Gately does escape the womb of solipsism or the "ironic trap" Holland suggests is manifested in the relationship of water and addictions. Hirt describes this water and addiction relationship when he writes: "Like the fish in the story, addicts spend their lives 'underwater,' separated from reality and unaware of it. The sea, traditionally a maternal symbol, resembles a womb, just as the drug abusers regress into psychic infancy" (39-40). This relates to narcissism as well for Frosh refers to narcissism as a "womb pursuit of the oceanic feeling" (*Identity* 79). Throughout *Infinite Jest*, water typically represents how the addicts are trapped or drowning in their addictions. When Joelle prepares to kill herself by smoking cocaine, she is described as "a diver preparing for a long descent" (239). The *Infinite Jest V* film stolen by Gately and Kite is found under a "seascape" (985 n. 18). Michael Pemulis, E.T.A.'s drug kingpin, often wears a "yachting hat" (155). And at the end of the novel, when Gately and Fackelmann's binge with Dilaudid is recounted, they are described as "moving like men deep under water . . ." (934). When Fackelmann is brought out of his euphoric state by the "psoriatic assistant," he is described as "making sounds like a long-submerged man coming up for air" (978). It could be argued then that the ending is really evidence that Gately has broken free of the maternal womb of narcissism represented by water: "when he came

back to, he was flat on his back on the beach in the freezing sand, and it was raining out of a low sky, and the tide was way out" (981). One could argue that the tide has finally washed Gately ashore. Thus, Gately is not doomed as Holland insists, but the pain and suffering which he experiences in the hospital is the toll he pays to escape the waters of addiction.

In a similar vein, Holland insists that "The joke of this novel, then lies in the fact that, from the moment we meet Hal, we know that he is doomed to the solipsistic death of his pathological society" (234). Such is not the case. In a letter to his editor, Michael Pietsch, Wallace states "We know exactly what's happening to Gately by end, [and] about 50% of what's happened to Hal'" (qtd. in Max). The reader does not know Hal is doomed. In fact the reader really does not know what will happen to Hal. However, it can certainly be argued that Gately, having escaped the womb of solipsism himself, now possesses all of the keys and abilities to helping Hal with his own addiction. Thus Hal's pain and inability to communicate in the beginning of the novel could be evidence that Hal has merely begun the painful process of recovery.

Works Cited

Arden, Patrick. "David Foster Wallace Warms Up." *Conversations with David Foster Wallace*. Ed. Stephen J. Burn. Jackson: UP of Mississippi, 2012. 94-100. Print.

Boswell, Marshall. *Understanding David Foster Wallace*. Columbia: U of South Carolina P, 2003. Print.

Burn, Stephen. *David Foster Wallace's* Infinite Jest. New York: International, 2003. Print.

Cairo, Mark. "The Next Big Thing: Can a Downstate Author Withstand the Sensation over His 1,079-Page Novel?" *Conversations with David Foster Wallace*. Ed. Stephen J. Burn. Mississippi: UP of Mississippi, 2012. 53-57. Print.

Carlisle, Greg. *Elegant Complexity*. Los Angeles: Sideshow, 2007. Print.

Christakis, Nicholas A., and James H. Fowler. *Connected: How Your Friends' Friends' Friends Affect Everything You Feel, Think, and Do*. New York: Back Bay, 2009. Print.

DeLillo, Don. "Informal Remarks from the David Foster Wallace Memorial Service in New York on October 23, 2008." *The Legacy of David Foster Wallace*. Ed. Samuel Cohen and Lee Konstantinou. Iowa City: U of Iowa P, 2012. 23-24. Print.

de Zengotita, Thomas. *Mediated*. New York: Bloomsbury, 2005. Print.

Ewijk, Petrus van. "'I' and the 'Other': the Relevance of Wittgenstein, Buber and Levinas for an Understanding of AA's Recovery Program in David Foster Wallace's *Infinite Jest*." *English Text Construction* 2.1 (2009): 132-45. Print.

Franzen, Jonathan. "David Foster Wallace." *The Best American Nonrequired Reading*. Ed. Dave Eggers. New York: Houghton Mifflin, 2009. Print.

Freud, Sigmund. "Civilization and Its Discontents." *The Freud Reader*. Ed. Peter Gay. New York: Norton, 1989. 722-73. Print.

---. "On Narcissism: An Introduction." *The Freud Reader*. Ed. Peter Gay. New York: Norton, 1989. 545-62. Print.

Frosh, Stephen. *Identity Crisis: Modernity, Psychoanalysis, and the Self*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 1991. Print.

---. *The Politics of Psychoanalysis: An Introduction to Freudian and Post-Freudian Theory*. London: Macmillan, 1987. Print.

Gilbert, Daniel. *Stumbling On Happiness*. New York: Random House, 2006. Print.

Giles, Paul. "All Swallowed Up: David Foster Wallace and American Literature." *The Legacy of David Foster Wallace*. Ed. Samuel Cohen and Lee Konstantinou. Iowa City: U of Iowa P, 2012. 3-22. Print.

Goerlandt, Iannis. "'Put the Book Down and Slowly Walk Away': Irony and David Foster Wallace's *Infinite Jest*." *Critique* 47.3 (2006): 309-28. Print.

Haidt, Jonathan. *The Happiness Hypothesis: Finding Modern Truth in Ancient Wisdom*. New York: Basic, 2006. Print.

Harris, Charles B. "David Foster Wallace: 'That Distinctive Singular Stamp of Himself.'" *Critique* 51.2 (2010): 168-76. Print.

Hayles, N. Katherine. "The Illusion of Autonomy and the Fact of Recursivity: Virtual Ecologies, Entertainment and *Infinite Jest*." *New Literary History* 30.3 (1999): 675-97. Print.

Hering, David. "Infinite Jest: Triangles, Cycles, Choices and Chases." *Consider David Foster Wallace*. Ed. David Hering. Los Angeles: Sideshow, 2010. 89-100. Print.

Hirt, Stephen. *The Iron Bars of Freedom*. Germany: ibidem, 2008. Print.

Holland, Mary K. "'The Art's Heart's Purpose': Braving the Narcissistic Loop of David Foster Wallace's *Infinite Jest.*" *Critique* 47.3 (2006): 218-42. Print.

Hyde, Lewis. *Alcohol and Poetry: John Berryman and the Booze Talking*. Dallas: Dallas Institute, 1986. Print.

Jacobs, Timothy. "The Brothers Incandenza: Translating Ideology in Fyodor Dostoevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov* and David Foster Wallace's *Infinite Jest.*" *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* 49.3 (2007): 265-92. Print.

Kennedy, Hugh, and Geoffrey Polk. "Looking for a Garde of Which to Be Avant: An Interview with David Foster Wallace" *Conversations with David Foster Wallace*. Ed. Stephen J. Burn. Jackson: UP of Mississippi, 2012. 11-20. Print.

Killinger, Barbara. *Achieving Inner Balance in Anxious Times.* Montreal: McGill-Queen's UP, 2011. Print.

Lasch, Christopher. *The Culture of Narcissism: American Life in An Age of Diminishing Expectations*. New York: Norton, 1979. Print.

LeClair, Tom. "The Prodigious Fiction of Richard Powers, William Vollmann, and David Foster Wallace." *Critique* 38.1 (1996): 12-37. Print.

Lipsky, David. *Although of Course You End Up Becoming Yourself*. New York: Broadway, 2010. Print.

Luther, Connie. "David Foster Wallace: Westward with Frederic Jameson." *Consider David Foster Wallace*. Ed. David Hering. Los Angeles: Sideshow, 2010. 49-61. Print.

Max, D. T. *Every Love Story is a Ghost Story: A Life of David Foster Wallace*. New York: Viking, 2012. Print.

---. "The Unfinished: David Foster Wallace's Struggle to Surpass *Infinite Jest*." 2009. *The New Yorker*. 10 Sept. 2009 <http://www.newyorker.com/reporting/2009/03/09/090309fa_fact_max>

McLuhan, Marshall. *Understanding Media*. Cambridge: MIT P, 1994. Print.

Miller, Laura. "The Salon Interview: David Foster Wallace." *Conversations with David Foster Wallace*. Ed. Stephen J. Burn. Mississippi: UP of Mississippi, 2012. 58-65. Print.

Mitchell, Stephen A., and Margaret J. Black. *Freud and Beyond: A History of Modern Psychoanalytic Thought*. New York: Basic Books, 1995. Print.

Nichols, Catherine. "Dialogizing Postmodern Carnival: David Foster Wallace's *Infinite Jest*." *Critique* 43.1 (2001): 3-16. Print.

Ovid. *Metamorphoses*. New York: Penguin, 1955. Print.

Phipps, Gregory. "The Ideal Athlete: John Wayne." *Consider David Foster Wallace*. Ed. David Hering. Los Angeles: Sideshow Media, 2010. 75-88. Print.

Roiland, Josh. "Getting Away from it All: The Literary Journalism of David Foster Wallace and Nietzche's Concept of Oblivion" *The Legacy of David Foster Wallace*. Ed. Samuel Cohen and Lee Konstantinou. Iowa City: U of Iowa P, 2012. 25-52. Print.

Russell, Bertrand. *The Conquest of Happiness*. New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1958. Print.

Saunders, George. "Informal Remarks from the David Foster Wallace Memorial Service in New York on October 23, 2008." *The Legacy of David Foster Wallace*. Ed. Samuel Cohen and Lee Konstantinou. Iowa City: U of Iowa P, 2012. 53-55. Print.

Simons, Ronald L., and Joan F. Robertson. "The Impact of Parenting Factors, Deviant Peers, and Coping Style upon Adolescent Drug Use." *Family Relations*. 38.3 (1989): 273-81. Print.

Taylor, Laramie D. "Effects of Visual and Verbal Sexual Television Content and Perceived Realism on Attitudes and Beliefs." *The Journal of Sex Research*. 42.2 (2005): 130-37. Print.

Tresidder, Jack, ed. "Eight." *The Complete Dictionary of Symbols*. San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 2004. 164. Print.

Twenge, Jean M., and W. Keith Campbell. *The Narcissism Epidemic: Living in the Age of Entitlement*. New York: Free Press, 2009. Print.

Wallace, David Foster. "Authority and American Usage." *Consider the Lobster*. New York: Back Bay, 2006. 66-127. Print.

---. "E Unibus Pluram: Television and U.S. Fiction." *A Supposedly Fun Thing I'll Never Do Again*. New York: Back Bay, 1997. 21-82. Print.

---. *Infinite Jest*. New York: Back Bay, 1996. Print.

---. "Joseph Frank's Dostoevsky." *Consider the Lobster*. New York: Back Bay, 2006. 255-74. Print.

---. *This is Water*. New York: Little, Brown, 2009. Print.

Wilson, Timothy D. *Redirect: The Surprising New Science of Psychological Change*. New York: Little, Brown, 2011. Print.

Winn, Marie. *The Plug-In Drug*. New York: Penguin, 2002. Print.