Marginalia after Modernism: the case of David Foster Wallace

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## Contents

List of Figures ........................................................................................................................................... 4

Abbreviations: Texts by David Foster Wallace .......................................................................................... 8

Abstract ...................................................................................................................................................... 9

Declaration ................................................................................................................................................ 10

Copyright Statement ............................................................................................................................... 11

Presentation of Archival Materials ......................................................................................................... 12

Acknowledgements .................................................................................................................................... 13

**Introduction – Marginalia after Modernism** ....................................................................................... 14

0.1 Preface .................................................................................................................................................. 14

0.2 From Copious Notes to Coleridgean Relics: a Romantic History of the Margin ........................................ 17

0.3 Reading Notes: Sylvia Plath’s Dangerous Obscurity, William Blake’s Theory of Art .................................. 33

0.4 Manuscript Marginalia: Archival Labours and Aesthetic Mediation ..................................................... 44

0.5 Pseudo-scholarly Footnotes: Popean Sneers, Modernist Dissociation, and the Legitimation Crisis ............. 55

0.6 A Note on Archival Research ............................................................................................................ 69

**Chapter One – ‘The realer, more enduring and sentimental part of him’: Wallace’s Library and Marginalia** ........................................................................................................................................... 73

1.1 DFW’s Family Secrets ....................................................................................................................... 73

1.2 W’s Theory of Art? The Library’s Portrait of an Artist ........................................................................ 88

1.3 ‘Not another word’: Origins, Identification, Mourning ....................................................................... 100

**Chapter Two – ‘A certain threshold of concentrated boredom’: Authority and Mediation in the Margins of Wallace’s Archive** ........................................................................................................... 112

2.1 Authorizing The Pale King ................................................................................................................. 112
2.2 Plagiarizing Wallace................................................................. 129

2.3 Choreography and Chaos in ‘Eschaton’; or, the Elegance of *Infinite Jest’s* Complexity ................................................................. 148

Chapter Three – ‘No clue’: Wallace’s Endnotes to Postmodernism............. 166

3.1 Theory’s Disappearance and Return............................................. 166

3.2 ‘Do you feel it too?’: Sincerity and Affect in ‘Octet’............................. 180

3.3 Reading (Post)Modern Centrality.................................................. 191

Conclusion...................................................................................... 205

4.1 ‘… which transcription ended up making the book valuable, in terms of reproduction, decades later’: Wallace in the Margins of Modernism .......... 205

4.2 Concluding Notes ....................................................................... 212

Bibliography..................................................................................... 217

Appendix........................................................................................... 238

Word Count: 85,996
List of Figures

**Figure 1** – David Foster Wallace, annotation in H. L. Hix, *Morte d’Author: An Autopsy*, HRCDFW-L (Reproduced courtesy of the Harry Ransom Centre, Austin, TX) ................................................. 238

**Figure 2** – David Foster Wallace, annotation in H. L. Hix, *Morte d’Author: An Autopsy*, citing Michel Foucault, HRCDFW-L (Reproduced courtesy of the Harry Ransom Centre, Austin, TX) ................................................................................................. 238

**Figure 3** – David Foster Wallace, annotation in H. L. Hix, *Morte d’Author: An Autopsy*, citing Roland Barthes, HRCDFW-L (Reproduced courtesy of the Harry Ransom Centre, Austin, TX) ........................................................................................................ 239

**Figure 4** – Miles Coverdale’s 1537 revision of the Matthew Bible (Reproduced courtesy of http://printinghistory.org.uk) .......................................................................................... 240

**Figure 5** – Sylvia Plath, annotation in Joseph Conrad, *Lord Jim* (Reproduced courtesy of Sotheby’s) ............................................................................................................................ 241

**Figure 6** – William Blake, annotation in Sir Joshua Reynolds, *The Works of Sir Joshua Reynolds* (Reproduced courtesy of the British Library) ........................................................................... 242

**Figure 7** – Vladimir Nabokov, annotation in Franz Kafka, *The Metamorphosis* (Reproduced courtesy of Pan Press) .............................................................................................................. 243

**Figure 8** – David Foster Wallace, annotation in Cormac McCarthy, *Suttree*, HRCDFW-L (Reproduced courtesy of the Harry Ransom Centre, Austin, TX) ...................................................... 244

**Figure 9** – Djuna Barnes, ‘Jefferson,-675-2277’ (Reproduced courtesy of The Authors League Fund and St. Bride’s Church) ............................................................................................. 244

**Figure 10** – James Joyce’s ‘notorious coloured crayons’, from Dublin, National Library of Ireland, The Joyce Papers 2002, ‘III.v. Pages from *Finnegans Wake* notebook’, MS 36,639/18/B/19 (Reproduced courtesy of the National Library of Ireland) ........................................................................... 245

**Figure 11** – David Foster Wallace, annotation in H. L. Hix, *Morte d’Author: An Autopsy*, citing William H. Gass, I, HRCDFW-L (Reproduced courtesy of the Harry Ransom Centre, Austin, TX) ................................................................. 247

**Figure 12** – David Foster Wallace, annotation in H. L. Hix, *Morte d’Author: An Autopsy*, citing William H. Gass, II, HRCDFW-L (Reproduced courtesy of the Harry Ransom Centre, Austin, TX) ............................................................................................. 247

**Figure 13** – David Foster Wallace, annotation in Don DeLillo, *Americana*, HRCDFW-L (Reproduced courtesy of the Harry Ransom Centre, Austin, TX) ........................................................... 248

**Figure 14** – David Foster Wallace, annotation in Lewis Hyde, *The Gift: Imagination and the Erotic Life of Property*, HRCDFW-L (Reproduced courtesy of the Harry Ransom Centre, Austin, TX) ........................................................................ 248

**Figure 15** – David Foster Wallace, annotation in James Joyce, *Stephen Hero*, HRCDFW-L (Reproduced courtesy of the Harry Ransom Centre, Austin, TX) ......................................................... 249
Figure 16 – David Foster Wallace, annotation on reverse spine of Hazard Adams, *Critical Theory Since Plato*, HRCDFW-L (Reproduced courtesy of the Harry Ransom Centre, Austin, TX)........................................................................................................250

Figure 17 – David Foster Wallace, annotation in Kit Reed, *Story First: The Writer As Insider*, HRCDFW-L (Reproduced courtesy of the Harry Ransom Centre, Austin, TX).................................................................250

Figure 18 – David Foster Wallace, annotation in Leo Tolstoy, *What is Art?*, HRCDFW-L (Reproduced courtesy of the Harry Ransom Centre, Austin, TX).......251

Figure 19 – David Foster Wallace, annotation in John Gardner, *On Moral Fiction*, HRCDFW-L (Reproduced courtesy of the Harry Ransom Centre, Austin, TX)........251

Figure 20 – David Foster Wallace, annotation in Richard Rohr, *Everything Belongs: The Gift of Contemplative Prayer*, HRCDFW-L (Reproduced courtesy of the Harry Ransom Centre, Austin, TX)........................................................................................................252

Figure 21 – David Foster Wallace, annotation in Susan Faludi, *Stiffed: The Betrayal of the American Man*, HRCDFW-L (Reproduced courtesy of the Harry Ransom Centre, Austin, TX)........................................................................................................252

Figure 22 – David Foster Wallace, annotation in Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, *Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience*, HRCDFW-L (Reproduced courtesy of the Harry Ransom Centre, Austin, TX)........................................................................................................253

Figure 23 – David Foster Wallace, ‘Draft 2: Handwritten draft’, *Harry Ransom Centre Website*, <http://hrc.contentdm.oclc.org/cdm/compoundobject/collection/p15878coll20/id/64#nav_top>, p. 1 (Reproduced courtesy of the Harry Ransom Centre, Austin, TX)........254

Figure 24 – David Foster Wallace, ‘*IJ* “First two sections”, typescript drafts and photocopy, undated’, fol. 16.6, HRCDFW-A (Reproduced courtesy of the Harry Ransom Centre, Austin, TX)........................................................................................................254

Figure 25 – David Foster Wallace, ‘*IJ* Handwritten drafts, undated’, fol. 15.4, HRCDFW-A (Reproduced courtesy of the Harry Ransom Centre, Austin, TX)........255

Figure 26 – David Foster Wallace, ‘*IJ* Handwritten drafts, undated’, fol. 15.4, HRCDFW-A (Reproduced courtesy of the Harry Ransom Centre, Austin, TX)........255

Figure 27 – David Foster Wallace, ‘Digital copy printouts of corrections of typos/errors for paperback printing of *Infinite Jest*, from 1st edition, 2nd printing *Infinite Jest* hardcover, 1996’, fol. 23.7, HRCDFW-A (Reproduced courtesy of the Harry Ransom Centre, Austin, TX)........................................................................................................256

Figure 28 – David Foster Wallace, ‘Draft 1: Wallace’s workbook’, *Harry Ransom Centre Website*, <http://hrc.contentdm.oclc.org/cdm/compoundobject/collection/p15878coll20/id/66#nav_top>, p. 1 (Reproduced courtesy of the Harry Ransom Centre, Austin, TX)............256

Figure 29 – David Foster Wallace, ‘Draft 1: Wallace’s workbook’, *Harry Ransom Centre Website*, <http://hrc.contentdm.oclc.org/cdm/compoundobject/collection/p15878coll20/id/66#nav_top>, p. 1 (Reproduced courtesy of the Harry Ransom Centre, Austin, TX)............257
Figure 30 – David Foster Wallace, ‘Draft 3: Handwritten draft’, *Harry Ransom Centre Website*, <http://hrc.contentdm.oclc.org/cdm/compoundobject/collection/p15878coll20/id/56>, p. 1 (Reproduced courtesy of the Harry Ransom Centre, Austin, TX) ........................................ 257

Figure 31 – David Foster Wallace, ‘Draft 4: Typed, with Wallace’s edits’, *Harry Ransom Centre Website*, <http://hrc.contentdm.oclc.org/cdm/compoundobject/collection/p15878coll20/id/52>, p. 7 (Reproduced courtesy of the Harry Ransom Centre, Austin, TX) ........................................ 258

Figure 32 – David Foster Wallace, annotation on a letter from Michael Pietsch, 22 December 1994, fol. 23.8, HRCDFW-A (Reproduced courtesy of the Harry Ransom Centre, Austin, TX) ....................................................... 258

Figure 33 – David Foster Wallace, ‘*IJ* “First two sections”, typescript drafts and photocopy, undated’, fol. 16.6, HRCDFW-A (Reproduced courtesy of the Harry Ransom Centre, Austin, TX) ........................................ 258

Figure 34 – David Foster Wallace, ‘*IJ* “First two sections”, typescript drafts and photocopy, undated’, fol. 16.6, HRCDFW-A (Reproduced courtesy of the Harry Ransom Centre, Austin, TX) ........................................ 259

Figure 35 – David Foster Wallace, ‘*IJ* Handwritten drafts, undated’, fol. 15.7, HRCDFW-A (Reproduced courtesy of the Harry Ransom Centre, Austin, TX) ........................................ 259

Figure 36 – David Foster Wallace, ‘*IJ* Typescript, copyedited (continued)’, fol. 22.3, HRCDFW-A, (Reproduced courtesy of the Harry Ransom Centre, Austin, TX) ........................................ 260

Figure 37 – David Foster Wallace, ‘*IJ* “First two sections”, typescript drafts and photocopy, undated’, fol. 16.6, HRCDFW-A (Reproduced courtesy of the Harry Ransom Centre, Austin, TX) ........................................ 260

Figure 38 – David Foster Wallace, ‘*IJ* Handwritten drafts, undated’, fol. 15.5, HRCDFW-A (Reproduced courtesy of the Harry Ransom Centre, Austin, TX) ........................................ 261

Figure 39 – David Foster Wallace, ‘*IJ* Handwritten drafts, undated’, fol. 15.5, HRCDFW-A (Reproduced courtesy of the Harry Ransom Centre, Austin, TX) ........................................ 261

Figure 40 – David Foster Wallace, ‘*IJ* Handwritten drafts, undated’, fol. 15.5, HRCDFW-A (Reproduced courtesy of the Harry Ransom Centre, Austin, TX) ........................................ 262

Figure 41 – David Foster Wallace, ‘*IJ* Handwritten drafts, undated’, fol. 15.5, HRCDFW-A (Reproduced courtesy of the Harry Ransom Centre, Austin, TX) ........................................ 262

Figure 42 – David Foster Wallace, ‘*IJ* “First two sections”, typescript drafts and photocopy, undated’, fol. 16.5, HRCDFW-A (Reproduced courtesy of the Harry Ransom Centre, Austin, TX) ........................................ 263

Figure 43 – David Foster Wallace, ‘*IJ* Handwritten drafts, undated’, fol. 15.5, HRCDFW-A (Reproduced courtesy of the Harry Ransom Centre, Austin, TX) ........................................ 263

Figure 44 – David Foster Wallace, annotation/fragmentary draft of ‘The Suffering Channel’, in Djuna Barnes, *Nightwood*, HRCDFW-L (Reproduced courtesy of the Harry Ransom Centre, Austin, TX) ........................................ 264

Figure 45 – David Foster Wallace, ‘Early schoolwork, 1971-1977, undated’, fol. 31.9, HRCDFW-A (Reproduced Courtesy of the Harry Ransom Centre, Austin, TX) ........................................ 265
Figure 46 – David Foster Wallace, annotation in Djuna Barnes, *Nightwood*, HRCDFW-L (Reproduced courtesy of the Harry Ransom Centre, Austin, TX) .......... 265

Figure 47 – David Foster Wallace, annotation in Djuna Barnes, *Nightwood*, HRCDFW-L (Reproduced courtesy of the Harry Ransom Centre, Austin, TX) .......... 266

Figure 48 – David Foster Wallace, annotation in J. M. Coetzee, *Disgrace*, HRCDFW-L (Reproduced courtesy of the Harry Ransom Centre, Austin, TX) ................................ 266
**Abbreviations: Texts by David Foster Wallace**

Note – I have abbreviated the titles of those texts by Wallace that are referred to most frequently throughout the thesis, although I give the title in full whenever I judge it might be useful to the reader (e.g. if the text has not been referred to for a significant number of pages). In order to avoid confusion and cross-referencing, I have also abbreviated references to annotated texts from Wallace’s library, although I give the title and date in first references. Full publication details are given in the Bibliography.

**Novels**

*BOTS* – *The Broom of the System*

*IJ* – *Infinite Jest*

*TPK* – *The Pale King: An Unfinished Novel*

**Novella**

‘TSC’ – ‘The Suffering Channel’

**Short Stories**

‘GON’ – ‘Good Old Neon’

‘O’ – ‘Octet’

**Reviews and Essays**

‘GE’ – ‘Greatly Exaggerated’

‘EUP’ – ‘E Unibus Pluram’

‘JFD’ – ‘Joseph Frank’s Dostoevsky’

‘AU’ – ‘Authority and American Usage’

**Public Speeches**

*TIW* – *This Is Water: Some Thoughts, Delivered on a Significant Occasion, about Living a Compassionate Life*

**Teaching Materials**


**Interviews with Wallace**

‘ICR’ – ‘David Foster Wallace, interview on the Charlie Rose Show’

‘ILM’ – ‘An Interview with David Foster Wallace, by Larry McCaffery’
Abstract

This thesis argues that marginalia, understood broadly as those writings to be found on the margins of the literary work or text, can help us to rethink a number of practical and theoretical issues that have been, and remain, central to the discipline of English Studies: from the formalist strictures on intrinsic/extrinsic evidence, to poststructuralist notions of textuality, to the more recent turn to ‘affect’, and the re-emergence of archival forms of research as a possible alternative to ‘Theory’ altogether. By bringing together three forms of literary annotation – reading notes, manuscript marginalia, and fictional footnotes – my thesis argues for the usefulness of a dynamic model of ‘centre’ and ‘margin’ for theorizing interpretation as a problem of ideological investment: in other words, I take any margin (‘material’ or otherwise) to be constituted in opposition to a ‘centre’ that is a matter of socio-historical perspective, rather than simply ‘given’.

I begin by contending that the value and meaning of authorly annotations have tended to proceed from Romantic notions of authority: the marginal note assumes a synecdochic relation to the author as a ‘whole’. However, I argue that this framework has historically tended to allow the marginal note to act as a kind of ‘transparent’ supplement to interpretation, while at the same time masking a number of potentially problematic assumptions. For example, whereas the annotations of William Blake and James Joyce have usually stood as evidence of aesthetic mastery, those of Sylvia Plath and Djuna Barnes have only tended to buttress their authors’ cultural positioning as stereotypically ‘dangerous’ or ‘embittered’ female artists. In this sense, while the thesis does not posit any straightforward equivalence between textual and ‘other’ kinds of marginality (e.g. political), nor does it dismiss their connection entirely; indeed, it goes on to argue that such divergent forms of ‘marginality’ have often been brought into conjunction by the appearance of pseudo-scholarly marginalia in the literary text, from Alexander Pope to T. S. Eliot to Susan Daitch.

The main ‘case study’ of the thesis builds on these claims to contend that the work of David Foster Wallace, as well as its reception, occupies a central position in a wider cultural reaction to the ‘radical de-centrings’ of Marxist and psychoanalytical post-structuralism. Chapter One argues that Wallace’s extensively annotated personal library – several items from which were controversially redacted by the Ransom Centre in 2011 – can be seen to participate in a critical return to the category of the (white, male, middle-class) ‘genius’ that is nonetheless critiqued in advance by his work; engaging with Fredric Jameson, I thus contend that Wallace’s marginalia perform both the ‘end of the bourgeois ego’ and its rejuvenation. Chapter Two argues that this tension is exacerbated by a reading of Wallace’s ‘unfinished’ posthumous novel, The Pale King, alongside its archival materials. Rather than allowing us to ‘disentangle’ the author’s intentions from his editor’s interference, the movement between oeuvre and archive instead draws the ‘original/mediated’ opposition into the problems of aesthetic ‘plagiarism’ and late capitalist abstraction that run throughout Wallace’s writing. And finally, although Wallace’s oeuvre seems persistently to attempt to supersede such tensions through its extensive use of pseudo-scholarly footnotes, yet Chapter Three argues that these same marginalia tend to reinscribe a set of anxieties around autonomous selfhood, ‘affect’, and cultural value that is inseparable from the modern institutionalization of U.S. literary production and ‘critical theory’. 
Declaration

No portion of the work referred to in the thesis has been submitted in support of an application for another degree or qualification of this or any other university or other institute of learning.
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**Presentation of Archival Materials**

**Book Marginalia**

As H. J. Jackson puts it in ‘Editing and Auditing Marginalia’, ‘[t]he problems associated distinctively with the publishing of marginalia are in the first instance practical problems having to do with presentation and format. [...] There are not many precedents to go by’ (p. 73). I have therefore followed my own system of presentation here, which aims to be as clear as possible about, firstly, the details of the text being annotated, and, secondly, the details of the annotation itself. For longer citations of David Foster Wallace’s book marginalia, I have employed the following formatting:

(author of book being annotated, along with any relevant bibliographical information)

Fragment of text from the original book, which may have been underlined, [highlighted or bracketed], or marked in some other way by Wallace.

*Wallace’s annotations on this fragment.*

In a number of instances, I have included a photograph of the marginalia by way of additional illustration (see Appendix).

**Manuscript Marginalia**

I have adapted the method of transcription used by Dirk Van Hulle in *Modern Manuscripts: The Extended Mind and Creative Undoing from Darwin to Beckett and Beyond*, which ‘aims to represent the quoted passages from manuscripts with as few diacritical signs as possible’ (p. x). Deletions are crossed out and superscript is used for additions. Uncertain words are marked with three xxx (only one x or two xx if the word is shorter than three letters). The transcriptions respect the author’s sometimes ungrammatical, paratactic formulation and idiosyncratic punctuation. I note whether manuscripts are handwritten or typed; marginalia are handwritten unless otherwise stated. Open variants and markings between lines are shown by means of subscript and superscript. Relevant marginalia from other parts of the page (further down in the margins, in the gutter, and so on) are sometimes appended in bold. In a number of instances, I have included a photograph of the manuscript by way of additional illustration (see Appendix).
Acknowledgements

I am extremely grateful to the AHRC for the financial support that made this thesis possible. Thanks also to the Harry Ransom Centre for the grant that allowed me to visit their archives in 2013.

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Thank you to my family for their continued support and love, and especially to my parents, who have always encouraged me to pursue the things I think are interesting and important.

And to Alice, without whose unflattering belief and support I would not have got very far at all, I send my love and gratitude and so much more.
Introduction: Marginalia after Modernism

I will not be long here, Charles! – & gone, you will not mind my having spoiled a book in order to leave a Relic.

- S. T. Coleridge, marginal inscription in a book belonging to his friend, Charles Lamb¹

I am a meaningless person.

- David Foster Wallace, marginal inscription in H. L. Hix’s *Morte d’Author: An Autopsy* (1990; see fig. 1)²

[…] although the prohibition of marginality that is crucial in the production of any explanation is politics as such, what inhabits the prohibited margin of a particular explanation specifies its particular politics.

- Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, ‘Explanation and Culture: Marginalia’³

0.1 Preface

This thesis argues that marginalia, understood broadly as those writings to be found on the margins of the literary work or text, can help us today to rethink a number of practical and theoretical issues that have been, and remain, central to the discipline of English Studies: from the formalist strictures on intrinsic/extrinsic evidence, to the necessity of authoritative texts and authorial intention for modern bibliography, to poststructuralist formulations of ‘textuality’ and the ‘author function’ in the late twentieth century, and to the contemporary divergence between archival or ‘genetic’ forms of research and those more closely associated with something that has come to be known as ‘Theory’. By bringing together three forms of literary annotation – reading notes, manuscript marginalia, and fictional footnotes – that have conventionally been

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² Austin, TX, Harry Ransom Centre, David Foster Wallace Library.
treated as part of the separate problems of biography, composition, and paratextuality, my thesis argues for the usefulness of a dynamic model of ‘centre’ and ‘margin’ for theorizing interpretation as a problem of ideological investment. If the biblical gloss participated traditionally in the mediation of ‘signs […] [that] the Author is supposed to have inscribed within [the text]’, I will argue here that modern marginalia work to mediate a central body (whether of writing or some authorly ‘subjectivity’ supposedly represented therein) that they simultaneously work to fragment. The thesis will look at the ways in which this centre/margin dynamic functions concurrently to constitute and to trouble the borders of the literary ‘work’ at each stage of its genetic or sociological itinerary, from inception (‘source texts’), to writing and editing (manuscripts), to reception and interpretation (the encroachment of critical footnotes upon ‘the text itself’).

Fredric Jameson, The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act (London: Routledge, 2002), p. 14. My thesis broadly proceeds from the Althusserian notion of ‘ideology’ that Jameson sets out, in Unconscious, by way of his analysis of the role of the biblical gloss in the ‘medieval and patristic system of the four levels of scripture’ (pp. 13-18). Ideology, writes Jameson, can today be seen as ‘a representational structure which allows the individual subject to conceive or imagine his or her lived relationship to transpersonal realities such as the social structure or the collective logic of History’ (pp. 14-15). However, whereas for Jameson, the ‘anti-totalizing’ or fragmentary interpretative methods associated with ‘post-structuralism in France’ can be rounded up together and briefly dismissed as so much Nietzscheanism (pp. 5-7), I will be arguing here that certain of these latter theoretical models (in particular, those inflected by psychoanalysis and deconstruction) can allow us to displace, or reformulate, the very binaries on which Jameson’s argument in the first place depends (between ‘totality’ and ‘anti-totality’, or ‘whole’ and ‘fragment’). Rather than promoting a model of ideology which rigidly juxtaposes ‘centre’ and ‘margin’, then, I will argue for the importance of a dynamic understanding of such an opposition to a contemporary analysis of not only the ‘individual subject’, but also the conditions that would make possible his or her conception of a relationship to such ‘transpersonal realities’ as society, culture, or history. My thesis also therefore takes the ‘poststructuralist motif of the “death of the subject”’ simultaneously more seriously, and less dogmatically, than the argument advanced by Jameson in Postmodernism; or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism (London: Verso, 1991), pp. 6-16, pp. 305-311. For instance, I will contend throughout that Jameson’s ‘end of the bourgeois ego, or monad’ (p. 15) is shown in the case of David Foster Wallace to be simultaneously a reinforcement or rejuvenation of that ego and its psychopathologies; I do not write off the notion of individual fragmentation as ‘mere’ écriture or textual luxuriance, but neither do I dismiss the strongly recuperative and ‘normalizing’ effects that the signifiers of such fragmentation, once assimilated to the capitalist system and reified as commodities, can have in reality. Furthermore, just as I will insist on the dynamism of the implied relation here between a ‘centre’ (ego) and its ‘margins’ (fragmentation), my occasional usage of the term ‘late capitalism’ is intended to refer to the movement, in the latter half of the twentieth century, towards ‘the vision of a world capitalist system fundamentally distinct from the older imperialism’ (pp. xviii-xix) – and not necessarily to the other, cultural half of [Jameson’s] title, namely postmodernism as an epochal or ‘dominant’ logic (p. xxi). Indeed, by studying Wallace specifically in relation to modernism – rather than postmodernism or (as has most often been the case) some contemporary variant of ‘post’-postmodernism – I hope to position his work in relation to what David Cunningham describes as a ‘temporal dialectic of negation and newness’, rather than Jameson’s more rigidly historicist constitution of the modernist/postmodernist opposition in line with ‘the particular “typological” abstractions required for a “generic-periodizing” definition’; see Asceticism Against Colour, or Modernism, Abstraction and the Lateness of Beckett’, New Formations, 55 (2005), 104-19 (p. 109).
While most full-length studies of marginal glosses, doodles, and illustrations have tended to focus on the Medieval and Early Modern periods, my thesis proceeds from the contention that our understanding of literary annotation shifts during Romanticism, is reified and recalibrated with modernism and its attendant institutionalization in post-structuralism, and today seems to intersect with those postmodern tenets of ‘de-centring’ and fragmentation that have been yielding more and more to ‘affective’ theories of immanent materiality. We will see below that the Latinate word ‘marginalia’ was itself co-opted into the English language by S. T. Coleridge in the early nineteenth century, and refers specifically to an author’s annotations according to an appropriately Romantic conception of authority; my use of the word is therefore both expansive and strategic, in that it aims to describe a modern dynamic of ‘centre’ and ‘margin’ that persists not only in the limited Coleridgean sense of authorial reading notes, but also across manuscript materials and published texts – without, however, becoming solidified into a structuralist taxonomy akin to ‘text’ and ‘paratext’. I am not, then, proposing a novel system with which to explain the transhistorical validity of any one interpretative structure. Rather, I am tracing a certain tendency, especially ‘[o]nce a system of ownership for texts came into being, once strict rules concerning author’s rights […] and related matters were enacted’, for interpretation to take the form of an ideological exchange between centre and margin that is dramatized by the mediatory function of marginalia. My thesis will show this dynamic of ‘centre/margin’ to be contingent and reversible, depending upon its particular configuration within the text and context of a given interpretative situation; the relative reversibility of centre and margin does not, however, indicate one side’s ultimate identity with the other, but is determined in relation to the particular ideological investment that is marked by the circumstances of a given exchange. It is also according to this alternation between the general and the particular that my thesis takes the form of the present more wide-ranging ‘Introduction’ to the problem of literary marginalia, followed by a three-chapter case study on a contemporary U.S. author, David Foster Wallace; for, as I will argue throughout those chapters, Wallace’s particular socio-historical moment, and his own cultural ‘centrality’ within it, are

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5 I will advance these claims in more specific detail in the following sections of the Introduction.
crucial to the ways in which we constitute and understand the meaning of ‘marginality’, textual or otherwise, in relation to his oeuvre.

Before elaborating such methodological points any further, however, I will first need to turn in greater detail to those aforementioned ‘shifts’ in our historical understanding of literary annotation, beginning with the case of Coleridge and Romanticism.

0.2 From Copious Notes to Coleridgean Relics: a Romantic History of the Margin

In November 1819, under the heading of ‘Marginalia’, Coleridge published a selection of his own reading notes on Sir Thomas Browne in *Blackwood’s Magazine*, ‘bringing the word *marginalia* from Latin into English and permanently changing the conditions under which readers wrote their notes’. For H. J. Jackson, who makes this latter claim, ‘Coleridge occupies a pivotal position in the history of marginalia in English, for his is the name associated with the publication and popularisation of the genre’: by at once refashioning these marks of readerly annotation, and at the same time recognizing their literary value as standalone fragments – independently even of their ‘central’ text – Coleridge is said to have established a modern genre of writing. Similarly, Thomas McFarland writes that:

> From the invention of writing, and a fortiori with the exponential duplications achieved by printing, readers had commented in margins. […] But there was nothing that could be called a form, and the jottings, ranging no doubt from intellectual vandalism to aids

\[7\] As Jackson elaborates: ‘The word itself, which Coleridge may well have used ironically to make light of his own pretensions, has stuck: readers seem to find that its Latinity confers a degree of seriousness and erudition that “notes”, “remarks”, “comments”, and even “annotations” lack’; see *Marginalia*, pp. 7-8; italics original. In 1983, Jackson replaced the late George Whalley as editor of the extensive writings that Coleridge had left in the margins of books that he owned; six volumes of the marginalia were published, around 2001, as part of Princeton University Press’s ‘Collected Works’. See H. J. Jackson, ‘Editing and Auditing Marginalia’, in *Voice, Text, Hypertext: Emerging Practices in Textual Studies*, ed. by Raimonda Modiano, Leroy Searle, and Peter Shillingsburg (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2004), pp. 72-80. Since then, Jackson has published *Marginalia*, which looks at a broad range of marginal writings added to books from 1700 to 2000; *A Book I Value: Selected Marginalia* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), a sampler of Coleridge’s annotations; and *Romantic Readers: The Evidence of Marginalia* (Ann Arbor: Yale University Press, 2005), a look at marginalia from 1790-1830, leading Seth Lerer to describe her as the ‘doyenne of marginalianists’; see ‘Devotion and Defacement: Reading Children’s Marginalia’, *Representations*, 118.1 (2012), 126-53 (p. 127). If Jackson herself hopes that her scholarly oeuvre can serve as a ‘starting point’ for the study of modern marginalia (*Marginalia*, p. 13), then my own project emerges, at least in part, as a response.

to memory, were for the most part private and outside the realities of the statements to which they were addressed. With Romanticism, however, a genre took shape and a canon appeared. [...] That the genre is in truth a Romantic emergence is perhaps indicated by the fact, if the Oxford English Dictionary is correct, that the first use of the word was by Coleridge [...] 9

For McFarland, ‘marginalia as a literary form [...] activates that tension between the part and the whole that lay at the base of the Romantic theory of hermeneutics’, as well as ‘the sense of fragmentariness that paradoxically defines the characteristic Romantic quest for unity’.10 With a ‘true master of the fragment’ – McFarland’s example is William Blake – the marginal note ‘indicate[s] not a fragmentary and erratic power of insight, but exactly the opposite, an organic, coherent, and fully worked-out viewpoint’: thus, whether the note in question is Blake’s long scrawl in defence of ‘Inspiration and Vision’ in his copy of The Works of Sir Joshua Reynolds (1798), or one of the many instances in which he has simply written ‘Mark this’ in the margin of Emanuel Swedenborg’s Divine Love and Divine Wisdom (1763), Blake’s marginalia ‘throughout are united by the common feature of synecdoche for his entire position’ (or what McFarland calls ‘the whole of Blake’).11 It follows, argues McFarland, that a particular set of marginalia will work ‘parasitically’ to form a ‘synecdochic structure’ that ‘forces open the [central] text’ and thereby changes its meaning, function, and value, in accordance with the particular ‘organic whole’ to which those notes have been attributed:12 and so it is with my first epigraph, wherein Coleridge’s near-sacred inscription paradoxically (and self-consciously) elevates the status of the same book that it ‘spoils’.

At the same time, however – as has been adduced by David C. Greetham – if the very possibility of a Coleridgean ‘Relic’ arises in historical conjunction with Wordsworth’s definition of ‘the “poet” as a “national treasure” precisely because of his ability to construct an original organicism that had never existed before’, then its ‘parasitic’ or ‘intertextual’ formation calls into question ‘intention, the originary moment of inscription, and the integrated “work” upon which Wordsworth’s poetic

12 McFarland, ‘Synecdochic’, pp. 77-78.
(and its embodiment in the 1842 Copyright Act) depends'. In other words, while Coleridge’s marginalia never quite attain the integrated or ‘organic’ status of the literary ‘work’, their value as publishable and protectable literary artefacts is nonetheless established in relation to some pre-existing index of authority – what McFarland would term ‘the whole of Coleridge’, but which I, following Michel Foucault, will call the ‘author function’, that classificatory assemblage of the individual writing subject, his more or less retrievable body of published works (or ‘oeuvre’), and some measure of stylistic, qualitative, and conceptual coherence therein. Marginalia – as with Foucault’s examples of Nietzsche’s laundry list, or the papers of Sade while he was imprisoned – thus lead us back to the related problem of ‘the word work and the unity it designates’: ‘What is a work? […] Is it not what an author has written? […] Why not?’; ‘How can one define a work amid the millions of traces left by someone after his death?’ In this sense, Coleridge’s marginal ‘Relic’ not only disrupts the Romantic notion of the work on which its value in the first place depends, but also raises the technical and theoretical question of whether the poet is a poet on account of his work (Wordsworth), or, conversely, whether the work is a work on account of its poet (Foucault).

Coleridge himself ‘well understood the sentimental value of his notes’, annotating volumes that had been lent to him by friends such as Charles Lamb, Thomas De Quincey, and the Wordsworths; ‘Reader’, Lamb would go on to write in his 1820 essay ‘The Two Races of Men’, ‘if thy heart overfloweth to lend them, lend thy books; but let it be to such a one as S. T. C. – he will return them […] rich with annotations, tripling their value’. In his later years, however, Coleridge became ‘so well known as an annotator’ that relative strangers would follow Lamb’s advice, sending in their books ‘so as to secure [Coleridge’s] opinion in the form of marginalia’, while ‘Coleridge, obliging them, was well aware that the results would circulate’. From roughly 1807, when [Coleridge] was thirty-five, the number of books that he freely

16 Jackson, Marginalia, p. 7, pp. 149-65.
annotated grew steadily until he began to see this library as a marketable resource, and to capitalise upon it. 19 We can trace here an early stage in the development of the so-called ‘Romantic genre’ of marginalia, as distinct from what Coleridge elsewhere describes merely as ‘copious notes’ – with the former category helping to establish the subsequent tradition of popular and critical interest in the annotations of figures such as Edgar Allan Poe, Mark Twain, Charles Darwin, Herman Melville, Emily Dickinson, Virginia Woolf, T. S. Eliot, Marilyn Monroe, Nelson Mandela, and Madonna, 21 and the latter one supposedly denoting those fairly ubiquitous and ordinary scribbles, jottings, and doodles that not only hold little or no interest on account of their fragmentary form and incidental authorship, but are actually prohibited by the majority of public libraries today (as in, ‘The Marking of Books is FORBIDDEN’). 22 ‘The term [marginalia] becomes fixed, oddly enough’, writes William H. Sherman, ‘just as the practice it describes begins to wane – or rather to be narrowed into an increasingly privileged form of writerly behaviour on the one hand, and an increasingly transgressive form of readerly behaviour on the other’. 23 On the one hand, then, I am not looking to dispute Greetham’s claim that, regardless of what we call it, ‘there has been a long and fairly continuous history of “readers writing in books”’ – among his many examples are the adversaria written to highlight ‘spurious’ Homeric lines by Alexandrian librarians, the ‘layers upon layers of commentary’ added to Aristotle textbooks by students in medieval universities, and the crowded mise en page of Midrash or Patristic exegetic texts. 24 On the other hand, however, we are beginning to see that Coleridge’s co-option of the term ‘marginalia’ into English, as part of that wider historical and ideological conjunction that we tend to call ‘Romanticism’, does at least participate in a shift in the way that the textual margin has been read, evaluated, and understood.

19 Jackson, Marginalia, p. 7, pp. 149-55.
20 In a letter of 22 April 1832, Coleridge proposed ‘a facsimile of John Asgill’s tracts with a life and copious notes, to which I would affix Postilla et Marginalia’; see The Letters of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, ed. by Ernest Hartley Coleridge, 2 vols (New York: Houghton, Mifflin, 1895), II, p. 761. As Greetham writes: ‘what I find fascinating about this citation is not just Coleridge’s usage, but the implied distinction between the “copious notes” and the “marginalia” […]’; see ‘Review’, p. 63; italics original.
21 This is just a handful of the figures whose annotations (and their reception) are discussed by Jackson in Marginalia.
23 Sherman, Used, pp. 20-21; italics original.
This latter is one of the basic opening contentions of the present thesis, which takes up the modern problem of marginalia as one neither of ‘genre’, nor of ‘the characteristic Romantic quest for unity’, nor again as a matter of fundamental difference between some original utterance and its exegesis. To be sure, marginalia have tended to exert just such a transhistorical or idealistic pull on their theorisers: before McFarland, there is Poe, who claims that ‘[i]n the marginalia […] we talk only to ourselves; we therefore talk freshly – boldly – originally – with abandonnement – without conceit […] so is nonsense the essential sense of the Marginal Note’. For Paul Valéry, on the other hand, just as ‘the attentive reading of a book is nothing but a continuous commentary, a succession of notes escaping from the inner voice’, so ‘[m]arginal notes are part of the notes of pure thought’. It is along similar lines that Jackson, citing Marcel Proust’s essayistic depiction of the reading process, proposes a ‘communicative’ model of marginalia as a kind of ‘transaction between two minds’, which is encapsulated as well in those strongly affective and identificatory responses described by Coleridge’s daughter, Sara, in the wake of her father’s death:

[H]e seems ever at my ear, in his books, more especially in his marginalia – speaking not personally to me, and yet in a way so natural to my feelings, that finds me so fully, and awakens such a strong echo in my mind and heart, that I seem more intimate with him than I ever was in life.

Book marginalia, in their apparent resistance to the relative fixity or ‘impersonality’ of the printed page, have persistently been associated with such notions of human presence and intimacy, from those intricately wrought drawings of severed hands (or

25 As James C. Nohrnberg has shown, the accretive production of biblical annotation has itself tended to collapse this difference, even – or most especially – around passages that are thematically concerned with notions of genesis and revelation; see ‘Justifying Narrative: Commentary within Biblical Storytelling’, in Annotation and its Texts, ed. by Stephen A. Barney (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), pp. 3-42.
28 Jackson, Marginalia, pp. 81-100, p. 210. Proust writes that ‘the essential difference between a book and a friend is not their degree of greatness or wisdom, but the manner in which we communicate with them, reading, contrary to conversation, consisting for each of us in receiving the communication of another thought, but while we remain all alone […]’; see On Reading Ruskin, ed. and trans. by Jean Autret, William Burford, and Phillip J. Wolfe (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987), p. 112.
‘manicules’, to take Sherman’s designation) that ‘littered’ the margins of the Renaissance, and find their modern redeployment as the hand-shaped computer cursor,\(^{30}\) to William W. E. Slicht’s description of the Renaissance page as a ‘concatenation of voices’,\(^{31}\) to Martin Heidegger’s Luddite refusal of the typewriter as a dissembler of individual human ‘character’ (‘In typewriting, all men resemble one another’).\(^{32}\) Marginalia are the promise of a body and of contact – as in Jean-Luc Nancy’s phenomenological claim that ‘[b]odies, for good or ill, are touching each other upon this page’\(^{33}\) – just as they seem to constitute the kind of ‘tactile plus emotional’ material that Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick (via Silvan Tomkins) turned her attention to in Touching Feeling, a 2003 critique of the ‘antiessentialist epistemological motive’ of post-structuralism that has played a key role in the subsequent disciplinary ‘turn’ towards theories of immanent materiality and ‘affect’.\(^{34}\) In this way, my thesis will contend throughout that marginalia enable us to negotiate a significant cultural and critical tendency during the past two decades, as they work to connect the ontological focus of recent critical theory to the re-emergence of archival research and the ‘material disciplines’ as an exciting, ‘post-Theoretical’ alternative across the Humanities.\(^{35}\)

However, if post-structuralist theory reached its peak in the academy during the 1970s and 80s, it often stated its case through the use of what John Carlos Rowe describes as a trope of ‘marginality’, propounding the oppositional political logic of a ‘dominant’ centre and its ‘radical’ margins (Rowe’s examples include Luce Irigaray’s feminism, Geoffrey Hartman’s defence of literature, and Edward Said’s ‘Third World’

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\(^{30}\) Sherman, Used, pp. 25-52.


\(^{32}\) Martin Heidegger, cited in Jacques Derrida, ‘Geschlecht II: Heidegger’s Hand’, trans. by John P. Leavé, Jr, in Deconstruction and Philosophy: The Texts of Jacques Derrida, ed. by John Sallis (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), pp. 161-96 (p. 179). As Derrida puts it, for Heidegger, ‘[t]ypographic mechanization destroys this unity of the world, this integral identity, this proper integrity of the spoken word that writing manuscripts, at once because it appears closer to the voice or body proper and because it ties together the letters, conserves and gathers together’ (p. 178).


\(^{35}\) Peter McDonald discusses the ways in which Book History and related contemporary disciplines have sometimes been framed as an empirical (and implicitly more ‘rigorous’) response to an ‘exhausted’ literary theory; they are occasionally even posed as ‘post-Theoretical’ or ‘after theory’. See ‘Ideas of the Book and Histories of Literature: After Theory?’, PMLA, 121.1 (2006), 214-28.
criticism). The worry, argues Rowe, is that ‘[t]he culture produces its own margins – margins that only appear to be at the boundaries of the picture’, thus turning these apparently radical interventions into the allotted ‘ventriloquism’ of a now more nuanced and assimilatory cultural ‘centre’ – a worry that is somewhat borne out by the concurrent institutionalization and commodification of ‘Theory’ that has followed, particularly in the United States. Jonathan Culler’s succinct question is instructive here: ‘What is a centre if the marginal can become central?’ Where Jacques Derrida writes of ‘a sort of overrun that spoils all these boundaries and divisions and forces us to extend the accredited concept, the dominant notion of a “text”’, so that a ‘“text” […] is henceforth no longer a finished corpus of writing, some content enclosed in a book or its margins, but a differential network, a fabric of traces referring endlessly to something other than itself’, we are left with a scenario in which the identification of any text or ‘work’ – never mind its respectively ‘central’ or ‘marginal’ aspects – is in doubt. And yet, later in the same essay, which itself takes place in a division between central text (a reading of Percy Bysshe Shelley’s ‘The Triumph of Life’) and a running marginal commentary of fragmentary asides and digressions, Derrida protests that ‘it was never our wish to extend the reassuring notion of the text to a whole extra-textual realm and to transform the world into a library by doing away with all boundaries’, but that ‘we sought rather to work out the theoretical and practical system of these margins, these borders, once more, from the ground up’. While the present thesis will look to challenge the by now familiar disciplinary account of deconstruction as merely a sequence of ‘scandalous aphorisms’ about ‘general textuality’, ‘finite infinites’, ‘originary repetitions’ and so on (deconstruction as merely ‘“the theory that does that”’), it will not do so by embracing Derrida’s own apparent disavowal of its radically de-systemising potential. Rather, my thesis takes the contemporary

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36 John Carlos Rowe, ‘“To Live outside the Law, You Must Be Honest”: The Authority of the Margin in Contemporary Theory’, *Cultural Critique*, 2 (1985-86), 35-68.
37 Rowe, ‘Margin’, p. 39, p. 57; italics original.
41 Derrida, ‘Living’, p. 84.
‘centralisation’ or reification of even the theoretical ‘trope of marginality’ as an occasion to attempt, in a new light, to trace the incessant movements between textual ‘overrun’ and practical ‘system’ that work towards the very production of the notion of the ‘these margins, these borders [of the text]’. The arguments that follow can therefore be thought of as an attempt to trace the various constructions and deconstructions of the margins of the literary ‘work’ or text, as seen from a critical perspective that accounts not only for what McFarland calls ‘the Romantic theory of hermeneutics’, but also the latter’s thoroughgoing critique in literary and philosophical modernism, from the ‘de-centred subject’ of psychoanalysis, to the postmodernist ‘“death” of the subject itself’ as diagnosed in the work of Fredric Jameson.

What does it mean, for example, when, during a research trip undertaken to the Harry Ransom Centre in late 2013, I turn to an apparently blank page in David Foster Wallace’s review copy of Morte d’Author by H. L. Hix – a 1990 critical text ‘outlining the question of the death of the author within the context of current debates in philosophy and in literary theory’ – only to find, on closer inspection, the faintly pencilled inscription that is included here as my second epigraph: ‘I am a meaningless person’ (see fig. 1). Before his suicide in 2008, at the age of forty-six, Wallace had published two novels, three short story collections, and two collections of essays, as well as a mass-market introduction to the mathematical concept of infinity, and (with Mark Costello) an analysis of North American hip hop with reference to Saussurean linguistics. As attested to by the numerous other annotations in his copy of Morte, as

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44 As Freud writes around 1925, ‘the psycho-analytic view of the relation of the conscious ego to an overpowering unconscious was a severe blow to human self-love. I described this as the psychological blow to men’s narcissism, and compared it with the biological blow delivered by the theory of descent and the earlier cosmological blow aimed at it by the discovery of Copernicus’; see ‘The Resistances to Psycho-analysis’, in The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, ed. and trans. by James Strachey and Anna Freud, 24 vols (London: Vintage, 2001), XIX, pp. 213-22 (p. 221); italics original.
45 Jameson, Postmodernism, pp. 6-16.
46 This is a quotation attributed to Hugh J. Silverman on the promotional website for Hix’s study; see ‘Morte d’Author: An Autopsy’, Temple University Press Website, <http://www.temple.edu/tempress/titles/757_reg_print.html> [accessed 28 November 2015].
47 Wallace, in Hix, Morte (HRCDFW-L).
48 There have also been several posthumous publications in the years after Wallace’s death: This Is Water, an edited version of his 2005 Kenyon College commencement speech; The Pale King, an ‘unfinished novel’; Fate, Time, and Language: An Essay on Free Will, a reproduction of Wallace’s undergraduate Philosophy thesis on Richard Taylor; and Both Flesh and Not, a collection of essays. The
well as his eventual review, Wallace also had a certain knowledge of, and interest in, academic theories of authorship.⁴⁹ Next to Foucault’s claim (cited by Hix) that ‘“the link between a proper name and the individual being named and the link between an author’s name and that which it names are not isomorphous and do not function in the same way’”, Wallace simply writes ‘Gobbledygook’ (see fig. 2)⁵₀ If the first note had given me pause, seeming so strangely intimate and ‘tactile’ in the ways enumerated above from Valéry to Sedgwick, this second one initially struck me as comic, if not mildly juvenile and dismissive – or perhaps comic because of these latter qualities. At which point a whole procession of implications becomes apparent: the discrepancy between the designatory function of an ordinary proper name and an author’s name, elucidated here by Foucault, is already having some effect on the way that I, on this well-funded visit to Wallace’s freshly-purchased, $675,000 archive, am approaching that ‘I’ of ‘I am a meaningless person’, as well as assuming the enunciatory source of ‘Gobbledygook’; the marginalia have invaded an apparently critical discourse on ‘the name of the author’ by turning it too straightforwardly onto ‘the individual being named’. But this assertion of personal meaningless has become another kind of (archived, institutionalised, and copyrighted) Relic – hardly something that we could call ‘marginal’, now that it presses upon the oeuvre of this classificatory assemblage called ‘David Foster Wallace’, which has already been associated, variously, with the foundation of a ‘New American Canon’ in the wake of literary postmodernism,⁵¹ a ‘New Sincerity’ or ‘postironic’ sensibility in response to the ‘hermeneutics of suspicion’,⁵² and, alongside the likes of Jonathan Franzen, Dave Eggers, and Jonathan Safran Foer, a ‘post-postmodern’ return to the more ‘traditional’ questions of morality and the human.⁵³

David Foster Wallace Reader also contains some of Wallace’s previously unpublished juvenilia and teaching materials.

⁴⁹ While the review of Hix’s book was fairly dismissive of its ‘archaic’ subject matter and argument, Wallace describes himself therein as a ‘hardcore theory-wienie’; see ‘Greatly Exaggerated’, p. 144.
⁵₀ Wallace, in Hix, Morte (HRCDFW-L).
appeared, replete with Wallace’s juvenilia and college teaching materials; Bloomsbury published the seventh and eighth single-author critical studies on Wallace’s work; the fifth international Wallace conference was held in Paris; and James Ponsoldt directed *The End of the Tour*, a Hollywood feature film based on Wallace’s life. As such, although Wallace’s marginalia on Foucault might at first seem to place the author ‘ever at our ear’ as he relays his ‘notes of pure thought’, they simultaneously force us to rethink that basic relationship between ‘work’ and ‘poet’ at a time when novelists have entered the U.S. university en masse, and their protagonists pile old copies of ‘Foucault and Greenblatt and hooks and Poovey into shopping bags’ to sell to the Strand at knock-down price.

While I expand upon this brief reading of Wallace’s annotated *Morte* in Chapter One, it can for now help to elucidate another of the opening claims of my thesis: that is, if marginalia constitute a specific and historically contested problem in literary interpretation, nonetheless they do not possess an essential, generic, or tranhistorical meaning. As much as they invite theorisation as ‘the voices of the dead’, the borders of intelligibility (Poe) or consciousness (Valéry), or even ‘the rhetorical double bind that keeps all language at the margin of discourse’, I will argue instead that marginalia work as part of a model of ‘centre’ and ‘margin’ that is contingent and reversible, depending upon its particular configuration within the text and context of a

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56 This is a reference to Chip Lambert of Jonathan Franzen’s *The Corrections* (London: Fourth Estate, 2001; repr. London: Harper Perennial, 2007), a former Assistant Professor in ‘Textual Artefacts’ who ends up selling off ‘his feminists, his formalists, his structuralists, his poststructuralists, his Freudians, and his queers’ in order to pay for expensive meals for a new girlfriend (pp. 106-07). Nicholas Dames reads this scene as exemplary of the work of the so-called ‘Theory Generation’, that group of U.S. authors also including Lorrie Moore, Ben Lerner, and Jeffrey Eugenides, who would have studied literary theory in the 1970s and 80s and whose novels now tend to take ‘revenge on Theory’ by ‘narrating it as just another part of growing up a college-educated American’; see ‘Theory and the Novel’, *n+1*, 14 (2012), 157-69 (p. 164). I engage more closely with Dames’s argument in Chapter Three.


given interpretative situation. This does not equate to either of the finally identical and equally meaningless conclusions that ‘everything is centre’ or ‘everything is margin’, but rather implies that the relative reversibility of the terms ‘centre’ and ‘margin’ is determined by the same form of ideological exchange that they serve to dramatize. I will think of this exchange, as per Fredric Jameson’s comparison of Althusserian structuralism to the theological schema of ‘history itself as God’s book, which we may study and gloss for signs […] that the Author is supposed to have inscribed within it’, as a dynamic form of ‘mediation’. Just as the gloss, in Jameson’s analogy, works to ‘prepare’ a text for ‘further ideological investment’ such as allows ‘the individual subject to conceive his or her lived relationship to transpersonal realities such as the social structure’, we will see throughout that Wallace’s marginalia dramatize this mediatory relation in such a way as to recalibrate the very terms (individual subject, social structure) on which it rests. For instance, in the case of Wallace’s ‘I am a meaningless person’, we have a marginal claim for personal meaninglessness in a book-object that has in fact taken on special significance on account of the identity of its former owner/annotator; and this dynamic movement from ‘margin’ to ‘centre’ is in turn a subversion of Morte’s overall argument about the social and theoretical ‘de-centralisation’ of the author figure in the twentieth century. In the context of the 2010 archivization of Wallace’s entire archive and library, the note therefore seems like a decidedly ‘concrete’ affront to Roland Barthes’s claim, cited by Hix, that “the modern scribe is born simultaneously with the text, is in no way equipped with a being preceding or exceeding the writing, is not the subject with the book as predicate” (next to which Wallace simply writes: ‘cool’; see fig. 3).

Here, we can begin to see also some justification for the structure and methodology of my thesis, which proceeds by way of this more general introduction to the problem of marginalia in literary interpretation, followed by a three-chapter study that deals with that problem as manifested specifically in the case of Wallace. As I am approaching marginalia in terms of their ‘modern’ (post-Coleridgean) distinction from the mere jottings and ‘copious notes’ of the everyday, I will accordingly be interested in the ways in which they mediate between those notions of ‘author’ and ‘work’ that

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are brought together under the rubric of ‘author function’. I have chosen Wallace as an example with which to advance my argument because, as we will see in the following readings of his personal library, manuscripts, fiction, essays, and reception, his is a case in which the negotiations between ‘centre’ and ‘margin’ are richly involuted, unusually flexible, and therefore especially instructive for contemporary reappraisals of such issues as: genetic criticism, literary postmodernism, and humanism (Chapter One); textual scholarship, U.S. literary production, and neoliberalism (Chapter Two); and notions of textuality, inside/outside, and ‘affect’ in the wake of post-structuralist theory (Chapter Three). Crucially, in addition to his association with the ‘New Sincerity’ and ‘post-postmodernism’, Wallace is also chief among those so-called ‘New White Guys’ whose alleged ‘marginality’ has been proposed by Kathleen Fitzpatrick as emerging from ‘a culture that is finally paying attention to the voices originating on the margins’.  

In this light, it will be an overarching contention of my thesis that Wallace’s case participates in a complex contemporary process of ‘recentralization’, a nostalgic reaffirmation of a familiar kind of North American, white, male, middle-class, and even Romantic cultural ‘centre’ that does not equate, however, to its straightforward return; for, if Wallace’s work (and its reception) have thus far tended to buttress the ‘hegemony of whiteness and maleness long served by the structures of traditional humanism’, yet we will see here that such apparently ‘centred’ stability is placed under constant pressure by the volatile reversibility of its relation to a variety of discursive, socio-historical, and ideological ‘margins’.

To begin with, in Chapter One, I argue that case of Wallace – who has commonly been branded as a ‘visionary’, a ‘turbulent genius’, and ‘the best mind of his generation’ – necessitates a re-examination of Jameson’s claim that:

63 Fitzpatrick argues that certain postmodern U.S. novelists, such as Wallace, Jonathan Franzen, Thomas Pynchon, and Don DeLillo, ‘reveal through their representations of the media a cluster of anxieties about being displaced from some possibly imagined position of centrality in contemporary cultural life’, and that this focus on technological shifts ‘is at times employed to obscure other, unspeakable anxieties about shifts in contemporary social life that pose a lesser threat to the dominance of the novel than to the hegemony of whiteness and maleness long served by the structures of traditional humanism’; see The Anxiety of Obsolescence: The American Novel in the Age of Television (Nashville, Vanderbilt University Press, 2006), pp. 201-33; italics original.


65 Zadie Smith, ‘What were you looking at? A host of celebrity critics choose their books of the year’, Guardian Online, 16 December 2000,
If the poststructuralist motif of the ‘death of the subject’ means anything socially, it signals the end of the entrepreneurial and inner-directed individualism, with its ‘charisma’ and its accompanying categorical panoply of quaint romantic values such as that of the ‘genius’ [...] 68

While Jameson’s assertion manages to be simultaneously ‘hedged’ and somewhat sweeping – if post-structuralism means anything socially, it means the end of inner-directed individualism – Chapter One works through such tensions in light of the controversy that surrounded Wallace’s personal library shortly after it had opened to the public. In April 2011, on the basis of various annotations made by Wallace in a range of bestselling self-help and psychology manuals, the journalist Maria Bustillos published an article for The Awl weblog about the author’s relationship with his mother. Having cited selectively from Wallace’s marginalia on Alice Miller’s The Drama of the Gifted Child (1981) and John Bradshaw’s Bradshaw On: The Family (1986), Bustillos comes to the conclusion that ‘[Wallace] blames his mother for quite a lot of his suffering’: ‘he identified so closely with his mom, it’s as if she got caught in the crosshairs of his self-loathing’. 69 Although similarly personal claims have been made both before and since Bustillos’s piece, it was in direct response to the latter that the Ransom Centre, in the summer of 2011, took the remarkable step of assenting to a request from Wallace’s estate to restrict eleven of the extant self-help books from public access; these marginalia, it seems, mark a limit of individual privacy and ‘sensitivity’ that had been breached. 70 Chapter One reads this incident alongside Wallace’s other marginalia in a host of putatively ‘high’ and ‘low’ texts (from Plato’s Republic to Richard Rohr’s Everything Belongs: The Gift of Contemplative Prayer (1999)), and several of his published texts (Infinite Jest, This Is Water, and ‘Good Old

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68 Jameson, Postmodernism, pp. 305-06.


Neon’), in order to argue that the process of postmodern fragmentation, described by Jameson as ‘the end of the bourgeois ego, or monad’, is shown by Wallace’s case to be simultaneously a reinforcement or rejuvenation of that ego and its psychopathologies. I then argue that Wallace’s marginalia on these notional ‘source texts’, in tandem with their now-protected archival status, sustain a nostalgia for the (‘quaintly romantic’) high modernist notion of the mediatory ‘genius’ (‘Joyce in his rooms in Paris’) that simultaneously acts as its continuation in reality – albeit in that altered, late capitalist social context of mass higher education and Creative Writing that Mark McGurl calls ‘the Program Era’. If the library thus facilitates a wider cultural process of mourning for Wallace as both ‘man’ and ‘artist’, nonetheless I conclude that his oeuvre has repeatedly questioned the ideological implications of such a process in advance.

As the foregoing outline of Chapter One suggests, then, the case study of Wallace will provide us with a particularly familiar kind of authorly ‘centre’ against which any number of different ‘margins’ (textual, psychological, social, etc.) might come to bear. And yet, if even the likes of Wallace, Jonathan Franzen, Don DeLillo, and Thomas Pynchon can be posited as ‘marginal’ in light of the perceived centralization of certain marginalized social groups in the contemporary U.S., then we will also need to take note of the warning, issued by Evelyn B. Tribble in her analysis of printed glosses and illustrations in Early Modern England, against ‘the constant

73 In a 2014 article on Wallace, McGurl writes: ‘If the Program Era was characterized by an increasingly prolonged intimacy of American writers with the ways and means of the institutions of higher education; by the historically novel rise and multiplication of creative writing programs and their staffing by writer-teachers; by the emergence, in that evolving professional matrix, of a constellation of late modernist aesthetic formulations registering by turns the advent of mass higher education, the recognition of “diversity” as a primary institutional value, and the increasing prestige of big science and technology as crucial determinants of postwar narrative form; and characterized, finally, by the systematic centrality of authorial self-reference, or “autopoetics”, in generating those forms, then Wallace was, indeed, a Program Man if ever there was one’; see ‘The Institution of Nothing: David Foster Wallace in the Program’, *boundary 2*, 41.3 (2014), 27-54 (pp. 31-32).
74 In this last part of the argument, I draw on what Lauren Berlant describes as a dynamic of ‘national sentimentality’: by making a figure of wounded innocence (Wallace, the white male) available for mass ideological investment (mourning, ‘universal true feeling’), this process masks the broader structural conditions of exploitation in the manner of an ‘ethically uncontestable legitimating device’ (and, consequently, it also ‘promotes and maintains the hegemony of the national identity form’); see ‘The Subject of True Feeling: Pain, Privacy, and Politics’, in *Cultural Pluralism, Identity Politics, and the Law*, ed. by Thomas R. Kearns and Austin Sarat (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 199), pp. 49-84 (pp. 49-59).
75 Fitzpatrick, *Obsolescence*, pp. 231-33.
temptation to pun offered by the currency of the word *marginal*”. Tribble in 1993, ‘implies a kind of stability between margin and centre and further suggests that the margin is always and inevitably powerless’, even though ‘so stable a distinction is problematic for any consideration of historical or real margins’: by looking at these ‘real’ margins – that is, margins in ‘books, the text embodied’ – Tribble claims to offer a ‘critique of the easy invocation of the “marginal” in contemporary theory’. In various Early Modern translations of the Bible, for example, Tribble shows that marginalia functioned ‘in shifting relationships of authority’ with the central text. On the one hand, the glosses in the Bishops’ Bible (1568) mark the ‘persistence of the hierarchical, vertical, deferential model of reading posited by [Thomas] More and the Great Bible’ (whereby marginalia are presented not as ‘fragments of competing, plural authorities’ but as constituting ‘a consensus formed over centuries’). On the other hand, however, the ‘central impression’ of William Fulke’s ‘Conutation’ of the New Testament (1589) is that of ‘competition and contestation: competing typefaces, competing notes, competing interpretations’; the complex interrelation of centre and margin here ‘becomes a locus for a bitter struggle over possession of the text’. Meanwhile, Miles Coverdale’s revised version of Matthew’s Bible (1537) replaces many of the marginal glosses with manicules, pointing wordlessly at certain controversial passages in order to signal that ‘interpretation is a privileged enterprise to be conducted by the church’ and thereby ward off the ‘subversive potential […] of interpretive proliferation’ (see fig. 4): if the margins can thus work to ‘affirm’ or ‘underwrite’ the central text by virtue of their very ‘expunging’, then it is clear that we cannot read the model of centre and margin straightforwardly as one of ‘power’ and ‘powerlessness’.

‘At the same time’, however, Tribble admits that these ‘pointing hands undoubtedly served to draw attention to suspect passages’, the same gestures that ‘affirm’ the central text (here standing as the officially sanctioned ‘Word’ of the church

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80 Tribble, *Marginality*, p. 50.
82 Tribble, *Marginality*, p. 25.
and state) contain the potential for its ‘subversion’. While Tribble wants to resist the wider implications of the word ‘marginal’ by focusing on ‘real’ margins in ‘books, the text embodied’, her own examples nonetheless betray something of that ‘overrun that spoils all these boundaries’, obliging us to understand the notion of the ‘text’ not as ‘some content enclosed in a book or its margins, but a differential network, a fabric of traces […].’ In this sense, then, as much as my thesis will follow Tribble in looking to resist the ‘easy invocation of the “marginal”’, it will make no accompanying attempt to rigidly separate the ‘embodied’ sense of the word from its significations in the wider, theoretical or political senses; rather, we might say that my thesis will be attempting to work out the relationships among these various senses of ‘marginality’ as they pertain to specific interpretative situations. Indeed, it is by looking in detail at the example of Wallace – whose work instigates a sustained and often explicit illustration of the entanglements among textual and ‘other’ types of marginality in an allegedly ‘post-postmodern’ or ‘post-theoretical’ context – that we will come to see the analytical benefits to adopting the contingent and reversible model of centre/margin outlined in the opening pages of this Introduction. Look again, for instance, at Wallace’s textually marginal ‘I am a meaningless person’ in light of Fitzpatrick’s conclusion that the political positioning of a figure such as Wallace as ‘marginal’ can:

‘redeem’ the white male from his historical role as the dominant and […] enable his search for an ‘unconstraining otherness’, a more comfortable sense of himself as the marginalized. […] Marginality thus becomes, in a literary culture obsessed with fragmentation and decentring, a paradoxical source of return to dominance, a melodrama of beset white manhood.

Here, Wallace’s marginal assertion of personal ‘meaninglessness’ in Hix not only takes on yet another implication that refuses to remain (safely) within the margins of a book, but also highlights the potential shortcomings of any notion of the archive as a purely affective or communicative space. As such, I will contend in the next section that the contingency and reversibility of the centre/margin dynamic need imply neither political

85 As Kaye Mitchell has argued in response to recent valorisations of the archive along these lines, ‘the knowledge that the archive protects and produces is both enlightening and – to some extent – restrictive, regulative, and even coercive’; see ‘“That Library of Uncatalogued Pleasure”: Querness, Desire, and the Archive in Contemporary Gay Fiction’, in Libraries, Literatures, and Archives, ed. by Sas Mays (London: Routledge, 2014), pp. 164-84 (pp. 164).
meaninglessness nor hopeless relativism, but are rather determined in accordance with the particular cultural and ideological ‘functioning’ of a particular author’s name.

**0.3 Reading Notes: Sylvia Plath’s Dangerous Obscurity, William Blake’s Theory of Art**

At Sotheby’s London in the summer of 2013, Sylvia Plath’s battered and well-annotated copy of Joseph Conrad’s *Lord Jim* (1900) was sold for around twelve and a half thousand pounds.\(^8^6\) In the lot description, however, the first marginal note to be described in any depth is the sole contribution of Ted Hughes, who wrote near the back of the book: ‘I read this novel, this copy, aloud to Sylvia, in the evenings, while she was making her rag-rug – 1962. Ted Hughes’.\(^8^7\) This is also the first detail to be discussed in the *Guardian’s* report on the auction, which adds in parentheses that Hughes’s note was written ‘the year before her suicide’.\(^8^8\) Not for the first time, then, Plath’s writing is overshadowed and even obscured by the intervention of Hughes; not for the first time does Hughes seem to make a claim for his version of ‘Sylvia’ on the basis of their shared domesticity (the evenings, the rag-rug), and, within that, his position as authority or speaker (reading novels aloud to her). We might even say that these marginalia play out the dynamic that first informed and then enveloped Jacqueline Rose’s 1991 *The Haunting of Sylvia Plath*: when Rose disagreed with Hughes’s statement that interpretations of Plath should ‘stick to observed fact, and […] make clear at every point that opinion is opinion’,\(^8^9\) Hughes attempted to block the book’s publication altogether.\(^9^0\) While Hughes had assumed the right to speak about the observable facts of Plath’s life (as opposed to the ‘Fantasia’ generated among her readership),\(^9^1\) Rose sought to read Plath’s work in order to unsettle this very distinction: ‘I am never claiming to speak about the life, never attempting to establish the facts

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\(^8^7\) Ted Hughes, cited in ‘Conrad, Joseph--[Sylvia Plath]’.


\(^9^1\) ‘[T]he Fantasia about Sylvia Plath is more needed than the facts. Where that leaves respect for the truth of her life (and of mine), or for her memory, or for the literary tradition, I do not know’; see Ted Hughes, ‘The place where Sylvia Plath should rest in peace’, *Guardian*, 20 April 1989, p. 22.
about the lived experience of Sylvia Plath’; rather, Plath’s example ‘lays bare the forms of psychic investment which lie […] behind the processes through which a culture – Western literary culture – evaluates and perpetuates itself’. The lavishly expensive *Lord Jim* marginalia similarly trouble this line between fact and fantasy: what kind of statement is Hughes’s deictic inscription (biographical/literary, private/public)? What kind of truth claim does it make? How does this marginal comment work to marginalize or silence Plath, while further solidifying her central position within the canon?

On the other hand – as Rose’s argument made clear – we are unlikely to solve the problem by simply allowing Plath’s marginalia to ‘speak for themselves’. One of the most heavily marked passages in her copy of Conrad is Marlow’s description of the ‘magnificent vagueness in the expectations that had driven each of us to sea […]’: ‘In no other kind of life is the illusion more wide of reality – in no other is the beginning all illusion – the disenchantment more swift – the subjugation more complete’. At the top of this page, in black pen, Plath writes: ‘disenchantment – cruel irony of young illusion of sea’ (see fig. 5). Now we might ask what kind of signification can be attached to Plath’s underlinings: where there is a double underscore (‘illusion more wide of reality’), might we conjecture a moment of intense identification with the text, a sort of key which will turn Marlow’s disenchantment with colonial seafaring into a succinct allegory for Plath’s ‘real’, biographical disenchantments and ‘young illusions’; or, conversely, is such a manoeuvre undermined in advance by Conrad’s text, which itself can only separate ‘illusion’ from ‘reality’ from within Marlow’s perspective (as even the novel’s narrator laments of Jim’s trial: ‘They wanted facts. Facts! They demanded facts from him, as if facts could explain anything!’). By moving between these two possible readings – first centring Plath, then placing her back into the margins of Conrad – we can see how marginalia, like the case of Plath itself, ‘confront us with a moment of indecision which […] can be productive if we allow it to indicate how uncertain truth can be’. And, in turn, it is this uncertainty that my thesis will look

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to place alongside the prevailing historical interpretation of marginalia as spontaneous disclosures of unambiguous truth, ‘a private matter for the reader who has no reason to lie to him- or herself’. 96 It is not simply that Hughes’s inscription obscures the ‘truth’ of Plath’s marginalia, but that ‘even in relation to one’s “own” life (especially in relation to it), there can be no simple ownership of the facts’; ‘that potential for misreading which lies between speech and its reception also resides internally to subjectivity itself’. 97

By contrast, authors’ reading notes have tended historically to play a straightforwardly supplementary role in literary interpretation, promising to explain a particular oeuvre – of which they are never quite a part – by positing its author as a ‘point where contradictions are resolved […] around a fundamental or originating contradiction’. 98 The study of ‘external source texts relating to the creative process’ – or what genetic critics have termed the ‘exogenetic’ evidence of an author’s initial ‘gathering of external information and materials’ 99 – has typically been held to present ‘a kind of biographical shadow text’ that might document the ‘intellectual life’ of the writer as ‘played out in the pages of [his] books’, 100 and, as is exemplified by the feud between Hughes and Plath’s defenders, the more we can claim to know about an author’s ‘life’, the easier it might be to resolve certain difficulties in the interpretation of her oeuvre. However, my thesis will contend, with Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, that such a production of ‘cultural explanation’ requires an inherent ‘prohibition of marginality’ that is irreducibly political. 101 In other words, although marginalia have tended to function as explanatory supplements to literary interpretation, I want to consider the productive ‘moment of indecision’ that occurs when marginalia are taken

98 Foucault, ‘Author’, p. 111.
as part of that interpretation. In some cases, this ‘prohibition of marginality’ is of the legal sort, wherein the rhetorical or legitimating force of the link between marginal materials and their ‘real’ author – the historical individual by whom they have been written – is enough to enact a restriction on the interpretation of those materials: Hughes destroyed a significant portion of Plath’s archive on account of their children, while Wallace’s family have withdrawn his self-help books from the private library. More often, however, the prohibition is best understood as part of the political dynamics of cultural explanation. Just as I will argue that legal restrictions on interpretation are, themselves, open to interpretation, so too will I open up that ‘fundamental or originating contradiction’ that Foucault links to notion of the author as the ‘principle of a certain unity of writing’. Thus, if marginalia posit something along the lines of the ‘whole of Blake’ or the ‘whole of Plath’, then the above reading of Plath’s *Lord Jim* shows this ‘wholeness’ still to be predicated on a certain kind of cultural investment or prohibition (‘[i]f Plath is a ghost of our culture […] it is above all because of what she leads that culture to reveal about itself’). And it is by reading marginalia in this way – as interpretable parts of a particular historical and ideological context, rather than as spontaneous fragments of an author’s pure thought – that my thesis finally arrives at its single-author structure: while the meaning of modern marginalia is always determined in relation to the function of a particular author’s name, nonetheless each author’s name has its particular function; the ‘wholeness’ of Plath, for


103 Here I am working from Spivak’s argument about the frequently regulative and ‘normalizing’ role of the Humanities within the broader political structure of late capitalism: ‘Our assigned role is, seemingly, the custodianship of culture. If, as I have argued, the concept and self-concept of culture as systems of habit are constituted by the production of explanations even as they make these explanations possible, our role is to produce and be produced by the official explanations in terms of the powers that police the entire society, emphasizing a continuity or a discontinuity with past explanations, depending on a seemingly judicious choice permitted by the play of this power.’ The relationship between ‘centre’ and ‘margin’, Spivak continues, is therefore ‘intricate and interanimating’: ‘individuals in the chosen profession of [the Humanities] can only be tolerated if they behave in a specific way’. The notion of ‘prohibition’ that I adopt throughout this thesis, then, is not generally to be understood in the most literal or extreme sense (a ban on free speech, for example), but rather as an ideological effect of ‘the structure of possibility of a knowledge whose effect is that very structure’. In other words, by thus ‘implicating myself in the centre and sensing what politics make it marginal’, I hope to produce cultural explanations that simultaneously take into account the cultural conditions of their own production. See Spivak, ‘Marginalia’, pp. 35-38; italics original.

104 Foucault, ‘Author’, p. 111.

105 ‘We do not know Plath (nor indeed Hughes). […] It has been objected that writing on Plath is a fantasia with no purchase on, or even interest in, the truth. This books starts from the assumption that Plath is a fantasy. But, rather than seeing this as a problem, it asks what her writing, and responses to it, might reveal about fantasy as such’; Rose, *Haunting*, pp. 5-6.
example, marks a different kind of ‘prohibition’ to the ‘wholeness’ of Blake, although the implications of each will inform my eventual reading of Wallace.

Blake, like Plath, is an author known for directly and often radically troubling the distinction between ‘illusion’ and ‘reality’; and yet, when Plath annotates and underlines these words, she is likely to become an explicitly gendered figure of either pathological culpability or absolute innocence, while the same markings by Blake would ‘constitute an enchiridion for his intellectual tenets’, a ‘synecdoche for his entire position’. Such totalizing claims are a longstanding feature of Blake scholarship. As Jason Snart has argued, ‘[w]hen the marginalia do receive critical attention, it tends to ignore issues of textuality in favour of content’, with the ‘temptingly extractable’ notes then allowing critics to postulate the poet’s ‘position’, ‘system’, or ‘Theory of Art’. For example, in the margins of Sir Joshua Reynolds’s discussion of Locke, Blake writes: ‘What is General Nature? is there Such a Thing? what is General Knowledge? is there such a thing? Strictly Speaking All Knowledge is Particular’. Where Reynolds’s editor elsewhere cites Edmund Burke’s claim that the ‘disposition to abstractions, to generalizing and classification, is the great glory of the human mind’, Blake writes that ‘To Generalize is to be an Idiot. To Particularize is the Alone Distinction of Merit. General Knowledges are those Knowledges that Idiots possess’ (see fig. 6). These marginalia are then cited by Northrop Frye as he attempts to provide ‘a key to Blake’s thought’, explaining why ‘Locke, along with Bacon and Newton, is constantly in Blake’s poetry a symbol of every kind of evil, superstition, and tyranny’; ‘as one of [Blake’s] main points against Reynolds is the Lockean basis of his aesthetics, it is quite safe to use these quotations here’. The marginalia are ‘safe’ in a way that the poetry is not, and yet we can ‘use’ the former to unlock the latter. My

quarrel here is not so much with Frye’s characterisation of the philosophical inflections of Blake’s oeuvre, which has some justification, as with the critical assumption that Blake’s marginalia are simultaneously less interesting (less ‘poetic’) and yet more reliable in the determination of the meaning of his poetic works. In a continuation of this trend, Jerome McGann claims that Blake’s marginalia ‘[do] not command our interest or study’, while citing them extensively to supplement his arguments in *The Romantic Ideology*;\(^{112}\) Edward Said takes another note on Reynolds as an ‘unrestrained’ expression of Blake’s opinion on Empire;\(^{113}\) and even Snart’s ‘anti-systematic’ critique of the ‘critical uses’ of Blake’s marginalia contains only a couple of close readings (‘I am less interested in what Blake writes in the margins than by the fact that he writes there at all’).\(^{114}\) In each case, then, we might say that the critical argument depends on a kind of ‘prohibition’ of marginality; the elision of the marginal note’s particularity gives rise to a more general hypothesis about its author and his work.

However, it is not the contention of my thesis that we can simply ‘restore’ the marginal content and, in so doing, present a more valid form of explanation: Blake’s particular notes in favour of particularity, for instance, are at the same time paradoxically general (‘All Knowledge is Particular’, ‘To Generalize is to be an Idiot’). Rather, I will argue that the dynamic of centre/margin dramatizes certain forms of ideological exchange that tend to supplement literary interpretation: if Blake’s poetry has often been read through the prism of ‘difficulty’, for example, then how do the marginalia work to ‘make things “easier”’?\(^{115}\) How does this process of supplementation differ from author to author? In the case of Frye’s reading of Blake, the annotations on Reynolds, cited above, are used as evidence for the claim that ‘Blake never tired of ridiculing Locke’s “Two Horn’d Reasoning, Cloven Fiction, / In Doubt, which is Self contradiction”’ (the citation is from Blake’s ‘For the Sexes: The Gates of

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\(^{114}\) Snart, *UnReading*, p. 111; italics original.

The marginalia now allow the poetry itself to become supplementary to what Frye calls ‘Blake’s doctrine of the imagination’, although we have already been warned that ‘[a]ny attempt to explain [the poems] in terms of something that is not poetry is bound to fail’; while sitting on the margin between poetry/not-poetry, Blake’s notes at the same time work to bypass that distinction altogether. In Frye’s argument, the apparent certainty of Blake’s assertions against generality are opposed to Locke’s philosophical ‘doubt’; but, as we have seen, the marginalia themselves perform a kind of ‘Two Horn’d Reasoning, Cloven Fiction’, turning Blake’s ‘doctrine’ itself into ‘Self contradiction’.

On the other hand, although Plath’s marginalia ‘rarely feature in critical discussions of her work’, writes Robin Peel, ‘[t]hey pose a particular problem’. For example, next to Erich Fromm’s claim, in *Escape from Freedom* (1941; Plath has dated her copy ‘1954’), that ‘[e]verybody in the [Medieval] period was chained to his role in the social order’, Plath writes ‘how awful’. For Peel, this note ‘immediately raises the problem of the various voices employed by Plath’, who ‘offers us similar challenges in her fiction and poetry, often seeming to delight in leaving the reader uncertain how to read such lines as “I hated babies” or “Every woman adores a Fascist”’; ‘we cannot always be certain that Plath is not deftly smuggling in several political alternatives under the cloak of creative ambiguity’. Here, the margin is no longer a site of ‘truth’ or certainty – nor indeed of system, theory, doctrine, and so on – but rather a menacing provocation, perhaps concealing some truth that the (baby-hating? Fascist-loving?) Plath ‘delights’ in withholding; the note promises to explain the oeuvre not in terms of literary or philosophical mastery, but as a deft ‘smuggling in’ of Plath’s ‘Nietzschean nonconformity’ (already proved by way of her ‘much annotated’ copy of *Thus Spake Zarathustra*).

But if that ‘how awful’ is a comment on the rigidity of pre-modern social position, it also comments on the rigidity involved in interpreting Plath
today: the modern annotated page is no longer a ‘concatenation of voices’, 122 nor a
representation of ‘the hierarchy that defined [one’s] position in the universe’, 123 but
rather a space in which ‘various voices [are] employed’ by a given author, who is
granted a particular ‘individuality’ and ‘unity’ in accordance with the functioning of
their name in cultural discourse. Marginalia have thus tended to work as a kind of
‘dangerous supplement’, allowing us to keep the problems of the ‘difficult’ or
‘uncertain’ literary text from touching on the figure of its author, while at the same time
constituting the former according to the latter. 124

Marginalia ‘[do] not command our interest or study’ 125 – indeed, they might
even be ‘sacrilege, “crap”, noise, invasion’ 126 – but they are frequently called upon to
play an anecdotal or epigrammatic role in the cultural iconicity of this or that author. In
his teaching copy of Franz Kafka’s The Metamorphosis (1915), Vladimir Nabokov
makes an intricate sketch of the insect into which Gregor Samsa has been transformed,
thus demonstrating to his students that ‘Gregor the beetle never found out that he had
wings under the hard covering of his back’ (‘This is a very nice observation on my
part’, Nabokov informed the students, ‘to be treasured all your lives’; see fig. 7). 127
Although this marginal beetle calls attention to issues of authority, interpretation, and
representation (not least in light of Kafka’s own insistence that ‘[t]he insect cannot be
drawn. It can’t even be shown in the distance’), 128 it is generally taken to exemplify
Nabokov’s ‘philological attention and entomological acumen’. 129 Meanwhile, in a
second-hand copy of Algernon Charles Swinburne’s Laus Veneris and Other Poems
and Ballads (1866), a young Ezra Pound complains that ‘[s]ome damn fool had this

122 Slights, Managing, p. 9.
124 In the same way that Derrida (after Jacques Rousseau) describes writing as a ‘dangerous supplement’
to naturalistic speech – dangerous because it promises to fulfil some lack in the latter that undermines its
status as ‘natural’ – marginalia work to construct some univocal or ‘central’ identity that they
concurrently fragment; see Of Grammatology, trans. by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (London: John
Hopkins University Press, 1997), pp. 141-64.
125 McGann, Knowledge, p. 16.
126 Jackson, Marginalia, p. 240.
259.
128 Franz Kafka, cited in Leland De La Durantaye, ‘Kafka’s Reality and Nabokov’s Fantasy. On
323).
129 De La Durantaye reads the sketch in the context of Nabokov’s longstanding interest in entomology;
see ‘Reality’, p. 323.
book before I bought it. I am not responsible for notes in his hand. Ezra Pound '05'.

Here we see a direct enactment of that Coleridgean distinction between ‘marginalia’ and ‘copious notes’, even an intersection of high modernism and ‘the masses’, but the inscription has merely become evidence that ‘[t]he characteristic Poundian voice, vanity, and cocksureness are already there’. When the ‘wholeness’ of the author is already assumed to exist, even the briefest of notes can ‘give a vivid impression of personal voice’. In her copy of The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas (1933), the only note written by Gertrude Stein is on the title page, immediately under the title: ‘I am very pleased with myself for having done so’; for Jackson, this ‘bafflingly gnomic’ inscription ‘sounds just like her’, although it also turns out to be a direct citation from the Autobiography itself. And even the dog-ears of both Emily Dickinson and Samuel Beckett have been taken as ‘exogenetic’ evidence, albeit with the former showing the poet to be reading ‘on her own […] for company’, and the latter helping us to ‘assess the amount of knowledge Beckett had to acquire before he was able to develop a poetics of unknowing’.

As we can see, then, even so-called ‘non-marginalia’ can dramatize an author’s mediatory position between ‘source text’ and ‘work’, but only if they putatively remain ‘outside’ the process of interpretation. The relatively recent curatorial and critical interest in the category of the ‘writer’s library’ has largely reproduced this interpretative model, taking an author’s books as ‘a clue to his method of writing’, ‘provid[ing] unexpected insights into patterns of reading, his process of composition,

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131 King, ‘ABC’, p. 32.
138 Nixon and Van Hulle take this term from Axel Gellhaus to refer to instances in which ‘the author eventually used an unmarked passage [in his personal library] for his own writing’; see Beckett’s Library, p. 8; italics original; also Axel Gellhaus, ‘Marginalia: Paul Celan as Reader’, in Reading Notes, ed. by Dirk Van Hulle and Wim Van Mierlo (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2004), pp. 207-19 (pp. 218-19).
and even certain habits of mind’; marginalia are rarely there to be interpreted, but rather to tell us something, straightforwardly and empirically, about the author as a person. In a wider cultural sense, this tendency enables marginalia to cultivate the various clichés of literary reception, turning the canon into a succession of visionary Romantics, difficult or obscure women, and lofty modernists to be perused via magazines and blogs (as per ‘Classic Books Annotated by Famous Authors’, and ‘Scribblings by Famous Authors Are Worth More Than Most People’s Homes’).

A similar effect was achieved for the contemporary scene from 2013-14, when the English and American branches of PEN raised millions of dollars by auctioning off first editions of books that had been specially annotated by their still-living authors, including the likes of Toni Morrison, Philip Roth, J. K. Rowling, Colm Tóibín, and Alice Walker (‘each contributor has transformed […] a classic work into a distinct new artefact for one lucky buyer’). Meanwhile, a string of recent articles in the *New Yorker* and the *New York Times* have speculatively linked this ‘slight but noticeable escalation of interest in marginalia’ to a sort of pre-emptive ‘nostalgia for the book as a tangible (and scrawlable) object at a time of increasing e-reader ubiquity’.

On Twitter, there is currently a weekly hashtag – #MarginaliaMonday – under which users are sharing and commenting upon particular instances of annotation that they have encountered in books. *Buzzfeed* even has an array of popular pieces on the subject (‘20 Bizarre Examples of Medieval Marginalia’, ‘21 Medieval Marginalia That Look Like

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Emojis’, and so on). If marginalia are never quite taken seriously, then, their popularity nonetheless seems to reside in their nostalgic, affective, and fetishistic appeal, which intersects with the rejuvenated appeal of the ‘genius’ that I outlined above. As Mark O’Connell writes in an article describing the present ‘marginal obsession with marginalia’:

A book someone has written in is an oddly intimate object; like an item of clothing once worn by a person now passed away, it retains something of its former owner’s presence. No doubt this partly explains why there was such widespread interest in the contents of David Foster Wallace’s archive when it was acquired by the Ransom Center, in 2010. There’s something deeply gratifying, after all, about seeing how one of the most important writers of his generation modified Cormac McCarthy’s author photo, in a copy of Suttree, with spectacles, mustache, and fangs. It’s not as though Wallace never clowned around in his actual writing, of course, but this particular kind of goofiness – spontaneous, distracted, childish – makes him seem especially vivid and present.

Here, Wallace’s marginalia are not a provocative or ‘creatively ambiguous’ cause for suspicion (like Plath’s), but rather manage to combine a sort of Blakean intellectual mastery (‘one of the most important writers of his generation’ doodling on Cormac McCarthy’s face) with a ‘deeply gratifying’ identificatory appeal: Wallace’s ‘spontaneous, distracted, childish’ annotations not only make it seem like he is right here in front of us, but also that he is just like us (see fig. 8). Evidently, Wallace is a different kind of ghost to Plath, and he exemplifies a different kind of ‘cultural repressed’. He is a ‘turbulent genius’ who wrote a ‘masterpiece’, but he is also – to cite Dave Eggers’s 2006 ‘Foreword’ to Infinite Jest – a ‘normal person’ (‘[Wallace] is normal, and regular, and ordinary, and [IJ] is his extraordinary, irregular, and not-normal achievement’). At a late stage in U.S. postmodernism, ‘DFW’ arrives to assure us that ‘plain old untrendy human troubles and emotions’ are what matter after all, and his private library now serves as a kind of ‘shrine’ for those readers and fans who ‘seek an emotional connection’ or to ‘connect their personal narrative with […] a

144 O’Connell, ‘Obsession’.
145 Rose, Haunting, p. 6.
146 Nazaryan, ‘Turbulent’.
147 Dave Eggers, ‘Foreword’ to Infinite Jest, pp. vii-xi (p. xi).
tragically deceased author’s life’. My case study traces this contemporary intersection of marginalia and Wallace, asking how it is that a few doodles can transform or safely ‘contain’ the meaning of an oeuvre in conjunction with the supposed ‘unity’ of its author, and, conversely, how those same marginal materials might work to complicate, contradict, and fragment such an interpretative programme.

0.4 Manuscript Marginalia: Archival Labours and Aesthetic Mediation

In his advocation for more ‘genetic’ forms of scholarship, Dirk Van Hulle has argued that ‘[l]iterary critics tend to take the text for granted by assuming that the words on which they base their interpretations are an unproblematical starting point’; in particular, he suggests that paying closer attention to an author’s source texts, manuscripts, sketches, and so on, might allow us to counteract ‘the New Critical machismo that refuses all extratextual help to interpret a work of literature’. Similarly, Greetham has suggested that recent studies on marginalia can be seen as part of a ‘post-New Critical, post-Formalist (in the linguistic sense) denial of the central function of the “text itself” (shorn of its contextual, personal, historical, and bibliographical features)’, thus participating in the historical disciplinary shift away from this ‘modernist icon’ and towards ‘a much broader concern with the physicality of the book and concomitantly with those features […] which had been largely ignored as extraneous to the scholarly study of book history’. This shift of focus from the text as a ‘linguistic structure’ to the book as a ‘material thing’ has also sometimes been placed in opposition to the ‘antiessentialism’ of an ‘exhausted’ post-structuralist theory – as Leah Price puts it, ‘[w]riting from the “margins” [has given] way to writing in the margin’. However, by looking at the myriad ways in which marginalia actually work to unsettle such oppositions – between text/extratextual, a ‘linguistic structure’ and the physicality of the book, theoretical ‘antiessentialism’ and self-evident materiality – my thesis argues for an updated disciplinary understanding of the relations among these

149 This is how Oram, the Associate Director of the Ransom Centre, has described the response to Wallace’s library; see ‘Libraries’, p. 13.
152 For a summary, see McDonald, ‘Ideas’, pp. 214–16, pp. 222-27.
traditional categories of text, author, and context. In particular, if the wide-ranging post-structuralist and deconstructive critiques of fundamental critical binaries such as centre/margin, or inside/outside, have left us with what Eve Sedgwick describes as ‘an incoherence of definition’, nonetheless my thesis argues that the subsequent ‘turn’ away from these theoretical paradigms has done little to clarify the situation. As Sedgwick continues in her (pre-‘affect theory’) Epistemology of the Closet: ‘To understand these conceptual relations as irresolvably unstable is not, however, to understand them as inefficacious or innocuous’; rather, ‘a deconstructive understanding of these [irresolvable] binarisms makes it possible to identify them as sites that are peculiarly densely charged with lasting potentials for powerful manipulation – through precisely the mechanisms of self-contradictory definition, or, more succinctly, the double bind’.155

Each of the chapters in my case study can be thought of as an attempt to unpack the complexity of this latter claim, arguing variously that: Wallace’s library and marginalia, far from providing us with an ‘extratextual’ ground on which to base our literary-critical interpretations, are in fact every bit as discursively and ideologically entangled with contemporary U.S. discourses of normative individual identity as Wallace’s oeuvre itself (Chapter One); that the uncertainties surrounding the authorship and ‘completeness’ of Wallace’s posthumous novel, The Pale King, are intensified rather than resolved by a reading of its ‘genetic’ materials (Chapter Two); and that a commonsensical refusal of either the New Critical distinction between inside and outside, or an expanded post-structuralist notion of ‘textuality’, will eventually work to reinscribe the same problems that such interventions had originally been designed to address – a dynamic that is borne out by Wallace’s extensive use of pseudo-scholarly marginalia throughout both his fiction and his essays (Chapter Three). In this way, unlike the majority of existing studies on marginalia, my thesis also expands the remit of the term beyond the initial territory of an author’s library or ‘source materials’ in order additionally to consider the marginalia of literary composition (or what genetic

155 Sedgwick, Epistemology, p. 10; italics original.
critics would term ‘endogenesis’), and, finally, the printed or ‘paratextual’ manifestation of such marginal materials in the published text (especially, in this case, the pseudo-scholarly footnote). The overall structure of the thesis therefore parallels the sociological or genetic itinerary of the text – that process of supposed ‘incorporation’ from source to publication, or from ‘external’ to ‘internal’ and out again – while attending to the challenges that marginalia might present for any such a teleological framework.

I suggested in the previous section that, although authorly reading notes have conventionally been taken as straightforward disclosures (or withholdings) of univocal truth, such a reading tends to rely on a ‘prohibition’ of marginality that is inherently ideological; by contrast, I argued that marginalia ‘confront us with a moment of indecision which […] can be productive if we allow it to indicate how uncertain truth can be’. The former tendency, which allows for book marginalia to be interpreted in the ‘communicative’ or ‘conversational’ sense of a ‘transaction between two minds’, means that such materials have usually been treated separately to the problem of an author’s compositional documents, in which, broadly speaking, she is seen to be annotating her own work-in-progress; the meeting between minds becomes a portrait of (mostly solitary) authorly mediation. Manuscript marginalia (deletions, additions, ‘stets’, plans, sketches, and so on) are then presumed to disclose something about an individual author’s ‘creative process’, providing some contextual guidance or indication as to the revision of a central text into which they are never quite integrated. However – to take the example of Wallace – once we introduce the

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156 ‘Whereas exogenesis relates to the gathering of external information and materials, endogenesis focuses on the actual writing of drafts, including the processing, assimilation, appropriation, or absorption of this external information in the author’s own work’; Van Hulle, ‘Modernism’, p. 230.
157 D. F. McKenzie describes his bibliographical ‘sociology of texts’ as a ‘discipline that studies texts as recorded forms, and the processes of their transmission, including their production and reception’; see Bibliography and the Sociology of Texts (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 12.
158 I mean to indicate here that, just as genetic criticism claims to trace those processes by which an author ‘discovers’ and ‘incorporates’ a set of ‘source materials’ into his own work before it is eventually published, so the structure of my thesis moves from Wallace’s ‘source materials’ (Chapter One), to his manuscripts (Chapter Two), and finally to his published oeuvre (Chapter Three). See Van Hulle, ‘Manuscripts’, pp. 802-03.
159 Rose, Haunting, p. xiv.
161 For example, compare the approaches of Jackson’s Marginalia and Van Hulle’s Awareness.
162 For a theoretical consideration of this editorial tendency, see David C. Greetham, ‘Context and the “Impossibility” Trope’, New Literary History, 42.4 (2011), 719-38 (pp. 727-35).
interlinked critical frames of Romantic genius and postmodern fragmentation, such marginal writings present a new problem: on the one hand, the mind of the autonomous genius is presumably inaccessible to outside scrutiny – meaning that marginal notes might well be taken as ‘part’ of the literary work itself, in the fashion of Coleridge’s ‘Rime of the Ancient Mariner’ – while, on the other hand, the ‘death of the subject’ suggests that, strictly speaking, there is no delimited mind or ‘subjectivity’ for critics to try to ‘access’ or scrutinize in the first place. This problem becomes particularly pressing for those areas of English Studies, such as textual criticism and bibliography, in which practical considerations of the ‘authoritative version’ have tended to rely on such increasingly contested notions as ‘uncontaminated originality’ and final authorial intention. Meanwhile, the emergent contradictions, described by Jerome McGann in 1983 as a ‘general crisis’ of the discipline, have only been exacerbated by the unprecedented abundance and preservation of modern manuscripts.

If the mediatory function of the Biblical gloss is Jameson’s analogy for the dynamic between concrete social reality and its abstraction in symbolic acts, then my thesis attends to the ways in which modern marginalia tend to ‘centre’ the process of aesthetic mediation on an author figure that they simultaneously work to fragment. Although Coleridge wrote the marginal notes for ‘Mariner’ almost two decades after the poem’s initial publication and reception, nonetheless they raise a number of initial problems that will carry over to my consideration of archival marginalia. For

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164 Greetham thinks of this bibliographical dilemma – in which the editor is forced to choose between, on the one hand, the ‘impossibility’ of deciphering the intentions of the genius author, and, on the other hand, the potential ‘disappearance’ of intention and authoriality into ‘écriture’ – in terms of a deconstructive ‘argument over the textual inside and outside […]’; see ‘Impossibility’, pp. 730-31; italics original.


167 Florence Callu, the former director of the manuscript department of the *Bibliothèque Nationale*, has described the modernist period as a ‘golden age of manuscripts’; see ‘La Transmission des manuscrits’, in *Les Manuscrits des écrivains*, ed. by Anne Cadet and Christel Haffner (Paris: CNRS/Hachette, 1993), pp. 54-67 (p. 65). I take the translation of this phrase from Van Hulle, *Awareness*, p. 9.


instance, while critics have historically disagreed over whether the ‘Mariner’ marginalia should be taken as a ‘harmonization’ or ‘perversion’ of the original poem, they have tended to base their conclusions on some personal judgement of the ‘ageing Coleridge’: are the notes a sign of the poet’s increasing ‘wisdom’ or ‘enfeeblement’? Furthermore, some critics of the latter persuasion have proceeded to claim that the marginalia should be considered separately to the poem ‘itself’ – a judgement notionally in keeping with the (still legally effective) wording of the 1842 Copyright Act: ‘Since the marginalia depend for their rationale on the pre-extant organicism of the “original” text, copyright conventions (if not actual legislation) would appear to offer protection for the “core” text and not for the “hangers on” of that text, the marginalia’. As with that ‘Relic’ inscribed by Coleridge in the margin of Charles Lamb’s book, ‘Mariner’’s marginal gloss works to fragment the same ‘original organicism’ on which it depends.

Similarly, while manuscript marginalia ‘depend for their rationale’ on a ‘core’ text, they have often been interpreted as signs of either aesthetic failure or retrospective brilliance, depending on whether one favours Shelley’s Romantic notion of the ‘original’ (‘when composition begins, inspiration is already on the decline’), or Pound’s modernist, revisionary ideal of artistic ‘economy’ and ‘perfect control’. In the case of Joyce, however, such marks of revision can work to subsume these two tendencies under the aegis of the ‘quaintly romantic’ modernist ‘genius’. Take, for example, the earliest draft of what would become the final page of *Ulysses*, which ends not with Molly Bloom’s ‘I will yes’, but rather ‘I would will yes’.

172 Greetham, ‘Review’, p. 69; italics original.
173 In this passage, Shelley goes on to state that ‘the most glorious poetry that has ever been communicated to the world is probably a feeble shadow of the original conceptions of the poet’; see ‘A Defence of Poetry’, in *Selected Prose Works of Shelley* (London: Watts, 1915), pp. 75-118 (p. 111).
novel’s (and in particular Molly’s) association with ‘stream of consciousness’ narration, the variant ‘would’ is absent from later drafts, and from published editions; Joyce’s latest authorized version is preserved. However, in Van Hulle’s genetic reading of the first draft variant, ‘Joyce’s cancellation of “would” is remarkable’ as an instance of so-called ‘creative undoing’: ‘Molly’s closing line is probably the most famous affirmative sentence in the history of literature, and yet […] the decision to write “I will yes” was preceded by a moment of hesitation’. For Van Hulle, then, manuscript annotations demonstrate the ‘constant tension between the finished and the unfinished, especially in modernist texts where the time lost in writing them becomes thematic, reflecting a poetics of process’, but they also allow him to reconstruct a somewhat ‘Romantic’ notion of the original author at his desk, making creative ‘decisions’ to write (or delete) each word, even if ‘hesitantly’. The extensive fragmentation implied by Joyce’s manifold variants of Ulysses is thus resolved around that ‘fundamental or originating contradiction’ of Joyce ‘himself’, whose revisionary marginalia manage to combine both original ‘brilliance’ and revisionary ‘control’ under the guise of aesthetic mediation.

However, in the case of a traditionally ‘marginalised’ modernist figure such as Djuna Barnes, the presence of similar manuscript annotations has tended to earmark certain of her late writings as ‘totally unrelated’ to her earlier, more properly ‘experimental’ literary oeuvre. Indeed, it is only recently that Scott Herring has suggested that Barnes’s late habit of incessantly annotating her shopping lists in the manner of a ‘revised poem cycle’ might be part of ‘an unacknowledged avant-garde

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177 See Brian McHale, Postmodernist Fiction (Taylor & Francis e-Library, 2004), pp. 233-35.
180 Van Hulle, Awareness, p. 1.
182 As Phillip F. Herring and Osías Stutman write in their guide to the late manuscripts, Barnes’s ‘complex handwritten notes and commentaries’ sometimes include ‘marginal notes or asides that have nothing to do with the poem’; ‘This last kind of material is extremely varied and includes […] totally unrelated materials (phone numbers, grocery lists, pharmacy lists, etc.)’. See ‘Guide to the Poems and Texts’, in Djuna Barnes, Collected Poems, With Notes toward the Memoirs, ed. by Phillip F. Herring and Osías Stutman (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2005), pp. xv-xix (p. xvi).
performance’, rather than merely a sign of old-age senility.\textsuperscript{183} Take the following piece, ‘Jefferson, 675-2277’ (see fig. 9):

Jefferson, 675-2277. Nov X0.
qt. Milk.
Half pound smelts.
[Of that balanced beast, the Unicorn.]
Abused by too much love; \textsuperscript{184} — PRAISE
first, When he first fell into his mother’s lake
That pool where human faces xxxx come
And go)\textsuperscript{184}

If Joyce’s various marginal ‘[i]nstructions, self-addressed or directed towards amanuenses or printers’ work together in the formation of what Daniel Ferrer calls the ‘“pragmatic layer” of the pre-text’\textsuperscript{185} — a supplementary web of marginalia that, unlike the underlying literary text, ‘seeks […] to offer the “real”’\textsuperscript{186} — then Barnes’s piece seems to challenge very possibility of such a distinction. The initial lines (address, telephone number, date, precise measurements of shopping items) quietly set up a sense of the quotidian ‘real’ that simultaneously marks the text as ‘unpoetic’, and yet the subsequent poetic verse and its marginalia work to draw this reality back into a problem of interpretation; that the text steadfastly refuses to divide itself neatly into poetry and not-poetry, centre and margin, is only emphasised by the presence of another, handwritten shopping list at the bottom of the page, upside-down for good measure. In this sense, while the form of the shopping list initially promises that degree of transparent common sense that Hannah Sullivan invokes in her recent contention that an author’s ‘[v]erbal commands such as “omit” or “stet” or a direct line drawn through a paragraph show intention very clearly’,\textsuperscript{187} Barnes’s composite marginalia subvert any such straightforward notions of error, correction, and linearity — without thereby recuperating a comfortable teleological position along the lines of ‘creative undoing’.

\textsuperscript{184} Djuna Barnes, ‘Jefferson, 675-2277’, cited in Herring, ‘Geriatric’, p. 82.
\textsuperscript{187} Sullivan, \textit{Revision}, p. 47.
We can begin here to draw a parallel between genetic criticism’s ‘quasi-scientific’ objective to recover the notionally ‘pre-textual’ origins of a work of art, and Tribble’s problematic attempt to distinguish between an array of ‘real/embodied’ and ‘theoretical/abstract’ margins in her own study of literary annotation. For, whereas even those manuscript notes in ‘Joyce’s notorious coloured crayons’ are said to illustrate ‘beyond doubt’ that ‘he had a definite system of composition and revision’ (even though ‘[i]t is difficult to ascertain the exact purpose of each colour since Joyce’s use does not always seem to be consistent’; see fig. 10), Barnes’s late marginalia have marked her out as the stereotypically ‘embittered’ female artist, ‘better known for enfeeblement than experimentalism’ as she fades away in her Greenwich Village apartment. Joyce, from his central position within the canon, is granted mastery over every marginal smudge, pencil line, or doodle in his archive, while Barnes, from her ‘relatively safe, because already construed as relatively dangerous’ position in the margins, is treated with just enough condescension to make her work harmless. And while the ‘chaos’ of Barnes’s late manuscripts has been reason enough to halt their classification and publication as literature as such, the similarly heavily annotated fragments in Beckett’s ‘Whoroscope’ notebook have been treated, as Daniela Caselli puts it, as a ‘prophesy’ of the final version of his novel, Murphy. Although Beckett’s ‘centrality’ within literary modernism is more recently-won than Joyce’s, it has nonetheless meant that even the notebook’s various erasures and crossings-out are taken as teleological signs of his (typically negative) authorial mediation, turning the text of Murphy itself into simply a ‘surface of which the manuscript is a deeper

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188 As Jenny points out, ‘Pierre-Marc di Biasi gives the subheading “Vers une science de la litterature” to his presentation of genetic criticism in the Encyclopaedia Universalis’; see ‘Myths’, p. 9n1; italics original. Despite some of the troubling implications of the term ‘pre-text’ as it circulates in genetic criticism, I deploy it at certain points throughout my thesis in order to refer, in a narrow and pragmatic sense, to the manuscript materials and notes that have been deemed to hold a specific relation to some published text.


193 Herring, ‘Geriatric’, pp. 81-82.

194 Daniela Caselli, Beckett’s Dantes: Intertextuality in the fiction and criticism (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005), pp. 81-86.
layer’; on the other hand, a typical response to Barnes’s fragmentary late output was that she needed ‘to get on with the poems’.

Once again, we are dealing here with ‘the power exerted by the idea of a canonical author on a series of texts’, and specifically ‘how the concept of author is the basis for including various unpublished materials in a canon’:

On the one hand, these materials are often regarded as less important than the published text, less authoritative, less under the control of the author. On the other hand, however, manuscripts and typescripts are taken to be proofs of the genesis of that same work, even more original than the original, more meaningful and revealing, capable of explaining the intentions of the author.

The nature and extent of a certain author’s ‘power’ over such contradictions – as we have seen from Coleridge to Joyce, from Barnes to Plath – will often depend on our investment in an ‘author function’ that can seem more or less obvious, even ‘personal’, but which actually helps to enact what Spivak describes as a fully ideological ‘prohibition of marginality’. The aim of my argument, however, is not merely to ‘flip’ the traditional canonical structure of ‘centre’ and ‘margin’, but rather to look at how different ‘author functions’ have historically been mobilised in the resolution of a range of interpretative dilemmas that might otherwise amount, in Sedgwick’s terms, to an ‘incoherence of definition’. As with the decision to read Barnes’s ‘Jefferson, 675-2277’ one way round rather than the other – as, say, an annotated shopping list, rather than an oblique avant-garde performance – we might then be prompted to consider more carefully ‘what works as central and what as marginal, and at which price’.

In Chapter Two, I track an arguably unique contemporary manifestation of these dynamics via the case of Wallace’s posthumous 2011 novel, The Pale King. The two predominant lines of response since the release of this ‘unfinished’ text, which was amended and assembled for publication by Wallace’s long-term editor Michael Pietsch, are nicely summed up when Robert C. Hamilton wonders whether TPK ‘should be read as “a David Foster Wallace novel” or as simply a tribute to its author and his untimely

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195 Caselli, Dantes, p. 84, p. 86.
197 Caselli, Dantes, p. 84.
198 Caselli, Improper, p. 33.
death’. Those critics in the former camp, who believe the published text to have been largely written and edited (or ‘authorized’) by Wallace, have tended to read *TPK* as part of either a humanist or a communist poetics that is unified precisely by the principle of authorial ‘mediation’. \(^{200}\) In other words, the readerly benefits to getting through this long, fragmentary text about the 1980s ‘neoliberalisation’ of the U.S. tax service – this ‘novel about boredom [that] is, more than occasionally, boring’\(^{201}\) – are directly in proportion to the amount of aesthetic labour and ingenuity that Wallace has invested in its composition. In the latter camp, however, there are those critics for whom Pietsch, in his editing and assembly of the final text, must merely have ‘guess[ed] at the intentions of a writer who was an obsessive reviser and a notoriously reluctant finisher of his work’; \(^{202}\) the archive then becomes a kind of gauge against which we ‘can start to disentangle what Wallace originally planned from the published text (heroically and painstakingly reconstructed, as it is, by his editor)’. \(^{203}\) Meanwhile, finding a satisfactory resolution to this problem only becomes more difficult when we consider that *even the published version* of *TPK*, under the guise of an ‘Author’s Foreword’, establishes its own value as a text as relative to the extent of its prior artistic mediation by a figure called ‘David Foster Wallace’ (the ‘real author, the living human holding the pencil’; *TPK*, p. 66).

While this debate has meant that Wallace’s manuscript marginalia have largely been read as a kind of ‘guarantee’ on our investment of readerly labour – functioning as a sort of Joycean ‘window into his mind’ that can reveal the ‘levels of thinking’ behind

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‘every sentence’ that he published204 – Chapter Two argues that these mediatory annotations actually work to dramatize a series of related disciplinary and socio-historical contradictions. Firstly, I suggest that the discord between those critics who valorise the published version of TPK (Pound’s revisionary ‘control’), and those who valorise its original archival drafts (Shelley’s Romantic ‘inspiration’), forms a kind of parallel to McGann’s so-called ‘general crisis’ of modern textual criticism. Whereas, conventionally, textual critics have looked to ‘establish through editing the text of highest authority’ by ‘retrieving it in a pristine state from extant documents in which it had become corrupted in transmission’, the conditions of modern manuscript transmission have seen this process ‘redefined in terms of authorial acts: the writing and/or authorization of documents’.205 However, if the recent turn towards archival and ‘affective’ forms of critique has also coincided with a return to traditional humanist notions of artistic ‘personality’ – in which Wallace has played a central role206 – nonetheless Chapter Two argues that Wallace’s manuscript marginalia for TPK work robustly to deny the possibility of either a stable and ‘accessible’ authorly subjectivity or ‘intention’, or an objectively recognizable authorial ‘style’, all the while basing its formal and narrative coherence on the authority of a figure called ‘Wallace’. Furthermore, I contend that this editorial contradiction of ‘authorization’ serves to participate in (rather than explain) TPK’s own political thematics. Although the novel’s depiction of a set of 1980s ideological shifts within the Internal Revenue Service seems simultaneously to prescribe and enact an ethic of boredom, ‘irrelevant complexity’, and community-spirited labour as against workforce mechanisation and neoliberal profiteering,207 this is at the same time predicated on our own readerly investment in a figure (‘Wallace’) whose apparent sincerity is shown by the manuscript marginalia to be indistinguishable from an avowedly cynical and self-serving form of aesthetic ‘plagiarism’. The chapter concludes by reading this paradox in the light of the

institutionalization of literary production and theory over the past several decades, whereby the valorisation of (and demand for) ‘hard labour’ throughout Wallace’s work is linked directly to an anxiety over the kind of value that literary writing and reading can be said to represent in a contemporary North American context.

0.5 Pseudo-scholarly Footnotes: Popean Sneers, Modernist Dissociation, and the Legitimation Crisis

Part of my argument in the final section of Chapter Two is also concerned with the way in which TPK’s economy of hard labour versus plagiarism, or sincerity versus entertainment, is informed by a dynamic of ‘centre’ and ‘margin’ that moves across not only Wallace’s manuscript marginalia, but also his published oeuvre’s extensive deployment of pseudo-scholarly footnotes and endnotes. If Wallace’s depictions of ‘serious’ socio-historical scenarios (e.g. 1980s neoliberalisation in TPK, or hyper-consumerism in IJ) are often framed within various self-consciously ‘plagiaristic’ narratives about college or university, then Chapter Three moves on specifically to consider his work’s formalisation of this dynamic via a ‘constant, implied reference to scholarly or academic work’. Furthermore, by considering the challenges that Wallace’s archival marginalia pose for Gérard Genette’s structuralist opposition between ‘text’ and ‘paratext’ – which relies for its stability on ‘[w]hatever aesthetic or ideological investment an author makes in a paratextual element’ – Chapter Two prepares the way for Chapter Three’s argument against reading Wallace’s multitudinous footnotes as a kind of aesthetic ‘trademark’, a formal innovation so original and even ‘notorious’ that our author’s death might spell the end of their appearance in fiction altogether.

208 McGurl, Program, pp. 1-74; Cusset, French, pp. 1-13, pp. 131-286.
209 Although I take into account the formal differences between footnotes and endnotes in specific readings, I use the terms fairly interchangeably during more general discussions of Wallace’s use of pseudo-scholarly marginalia. On the convoluted historical relationship between footnotes and endnotes, see Anthony Grafton, The Footnote: A Curious History (London: Faber and Faber, 1997).
213 The novelist Jon McGregor half-jokingly calls for a ‘Footnote Moratorium Cessation Treaty’, lest Wallace’s death should prevent other authors from deploying the fictional footnote in their own work;
In fact, Chapter Three contends that the frequently comic effects of Wallace’s pseudo-scholarly footnotes can be seen, from another angle, to dramatize an anxiety about the same forms of contemporary academic discourse that they seek to surpass. If Wallace himself was a one-time ‘hardcore theory-wienie’ who spent almost all of his adult life as an English professor, he would go on in later essays to describe modern English Studies as the ‘joy-killing’ ‘radical-intellectual fad’ of our ‘age’, singling out in particular the ‘social-dash-ideological criticism’ of ‘poststructural literary theory (as in e.g. Deconstruction, Lacanian psychoanalysis, Marxist/Feminist Cultural Studies, Foucaultian/Greenblattian New Historicism, & c.).’ However, while Wallace’s widespread use of fictional and essayistic footnotes has usually been read as a ‘reversal of poststructuralism from within poststructuralism itself’ – one of a number of consciously proliferative ‘poststructural narrative techniques’ that ‘serves to make present the real author of the proliferation’ – Chapter Three compares their repetitious, back-and-forth movement to the game of fort/da described by Freud in ‘Beyond the Pleasure Principle.’ That is to say: while these notes take their pleasure at the expense of various scholarly caricatures, from IJ’s pseudo-Lacanian Dr Dolores Rusk, to the ‘long semicolonic sentence[s]’ of Fredric Jameson (‘AU’, p. 115n68), their prevalence throughout Wallace’s oeuvre might be thought of as a kind of ‘repetition compulsion’: the incessant attempt to reject the likes of psychoanalysis, Marxism, and deconstruction as outmoded (if not frankly ridiculous) theories, is inseparable from a tendency to reiterate what is most disturbing about their insights. My third chapter will also therefore take issue with Nicholas Dames’s argument that recent U.S. Bildungsroman narratives by such authors as Jonathan Franzen, Jennifer Egan, Jeffrey Franzen, Jennifer Egan, Jeffrey Franzen, Jennifer Egan, Jeffrey Franzen, Jennifer Egan, Jeffrey Franzen, Jennifer Egan, Jeffrey
Eugenides, Ben Lerner, and Lorrie Moore – all of whom studied for liberal arts degrees in the late twentieth century – have led to a ‘swallow[ing]’ of ‘Theory […] by the ordinary developmental processes that it so often sought to disrupt’, with theoretical ideas and terminology ‘becom[ing] an uneasy part of fiction’s content’.\(^{219}\) While Dames sees this assimilatory movement as ‘one way in which contemporary realism has its revenge on Theory’,\(^{220}\) I will contend that the appearance of pseudo-scholarly footnotes throughout the work of Wallace, as well as the likes of Mark Z. Danielewski and Nicholson Baker, can be seen as a kind of *formal* interruption of that straightforward ‘revenge’ narrative – which calls attention in turn to the ways in which these literary texts are already being read by, and therefore drawn back into, those same theoretical discourses.

It will not be the purpose of my thesis, however, to defend an unimpeachably ‘good’ critical theory against something ‘bad’ called common sense. On the contrary, Chapter Three’s readings of pseudo-scholarly notes in *Infinite Jest*, ‘Octet’, and several of Wallace’s essays, will consider not only the process of reification that has led to the mainstream ascent of so-called ‘Theory with a Capital T’,\(^{221}\) but also the problematic consensus that has formed today between revived notions of (‘central’) humanistic empathy and communication,\(^{222}\) and affect theory’s (‘marginal’) focus on moments of unmitigated identification and inter-subjectivity.\(^{223}\) Indeed, in the latter part of the chapter, I will argue that this seemingly cross-political prioritisation of ontological immanence in Anglo-American criticism tends, unwittingly, to obscure the conditions of exchange that actually afford us our moment of pure empathy, or affective identification, ‘in an environment that can well absorb and even sanction a little spontaneous leisure’.\(^{224}\) It is these conditions of exchange, I contend, that the centre/margin dynamics of pseudo-scholarly marginalia in the work of Wallace, Danielewski, and Baker, serve simultaneously to suppress and to illuminate; I conclude

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\(^{219}\) Dames, ‘Theory’, p. 164, p. 159; italics original.

\(^{220}\) Dames, ‘Theory’, p. 164.


\(^{223}\) By describing affect theory as a politically ‘marginal’ form of critique, I am referring to its historically close association with Queer studies; see Hemmings, ‘Invoking’, pp. 549-50.

that Wallace’s notes in particular, in their movements between a proto-Habermasian form of (‘central’) communicative consensus, and a kind of recurrent (‘marginal’) dissension that we might broadly associate with Jean-François Lyotard, seem to enact a contemporary iteration of the wider and longstanding critical debate characterised as ‘modernity versus postmodernity’. 225

In its broadest sense, then, the final chapter of my thesis will take the back-and-forth movement of the footnote as performative of those oppositions – between materialism and abstraction, consensus and dissension, affective identification and rational analysis – that have predominantly informed the modern institution of aesthetic critique (a move that also helps us to more rigorously historicise the currently fashionable framework of the critical ‘turn’). As Derrida notes in his reading of Immanuel Kant’s Critique of Aesthetic Judgement, it is by means of a footnote to the opening page that Kant manages to apply ‘an analytic of logical judgements to an analytic of aesthetic judgements at the very moment that [the central text] is insisting on the irreducibility of the one kind to the other’. 226 Where the central text of the Critique states that ‘[i]n order to distinguish whether or not a thing is beautiful, we do not relate the representation to the object by the means of the understanding […] but to the subject and to its feeling of pleasure or unpleasure’, the appended note insists that ‘in judgements of taste there is still always […] a relation to the understanding’. 227 Derrida focuses in here on what he describes as ‘the labour of the frame’: the footnote’s ‘visibly very awkward’ attempt to enact a ‘hypothetical “liaison” with the understanding, to which the judgement of taste, although there is nothing logical about it, supposedly “always still” has a relation’; 228 the dynamic of ‘centre’ and ‘margin’ discloses a vital moment of exchange, a kind of prohibition of marginality which the Critique must ‘put to work’ if it is to proceed in its foundational discussion of the beautiful.

227 This is Derrida’s translation of Kant, cited in Truth, p. 70.
228 Derrida, Truth, p. 75, p. 71.
Wallace’s oeuvre, therefore, is only one of the most recent to participate in a tradition that places the footnote at the juncture of aesthetics and criticism, or ‘feeling’ and ‘analysis’. Tribble has argued that the general typographical movement from the marginal gloss to the footnote, occurring somewhere around the turn of the eighteenth century, was a ‘manifestation of the marked shift in canons of taste’ that accompanied the professionalization of literary scholarship in England.\(^\text{229}\) ‘The role of the note […]’, Tribble contends, ‘becomes of central importance in the struggles to define this emergent notion of taste and the concomitant role of the critic.’\(^\text{230}\) As John Dryden writes in the ‘Postscript’ to his *Virgil*:

> the few Notes which follow are *par maniere d’acquit*, because I had oblig’d myself by Articles to do somewhat of that kind. These scattering observations are rather guesses at my author’s meaning in some passages than proofs that he so meant. The unlearn’d may have recourse to any Poetical Dictionary in *English*, for the Names of Persons, Places, and Fables, which the learned need not […]\(^\text{231}\)

The implications here tally with Coleridge’s separation of ‘marginalia’ from ‘copious notes’, or what Tribble describes as a class-based distinction between ‘worthy, useful knowledge pursued by gentlemen’, and the ‘“low diversions”’ or ‘excessive minutiae’ of the nascent class of professional commentators such as Richard Bentley and Lewis Theobald: the footnote was a sign of pedantry, to be curtailed as far as possible by the ‘true critic’ in his gentlemanly pursuit of poetic appreciation.\(^\text{232}\) Meanwhile, as again noted by Tribble, the extensive marginalia that Bentley and Theobald had appended to their updated editions of Homer, Milton, Shakespeare and others, were of particular concern to Alexander Pope, who lamented in the Introduction to his own commentary on the *Iliad* that:

> of all the commentators upon *Homer* there is hardly one whose principle design is to illustrate the poetical beauties of the author. […] This has been occasion’d by the ostentation of men who had more reading than taste, and were fonder of shewing their variety of learning in all kinds, than their single understanding in Poetry. Hence it


\(^{230}\) Tribble, “‘Looking-Glas’”, p. 233.


\(^{232}\) Tribble, “‘Looking-Glas’”, p. 239.
comes to pass that their remarks are rather philosophical, historical, geographical, allegorical, or in short rather any thing than critical and poetical. Pope’s 1729 *Dunciad Variorum*, in which the text of the previous year’s *Dunciad* is supplemented by ‘approximately 7000 lines’ of mock-scholarly footnotes, has often been read as the poet’s satirical ‘sneer’ at the commentators in question. The *Variorium*’s first note, for example, is even attributed to ‘Theobald’; appended to the title of the poem itself, it rambles on for a couple of hundred words about whether *Dunciad* should be spelled with an ‘e’ (‘Ought it not rather to be spelled *Dunceiad*, as the Etymology evidently demands? *Dunce* with an *e*, therefore *Dunceiad* with an *e*’). In a similar fashion, the footnotes in Jonathan Swift’s *A Tale of a Tub* paint the literary critic as a mere ‘discoverer and collector of writers’ faults’, while the ‘central’ narrational authority of Lawrence Sterne’s *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman* is persistently usurped by a range of donnish and occasionally absurd marginalia (‘The author here is twice mistaken […]’; ‘Mr. *Shandy* is supposed to mean ******* *******, Esq; member for ******* […]’).

However, if the fictional footnote seems ‘to undermine the traditional purpose of scholarly notations in texts’—mobilising a sort of ‘literary’ unruliness against the note’s crucial evidentiary function within ‘the ideology and technical practices of a profession’—nonetheless it marks an encroachment of the very forms and stylistic features of literary scholarship upon the fictional text itself. For all of Pope’s attacks on

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234 This is the estimation given by Chuck Zerby in *The Devil’s Details: A History of Footnotes* (New York: Touchstone, 2003), p. 54.
240 Grafton, *Footnote*, p. 5.
those ‘men who had more reading than taste’, 241 the marginalia to the Dunciad ‘nevertheless do supply authorial identifications and evidence’, thus allowing Pope to ‘pre-empt other commentaries and tell his readers what to think’ while concurrently attempting to enlist those readers as ‘allies in a joke about the absurdity of overzealous commentators’. 242 Some of the footnotes from A Tale of a Tub are actually direct citations from William Wotton’s critique of an earlier version of the text, so that Swift’s satirical notes ‘do not resolve the ironies of the Tale into a single authoritative voice’, but rather produce a ‘dialogic tension’ between centre and margin that ‘extends the unresolved dialogue between opposite positions and languages’ that persists throughout. 243 And the first note in Tristram Shandy – a digression on the ‘Romish Rituals’ of ‘the baptizing of the child, in cases of danger’ that expands over pages into a sequence of sub-footnotes – becomes so protracted that the central text itself has the ‘terrible misfortune’ of being ‘quite swallowed up in the consideration of it’: the ‘marginal’ theological discussion on the proper order of baptism (before birth ‘by injection’, or after) disrupts the proper order of the text. 244 The dynamic, de-centred irony that informs each of these examples also indicates some of the critical benefits of considering such pseudo-scholarly footnotes as marginalia (as part of a contingent and reversible model of centre and margin), rather than paratexts (which are constituted in accordance with ‘[w]hatever aesthetic or ideological investment an author makes in a paratextual element’). 245 That is, even if we wanted to characterise Pope’s satirical notes as a ‘weapon’ in the ‘constitution of a social and literary hierarchy against those [professional critics] who are seen as its enemies’, 246 yet they draw his own work into that allegedly ‘lowly’ and ‘pedantic’ discourse of professional criticism according to the same logic of supplementarity that we have been considering throughout this Introduction.

242 Jackson, Marginalia, p. 58.
245 Genette, Paratexts, p. 12.
When T. S. Eliot published the annotations to ‘The Waste Land’ in December 1922, this centre/margin dynamic was ‘made anew’ for a modernist paradigm. When T. S. Eliot published the annotations to ‘The Waste Land’ in December 1922, this centre/margin dynamic was ‘made anew’ for a modernist paradigm. Claiming to set out what ‘I had in mind’ at certain moments in the composition of the main body of the text, these notes have been read both as an interpretative ‘key’ to Eliot’s otherwise ‘chaotic, irregular, fragmentary’ poem, and as a ‘muddled’ batch of red herrings that signify either their author’s brilliance or his incompetence. In this sense, they have also played a symbolic role in the accelerated institutionalization of literary interpretation that overlapped with, and was partially driven by, the critical appraisal of modernism as the major artistic ‘movement’ of the early-to-mid twentieth century. When William Carlos Williams claims that Eliot’s footnotes had ‘[given] the poem back to the academics’, he anticipates Peter Middleton’s reflection in 1986 that ‘academic interpretation of [“The Waste Land”] has gone straight along the paths laid out by those footnotes’; this was a ‘ready-made academic poem with interpretations already included’. However, in the movement of the notes themselves between positions that we might describe as ‘objective’ (‘Cf. Antony and Cleopatra, II.ii.190’) and ‘subjective’ (‘A phenomenon which I have often noticed’), we can trace not only the longstanding philosophical dynamic outlined above between Kant and Derrida, but also the tension between ‘the two theories of reading then dominant in the professional literary field, philology and impressionism’. As such, and as in the

247 The annotations to the poem were only published when it was released in book form in December 1922; before that it had been published without notes in The Criterion (October 1922) and The Dial (November 1922). See Michael North, ‘A Note on the Text’, in T. S. Eliot, The Waste Land, ed. by Michael North (London: W.W. Norton, 2001), pp. xi-xiii.
249 As Jo Ellen Green Kaiser puts it, Edmund Wilson initially ‘found the structurally fragmented poem representative of the “chaotic, irregular, fragmentary” experiences that Eliot […] had used to define the “dissociated” modern mind’; however, after reading the notes, ‘he could write that “we feel that [Eliot] is speaking not only for a personal distress, but for the starvation of a whole civilisation”’; see ‘Disciplining The Waste Land, or How to Lead Critics into Temptation’, Twentieth Century Literature, 44.1 (1998), 82-99 (p. 84). For Wilson’s readings see Letters on Literature and Politics (New York: Farrar, 1977), p. 94; and ‘The Poetry of Drouth’, Dial, 73.6 (1922), 611-16.
254 Eliot, Waste, p. 22.
cases of Pope, Swift, and Sterne, Eliot’s notes work to dramatize ‘a particular conflict in professional literary discourse’, this time centring on two, divergent lines of response in the 1920s to the ‘crisis of modernity’ (or ‘dissociated sensibility’) that was depicted and enacted by the poem itself; once again, these pseudo-scholarly marginalia can be seen to move between ‘pleasure’ and ‘understanding’, or, in Eliot’s words, between the ‘profit’ of ‘mere amusement’ and the ‘danger’ of ‘mere explanation’. 

However, if Eliot himself would stop short of endorsing one critical approach over the other, nonetheless the marginalia to ‘The Waste Land’ went on to provide a primary example for William K. Wimsatt Jr. and Monroe C. Beardsley’s arguments in ‘The Intentional Fallacy’. In refusing to take the footnotes ‘as guides to send us where we may be educated’ (because, by their reckoning, ‘it would not matter much if Eliot invented his sources’), Wimsatt and Beardsley conclude that:

whereas notes tend to seem to justify themselves as external indexes to the author’s intention, yet they ought to be judged like any other part of a composition (verbal arrangement special to a particular context), and when so judged their reality as parts of the poem, or their imaginative integration with the rest of the poem, may come into question.

By focusing on the poetic text as a discrete, ‘integrated’ object which is ‘detached from the author at birth and goes about the world beyond his power to intend about it or control it’, Wimsatt and Beardsley here underline some of the initial, egalitarian potential of the New Criticism: ‘The poem belongs to the public. It is embodied in language, the peculiar possession of the public, and it is about the human being, an object of public knowledge.’ And yet, if pseudo-scholarly footnotes are seen to mark an outer limit to the poem that is simultaneously a limit on its author’s ‘external’ interpretative power, then their continuing appearance in modernist fiction provided a thoroughgoing challenge to the very possibility of such an internal/external divide in the first place. In Vladimir Nabokov’s *Pale Fire*, which I read alongside Wallace’s *The Pale King* at the beginning of Chapter Two, Charles Kinbote’s protracted endnotes to

258 Despite Eliot’s traditionally close association with New Criticism, he often sought in essays to distance himself from any one interpretative methodology; see Kaiser, ‘Disciplining’, pp. 91-96.
259 W. K. Wimsatt, Jr, and Monroe C. Beardsley, ‘The Intentional Fallacy’, *Sewanee Review*, 54.3 (1946), 468-88 (pp. 483-84; italics original).
John Shade’s unfinished canto ‘Pale Fire’ provide a paradoxical disjuncture of ‘internal’ literary text and ‘external’ scholarly interpretation: while we are never quite sure which is which, *Pale Fire* earns itself the status as ‘one of the most brilliant and extraordinary novels ever written […]’.

Meanwhile, Shari Benstock has argued that Issy’s notes, placed at the bottom of the page throughout Chapter Ten of Joyce’s *Finnegans Wake*, provide a challenge to the ‘world of scholarship, erudition, endowed knowledge, [and] preceptorship [that] has been by birthright (i.e., by law) the domain of man’.

While the (right and left) marginal comments of her twin brothers puzzle over a geometrical diagram of their mother’s vagina as an object of knowledge, replete with mathematical symbols, Issy’s footnotes immediately recognise ‘Draumcondra’s Dreamcountry where the betterlies blow’, a ‘secret stripture’ that is ‘toadhauntered by that old Pantifox Sir Somebody Something’.

For Benstock, then, Issy’s commentary provides a specifically feminine ‘point of entrance’ into the ‘hermetically closed world of scholasticism’, ‘undercut[ting] the authority on which the footnote convention itself rests’ by reference to the ‘more intuitive, perhaps visionary, world of the woman’ – an argument which also draws attention to the gender politics that were implicit in the New Critical project of systematic, close readings of discrete textual units.

Benstock’s gesture is exemplary of what we have been calling here the ‘trope of marginality’, that tendency for post-structuralist theory in the 1970s and 80s to make its arguments from an assumed position in the cultural ‘margin’. Likewise, having played a seemingly ‘marginal’ yet critically central role in the high modernist canonisation of Eliot, Joyce, and Nabokov, the fictional footnote subsequently begins to proliferate throughout a variety of marginal and ‘late’ modernist, as well as postmodernist, texts. In Manuel Puig’s *The Kiss of the Spider Woman* (1976), a series of psychoanalytical case notes provides a marginal commentary to the conversations.

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265 As Stephen Matterson notes, it was not only feminist studies that struggled to advance its arguments within the New Critical framework, but any kind of criticism ‘which seeks to relate the text’s language to discourses outside the text’; see ‘The New Criticism’, in *Literary Theory and Criticism: An Oxford Guide*, ed. by Patricia Waugh (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), pp. 166-76 (pp. 174-75).

266 Rowe, ‘Margin’, pp. 36-40.
taking place, in an Argentine prison cell in the 1970s, between two men who have been jailed for Marxist political activism (Valentin) and homosexual activity (Molina).\textsuperscript{267} As each prisoner begins to discuss his ‘inclination’ with the other – Valentin: ‘Give me your answer, what makes a man in your terms?’ / Molina: ‘Mmm… his not taking any crap… from anyone, not even the powers that be…’ – the scholarly austerity of the marginalia at first forms a comic or pathetic contrast. For example, rather than responding directly to Valentin and Molina’s discussion of masculinity, the apparently oblivious notes to these pages are engaged in a critique of the early sexological theory that ‘male homosexuals might actually be, genetically speaking, women whose bodies have suffered a complete sexual inversion’, which is ‘marred by a failure to account for the normal physical characteristics of a large majority – 99 percent – of homosexuals’.\textsuperscript{268} Gradually, however, as the situation of Valentin and Molina worsens, the notes move towards a nuanced analysis of the role of ‘sexual marginals’ in 1960s liberation movements that cites the likes of Herbert Marcuse and Kate Millett, producing a complex, shifting dynamic between ‘centre’ and ‘margin’ that also seems to imply the political need for ‘dialogical’ engagement between academic and non-academic discourses.\textsuperscript{269} Meanwhile, in Susan Daitch’s novel \textit{L. C.} (1986), it is through the footnotes that we must attempt to trace the intertextual links that move both between and across the three first-person narratives: the diary of Lucienne Crozier, a revolutionary in 1848 Paris; the ‘Introduction’ of Willa Rehnfield, who discovers Crozier’s text in 1968 and gets partway through its translation before her death; and the ‘Epilogue’ of the pseudonymous Jane Amme, a feminist, Californian ex-academic who inherits Rehnfield’s estate and reworks/completes the translation in 1982.\textsuperscript{270} Although Amme’s footnotes quietly cast doubt on both Crozier’s story and Rehnfield’s original translation (‘I don’t believe that the word or concept of the picket line existed in 1847’), we later become aware that she believes that ‘Lucienne’s story and mine run in tandem’, that she somehow belongs ‘in the margins of the diary’.\textsuperscript{271} As such, when the final, retranslated part of Crozier’s diary states that ‘all women are the mad woman locked in

\textsuperscript{268} Puig, \textit{Spider}, p. 56, pp. 59-65n*.
\textsuperscript{271} Daitch, \textit{L. C.}, p. 114n*, p. 220.
the attic,* real or theoretical’, and the accompanying footnote does not refer to the seminal 1979 feminist monograph of almost the same name (and partially written in California), our trust of Amme’s editorship is seriously undermined: this narrative of nineteenth century revolutionary heroinism might all along have been a kind of postmodern, pseudo-academic hoax.272

It is in light of such interpretative uncertainties – engendered also by the appearance of footnotes in texts like Beckett’s Watt, William H. Gass’s Willie Masters’ Lonesome Wife, and John Fowles’s The French Lieutenant’s Woman – that we begin to see the increasing critical tendency for the ‘margin’ to be read as part of a by turns resistant and complicit relationship with some ‘real or theoretical’ centre. On the one hand, fictional footnotes participate in what Linda Hutcheon calls the ‘postmodern paratextuality’ that underscores such works as Robert Coover’s The Public Burning, Maxine Hong Kingston’s China Men, John Barth’s Letters, Salman Rushdie’s Midnight’s Children, and Joy Kowaga’s Obasan, problematizing ‘the entire concept of objective […] documentation’ in order to call attention to ‘the ex-centric, the marginal, the borderline – all those things that threaten the (illusory but comforting) security of the centred, totalizing, masterly discourses of our culture’.273 On the other hand, it is because of this insistence on ‘the discursive nature of [documentary] representations of the past’, on demonstrating both history and fiction to be involved in related processes of ‘constructing and interpreting’,274 that such pseudo-scholarly marginalia might be associated with ‘the easy invocation of the “marginal” in contemporary theory’.275 Meanwhile, even in a number of theoretical texts published during these decades – such as Derrida’s Glas, Ihab Hassan’s The Dismemberment of Orpheus, and Julia Kristeva’s ‘Stabat Mater’ – we start to see the deployment of unconventional or ‘experimental’ forms of typography, a recruitment of the textual margin as part of a broad project of ‘de-centring’ that has also tended to draw accusations of ‘playful’ or relativistic self-

274 Hutcheon, Politics, p. 84, p. 70.
275 Tribble, Marginality, p. 103.
indeed, if such theorists often started from a reading of Marxist or
psychoanalytical models, it was Jürgen Habermas, a former member of the Frankfurt
School, who would contend most stridently in the 1980s that their work actually
represented a ‘terroristic’ over-extension of the aesthetic sphere into matters of morality
and rationality, propounding ‘revelations of a decentred subjectivity’ in order to ‘justify
an irreconcilable anti-modernism’ (and by extension, a betrayal of the whole Kantian
project of Enlightenment). A somewhat more measured critique comes from Spivak
herself, who notes, in a reflection on the essay that provides my third epigraph, that
‘[m]ore and more people have found in me a very convenient marginal, capital M, and
this of course I have found politically very troubling’:

I would like to re-invent [the margin] as simply a critical moment rather than a de-
centred moment […] That’s the way I think of the margin – as not simply opposed to
the centre but as an accomplice of the centre – because I find it very troubling that I
should be defined as a marginal.

These comments, from 1988, make clear the contradictions involved in adopting the
stance of ‘critical’ marginality at a time when Spivak, alongside the likes of Derrida,
Foucault, Deleuze, and Jameson, were attaining ‘minor celebrity’ status in North
America as the ‘pioneers’ of late twentieth century literary theory; critical
marginality, we might say, had never enjoyed a more ‘central’ position.

Accordingly – and as we shall see in Chapter Three – when references to these
figures start turning up throughout the pseudo-scholarly marginalia in such texts as
Wallace’s *Infinite Jest* and Danielewski’s *House of Leaves*, they have tended to be read
as part of a ‘return to humanism through poststructuralism’, or, in other words, as a
way for the author to ‘subvert and have his subject at the same time’. To cite
Jameson’s own description of *IJ*, the footnotes then become somewhat emblematic of
these texts’ characteristically postmodern ‘mixtures of theory and singularity’, seeking

277 Habermas, ‘Moderne’, pp. 9-14. See also Jürgen Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of
278 Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, ‘The New Historicism: Political Commitment and the Postmodern
281).
281 N. Katherine Hayles, ‘Saving the Subject: Remediation in *House of Leaves*, *American Literature*,
74.4 (2002), 779-806 (p. 779).
to ‘transcend the old opposition between a work and its criticism or interpretation’ and thereby to disarm the authority of the contemporary literary critic altogether. At the same time, if Wallace’s notes seem to take part in a lineage running from Pope to Eliot and through Nabokov, yet they do not represent a simple ‘return’ to the *Dunciad Variorum*’s class-based ‘sneers’, to the modernist problem of unifying a ‘dissociated sensibility’, or to the subversion of academic apparatuses in a postmodernist gesture of ‘formal ingenuity’. Rather, they provide a final example for my overall argument that Wallace’s case represents a process of cultural ‘recentralization’, a nostalgic reaffirmation of a familiar kind of North American, white, male, middle-class ‘ordinariness’ that does not equate, however, to its straightforward return. By attending to what Phillip Brian Harper has called ‘the easy appropriability of the signifiers of certain forms of social marginality’, which ‘makes them prime commodities in the mass-cultural drive to market the effects of disenfranchisement for the social cachet that can paradoxically attach to it’, Chapter Three will ultimately argue that even the most seemingly ‘normative’ appropriation of pseudo-scholarly marginalia carries anxiously within it the conditions of its own destabilisation. This means, for instance, that even in the light of the ‘luxuriant incidentalism of the footnotes’ that runs throughout Baker’s *The Mezzanine* – a work that has been read as an ‘unqualified celebration of the consumer’s life’ – the resultant dynamic of ‘centre’ and ‘margin’ produces a kind of residue of the so-called ‘legitimation crisis’ that its comic or satirical attitude can never quite manage to overcome.

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283 As this ‘central’ lineage is my focus here, I have not been able to consider the divergent functions of footnotes in a range of other contemporary literary texts. See, for instance, their role in the presentation of ‘your mandatory two seconds of Dominican history’ in Junot Diaz, *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* (New York: Riverhead, 2007; repr. London: Faber and Faber, 2009), pp. 2-3n1; or in the depiction of a woman trying to read Samuel Beckett’s *Worstward Ho* on board a ‘van bound for south meeting plane from west’, in Lydia Davis, ‘Southward Bound, Reads *Worstward Ho*’, in *Varieties of Disturbance: Stories* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2007), pp. 68-71 (p. 68).

284 Harper, *Framing*, p. 188.


In the Conclusion, I argue that Wallace’s marginalia in copies of Nightwood by Djuna Barnes and Disgrace by J. M. Coetzee, in conjunction with readings of his novella ‘The Suffering Channel’ and a selection of his published teaching materials, can help us to reflect on the accelerated processes of U.S.-centric, late capitalist cultural assimilation and reification that have informed the archivization and canonisation of his work. I will finish by summarising the arguments of the thesis overall.

0.6 A Note on Archival Research

The David Foster Wallace archive held at the Harry Ransom Centre in Austin, Texas, consists of forty-four large containers, each holding around ten individual folders of material. Visitors are able to consult handwritten drafts, typescripts, corrected proofs, research notes, letters, and promotional materials relating to almost all of Wallace’s published texts, as well as some of his teaching materials, college papers, and childhood schoolwork (spelling tests, writing exercises, and so on). Meanwhile, Wallace’s personal library is held in a separate part of the same building, and contains 321 books that he had annotated, often extensively.

Although the relevant members of curatorial staff advised me, clearly and sensibly, that I should not try to ‘do it all’ in the course of my five-week residency in October 2013, nonetheless the need for discrimination presented a number of practical and critical problems. Firstly, as I was only a year into my doctorate, I had decided neither on my final research questions, nor on the overall structure of my thesis; I wanted to spend at least a few days consulting some of the other, potentially germane collections held by the Ransom Centre, such as the manuscripts of James Joyce, Samuel Beckett, and J. M. Coetzee, and the partial libraries of Virginia Woolf and Ezra Pound. Secondly, I was aware that even if I decided solely to audit all of the archival materials relating to Wallace’s best-known work, Infinite Jest, the five weeks might not be enough (as Wallace once wrote in a

letter to Don DeLillo, the novel itself ‘takes over a month of hard labour to read’).\(^{290}\) Finally, as this was my first time completing archival research, I also had to decide on a methodology for working through the materials: it seemed that I could either, a. take a photograph of each page, to be scrutinised at a later date, or b. read each page in order to determine its relevance and interest, which would in turn determine whether or not a photograph was necessary.

On my first day in the reading room, I requested to look at the folder containing the earliest handwritten fragments of *IJ*. Ten days later, I had not even made it onto the first, full, typewritten draft. This was a novel that had initially been marketed as a direct 1079-page challenge or ‘dare’ to the reader,\(^{291}\) and which, in subsequent years, has been at the centre of a number of online reading groups whose determination to ‘get through’ the text as a ‘community’ has been compared, by Kathleen Fitzpatrick, to the various self-help groups that *IJ* itself depicts (as it was put on infinitesummer.org: ‘You’ve been meaning to do it for over a decade. Now join endurance bibliophiles from around the web as we tackle and comment upon [Wallace’s] masterwork over the summer of 2009’).\(^{292}\) Alone in the reading room, I was beginning to realize that the copious manuscripts, sketches, and notes of *IJ*’s ‘pre-text’ were providing me with an intensified version of this dynamic, which we might think of as a movement between ‘hard labour’ and ‘payoff’. Furthermore, if this economy rests on the notion of the ‘genius’ author and his ‘masterwork’ as a principle of coherence, then the excessiveness of the archive was also intensifying my initial reading of the novel as ‘a degenerative chaos so complex in its disorder that it’s hard to tell whether it seems choreographed or simply chaotically disordered’ (*IJ*, p. 341); were Wallace’s manuscript marginalia to be read as evidence of aesthetic choreography, I asked, or simply as part of the chaos?

In the evenings in Austin, I was also re-reading *The Pale King*, the posthumous, ‘unfinished’ text that has been marketed as authored ‘by’ Wallace, despite having been

\(^{290}\) Letter to DeLillo, undated, in Austin, TX, Harry Ransom Centre, Don DeLillo Archive, fol. 101.10.
\(^{291}\) As D. T. Max reports: ‘The massiveness of the novel was the central fact to be dealt with. […] Soon Little, Brown realized that the obstacle could be made the point. To read *Infinite Jest* was to accept a dare’; see Every Story is a Ghost Story: A Life of David Foster Wallace (London: Granta, 2012), p. 211.
assembled and edited by his editor. Not only did this uncertainty around ‘authorization’ work analogously to the ‘choreography versus chaos’ dynamic of the archive, but TPK itself seems to suggest a model of ‘hard’ and specifically archival labour (in the form of taxation examination) as a solution to an analogous uncertainty about the relative coherence or chaos of neoliberal models of value in post-80s North America. Indeed, by the end of the novel, we realize that only those tax examiners with powers of either mystical prescience, or machine-like concentration, are able to make sense of the seemingly never-ending stacks of files that arrive at their desks each day – a point that reminded me of my own, increasingly difficult daily dilemma of deciding which folders to look at, how many photographs to take, and how much critical interpretation I should do as I went along. Slowly I began to realize (or to ‘sense’) that Wallace’s archive was dynamic, contradictory, and compelling enough to form of the basis of a full-length case study. Although I did spend some time looking at other collections held by the Ransom Centre, I increasingly focused in on Wallace’s papers as the weeks went by, trying to audit as many folders as I could, while seeking a balance between sheer quantity (taking photographs for future reference) and interpretation (getting a sense of each folder so as to determine which one to request next). Especially when I thought of these archival dynamics in conjunction with the Ransom Centre’s controversial redaction of Wallace’s annotated self-help books in 2011, it struck me that Wallace provided a case in which the archival (practical) and the interpretative (theoretical) were utterly inseparable, and whose mutual implication would have significant ramifications for a number of contemporary and historical disciplinary issues.

In this sense, although my study is the first to describe Wallace’s marginalia and archival materials in extensive detail, it aims to do so in the manner of an analysis of their participation in a range of interpretative, socio-historical, and political problems, rather than in the spirit of ‘completeness’ (it is not at all intended as a full ‘inventory’ of Wallace’s papers). I might have returned with a hard drive containing over two thousand high-definition photographs, but time constraints meant that I had not been able to cover in any depth those materials relating to Wallace’s essays, short stories, or first novel, The Broom of the System; moreover, my initial focus on the controversy around Wallace’s self-help marginalia has also determined that Chapter One looks

293 I advance this argument in detail in Chapter Two.
mainly at those materials rather than, say, his extensively annotated copies of Edwin Williamson’s *Borges: A Life* (2004), or Paul de Man’s *Blindness and Insight* (1983). Gradually, however, these potential limitations became the core of my argument: just as I have contended throughout the Introduction that we cannot separate the general from the particular, theory from practice, or ‘feeling’ from ‘analysis’, neither do I claim to be speaking from a position of straightforward critical mastery over either Wallace’s archival materials, or his oeuvre; rather, I would insist on the inseparability of the various practical and theoretical frameworks through which I have attempted to make sense of Wallace’s case. It is on this basis that I have decided here to ‘disclose a little of the undisclosed margins’ of my thesis;²⁹⁴ for, as I will argue in the following chapters, even the most seemingly assured or ‘central’ of positions can be qualified by its mutual implication in a range of critical margins.

Chapter One ‘The realer, more enduring and sentimental part of him’: Wallace’s Library and Marginalia

[The literary text is] a thing whose modulated surfaces betray the consciousness it contains, and which we read, as we read words, to find the hand, the arm, the head, the voice, the self, which is shaping them, which is arranging those surfaces – this second skin – to reflect an inside sun, and reveal the climate of an inner life.

- William H. Gass, cited in Hix, Morte, with underlinings by David Foster Wallace (see figs 11-12)

I like Gass. Writing and reading are both communicative & both spiritual. We read to be intimate with another mind.

- Wallace’s marginal inscription on the above (see figs 11-12)

1.1 DFW’s Family Secrets

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

I mean stuff of the best-sellingest, Oprah-level cheesiness and la-la reputation was to be found in Wallace’s library. Along with all the Wittgenstein, Husserl and Borges, he

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

\(^3\) Bustillos, ‘Self-Help’.  
\(^4\) Bustillos, ‘Self-Help’.  
\(^5\) Bustillos, ‘Self-Help’.  
\(^7\) Wallace, cited in Bustillos, ‘Self-Help’. Amy is the name of Wallace’s sister.
(the latter is a major theme in *The Pale King*, Bustillos tells us, which is the novel that Wallace was writing when he died).\(^8\)

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

\(^8\) Bustillos, ‘Self-Help’.
\(^10\) Catherine Toal, for example, quotes from passages that are focalized through Hal in order to evaluate ‘Wallace’s strategy’ and ‘Wallace’s argument’; see ‘Contemporary American Melancholy’, *Journal of European Studies*, 33.3-4 (2003), 305-22 (pp. 316-21). See also Max, *Ghost*, p. 3, p. 177, p. 197.
\(^13\) Gross, ‘Ransom’. Bustillos has since responded by stating that ‘[i]t never occurred to me that Wallace’s estate would be in a position to rescind part of the sale of the documents to the Ransom Centre; I wrote what I did under the assumption that these books would remain available to anyone who
In those first months after David died, the Ransom Centre had approached us about buying the archives; Karen [Green, Wallace’s widow] had to get out of the house where she and David lived in Claremont and in the craziness of grief and the mess of packing up the books into boxes to send to the archives, we made some mistakes. […] Having a person’s library with paperbacks and writing in them as part of the archive is a new thing really and we did not realize how much personal and private information was in them. For the peace of mind and privacy of David’s family [the annotated self-help books] are now restricted. […] [The family] are not public figures, their lives are not meant to be discussed on the internet. 14

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

This episode highlights a range of the difficulties involved in the acquisition and public archivalization of a contemporary author’s private reading and writing materials. On a practical level, it seems that the circumstances of the sale of Wallace’s archive did not allow for the materials to be thoroughly vetted by the family in advance, which in turn has raised legal and ethical questions around ownership, privacy, and interpretation. Bustillos herself writes that:

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

This affective quality of marginalia, their ability, as we started to see in the Introduction, to simultaneously compel and disturb their reader, is manifested even in the enticements of Bustillos’s title, ‘Inside David Foster Wallace’s Private Self-Help Library’, with its promise to divulge the deepest and most banal secrets of an author popularly portrayed as a sort of ‘visionary’ or tragic genius, ‘the best mind of his

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

And the other narrative that has now emerged – Bustillos’s discoveries and disclosures, followed by the post facto archival restriction – already seems to participate in the recurrent theme of the family secret in Wallace’s oeuvre, especially as dramatized by the Incandenzas. Dr Dolores Rusk, a pseudo-Lacanian counsellor at the Incandenzas’ Ennet Tennis Academy, and wannabe self-help author ‘with doctorates in both Gender and Deviance’, suggests that Avril suffers from ‘a black phobic dread of hiding or secrecy in all possible forms with respect to her sons’ (II, p. 1039n234, p. 50).

Regarding Avril’s possible discovery of his use of ‘high-resin Bob Hope’, Hal tells his brother Mario that “it’d kill the Moms […]. Not so much the Hope. The secrecy of it.

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18 Scott, ‘Generation’.
19 See Craig Fehrman, ‘Lost libraries’, Boston.com, 19 September 2010, <http://www.boston.com/bostonglobe/ideas/articles/2010/09/19/lost_libraries/?page=full> [accessed 28 November 2015]. Fehrman outlines some of the practical difficulties specific to the organization and sale of Wallace’s library: ‘When Wallace’s widow and his literary agent, Bonnie Nadell, sorted through his library, they sent only the books he had annotated to the Ransom Centre. The others, more than 30 boxes’ worth, they donated to charity. There was no chance to make a list, Nadell says, because another professor needed to move into Wallace’s office. “We were just speed skimming for markings of any kind”’.
21 Bustillos, ‘Self-Help’.
That I hid it from her. That she’ll feel I had to hide it from her”” (p. 784; italics original). Meanwhile, Hal ‘hasn’t had a bona fide intensity-of-interior-life-type emotion since he was tiny’:

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

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

(Miller) [Such a person is usually able to ward off threatening depression with increased displays of brilliance, thereby deceiving both himself and those around him.]
Amherst 80-85

(Miller) [Others are allowed to be ‘ordinary’ but that he can never be.]
Grandiosity- The constant need to be, and be seen as, a superstar

(Bradshaw) [Shame begets shame to compulsive/addictive behaviour]
DFW comes home broken in ’82- not a ‘perfect family.’ Mom’s lie here breaks down.
DFW the ‘troubled’ one in family-anxious, depressed-acting out, instantiating family’s sickness (Why I see myself as ‘fucked up’?)

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

In this last manoeuvre – whereby Hal is reduced to a kind of allegory to which Wallace’s marginalia are the key – we see a recurrence of the basic problematic outlined in my Introduction: as has so often been the case, the writer’s library is taken as the ‘point where contradictions are resolved, where incompatible elements are at last tied together or organized around a fundamental or originating contradiction’, namely,

the author as an ‘individual’. As I argued in the cases of William Blake, Sylvia Plath, Vladimir Nabokov, Gertrude Stein, Emily Dickinson, and Samuel Beckett, this critical tendency can mean different things at different historical and ideological junctures, but it will often imply a ‘prohibition’ on interpretation that works in line with the wider cultural function of a particular author’s name; the marginalia can then be called upon as a kind of ‘dangerous supplement’ in the interpretation of some ‘central’ literary oeuvre, of which they are never quite a part. In this sense, if Wallace’s work has frequently been characterized as a response to postmodernist notions of psychic fragmentation (what Fredric Jameson calls ‘the end of the bourgeois ego, or monad’), then the present chapter traces the degree of psychic ‘containment’ – if not quite reunification – that is seemingly implied by the controversy surrounding Wallace’s annotated self-help books. My argument thus ‘addresses the archive as both source and subject’, taking the archivization of Wallace’s marginalia as part of a broader ideological reinvestment in those ‘quaintly romantic’ categories of the ‘genius’ or Great Writer that had supposedly disappeared with postmodernism, while reading the text of the library itself, in tandem with the oeuvre, to show this as simultaneously a sort of ‘therapeutic’ investment in a certain form of U.S. (white, male, middle-class) normativity.

Kathleen Fitzpatrick has gestured towards a similar dynamic in her contention that the so-called ‘melodrama[s] of beset white manhood’ produced by Wallace – as well as the likes of Jonathan Franzen, Jeffrey Eugenides, and Dave Eggers – project ‘a cluster of anxieties about being displaced from some possibly imagined position of centrality in contemporary cultural life’ such that the white male’s sense of marginality ‘becomes, in a literary culture obsessed with fragmentation and decentring, a

24 Derrida, Grammatology, pp. 141-64.
27 Here I am referencing Jameson’s claim that, in postmodernism, we see an end to ‘geniuses, prophets, Great Writers, or demiurges’; see Postmodernism, pp. 302-13. I return to Jameson’s claims below.
paradoxical source of return to dominance [...]. 29 However, by looking at the ways in which a range of annotated fragments from Wallace’s library are *themselves* discursively entangled with a more or less explicit idealization of an ‘ordinary’, fully functioning U.S. subject – from Alice Miller’s notion of the ‘true self’, to heavily underlined theories of ‘Art as *Empathy*’ 30 from Plato to Leo Tolstoy – I take this as a more broadly intertextual and ideological problem, rather than an occasion to identify either the intentions, feelings, and thoughts of the author in question, or indeed the genetic ‘origins’ of his work. Central to my argument here is the way in which ‘Wallace’, as an ‘author function’, manages flexibly to mediate between putatively ‘high’ and ‘low’ positions, maintaining at once the statuses of ‘genius’, ‘celebrity’, and ‘regular guy’. 31 We saw an example of this in the Introduction, whereby Wallace’s ‘spontaneous, distracted, childish’ doodles on a dustjacket photograph of Cormac McCarthy made ‘one of the most important writers of his generation’ seem ‘especially vivid and present’ (see fig. 8): whereas similarly ambiguous marginalia by the likes of Stein and Plath have been read as ‘bafflingly gnomic’ or even politically suspect, ‘Wallace’ functions to bring together a Romanic vein of intellectual mastery with a ‘deeply gratifying’ identificatory appeal. 32 If this appeal is now further enhanced by the controversy surrounding Bustillos’s article – which purports to prove that Wallace was ‘just like us’ after all – then this chapter will finally contend that Wallace’s apparently ‘ordinary’ centrality in contemporary critical and cultural discourse can be seen, in light of the ‘margins’ of the annotated library, to be constituted broadly in accordance with a number of problematically hegemonic forms of ideological investment.

The admixture of the Austin library catalogue in particular stands as a sort of monument to the heroic cultural dexterity of ‘DFW’: the bandana-wearing, tobacco-chewing, polymathic Midwesterner, who could do Wittgenstein or *Hannibal*, Cantor or *Freakonomics*, Tolstoy or tennis, 33 and whose familiar initials turn out to be scattered throughout the margins of his books like an abundance of Coleridge’s ‘Relics’, and

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30 This is a phrase from Leo Tolstoy, *What is Art?* (HRCDFW-L), which has been underlined by Wallace. I return to this annotated fragment in section two of the present chapter.
32 O’Connell, ‘Obsession’.
33 For a full catalogue of the items in Wallace’s library, see ‘Catalogue’.
every bit as holy.\textsuperscript{34} As Oram puts it, Wallace’s book collection has already become a ‘visible shrine’:

> the Harry Ransom Centre staff has been surprised at how many users simply wish to commune with [Wallace’s books] […]. A certain subset of our public does come to seek an emotional connection […] or […] to connect their personal narrative with (in case of Wallace) a tragically deceased author’s life. And that is undeniably a part of what special collections libraries are all about.\textsuperscript{35}

However, while Oram is careful to distinguish between ‘bibliographical and literary scholars’ and this ‘certain subset of [the] public’ – made up here, perhaps, of bloggers like Bustillos, as well as those journeying ‘fanboys’ for whom ‘David Foster Wallace’s annotations are probably about as sacred […] as a piece of the True Cross is to Christians’\textsuperscript{36} – there has thus far been a predominant tendency to position Wallace at the intersection of popular and critical discourses. Indeed, in his seminal 2008 account of the beginnings of ‘Wallace Studies’, Adam Kelly claims that, by comparison with the ‘Joyce industry […] where the keys to understanding are presumed to be held by professional scholars’, the co-development of Wallace criticism in academic and non-academic (mostly online) spaces has helped to make it a more ‘democratic’ enterprise.\textsuperscript{37} At the same time, Kelly’s piece (‘The Death of the Author and the Birth of a Discipline’) conceives the field as a form of collective grieving, with the effect that visiting the archive now becomes another – even a more appropriate – way to ‘honour the dialogic quality Wallace strove for’: ‘the conversations between the writer and his readers look set to be many, lengthy, and perhaps even infinite’.\textsuperscript{38}

If to read Wallace’s work is at once to communicate with the author, and at the same time to ‘honour’ the quality that he strove for, then reading the author’s marginalia seems to promise the kind of intensification of this process that we find in my epigraph: the writer’s library then becomes that ‘thing whose modulated surfaces betray the consciousness it contains, and which we read, as we read words, to find the

\textsuperscript{34} See Mike Miley’s candid piece about his trip to the library, in which he compares his motives to those of a medieval pilgrim. He finds many passages that Wallace has marked with his initials (either ‘DFW’ or ‘DW’), suggesting them as proof of ‘capital-I Identification’; see ‘Reading Wallace Reading’, \textit{The Smart Set}, 18 August 2014, <http://www.thesmartset.com/article/article08181401.aspx> [accessed 28 November 2015].


\textsuperscript{36} Miley, ‘Reading’.

\textsuperscript{37} Kelly, ‘Death’.

\textsuperscript{38} Kelly, ‘Death’.
hand, the arm, the head, the voice, the self, which is shaping them’ in order to ‘reveal the climate of an inner life’. Wallace’s marginalia respond almost performatively to Gass’s description of literary interpretation: the underlining is like the process of tracing described therein, while the note pencilled in the margin (‘I like Gass. Writing and reading are both communicative & both spiritual. We read to be intimate with another mind’) seems at once to name and inscribe its own bodily and spiritual ‘intimacy’ (see figs 11-12). What’s more, if the text of the marginal note is merely the ‘second skin’ of a message that passes between minds, then it performs a hermeneutic operation similar to the one that finds, at the bottom of all of Wallace’s style – the ‘controlled lack of control’, 39 the ‘super-mimetic’ immersion in ‘the collective idiolect of the culture’ 40 – that ‘distinctive singular stamp of himself’ that Wallace in turn identified in the style of Dostoevsky and others. 41 However, I will contend here that these parallels enjoin us to see the archivization of Wallace’s writing and reading materials not as a kind of ‘revelatory’ moment in our understanding of his ‘legacy’, 42 but rather as an ‘underlining’ of certain aesthetic and ideological problems that were already the subject of his oeuvre.

For example, those slanted ‘DW’s and ‘DFW’s that Wallace inscribes next to certain passages in the likes of Don DeLillo’s Americana (see fig. 13), Stanley Cavell’s In Quest of the Ordinary, and R. D. Laing’s The Divided Self: rather than abetting ‘the work of getting to the truth about Wallace’, 43 these markers can be seen to partake in the troubling of univocal identity that is already exemplified by his oeuvre’s proliferation of characters by the name of ‘David Wallace’, ‘David F. Wallace’, ‘David Foster Wallace’, and so on. 44 Similarly, if the very attempt to ‘genetically’ trace what Daniel Ferrer and Michael Groden call ‘a movement, a process of writing’ will require

41 ‘That distinctive singular stamp of himself is one of the main reasons readers come to love an author. […] The quality’s almost impossible to describe or account for straight out – it mostly presents as a vibe, a kind of perfume of sensibility – and critics’ attempts to reduce it to questions of “style” are almost universally lame’. See ‘JFD’, p. 260n9.
43 Miley, ‘Reading’.
44 ‘David Wallace’ appears in ‘Good Old Neon’, while there are two characters named ‘David F. Wallace’ in The Pale King (‘David Foster Wallace’ and ‘David Francis Wallace’).
us to imagine having Wallace ‘ever at [our] ear’, we will see that this imaginative reconstruction of (or ‘communication with’) the figure of a Great Writer – his brilliant mind, his solidly masculine body – is dramatized and comprehensively undermined in advance by the ‘Incandenza family’ plotline of IJ. In a kind of parallel to the family scenario presented by those annotated self-help texts that we considered in the opening pages of this chapter, Hal Incandenza’s father, James (nicknamed ‘Himself’), tries to create a great artwork in order to fix the family problems apparently caused by the narcissistic mother, but fails disastrously; James then commits suicide, and goes on haunting his family, and failing to fix their problems, either as a corpse in the grave (he is buried with his disastrous work) or as a meddling and telekinetic wraith (who is then ‘ever at the ear’ of several still-living characters). And while Wallace’s own suicide now serves to identify him, uncannily, with James as much as with Hal, nonetheless we will see how each of these narratives participates in a ‘melodrama of beset white manhood’ that operates well beyond the level of the individual author or text, moving across the normative boundaries of family and nation in order to posit ‘postmodern fragmentation’ as a fairly ill-defined pretext for a return to the older interpretative questions of sincerity and intention – while allowing, at the same time, for the unchecked continuation of ‘the hegemony of whiteness and maleness long served by the structures of traditional humanism’. The final section of the chapter will suggest that the tragic narrative of ‘Wallace himself’ has now been drawn into this dynamic, whereby the work of mourning for the predominance or ‘centrality’ of the ‘normal’ white male acts, paradoxically, to preserve its continuation in reality.

Marshall Boswell has noted that Hal’s plotline in IJ bears resemblance to that of a ‘more or less traditional’ Bildungsroman: the ‘maturation’ of a young man within

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47 This is one of the nicknames that his sons have for James Incandenza; as Hal puts it: ‘“Himself is my dad. We call him Himself. As in quote “the man Himself””’ (p. 29).
48 Fitzpatrick, Obsolescence, pp. 201-02.
49 This final part of the argument will proceed primarily from Lauren Berlant’s work on mourning and North American hegemony, in ‘Feeling’, pp. 49-59.
his family is linked, on the next level up, to the ‘progress’ or development of the nation.\textsuperscript{51} As we have seen, Hal’s passage into a functional adult life in the U.S. is initially blocked by an excess of thinking (the manipulation of ‘so many variables in rarefied equations’) at the expense of feeling (‘intensity-of-interior-life-type emotion’). This is replicated at a national level by the novel’s dystopic, near-future depiction of a North America (now become the Organization of North American Nations, or O.N.A.N.) in which the inner lives of citizens take the form of an addictive and sometimes fatal hyper-self-consciousness, which in turn drives a seemingly endless cycle of consumption and excess. Meanwhile, a group of Quebecois terrorists are seeking the Master Copy of an elusive film, also called \textit{Infinite Jest}, which promises to invert this scenario by generating an ‘interior-life-type emotion’ so intense that its engrossed viewers are rendered motionless, infantile, and eventually dead. This national plotline is then restored to the level of the individual and the family when we discover that the film \textit{Infinite Jest} was the one originally produced by James Incandenza, as an attempt to ‘reverse thrust’ on his son’s ‘fall into the womb of solipsism’ (p. 839), a condition which, as we have seen, is linked by Hal and Dr Rusk to Avril Incandenza’s narcissistic compulsions; meanwhile, James Incandenza and Hal’s older brother, Orin, respectively blame Hal’s condition on Avril’s infidelity and neglectfulness. The film, however, is a catastrophic failure. James Incandenza commits suicide on its completion. Even as a ghost he continues to try to resolve Hal’s initial dilemma, but ends up merely flipping the ‘thinking versus feeling’ equation: by the end of the \textit{fabula},\textsuperscript{52} Hal is like the viewers of his father’s deadly film, rendered so overcome with interior-life-type emotion that he is unable to function in society (pp. 3-17).

During the scene in which Hal’s breakdown finally occurs, it is also suggested that the terrorists have retrieved the Master Copy of \textit{Infinite Jest} and, by widely disseminating it to pleasure-thirsty Americans, are about to succeed in their aim to destroy O.N.A.N. (p. 16). In a further complication, this ‘final’ scene actually comes ‘first’ in the \textit{syuzhet}, and is narrated in the first person by the now fully internalized Hal, thus raising the


\textsuperscript{52} Here I am making use of the formalist distinction between \textit{fabula} (‘the order of events referred to by the narrative’) and \textit{syuzhet} (‘the order of events presented in the narrative discourse’). See Peter Brooks, ‘Narrative and Desire’, in \textit{Narrative Dynamics: Essays on Time, Plot, Closure, and Frames}, ed. by Brian Richardson (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2002), pp. 130-37 (p. 130; italics original).
The possibility that the next thousand or so pages of the novel are no more than our protagonist’s fantastic solipsistic projection. The very form of the novel thereby comes to reproduce that ‘excluded encagement in the self’ (p. 694) that is the constant preoccupation of Wallace’s oeuvre, functioning at once as an irresistible seduction and a potentially lethal trap.

This wholly disastrous outcome to Hal’s narrative, however, has not stopped the majority of ‘Wallace Studies’ critics from citing at length from the author’s many essays and interviews – especially those which suggest the potentially edifying role of fiction in a cynical and uncommunicative postmodern consumer culture⁵³ – in order to claim that the novel ‘does succeed where [James] Incandenza’s art fails’, enabling an ‘exchange between [Wallace] and the reader’ that also opens up ‘the possibility of empathy with others’.⁵⁴ Wallace’s library now promises to further authorize such interpretations, standing both as a ‘shrine’ that contains Valéry’s ‘notes of pure thought’,⁵⁵ and constituting what Joseph Nicholson has called ‘a kind of biographical shadow text’ that might document the ‘intellectual life’ of the writer as ‘played out in the pages of [his] books’.⁵⁶ Indeed, most endorsements of Wallace’s work as part of a ‘New American Canon’ turn on his voracious reading of ‘high’ and ‘low’ texts in order to arrive at a new, popular, and affectively restored writing that has been classified alternately as ‘post-postmodern’,⁵⁷ ‘postironic’,⁵⁸ ‘sentimental posthumanistic’,⁵⁹ and as initiating ‘The New Sincerity’.⁶⁰ However, if the proliferation of fresh-sounding academic classifications reminds us of the jokes that James Incandenza played on his own critics (including ‘après-garde’ and ‘anti-confluential’ cinema, and the yet crueler ‘Found Drama’),⁶¹ then it also draws literary criticism into \( IJ \)’s economy of excess and

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⁵³ Perhaps the most glaring instance of this is in Kelly’s ‘Death’, which critiques the overwhelming tendency of Wallace critics to frame their readings with passages from either the essay ‘E Unibus Pluram’ or the interview with Larry McCaffery, before basing its own conclusions almost entirely on the said interview.

⁵⁴ Boswell, *Understanding*, pp. 170-71; italics original.

⁵⁵ Valéry, *Collected*, p. 18; italics original.


⁶⁰ Kelly, ‘Sincerity’, loc. 2109-2167.

⁶¹ ‘Found Drama’ is supposedly an aesthetic innovation that won Incandenza and his friends several institutional grants, and garnered plenty of attention on the ‘theoretical deadly-serious’ lecture circuit in the U.S. – despite the fact that it never technically existed (‘No see there weren’t any real cartridges or pieces of Found Drama. This was the joke’). Incandenza would tear out a page from the phonebook, stick
consumption. Next to a passage in Wallace’s copy of Lewis Hyde’s *The Gift: Imagination and the Erotic Life of Property* (1983) that apportions blame to the corporatization of universities for ‘a fair amount of the useless material that’s [recently] been published, both as literature and as criticism’, we find a simple drawing of a smiley face in felt tip (see fig. 14).62 Like the ‘best’ marginalia as described by H. J. Jackson, this inscription seems to cut through the actual ‘stereotypes’ of mass-produced print, taking us back almost literally to the body, the facial expression, the persona.63 But we might also recall that the simple imprint of a smiling face is what adorns the masks worn by *IJ*’s terrorists when they are at their destructive worst (*IJ*, pp. 480-89). Accordingly, while Wallace’s death has made him a ‘byword for with-it-ness’,64 ‘an old-fashioned moralist in postmodern disguise all along’,65 and even a ‘therapeutic’ figure whose work ‘verge[s] on the border of self-help’,66 there are still more than a few who suspect him of being, like poor Yorick in the grave, a ‘fellow of infinite jest’.67 The writer’s library now routes this question through those processes by which Wallace has ‘gathered’ cultural materials (‘exogenesis’) and ‘assimilated or absorbed’ them into his text (‘endogenesis’).68 is that smiling marginal note, which seems to stand at the juncture of these two genetic processes, a sign of benign aesthetic mastery, or, to cite one character’s description of Himself’s final film, a hint that the whole endeavour of DFW has been one big joke (*IJ*, p. 940)?

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63 For Jackson’s ‘poetics’ of literary annotation, see *Marginalia*, pp. 204-33.
64 Gallagher, ‘Cobainification’.
67 When asked by an interviewer about Wallace, Harold Bloom remarked: ‘You know, I don’t want to be offensive. But *Infinite Jest* […] is just awful. It seems ridiculous to have to say it. He can’t think, he can’t write. There’s no discernible talent’; ‘Stephen King is Cervantes compared with David Foster Wallace. We have no standards left. He seems to have been a very sincere and troubled person, but that doesn’t mean I have to endure reading him. I even resented the use of the term from Shakespeare, when Hamlet calls the king’s jester Yorick, “a fellow of infinite jest”’. Cited in Lorna Koski, ‘The Full Harold Bloom’, *Women’s Wear Daily Online*, 26 April 2011, <http://www.wwd.com/eye/people/the-full-bloom-3592315?full=true> [accessed 28 November 2015]. It is worth noting that one of *IJ*’s endnotes makes reference to ‘Professor H. Bloom’s turgid studies of artistic influenza’ (pp. 1077n366; italics original).
One way in which this question has tended to be resolved is by looking to the author’s own responses to theories of literary authorship. Soon after H. L. Hix’s discussion of Foucault in *Morte d’Author*, Wallace marks the following summary of Roland Barthes (see fig. 3):

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

*Cool*°°

Let us say that there are two ways in which we might initially deal with this annotated fragment. In the first, we take seriously Barthes’s argument that ‘the modern scriptor is born simultaneously with the text, is in no way equipped with a being preceding or exceeding the writing’: Wallace’s marginal note, ‘cool’, then becomes just another part of the cultural text that is eternally being written ‘here and now’. For instance, the presence of this slangy U.S. descriptor might tell us something about the potential for literary theory to be assimilated into ‘hip’ mainstream or middle-class culture, as a commodity item to be admired, mastered, or otherwise utilized above and beyond the explicitly anti-bourgeois, anti-capitalist, anti-individualist implications of Barthes’s language and analysis. And such a potential gives rise to our second possible approach, in which Wallace’s annotation, by means of its very ‘immediacy’ – its Coleridgean promise of ‘voice’ and ‘character’ – seems to turn on its head Barthes’s own dismissal of the ‘explanation of a work’ through ‘the voice of a single person, the *author* “confiding” in us’. Here in the margins, it would seem, is Wallace himself, that ‘being preceding or exceeding the writing’, *confiding* in us within the quiet confines of his personal library or ‘shrine’: the theoretical notion of the ‘Death of the Author’ is a neat enough idea, Wallace seems to say, but it isn’t one that we should take seriously (as he writes in his eventual review of Hix’s book: ‘For those of us civilians

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71 I engage with this tendency in more detail in Chapter Three.
who know in our gut that writing is an act of communication between one human being and another, the whole question seems sort of arcane’).\(^{73}\)

It is according to this same ‘communicative’ logic, I suggest, that the very fact Wallace read and disagreed with the likes of Barthes has been enough for Kelly to claim that ‘intention is birthed again to co-exist with theory, resulting in fresh forms of critical engagement’; ‘When major writers become willing to engage the discourses of theory itself […] it is impossible not to take notice’\(^{74}\). For Mary K. Holland, meanwhile, Wallace’s entire project can be thought of as a ‘reversal of poststructuralism from within poststructuralism itself’, leading not to any of those textual, formal, and psychic fragmentations she associates with ‘twentieth-century [theoretical] antihumanism’, but rather to a moment of ‘direct’ empathy between the reader and ‘the newly present author’\(^{75}\). As such, before we return to the more specific problem of the ‘genetic’ relationship between popular self-help discourse and Wallace’s oeuvre, the next section will look at how this ‘communicative’ characteristic of marginalia initially promises to resolve any interpretative uncertainties by producing what Frank McFarland might call the ‘whole of Wallace’;\(^{76}\) a figure working ‘in the margins’ of his intertexts, who then functions as a ‘centralising’ principle of coherence to reassure us about the fundamentally benevolent and even potentially curative impulses that lie behind the ambiguities of the literary oeuvre itself.

1.2 W’s Theory of Art? The Library’s Portrait of an Artist

In one of his only annotations on Joyce’s *Stephen Hero* (1944), Wallace underlines the protagonist’s ‘proclam[ation] at the outset that art was the human disposition of intelligible or sensible matter for an esthetic end […]’. In the adjacent margin, he writes ‘S’s (J’s?) Theory of Art’ (see fig. 15).\(^{77}\) This moment in *Hero* comes as part of a passage in which Stephen seeks ‘to establish the relations which must subsist between the literary image, the work of art itself, and that energy which had imagined and fashioned it, that centre of conscious, re-acting, particular life, the artist’:

\(^{73}\) ‘GE’, p. 144.
\(^{74}\) Kelly, ‘Death’.
\(^{76}\) McFarland, ‘Synecdochic’, pp. 77-78.
\(^{77}\) Wallace, in James Joyce, *Stephen Hero* (HRCDFW-L).
The artist, he imagined, standing in the position of mediator between the world of his experience and the world of his dreams – a mediator, consequently gifted with twin faculties, a selective faculty and a reproductive faculty. To equate these faculties was the secret of artistic success: the artist who could disentangle the subtle soul of the image from its mesh of defining circumstances most exactly and re-embbody it in artistic circumstances chosen as the most exact for its new office, he was the supreme artist.  

Here we have a canonical model for what Jameson describes as the modernist ‘Great Work’ being composed by the ‘Great Writer’ (‘Joyce in his rooms in Paris single-handedly produc[ing] a whole world’), which is allegedly then rendered obsolete by postmodernism and ‘the poststructuralist motif of the “death of the subject”’. Postmodernism’s artists, adduces Jameson in 1991, will no longer be grasped as ‘great souls of one kind or another, but rather […] as careers’; gone too is that notion of “charisma” and its accompanying categorical panoply of quaint romantic values such as that of the “genius”. With late capitalism’s putatively ‘universal’ facilitation of socio-historical processes of democratization or ‘plebeianization’ – so the argument goes – who needs a prophet? But Wallace’s gloss on Joyce is also a gloss on this question, albeit one which ‘opens it up’ and complicates its meaning, rather than dutifully providing it with a definitive answer or interpretation.

Stephen positions the artist as a ‘mediator’, a ‘centre of conscious […] life’, whose ‘secret of artistic success’ lies in his ability to ‘disentangle the subtle soul of the image from its mesh of defining circumstances most exactly and re-embbody it in artistic circumstances chosen as the most exact for its new office’. Insofar as this describes an idealized scheme of modernist composition, of the artistic mediations involved in so-called exo- and endogenesis, then the writer’s library might stand as a sort of (concretized and fragmentary) ‘mesh of defining circumstances’ from which the writer has ‘selected’ and ‘reproduced’ the ‘literary image’ in his work of art. Indeed, Oram has even suggested that we can take an author’s books as a ‘physical embodiment’ of that ‘multidimensional space’ described by Barthes as a ‘tissue of quotations drawn from the innumerable centres of culture’. Although this manoeuvre, like Wallace’s

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78 James Joyce, Stephen Hero: Part of the first draft of ‘Portrait of an Artist as a Young Man’, ed. by Theodore Spencer (London: Cape, 1956; orig. published 1944), p. 82.
79 Jameson, Postmodernism, pp. 305-07.
80 Jameson, Postmodernism, p. 306; italics original.
81 Jameson, Postmodernism, p. 306.
copy of Hix, appropriates and re-writes the theoretical ‘Death of the Author’ as the ‘death of an author’ – while also overriding Barthes’s notion of ‘textuality’ with a host of hard material ‘facts’ – it nonetheless demonstrates the potential of the writer’s library to place even literary theory into that mesh of ‘intelligible or sensible matter’ to be disposed ‘for an esthetic end’. Wallace then becomes the ‘supreme artist’, for whom theory, whether ‘cool’ or ‘gobbledegook’, is only more raw material towards the eventual literary act of ‘straightforward human communication’, whether ‘sincere’ or ‘postironic’.84

Meanwhile, if we follow Nicholson’s notion of the writer’s library as a ‘biographical shadow text’, then Wallace’s copy of Hero forms part of his own ‘Portrait of an Artist’ – one which, however, depicts not the formation of a ‘great soul’, but rather the belated cultivation of a ‘career’ in the margins of that initial formation. With Jameson’s modern/postmodern framework in mind, this would suggest that Wallace now could see the ‘objective possibility’ of ‘turning himself into the greatest novelist of the age’, by following ‘strategies of a well-nigh military character based on superiority of technique and terrain […] a shrewd maximization of one’s own specific and idiosyncratic resources’.85 A similar transition is at the core of Mark McGurl’s study The Program Era, which charts the post-45 expansion in the U.S. university of an institutional system of artistic patronage (or ‘Creative Economy’) which, in its massive ‘pursuit of the new’, bears as much resemblance to ‘R & D’ as it does to literary experimentalism.86 Wallace himself has often been depicted as ‘a Program Man if ever there was one’,87 ‘a creature of the school’ who was ‘barely able to function’ outside of the university, while standing at the same time as ‘an exemplar of U.S. education, a hyperthroidal instance of what creative writers have the potential to become during the program era’.88 He is also exemplary, then, of that central contradiction outlined by McGurl’s analysis of Creative Writing, which sees authors removed from the mainstream of ‘everyday life’ while systematizing Stephen’s scene of literary invention.

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83 For a discussion of this term, see Roland Barthes, ‘From Work to Text’, in Image – Music – Text, pp. 155-64.
85 Jameson, Postmodernism, p. 306.
as but one part of an ‘assembly line’. As I noted above, critics have thus far been utterly unable to write Wallace’s oeuvre ‘out’ of a host of parallel high/low contradictions, except by taking several of the author’s non-fictional texts as ‘manifestoes’, and then extracting a series of relevant statements on the topic of ‘what comes next’ for the generations ‘after postmodernism’ against which the fiction can then safely be judged. However, if the author’s library acts as yet another non-fictional text – one which, indeed, seems to take us closer than ever to the mind and body of ‘the man Himself’ (II, p. 29) – it gives us no corresponding opportunity to happily underline something like ‘W’s Theory of Art’, still less to somehow ‘make author a person’.

For, as attested to by the question mark that we find in the middle of Wallace’s annotation on Hero, to make ‘S = J’ requires the same sort of simplification as it does to see Joyce’s novel as the ‘esthetic end’ of the ‘supreme artistry’ that it describes, or to really envisage that the early 1900s was ‘still a time of giants and legendary powers no longer available to us’. Wallace’s gloss on Joyce effectively textualizes the historical processes that have intervened between the periods conventionally known as ‘modernist’ and ‘postmodernist’, but it also spatializes them, and as such allows the latter to overwrite the former, while also overwriting Stephen’s dilemma as now a problem of what the ‘supreme artist’ and his ‘mesh of defining circumstances’ might mean with today’s inverted placement of ‘creation’ on the ‘assembly line’, wherein the resurgent category of the ‘genius’ has, in Wallace’s case, become indissolubly linked to his status as ‘ordinary’. Furthermore, by specially ‘selecting’ or ‘disentangling’ Stephen’s proclamations on literary composition, the marginalia make the strange notion of an author’s ‘Theory of Art’ into an object of fascination or appropriation, a possibility buried in the deep history that modernism has come to represent after at

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90 For two prominent examples, see Boswell, Understanding, and Holland, Succeeding.
91 As Wallace writes near the citation of Gass, in Hix’s Morte, that serves as an epigraph to this chapter: ‘H will say these guys [like Gass] all make “author” a person. Hix will expand “author” to take in writing text, and reading. So what’s the point?’; see Hix, Morte (HRCDFW-L).
93 Jameson, Postmodernism, p. 305.
least three ‘generations’ of U.S. postmodernism;\(^{94}\) the young artist’s proclamation is
turned into an ‘allusion’, an intertext, and the ‘subtle soul’ of the literary image
becomes that of the ‘literary image’ itself. If *Hero* has become part of a narrative
whereby Joyce himself transforms from the ‘sickly, stiffnecked, introspective aesthete’
of *Portrait of an Artist as a Young Man*, into the great artist whose later works will
‘fully realize’ his oeuvre as ‘an indivisible aesthetic whole’,\(^{95}\) then Wallace’s library
does indeed produce a ‘biographical shadow text’ – one which mourns the very
possibility of such an ‘aesthetic realization’, and in so doing, realizes the possible
meaning of Wallace’s own ‘greatness’ (that is to say, the appeal of Wallace’s work
seems, paradoxically, to be bound up with its nostalgic or mournful attachment to the
kinds of artistic and personal ‘wholeness’ that are apparently no longer possible in
postmodernism).

However, before we look more closely at Wallace’s ‘shadow text’, we might
note that the critical reception of James Incandenza’s films is similarly invested in the
notion of the artist’s ‘life’ or ‘career’. *IJ* maps this latter as a sort of embedded
*Künstlerroman*, starting from the ‘early Himself [who] hadn’t wanted skilled or
believable acting to get in the way of the abstract ideas and technical innovations’ in his
films, to the ‘late’ Himself who ‘in his last several projects [had] been so desperate to
make something that ordinary U.S. audiences might find entertaining and diverting and
conducive to self-forgetting that he had professionals and amateurs alike emoting
wildly all over the place’ (p. 944). Crucially, this development from technical
abstraction to ordinary emotion is hinged upon the event of Incandenza’s suicide. Hal
tells us that by the time the credits roll at the end of *Accomplice!*, one of Incandenza’s
latest and most disturbing pieces (pp. 945–46), the ‘real tension becomes the question’:

Did Himself subject us to 500 seconds of the repeated cry ‘Murderer!’ for some reason,
i.e. is the puzzlement and then boredom and then impatience and then excruciation and
then near-rage aroused in the film’s audience by the static repetitive final 1/3 of the
film aroused for some theoretical-aesthetic end, or is Himself simply an amazingly
shitty editor of his own stuff?

It was only after Himself’s death that critics and theorists started to treat this
question as potentially important. A woman at U. Cal-Irvine had earned tenure with an

\(^{94}\) For a summary of U.S. postmodernism in literature, see Brian McHale, ‘Postmodernism and
experiment’, in *The Routledge Companion to Experimental Literature*, ed. by Joe Bray, Alison Gibbons,

essay arguing that the reason-versus-no-reason debate about what was unentertaining in Himself’s work illuminated the central conundrum of millennial après-garde film, most of which […] involved the question why so much aesthetically ambitious film was so boring and why so much shitty reductive commercial entertainment was so much fun. The essay was turgid to the point of being unreadable, besides using reference as a verb and pluralizing conundrum as conundra. (pp. 946-47; italics original)

Here, any analysis of the actual content of the film is superseded by debate over the presence or absence of the ‘theory of art’ that lies behind it, a question which is itself raised by Incandenza’s suicide; the very irresolvability of this debate is in turn the occasion for ‘[a] woman’ to write her lofty, inaccessible essay and earn tenure; while, finally, we see these same questions returned upon Wallace’s own text. Even before its publication in ’96, a substantial marketing campaign had made IJ the ‘Big New Thing’ on the East Coast, but such hype was mitigated by a set of ambivalent, if not straightforwardly baffled, reviews. Anne Marie Donahue said it was both ‘brilliant’ and a ‘big fat mess’. For Sven Birkerts, the novel was ‘resourceful, hilarious, intelligent, and unique’, but also ‘confusing […] and maddening in myriad ways’. Dan Cryer wrote that the book ‘coheres into something unmistakably, brilliantly new’, and yet remains ‘disappointingly inconclusive’. Meanwhile Michiko Kakutani judged IJ to be ‘compulsively entertaining’ and ‘funny and affecting’, and at the same time ‘arbitrary and self-important’, ‘an excuse for Mr. Wallace to simply show off his remarkable skills as a writer and empty the contents of his restless mind’; Kakutani is joined by James Wood in deeming that the novel, as with Wallace’s oeuvre in general, is ‘sorely in need of some editing’. And Wood concludes that Wallace is ‘talented, frustrating,

96 See Max, Ghost, p. 211.
and finally intolerable’ because, in ‘render[ing] a world from which the human has been all but evacuated’, ‘he never moves us’.102

It is of some interest, then, that Wallace’s death has focused the interpretation of his work on matters of sincerity and ordinariness, while making it seemingly inseparable from a Künstlerroman that resembles Incandenza’s. We find in Max’s bestselling biography one of a succession of accounts which now confidently trace Wallace’s ‘artistic maturation’: from the initially solipsistic and cerebral figure of The Broom of the System and Girl With Curious Hair, through the ‘turning point’ of IJ, and into the sort of ill-fated moral or spiritual leader who preaches ‘attention and awareness and discipline’ in the 2005 Kenyon College commencement speech (published posthumously as This Is Water), before finally abandoning hope while writing The Pale King.103 As Finnegan’s Wake and Ulysses need a ‘maturing’ Joyce behind them in order to be accounted for, so films such as Infinite Jest and Accomplice! need the tragic Incandenza; and we now see, as per his marginalia on Miller, Bradshaw, and Joyce, that in Wallace’s case the two ‘explanatory’ narratives (artistic development and personal tragedy) are brought into tension. The marginal notation can thus be understood here to be playing its normative historical role: not quite ‘serious’ enough to be part of the oeuvre, it can nonetheless be quietly called upon to resolve moments of critical difficulty as a kind of legitimizing authorial or personal ‘trace’.

However, marginalia’s explanatory function becomes simultaneously more necessary and less tenable when, not only are we unsure whether the excesses and frustrations of IJ denote Wallace’s ‘amazingly shitty’ editing or serve ‘some theoretical-aesthetic end’, but the text itself has already pinpointed and satirized the pertinence of such an opposition in advance. For its strongest critics, we recall, Wallace’s work is ‘intolerable’ because it resembles the contents of his ‘emptied mind’ – to use Hero’s terms, it is a ‘mesh of defining circumstances’ without the artistic mediation. On the other hand, those critics who praise Wallace’s work do so because that ‘mesh’ has apparently become indistinguishable from the mediation – Stephen J. Burn describes Wallace as ‘arguably the most intellectually gifted writer of his generation’, before claiming that IJ:

102 Wood, ‘Digressionist’.
103 Max, Ghost. See also Scott, ‘Generation’; Nazaryan, ‘Turbulent’.
offers an encyclopaedic distillation of the twentieth century […] [which] strives to use its erudite allusions to span outwards […] to trace Wallace’s genealogy as a writer, to remind the reader of human connection, and to dramatize the way reading shapes behaviour.¹⁰⁴

Working as a posthumous materialization or ‘repository’ of such reading, erudition, and writerly genealogy, Wallace’s book collection thus promises to reveal what kind of relation really subsists between the ‘secret[s] of [his] artistic success’ and his personal tragedy – or, to cite Jacqueline Muñoz, the rare book specialist who catalogued Wallace’s library, we might now hope for the author’s ‘ample and personally revealing margin notes’ to finally ‘provide some answers’.¹⁰⁵

To be sure, the library abounds with examples that would suggest a fairly straightforward equivalence between the personal and the aesthetic. Take the following from Wallace’s copy of Hazard Adams’s compendium, Critical Theory Since Plato (1971):

(Plato, extracted in Hazard) [That there are three arts which are concerned with all things: ones which uses, another which makes, a third which imitates them?]

Yes.

And the excellence and beauty and rightness of every structure, animate or inanimate, and of every action of man, is relative solely to the use for which nature or the artist has intended them.

True.

‘Goodness’ of work dependent on use artist has put them to.

(Longinus, extracted in Hazard) [First, then, it is absolutely necessary to indicate the source of this elevation, namely, that the truly eloquent must be free from low and ignoble thoughts.] For it is not possible that men with mean and servile ideas and aims prevailing throughout their lives should produce anything that is admirable and worthy of immortality. Great accents we expect to fall from the lips of those whose thoughts are deep and grave.

- Worth of poem - worth of poet as person.¹⁰⁶

Although only the first few sections of Adams’s book have been annotated, Wallace’s initials are scrawled across the reverse spine as if to emphasize this continuity between the worth of literature and the ‘worth of poet as person’ (see fig. 16). Meanwhile, in Hyde’s Gift, Wallace marks the following discussion of T. S. Eliot’s poetry:

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¹⁰⁴ Burn, Guide, p. 75.
(Hyde) Feeling and spirit mysteriously drain away when the imagination tries to embody them in commodities. Certainly this is part of the melancholy in those poems of Eliot’s in which men and women are surrounded by coffee spoons and cigarettes but cannot speak to one another. […] The imagination senses that packs of cigarettes or cafeteria trays are not emanations of eros. Some spirit other than the creative spirit attended to their manufacture.

**Image, object in commodity culture**

This gives us an alternative view on the scene of modernist composition, here more associated with abstraction and commodification than any of Stephen Hero’s ‘supreme artistry’; whereas the latter imagines the artist as a ‘centre of conscious […] life’, Hyde claims that modernist poetry is founded almost entirely upon the predomination of the artist’s ‘will’:

(Hyde) For when the will dominates, there is no gap through which grace may enter […] and for an artist, no moment of receptiveness when the engendering images may come forward.

(Hyde) An essential portion of any artist’s labour is not creation so much as invocation. Part of the work cannot be made, it must be received; and we cannot have this gift except, perhaps, by supplication, by courting, by creating within ourselves that ‘begging bowl’ to which the gift is drawn.

If Wallace’s marginalia here signify an instance of such ‘supplication’ – the writer reading for ideas – they nonetheless remind us of that same figure whose traces of handwriting have become yet more ‘images and objects in commodity culture’.

Wallace’s library repeatedly figures this oscillation between personal ‘improvement’ and authorly accomplishment. Bonnie Friedman’s *Writing Past Dark: Envy, Fear, Distraction, and Other Dilemmas in the Writer’s Life* (1993) advises that personal ‘disorders’, such as perfectionism (in some cases again linked to upbringing and the mother), are always standing in the way of artistic success:

(Friedman) A writer’s concentration is not only like mercy, it is mercy, mercy toward oneself. It is allowing imperfection. It is allowing mess. Even what stinks must be allowed into one’s heaven. Even what has been considered paltry, contemptible, must have its place. Bar the lowly, and no one worthwhile will enter.

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Meanwhile, in Kit Reed’s *Story First: The Writer As Insider* (1982), the quality of an author’s work is wholly dependent upon the quality of their ‘true’ or ‘natural’ self (see fig. 17):

(Reed) Novelist Paul Horgan says literary style is metabolic, as much a part of the writer as his adrenaline level or his pulse rate, and I think he is right. […] It may take a beginning writer years to discover his own style, some never do, but I believe it is potentially there from the beginning. […] It’s what it sounds like inside your head, and that is an amalgam of everything you’ve read and the ways you think [...].

(Reed) As you work, each choice along the way opens a new avenue of choices, and each of these choices is individual because you are an individual.

These texts sit in Wallace’s collection alongside the likes of Tolstoy’s *What is Art?* (1897) and John Gardner’s *On Moral Fiction* (1978), where the focus on ‘true feelings’ and individuality takes on a ‘higher’ register (see figs 18-19):

(Tolstoy) And it is upon this capacity of man to receive another man’s expression of feeling and experience those feelings himself, that the activity of art is based.

(Tolstoy) *Art as Empathy*

(Gardner) True art is a conduit between body and soul, between feeling unabstracted and abstraction unfelt.

(Gardner) Structuralists, formalists, linguistic philosophers who tell us that works of art are like trees – simply objects of perception – all avoid on principle the humanistic questions: who will this work of art help? what baby is it squashing?

- Because this is always implicit, or else historical, asshole. this is fascism

This final outburst against Gardner functions much like the smiling face that we had earlier seen in Hyde, or the question mark in ‘S’s (J’s?) Theory of Art’: while the library’s mesh of such ‘disentangled’ fragments can seem to show Wallace somehow transcending the ‘reason-versus-no-reason debate’, the implicit questions of history, identification, and perspective constantly threaten to emerge like a note in the margin. Do Wallace’s marginalia finally uncover the ‘reasons’ for his work, or do they merely prolong a tired postmodern debate? For Burn, Kelly, and Boswell, the ‘humanistic question’ of Wallace himself seems to overcome these former, as they read both his fictional and non-fictional work (with Tolstoy) ‘to receive another man’s expression of feeling and experience those feelings [themselves]’. Lee Konstantinou even locates Wallace’s ‘genius’ in his ‘narrowness of focus’, his inability to think outside of an

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American kind of ‘averageness’ that ‘he frequently, anxiously described as highly educated, straight, white, and male’; Wallace’s value is here reinvested in a paradoxical ability to see what he cannot see.\textsuperscript{112} For Wood, on the other hand, such an apparently ‘narrow’ aesthetic bespeaks the ‘curious form of autism’ that constitutes ‘Wallace’s own numbing pedantry of style’;\textsuperscript{113} for Kakutani it is merely a mark of ‘self-indulgence’,\textsuperscript{114} in line with what Hyde laments as the predomination of the artistic ‘will’. We begin to realize here that judgements of Wallace’s work, whether positive or negative, so often depend upon his worth as a person that it seems as though Stephen’s maxim has been flipped (with art now as the ‘aesthetic disposition of intelligible or sensible matter for a human end’).

Let us unpack this logic for a moment. The critical debate over the value of \textit{IJ} as a work of art is not only sustained by its trenchant undecidability (are certain passages shit for good reason or just shit?),\textsuperscript{115} but this undecidability is already comically posited in advance by \textit{IJ}. As a result, critics have had to base their judgements on the perceived presence or absence of a ‘theory of art’ operating ‘in the margins’ of the work, which leads us more or less directly to personal judgements about the individual called ‘Wallace’ (as Samuel Cohen contends, it would not be possible to ‘fully understand \textit{Infinite Jest} without reckoning in what Wallace was feeling and thinking about writing and about himself as a writer at the time he wrote it’).\textsuperscript{116} We might therefore go to the library in search of certain authorly marginalia and annotated passages that will reveal Wallace’s ‘true character’ as something ‘metabolic’, something which was ‘potentially there from the beginning’.\textsuperscript{117} But this critical manoeuvre has \textit{also} already been anticipated by \textit{IJ}, via the narrative of the suicidal artist James ‘the man Himself’ Incandenza. As such, although the multitude of rare and heavily annotated artefacts in the library in Austin initially appear to be the closest things that we have to the ‘life of the writer’, a Joycean portrait of the artist’s feelings and thoughts, the experience of working through them becomes somewhat more

\textsuperscript{112} Konstantinou, ‘World’, pp. 67-68.
\textsuperscript{113} Wood, ‘Digressionist’.
\textsuperscript{114} Kakutani, ‘Musings’.
\textsuperscript{115} The conjunction of ‘shit’ and ‘art’ is also a major theme in Wallace’s novella, ‘The Suffering Channel’, which I look at in the Conclusion.
\textsuperscript{116} Samuel Cohen, ‘To Wish to Try to Sing to the Next Generation: \textit{Infinite Jest}’s History’, in \textit{Legacy}, pp. 59-79 (p. 59, pp. 64-68).
\textsuperscript{117} Wallace, in Reed, \textit{Insider} (HRCDFW-L).
reminiscent of ‘those texts that, whether by fragmentation and imperfection or by a
dizzying multiplication of presences on the page, somehow evade form and
reification’ – which, incidentally, is also Jameson’s description of *IJ* in 2008. As we
have seen, even in the relatively tiny sample of Wallace’s annotated books that we have
thus far been able to examine in this chapter, the recurrent themes of empathy,
individuality, naturalness, and so on, take on their own ‘dizzying’ form of
fragmentation and multiplicity that the presence of authorly marginalia is also utterly
unable to unify (unless, of course, we decide on an image of Wallace as either autistic
or a visionary, and stick to it). The experience of reading the library is therefore
analogous to that of reading the novel: the centre (text) needs the margin (author) as a
supplement in order to cohere, and yet their mutual implication threatens to undo this
opposition altogether.

Earlier in this chapter, however, I suggested that the Ransom Centre’s lucrative,
high-profile archivization of Wallace’s manuscripts and personal library – and, in
particular, the subsequent controversy surrounding Wallace’s self-help marginalia –
points towards a broader form of ideological investment that seems to belie any
overriding notion of uncontrollable postmodern ‘fragmentation’. Although, for
Jameson, *IJ* is exemplary of those postmodern cultural products that ‘transcend the old
opposition between a work and its criticism or interpretation that held for an aesthetic
committed to the concept of the work in general, and to the security of closure and of
reified form’, we can see in the apparently secure enclosure of DFW ‘Himself’ in
Austin a kind of mournful nostalgia for the idea of the ‘supreme artist’, and of the
masterwork, that simultaneously acts as their continuation in reality. This requires us
to see that the process of postmodern fragmentation, described by Jameson as ‘the end
of the bourgeois ego, or monad’, is simultaneously a reinforcement or rejuvenation
of that ego and its psychopathologies. And it requires us also to see that *IJ* emerges not
so much from Stephen Hero’s ‘secret of artistic success’ – the fine mediation between

120 While I will come to the specific question of mourning in the following section, the kind of dynamic
that I am identifying here might be also thought of in terms of Svetlana Boym’s notion of ‘restorative
nostalgia’, a national and religious construction which responds to some perceived loss of ‘truth and
tradition’ by seeking to protect or recreate it ever more stridently in the present; see The Future of
121 Jameson, Postmodernism, p. 15.
the everyday and the aesthetic – as from a historical present in which those categories’ much-remarked collapse has itself become a cliché that conceals their continuing distinction in reality.

The following section will return to the specific significance of ‘self-help’ discourse in relation to these questions. As we saw in the opening pages of this chapter, a range of pop-therapeutic texts annotated by Wallace seem to centre on the notion of a ‘true’ or ‘inner’ self that has only been reinforced by the Ransom Centre’s subsequent censorship of the texts in question. I will now contend that this notion is deeply but ambiguously entrenched in Wallace’s oeuvre, which seems simultaneously to entreat and to warn against the resolution of interpretative difficulty via a gesture of straightforward identification with the figure of the author.

1.3 ‘Not another word’: Origins, Identification, Mourning

It is not without irony that, in the end, visitors to the library are placed into the position of one of Wallace’s several characters called ‘Wallace’ – the narrator of the short story ‘Good Old Neon’ – as he attempts to empathise with the failure of the suicidal protagonist, Neal, to become ‘an even marginally normal or acceptable U.S. male’:

> With David Wallace also fully aware that the cliché that you can’t ever truly know what’s going on inside somebody else is hoary and insipid and yet at the same time trying very consciously to prohibit that awareness from mocking the attempt or sending the whole line of thought into the sort of inbent spiral that keeps you from ever getting anywhere […], the realer, more enduring and sentimental part of him commanding that other part to be silent as if looking it levelly in the eye and saying, almost aloud, ‘Not another word’. (p. 181)

As ‘Wallace’ tries to ‘reconcile what this luminous guy had seemed like from the outside with whatever on the interior must have driven him to kill himself’ (p. 181), so Wallace’s readers can now turn to his marginalia for similar answers. Take, for example, the following underlined passage in Wallace’s copy of Richard Rohr’s *Everything Belongs: The Gift of Contemplative Prayer* (1999):

> (Rohr) We are all on overload and understandably confused and conflicted. This prompts many to move ‘over and out’ into dogmatism, skepticism, or psychic
numbness. We desperately need some disciplines to help us know how to see and what is worth seeing, and what we don’t need to see.\textsuperscript{122}

A few pages later, Wallace writes in the top margin: ‘Discipline = Acceptance of Pain’.\textsuperscript{123} This generic self-help conjunction between self-discipline and ‘worthwhile’ feeling is frequently marked by Wallace, whether in the form of Paramananda’s \textit{Change Your Mind: Practical Guide to Buddhist Meditation} (1996) – ‘It is simply a matter of being aware of oneself in a deeper and deeper way. That is all we need to do’ – or Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi’s \textit{Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience} (1990), which claims to help its reader to ‘learn to achieve mastery over consciousness itself’.\textsuperscript{124} As is announced on the front cover of Wallace’s copy of Theodore Isaac Rubin’s \textit{Compassion and Self-Hate: An Alternative to Despair} (1975), ‘You don’t have to be perfect! Start liking yourself today!’:\textsuperscript{125} the typical manoeuvre of such pop-therapeutic discourse is to turn its own apparent status as ‘hoary and insipid’ cliché (‘GON’, p. 181) into a problem with the reader’s ‘perfectionism’ or ‘over-intellection’, which it then paradoxically promises to replace with an alleviative level of mental and emotional autonomy. Incidentally, we might recognize this gesture from \textit{This Is Water}, the commencement speech that was published in the year after Wallace’s death (‘This, like many clichés, so lame and unexciting on the surface, actually expresses a great and terrible truth’; \textit{T IW}, p. 55).

However, if Wallace’s ‘great and terrible truth’ also looks suspiciously like a description of ‘the numbing effects of normative white middle-class life’ (to cite Ann Cvetkovich’s reading of \textit{Water}),\textsuperscript{126} then it shares the ideological perspective of a contemporary self-help discourse that frequently ‘mirrors and reinforces a dominant Christian-inflected discourse in the United States about morality, the law, and family’.\textsuperscript{127} As Marilynn Ivy has argued, the hypothesized ‘ideal’ of such therapeutic narratives is the white, middle-class subject, who overcomes a range of increasingly widespread U.S. anxieties in the late 1980s and early 1990s (around child abuse, drug

\textsuperscript{122} Wallace, in Rohr, \textit{Everything} (HRCDFW-L).
\textsuperscript{123} Wallace, in Rohr, \textit{Everything} (HRCDFW-L).
\textsuperscript{124} Wallace, in Paramananda, \textit{Meditation}; and Csikszentmihalyi, \textit{Flow} (HRCDFW-L). The Paramananda citation here is from a longer passage that Wallace has placed in brackets.
\textsuperscript{125} Rubin, \textit{Compassion and Self-Hate} (HRCDFW-L).
\textsuperscript{126} Cvetkovich, \textit{Depression}, p. 207.
addiction, the breakdown of ‘family values’) by maturing into a ‘fully functional, nonaddicted’ member of the vital co-constitutive units of family and society. This, we might say, is the ‘even marginally normal or acceptable U.S. male’ that Neal fails to become, which has its analogues also in Alice Miller’s idealized notions of ‘ordinariness’ and ‘averageness’ (constituted by a so-called ‘Lost World of Feelings’), as well as Hal Incandenza’s inability to experience ‘bona fide intensity-of-interior-life-type emotion’ (or, finally, to function in everyday life at all).

‘GON’ is a painstaking dramatization of this dilemma: a generalized (or ‘bourgeois’) psychic entrapment within a cycle of ‘diagnosis’ and ‘cure’ that is not only recognizably ideological and discursive, but also subject to the assimilatory logic of late capitalist cultural production. At the beginning of the story, the avowedly ‘fraudulent’ Neal himself cycles through a host of potentially therapeutic exercises in order to find out ‘who I really was inside’ – ‘hypnosis, cocaine, sacro-cervical chiropractic, joining a charismatic church, jogging, pro bono work for the Ad Council, meditation classes, the Masons’, and so on – before finally trying psychoanalysis (pp. 141-43). While it does not take long for Neal to decide that Dr Gustafson is an ‘idiot, or at least very limited in his insights into what was really going on with people’, he is nonetheless struck, a little later in his treatment, by Gustafson’s claims ‘that there were really only two basic, fundamental orientations a person could have toward the world, (1) love and (2) fear, and that they couldn’t co-exist’, and, further, ‘that one of the worst things about the conception of competitive, achievement-oriented masculinity that America supposedly hardwired into its males was that it caused a more or less constant state of fear that made genuine love next to impossible’ (p. 158, pp. 164-65).

In that ‘being unable to really love was at least a different model or lens through which to see the problem’, Neal initially feels ‘some of the first genuine hope I’d had since the early, self-deluded part of the experiment with Naperville’s Church of the Flaming Sword of the Redeemer’ (p. 166); and yet, just weeks later, he will hear a throwaway line spoken by one of the therapist characters during a late night rerun of Cheers (“If I have one more yuppie come in and start whining to me about how he can’t love, I’m going to throw up’”), realize that even the audience on this now-syndicated sitcom

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129 Bustillos tells us that Wallace marked this phrase in his copy of Miller; see ‘Self-Help Library’. 
‘recognized what a cliché and melodramatic complaint the inability-to-love concept was’, and then drive his car at high speed into a concrete bridge abutment (pp. 168-79). If Wallace’s library seems to offer a privileged insight into who he ‘really was inside’, then it does so strictly within this pattern of hope and self-delusion, whereby a procession of ‘different models through which to see the problem’ are eventually, and fatally, recognized as so many clichés (Wallace then looks ‘like almost everybody else then in their late twenties who’d made some money or had a family or whatever they thought they wanted and still didn’t feel that they were happy’; p. 142). Take, for example, Gustafson’s ‘basic operating premises’ on love, fear, and masculinity which now read, in light of the library, like a sort of ‘syndication’ or ‘rerun’ of annotated passages from Wallace’s copies of Rohr’s *Everything Belongs*, Susan Faludi’s *Stiffed: The Betrayal of the American Man* (1999), and Hyde’s *The Gift* (see figs 20-21):

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

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

(Hyde) [In a modern, industrial nation, the ability to act without relationship is still a mark of the masculine gender; boys can still become men, and men become more manly, by entering into the marketplace and dealing in commodities. A woman can do the same thing if she wants to, of course, but it will not make her feminine.]130

My aim here is not so much to consolidate these often generically and politically diverse discourses under the same broad heading of (‘bad’) self-help, as to emphasize their steadily homogenizing assimilation into a popular discourse of diagnosis/cure – or self-ignorance/self-revelation – that develops largely in accordance with its commercial appeal (the ‘true self’ in this instance is the one that ‘sells’, from self-help manuals to *Cheers* and even to therapeutic practice itself). We can also then begin to read the library’s repeated (and repeatedly unfulfilled) structural promise to unveil the ‘secrets’ of Wallace’s oeuvre in line with Slavoj Žižek’s contention that ‘the “secret” to be unveiled through analysis is not the content hidden by the form (the form of commodities, the form of dreams) but, on the contrary, the “secret” of this form

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itself':\textsuperscript{131} it is through the relentless consumption of redemptive narratives of ‘ordinary’ selfhood that the very notion of ordinariness assumes its ideological and reproductive power.

When the story’s protagonist and narrator is later shown, ‘deep down’, to have been all along the metadiegetic projection of Neal’s former classmate, the aforementioned ‘David Wallace’, a diegetic narrator who has recently heard news of Neal’s suicide (p. 141, pp. 178-81),\textsuperscript{132} it initially seems that ‘GON’ will offer a metafictional resolution to the problem of ‘who [Neal] really was inside’. However, while critics have tended to read ‘Wallace’’s climactic attempt to empathize with Neal as establishing a ‘cerebral route to emotional impact’,\textsuperscript{133} or even as a ‘straightening out’ of postmodern recursivity,\textsuperscript{134} Wallace’s library recasts this as yet another oscillation between ‘hope’ and ‘self-delusion’. That is, if ‘Wallace’ is only able to mourn for Neal by ‘trying very consciously to prohibit’ his own self-critical thought processes, then the library by definition overrides that final command for ‘Not another word’ (p. 181) – and ‘Wallace’’s ‘sentimental’ denial of self-awareness suddenly looks much like the stuff of contemporary fridge-magnet wisdom (see fig. 22):

(Bradshaw) Intellectuals create the most grandiose denials!

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

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

\textsuperscript{131}Žižek is here outlining what he sees as ‘the fundamental homology between the interpretative procedure of Marx and Freud – more precisely, between their analysis of commodity and of dreams. In both cases the point is to avoid the properly fetishistic fascination of the “content” supposedly hidden behind the form […], in order instead to attempt to discern ‘why [the dream-thoughts were] transposed into the form of a dream’, and ‘why [labour] can affirm its social character only in the commodity-form of its product’; see The Sublime Object of Ideology (London: Verso, 1989), pp. 3-4; italics original.

\textsuperscript{132}I am following Gérard Genette’s differentiation between ‘narrative levels’: ‘any event a narrative recounts is at a diegetic level immediately higher than the level at which the narrating act producing this narrative is placed’. See Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method, trans. by Jane E. Lewin (New York: Cornell University Press, 1983), pp. 227-34; italics original.

\textsuperscript{133}Burn, Guide, p. 83.

\textsuperscript{134}Nicoline Timmer, Do You Feel It Too? The Post-postmodern Syndrome in American Fiction at the Turn of the Millennium (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2010), pp. 114-15; italics original.
I am not thereby suggesting that a simple nod towards a few annotated intertexts will somehow defuse this story’s potential for ‘emotional impact’, or abate its ‘uncompromising difficulty’. Rather, I would argue that the underlinings in Wallace’s library actually serve to emphasize the force of disavowal that must be enacted by the determinedly empathetic ‘Wallace’ at the end of ‘GON’, while drawing attention in turn to the historically and politically specific conditions of their own identificatory appeal as traces, however slight, of the ‘realer, more enduring and sentimental part’ of Wallace himself (p. 181). In other words, just as ‘Wallace’ desperately attempts to take a recognizably discursive construct (Neal) as somehow ‘realer’ or more ‘sincere’ than that recognition in itself, the text of ‘GON’ alerts us to the similar quandaries that will be involved in any attempt to finally locate the ‘real’ version of Wallace in his personal library and marginalia.

We might note, furthermore, that ‘GON’ portrays this process of determined identification as a particularly self-reflexive form of mourning: by reflecting on a photograph of the recently-deceased Neal from his old yearbook, ‘Wallace’ conjures up a remarkably intricate, forty-page narrative about the inner life of a (white, male, middle-class) individual he barely even knew, and who must, therefore, represent something like a fantastic projection of himself. In this sense, ‘GON’ is not simply a classic example of a ‘melodrama of beset white manhood’, but it also reiterates the logic of what Lauren Berlant calls ‘national sentimentality’: by making a figure of wounded innocence (e.g. Neal, the white male) available for mass ideological investment (mourning, identification with pain, ‘universal true feeling’), national sentimentality masks the broader structural conditions of exploitation in the manner of an ‘ethically uncontestable legitimating device’ (and, consequently, it also ‘promotes and maintains the hegemony of the national identity form’). Wallacea’s own death

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135 For the Bradshaw and Miller annotations, see Bustillos, ‘Self-Help Library’. See also Wallace, in Rohr, Everything; Csikszentmihalyi, Flow (HRCDW-L).
137 Fitzpatrick, Obsolescence, p. 233.
138 Berlant, ‘Feeling’, pp. 49-59. For a related argument see Banner, “‘Shit’”. I critique some of Berlant’s more recent arguments in Chapter Three.
now seems to function as an even more effective instance of this dynamic, with marginalia playing their typically facilitative role in the work of mourning, and the tragic figure of Wallace himself standing, like Neal, as a sort of ‘proleptic shield’ against the insensitivities of critique (‘not another word’). However, by placing the oeuvre’s central emphasis on ideas of the ‘true’ or ‘inner’ self alongside the ‘dizzying multiplication’ of such notions that occurs in the margins of Wallace’s personal library, the present chapter has sought to reformulate the apparently ‘uncontestable’ appeals of identification as instead a properly critical and political problem of interpretation. In order to address the wider familial and national problematics that are implicit in this centre/margin dynamic, we can now finally return to the intersection of Wallace’s self-help marginalia with the suicide of James Incandenza in *IJ*, and the doomed *Bildungsroman* of his son, Hal.

We have already seen some of the parallels that exist between Hal and the abjected figures of U.S. self-help discourse, such as Alice Miller’s ‘gifted child’, or John Bradshaw’s ‘dysfunctional’ adults. As with Neal in ‘GON’, Hal’s passage into a functional adult life in the contemporary U.S. is initially blocked by an excess of thinking (the manipulation of ‘so many variables in rarefied equations’) at the expense of feeling (‘intensity-of-interior-life-type emotion’; *IJ*, p. 694); and, as again with the self-help narratives, Hal’s problems with addiction and emotional withdrawal are traced back to the role of a narcissistic mother. The eponymous film that is produced by Hal’s father, Himself, is initially intended as a therapeutic solution to this problem, one which will potentially allow Hal to resolve the thinking versus feeling equation; as Incandenza puts it, the film is his attempt to ‘simply converse’ with Hal, a ‘magically entertaining toy to dangle at the infant still somewhere alive in the boy […]. To bring him “out of himself”, as they say’ (pp. 838–39; italics original). However, while critics have tended to read Incandenza’s magnum opus as either an ‘interpretive aporia’ of ‘impossible textuality’, or as ‘represent[ing] the novel’s core expression of the closed loop of [contemporary U.S.] infantile narcissism’, we will see that Wallace’s library

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139 For an example, see O’Connell, ‘Obsession’.
140 Berlant, ‘Feeling’, p. 54.
142 Holland, *Succeeding*, p. 81.
refashions the film as a dramatization of the theories and procedures of Bradshaw’s 1980s and 90s pop-therapeutic movement of the ‘Inner Child’ – thus shifting the focus of my own analysis away from either postmodernist aesthetics, or North American social decline, and towards the seeming inescapability of certain mainstream contemporary narratives of the ‘normative’ self as something that is secret or tragically lost, but which might yet be ‘recovered’ by its owner (in this sense, these narratives ‘d[o] what all ads are supposed to do: create an anxiety relievable by purchase’; *IJ*, p. 694).

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

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

When Kevin is subsequently asked to ‘“name what your Inner Infant wants right now more than anything in the world”’, he replies, hysterically: ‘“To be loved and held!”’ before ‘repeating “Please, Mommy and Daddy, come love me and hold me” in a kind of monotone of pathos’ (pp. 803-04; italics original). We can see here a fairly direct satirisation of Bradshaw’s ‘Inner Child’ programme, the first step of which requires the ‘dysfunctional adult’ to meditate ‘until you are an infant in your crib’ and, at that point, to ‘[a]nchor the feeling of being alone and unwanted’.143 However, although Holland contends that the increasingly uncomfortable and disgusted Hal ‘mentally articulates’ a ‘reasonable critique’ of such therapeutic ‘oversimplification[s]’,144 nonetheless this

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144 Holland, *Succeeding*, p. 75.
critique remains trapped within the alternative self-help strictures and terminology of Miller’s *Gifted Child*:

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

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

This airless ideological dynamic is recapitulated one more time by Incandenza’s eponymous final film, which seems to share its basic structure with the culminating stages of Bradshaw’s therapeutic programme of imaginative self-mediation. In the latter, ‘the adult moves back and forth between locating herself as the infant (for example, in the crib) and as the wise and gentle adult who is now looking down at the infant with love and is “reparenting” the child’; the former, meanwhile – according to the best accounts we have, as anyone who watches it becomes permanently infantilized, going on watching until they die – is shot from a ‘crib’s-eye view’ (‘mediated by [a] very special lens’ to ‘reproduce an infantile visual field’), and

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146 Ivy, ‘*Inner*’, p. 240.
147 Ivy, ‘*Inner*’, p. 245.
149 This is Ivy’s paraphrase of the method outlined by Bradshaw in *Homecoming*; see ‘*Inner*’, pp. 242-43.
portrays ‘some kind of maternal instantiation of the archetypal figure Death’ who ‘lean[s] in over the […] crib and simply apologize[s]’: “I’m so sorry. I’m so terribly sorry. I am so, so sorry. Please know how very, very, very sorry I am”. As if in a cinematic realization of Bradshaw’s therapeutic programme, then, Incandenza attempts to depict the remorsefulness of an ‘archetypal’ Winnicottian mother (an analogue of his adulterous wife Avril) in order to try and cure their ‘damaged’ child (p. 788). And yet, if Wallace’s library allows us in this way to posit a seemingly significant intertextual connection between *IJ* and Bradshaw’s work, the question nonetheless remains – particularly in the wake of the controversy around Bustillos’s article – as to what this significance might productively be held to be. In genetic criticism, for example, we have seen that such an intertextual overlap would be described in terms of ‘exo-’ or ‘endogenesis’: the critic claims to discover the origin or ‘source text’ for a certain passage in a given literary work, and then presents textual evidence of the author’s ‘processing, assimilation, appropriation, or absorption of this external information’ to his or her own ends. In this sense, just as Incandenza wants to recover a state of childhood purity within Hal – an inner or ‘true’ self that is secret even to himself – so the library promises to divulge the secrets of what has often been described as Wallace’s own ‘magnum opus’.

Incadenza’s film, however, is an unmitigated disaster, leading to his own suicide, the dissolution of the novel’s O.N.A.N.ite superstate, and the inversion (rather than resolution) of the terms of Hal’s *Bildungsroman* (Hal eventually becomes too ‘infantile’ and emotionally credulous to function in everyday life). Its solipsism-inducing effects are similar to those induced by the tightly individuated form of the novel itself, which, as I mentioned earlier (and much like ‘GON’) raises the possibility that the entirety of the novel represents no more than Hal’s fantastic internal projection (pp. 3-17). And this formal enclosure in turn works to dramatize a broader, pop-therapeutic concern with the ‘true self’ that makes it seem:

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

as if all the dynamics of human relationships and intergenerational contact could be reinscribed within this contained self, and as if the family – itself a certain erasure of the social and of community in the contemporary U.S. – could now be fully privatized and enclosed within the individual.\footnote{Ivy, ‘Inner Child’, 239-48.}

The disastrous consequences of Incandenza’s origin-seeking film might thus serve as a kind of warning against the critical temptation to treat the library in Austin as one final ‘enclosure in the individual’, a space where we can not only ‘commune’ with Wallace himself but also mitigate the myriad complexities of his oeuvre by a ‘genetic’ appeal to authorial originality or mediation (a move which would once again turn ‘DFW’ into the ‘troubled one in the family’, fucked up so we don’t have to be).\footnote{I am referring back here to Wallace’s marginalia on Bradshaw, cited above in p. 78n22: ‘DFW the “troubled” one in family-anxious, depressed-acting out, instantiating family’s sickness (Why I see myself as “fucked up”?).’}

Moreover, if the novel seems in this way to ‘enclose’ all of its ideological content within the individual known as Hal Incandenza, then Wallace’s library might actually provide us with a kind of ‘opening up’, an important (if empirically bounded) opportunity to attend to the ways in which such apparently naturalized ‘bourgeois’ dynamics are in fact the product of multiple and intersecting socio-historical discourses, circulating in ways that defy any straightforward notion of source text, genesis or ‘origin’. We can then take into account, for example, the wider familial and national implications of the failure of Hal’s Bildungsroman narrative to resolve its own symbolic terms: we are no longer dealing here with qualitative or moralistic questions about Wallace as an artist or an individual, but rather with the apparent inability of a certain discourse of ‘normative’ U.S. selfhood itself to ‘mature’ beyond or escape the present conditions of its own reproduction. We need only to look at the posthumous cultural status of Wallace – as either a literary hero of near-messianic proportions, or a ‘Cobainified’ fetish, a ‘byword for with-it-ness’\footnote{Gallagher, ‘Cobainification’} – to grasp that the pattern of cyclical and catastrophic consumption traced by his oeuvre has had no problem in swallowing up both oeuvre and author alike; meanwhile, by investing wholeheartedly in either side of this debate, we risk becoming like Hal, who (‘like most North Americans of his generation’) ‘tends to know way less about why he feels certain ways about the objects and pursuits he’s devoted to than he does about the objects and pursuits themselves’ (p.

\footnote{152 Ivy, ‘Inner Child’, 239-48.}
\footnote{153 I am referring back here to Wallace’s marginalia on Bradshaw, cited above in p. 78n22: ‘DFW the “troubled” one in family-anxious, depressed-acting out, instantiating family’s sickness (Why I see myself as “fucked up”?).’}
\footnote{154 Gallagher, ‘Cobainification’}. 
54). As such, rather than treating Wallace’s library and marginalia as a series of secrets to be systematically discovered and enumerated, we might recall that, again in the words of Hal, discovering a secret is never so dangerous as the ‘secrecy of it’ in the first place (p. 784; italics original). Although Wallace’s oeuvre has repeatedly been presented as a solution to the broadly postmodernist schematics of solipsism, relativism, and fragmentation, the present chapter has argued that it seems just as frequently to suspect its own participation in an altogether more entrenched and insidious set of contemporary problems – perhaps most prominently, the entanglement of a range of discourses of the ‘true’ or natural self, both critical and popular, within the same, ideological cycle of commodification and ‘hegemonic’ identification that they claim to surpass (or even to cure).

In the following chapter, we will see that Wallace’s posthumous novel The Pale King (2011) moves towards the explicit identification of these wider problems with the processes of post-1980s neoliberalisation in the United States. I will argue, however, that the majority of recent critical endorsements of the apparent political ‘seriousness’ of his late work have continued to rely on a problematic investment in the figure of Wallace himself: as well as a ‘visionary’ liberal humanist, he has now been assimilated by some as a kind of didactic communist ‘teacher’. By tracing the interpretative dynamic of the published version of TPK (centre) and its manifold archival materials (margin), Chapter Two will argue that the posthumous reception of Wallace as a ‘serious’ author has in fact tended both to exacerbate and to complicate the problems of ideological investment that we have traced in Chapter One. In an uncanny continuation of the interconnected themes of mourning, sentimentality, and ‘truth’, Chapter Two will start by looking at the way in which these problematic interpretative processes have often proceeded from readings of the scene of Wallace’s own suicide.
Chapter Two ‘A certain threshold of concentrated boredom’: Authority and Mediation in the Margins of Wallace’s Archive

Author here. By which I mean this is the real, living human sitting here holding the pen and chewing his lip, not any sort of abstract narrative persona. There is, in fact, such an abstract narrative persona

- David Foster Wallace, The Pale King ‘Author’s Foreword’, second handwritten draft (see fig. 23)¹

All typos intentional

- Wallace, marginal note on Infinite Jest typescript draft (see fig. 24)²

2.1 Authorizing The Pale King

The scene of David Foster Wallace’s death in September 2008 has been repeatedly staged as a legitimation or explanation of the ‘Long Thing’ that he had been working on for over ten years, and which was published posthumously as The Pale King: An

¹ ‘Draft 2: Handwritten draft’, Harry Ransom Centre Website, <http://hrc.contentdm.oclc.org/cdm/compoundobject/collection/p15878coll20/id/64#nav_top>, p. 1 [accessed 28 November 2015]. The six draft versions of the ‘Author’s Foreword’ are available online, as high resolution images; see ‘David Foster Wallace’s The Pale King’, Harry Ransom Centre Website, <http://hrc.contentdm.oclc.org/cdm/landingpage/collection/p15878coll20#nav_top> [accessed 28 November 2015]. I refer to the digitized TPK sources here not only to allow the reader to consult each manuscript in as much detail as they choose, but also because I argue (in section two) that the presentation of these drafts on the Ransom Centre’s website constitutes a significant form of archival mediation, which in turn has specific effects upon the meaning of the text(s). For hard copies of the manuscripts, see Austin, TX, Harry Ransom Centre, David Foster Wallace Archive, fols 36.1-2, 38.6-7, 38.8, 41.7.

² ‘IJ’ ‘First two sections’, typescript drafts and photocopy, undated’, fol. 16.6 (HRCDFW-A).
Unfinished Novel in 2011. The following account comes from the final paragraphs of D. T. Max’s biography:

Wallace went into the garage and turned on the lights. [...] Then he crossed through the house to the patio, where he climbed onto a chair and hanged himself. [...] [Karen] Green returned home at 9.30 and found her husband. In the garage, bathed in light from his many lamps, sat a pile of nearly two hundred pages. He had made some changes in the months since he considered sending them to [Michael] Pietsch [Wallace’s editor]. The story of ‘David Wallace’ was now first. In his final hours, he had tidied up the manuscript so that his wife could find it. Below it, around it, inside his two computers, on old floppy disks in his drawers were hundreds of other pages – drafts, character sketches, notes to himself, fragments that had evaded his attempt to integrate them into the novel over the past decade. This was his effort to show the world what it was to be a ‘fucking human being’. He had never completed it to his satisfaction. This was not an ending anyone would have wanted for him, but it was the one he had chosen.

In a series of initially terse, deliberate sentences, Max portrays Wallace’s ‘final hours’ as a time of revisionary caretaking: the manuscript’s order has recently been altered so that a section narrated by a character called ‘David Wallace’ will open the narrative, and now it is ‘bathed in light from his many lamps’ and ‘tidied up [...] so that his wife could find it’. Then there is a longer sentence, in the form of two lists that are bifurcated by a hyphen: firstly, an enumeration of the manuscript’s proliferation into hundreds of other pages on various media (‘below it, around it’), followed by an enumeration of the forms taken by these ‘fragments that had evaded his attempt to integrate them into the novel’. The final few sentences figure Wallace’s suicide as a tragic ‘ending’ to his oeuvre and life, which have been an ‘effort’ of personal sacrifice to ‘the world’; we end with an affirmation of individual choice. So Wallace cannot finish his third novel, and chooses to end his life instead: but, as we saw in Chapter One, these two narratives (the oeuvre, the biography) have themselves become integrated into the text, or series of texts, that are the subject of this case study.

Most of the reviews of TPK have been interested in the details of this scene, turning it simultaneously into an origin, an ending, and a continuation of the novel and its contexts. References to Wallace’s death or body are often contiguous with

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3 In his correspondence with Jonathan Franzen, Don DeLillo, and others during the years after the publication of Infinite Jest, Wallace referred to the manuscripts that would eventually be published as TPK as ‘the Long Thing’ or ‘a certain Larger Thing’; see Marshall Boswell, ‘Preface: David Foster Wallace and “The Long Thing”’, in ‘Thing’, pp. vi-xii. The paperback version of the novel was released roughly one year later, in April 2012, and contained four previously unpublished scenes.

4 Max, Ghost, p. 301.
descriptions of the manuscript in its ‘neat pile, almost as if spotlighted’,\(^5\) these ‘twelve chapters [that] had been neatly printed out’;\(^6\) on the other hand, the ‘binders, notebooks, floppy disks and hard drives full of other material’ are a cue for examining Wallace’s editor Michael Pietsch, who has either ‘valiantly assembled some of the shards he found into the semblance of a novel’;\(^7\) ‘guess[ed] at the intentions of a writer who was an obsessive reviser and a notoriously reluctant finisher of his work’,\(^8\) ‘conscientiously and intelligently whittled [the materials] down’ into ‘a coherent, if incomplete, portrayal of our age unfolding on an epic scale’,\(^9\) or ‘stuffed’ a ‘heap of pages’ into his duffel bag and published them in a cynical act of commercial self-interest.\(^10\) Indeed, Pietsch was originally invited to assemble ‘the best version of The Pale King that [he] could find’ by Karen Green and Bonnie Nadell (Wallace’s widow and literary agent respectively) on the basis of the garage scene;\(^11\) as Green puts it:

> The notes that [Wallace] took for the book and chapters that were complete, were left in a neat pile on his desk […]. And his lamps were on it, illuminating it. So I have no doubt in my mind this is what he wanted. It was in as organized a state as David ever left anything.\(^12\)

Nadell, meanwhile, states that ‘if there had been a spotlight on those pages it could not have been more obvious’:

> I felt in my heart and so did Karen […] that he wanted people to see it, and ultimately the reasons to publish outweighed the reasons not to. You can go back to Kafka, when the friend ignored his instructions to burn everything, and to Lord Byron, when they

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\(^5\) Rayner, ‘Review’.
\(^7\) Margaret Quamme, ‘Is boredom the subject or result?’, Columbus Dispatch Online, 7 April 2011, [http://www.dispatch.com/content/stories/life_and_entertainment/2011/04/07/is-boredom-the-subject-or-result.html] [accessed 28 November 2015].
\(^8\) Rayner, ‘Review’.
\(^10\) Tom Scocca, ‘David Foster Wallace Wrote Two Novels, and The Pale King Is Not One Of Them’, Slate, 4 April 2011, [http://www.slate.com/content/slate/blogs/scocca/2011/04/04/david_foster_wallace_wrote_two_novels_and_the_pale_king_is_not_one_of_them.html] [accessed 28 November 2015].
\(^11\) Michael Pietsch, ‘Editor’s Note’, in TPK, pp. v-x (p. vii).
did destroy his manuscripts. Unfortunately, when you’re dead, people make decisions for you.  

For Pietsch himself, who had been Wallace’s editor since the early draft stages of *Infinite Jest*, ‘the fact that he left those pages on his work table is proof he wanted the book published’. At the same time, we know that while there were around 250 pages found on Wallace’s desk, their order is significantly altered in the published version, which runs to almost 550 pages; the exact details of this alteration nonetheless remain unclear.

Discussions of *TPK*, then, tend to be prefaced by this set of recurrent oppositions – between complete and incomplete, neat pile and excessive mess, Wallace and not-Wallace – in the same way that the published text, in a perhaps unavoidable echo of Vladimir Nabokov’s *Pale Fire*, is quite literally prefaced by a short ‘Editor’s Note’ written by Pietsch. While working through the materials that he found in Wallace’s garage, Pietsch writes that he:

found an astonishingly full novel, created with the superabundant originality and humour that were uniquely David’s. As I read these chapters I felt unexpected joy, because while inside this world that David had made I felt as if I were in his presence, and was able to forget awhile the awful fact of his death. […] All these materials were gorgeously alive and charged with observations; reading them was the closest thing to seeing his amazing mind at play upon the world.

Despite this ‘fullness’, however, ‘nowhere in all these pages was there an outline or other indication of what order David intended for these chapters’; ‘In putting this book together I have followed internal clues from the chapters themselves and from David’s notes’. Though tentative, Pietsch sets up a distinction here between centre (‘internal clues’) and margin (Wallace’s manuscript marginalia). There is a ‘central narrative that follows a fairly clear chronology’, concerning a group of characters who ‘arrive at the Peoria Regional Examination Centre on the same day in 1985’ and ‘begin working in and learning about the vast world of IRS tax returns processing’; but there are also

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14 Michael Pietsch, cited in McGrath, ‘Piecing’.
15 See Pietsch’s correspondence with Burn, in the latter’s ‘“Consciousness”’, p. 372.
16 Pietsch, ‘Note’, p. vi.
‘self-contained’ chapters that are ‘not part of any chronology’.\(^{18}\) This presents Pietsch with ‘the most difficult part of editing *The Pale King*’:

> It became apparent as I read that David planned for the novel to have a structure akin to that of *Infinite Jest*, with large portions of apparently unconnected information presented to the reader before a main story line begins to make sense.\(^{19}\)

In some cases, then, Pietsch arranges the sections according to chronology; in others, ‘it is a matter of pace and mood, as in siting short comic chapters between long serious ones’.\(^{20}\) As for the question of an ending, we saw in Chapter One that *IJ*, a novel that Wallace did supposedly ‘finish’, was deemed ‘disappointingly inconclusive’ at best;\(^{21}\) Wallace’s debut novel, *The Broom of the System*, ends mid-sentence;\(^{22}\) and Pietsch reports that there are ‘notes among David’s manuscript pages that suggest that he did not intend for [TPK] to have a plot substantially beyond the chapters here’.\(^{23}\) (Notes such as ‘something big threatens to happen but doesn’t actually happen’; ‘a series of setups for things to happen but nothing ever happens’).\(^{24}\) The marginalia thus give Pietsch the difficulty of suggesting that ‘the novel’s apparent incompleteness is in fact intentional’, while concluding that ‘David was a perfectionist of the highest order, and there is no question that *The Pale King* would be vastly different had he survived to finish it’.\(^{25}\)

Finally, Pietsch admits to ‘lightly’ editing the manuscript pages ‘for sense or pace, or to find an end point for a chapter that trailed off unfinished’, ‘to correct obvious grammatical errors and word repetitions’, and to make character names, place names, job titles, ‘and other factual matters match up throughout the book’, with the ‘overall intent’ to ‘allow readers to focus on the enormous issues David intended to

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\(^{18}\) Pietsch, ‘Note’, p. vii.

\(^{19}\) Pietsch, ‘Note’, p. viii.

\(^{20}\) Pietsch, ‘Note’, p. viii.

\(^{21}\) Cryer, ‘Infinite’.

\(^{22}\) This sentence fragment, delivered by Rick Vigorous – ‘I’m a man of my’ (*BOTS*, p. 467) – was the subject of a fairly lengthy editorial debate. In one of a series of notes that she sent Wallace regarding a late draft of the novel, his agent Bonnie Nadell wrote: ‘Last page: You absolutely cannot end the book with an incomplete sentence […] I just feel it isn’t fair to leave all the ends dangling’. See Austin, TX, Harry Ransom Centre, Bonnie Nadell Collection of David Foster Wallace, letter to Wallace, undated, fol. 1.5.

\(^{23}\) Pietsch, ‘Note’, p. viii.

\(^{24}\) Wallace, cited in Pietsch, ‘Note’, p. viii; italics original.

\(^{25}\) Pietsch, ‘Note’, p. ix.
raise, and to make the story and characters as comprehensible as possible’. Thus, the assembly of TPK is figured as a difficult negotiation between centre and margin: on the one hand, Wallace’s notes contain no ‘outline or other indication’ as to his intention for the novel; on the other hand, Pietsch suggests that, as editor, he has ‘lightly’ facilitated a movement towards an apparently latent (and ‘intended’) central cohesion.

If we recognize here a development of the problem of Wallace’s ‘theory of art’ from Chapter One – is his oeuvre the product of ‘amazingly shitty’ editing or ‘some theoretical-aesthetic’ principle? – then it is also a particularly complex and arguably even unique contemporary exemplification of what Jerome McGann, in 1983, called the ‘general crisis’ of the discipline of modern textual criticism and editorial theory. McGann’s intervention came at a point when the historically dominant theories of textual scholarship for the Classical and early typographical periods, which seek by various methods to establish either a ‘text of highest authority’, or one ‘which […] most nearly represents the author’s original (or final) intentions’, were being seriously challenged by not only post-structuralist theory but also the unprecedented abundance and preservation of modern manuscripts. As we saw in the Introduction, the case of S. T. Coleridge’s ‘Rime of the Ancient Mariner’ has led to intense and longstanding debates over the ‘sincerity’ of original manuscripts as against the ‘authority’ of a final copy, while the editorial annotations of James Joyce, Samuel Beckett, and Djuna Barnes have tended to be interpreted in line with their authors’ respectively ‘central’ and ‘marginal’ positions within the literary canon. Moreover, as has been argued by Dirk Van Hulle, the works in question will often exploit the ‘constant tension between the finished and the unfinished, especially in modernist texts where the time lost in writing them becomes thematic, reflecting a poetics of process’ which also ‘implies the problematization of the work of art as a finished product’. On the other hand, if the modernist period has been described as a ‘golden age of manuscripts’, the availability of an archive as ‘recent’ as Wallace’s remains exceptional: as Molly Schwartzburg has put it, ‘Wallace was born a decade later than any other writer whose papers are held at

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26 Pietsch, ‘Note’, p. ix.
27 McGann, Critique, p. 5.
29 Van Hulle, Awareness, p. 1, p. 10.
the Ransom Centre, and the acquisition of his papers literally begins a new generation of collecting at our institution’. One of the aims of the present chapter is to think about the relationship between the Wallace oeuvre and Wallace’s archive in light of these oppositions between newness and preservation, original draft and final copy, and finished and unfinished. By reading several of his texts alongside their genetic documents, I will ask how the notion of a ‘central’ oeuvre and its ‘marginal’ materials might inform (and be informed by) the relative coherence of ‘Wallace’ as an author-function: as a more or less retrievable body of texts, associated with an identifiable literary ‘style’, and governed by a recognizable authorial consciousness, and which now finds itself in a pivotal (if uneasy) canonical position as simultaneously modern and postmodern, or else ‘for[ing] ahead in hopes of breaking through to the other side, whatever that may be’. The formation and publication of TPK in particular, which both brings an end to the Wallace oeuvre and raises questions about its own status as ‘a David Foster Wallace novel’, will provide an acute illumination of these questions.

Unlike Pietsch, who ends his ‘Editor’s Note’ by stating that ‘the entire mass of material from which this novel was culled […] will ultimately be made available to the public’ in Austin (as he puts it elsewhere, ‘I’m sure [the scholars are] already sharpening their teeth’), Nabokov’s Charles Kinbote deceitfully acquires the manuscript of ‘Pale Fire’ upon its author’s suspicious death, hoards it jealously in a faraway motor lodge, and asserts his supreme authority to assemble, edit, and annotate the ‘organic miracle’ of his ‘dear poet’’s final work. When challenged publicly by a host of scholars (‘our professed Shadeans’) claiming that ‘Pale Fire’ ‘consists of

33 Marshall Boswell argues that Wallace’s work ‘moves forward while hoisting the baggage of modernism and postmodernism heavily, but respectfully, on its back’; see Understanding, p. 1; italics original.
35 As Hamilton puts it, the ‘honesty’ of Pietsch’s ‘Editor’s Note’ ‘does inevitably raise the question of whether The Pale King should be read as “a David Foster Wallace novel” or as simply a tribute to its author and his untimely death’; see ‘Tedium’, p. 167.
36 Pietsch, ‘Note’, p. ix; Pietsch, cited in McGrath.
37 Nabokov, Fire, pp. 11-23.
disjointed drafts none of which yields a definite text’ and ‘represents only a small fraction of the composition [Shade] saw in a glass, darkly’, Kinbote alleges a:

malicious invention on the part of those who would wish not so much to deplore the state in which a great poet’s work was interrupted by death as to asperse the competence, and perhaps honesty, of its present editor and commentator.\(^{38}\)

In Kinbote’s further assertion that ‘without my notes Shade’s text simply has no human reality at all’,\(^{39}\) we see a movement from marginalia as a kind of ‘extrinsic’ gloss upon or appropriation of a prior text, to marginalia as an ‘intrinsic’ feature of a text that begins to provide its own interpretation; we might say that it is this tension that informs Fire’s simultaneous satirisation and instantiation of McGann’s ‘general crisis’.\(^{40}\) While in Chapter Three we will have more occasion to consider this latter kind of marginalia, now formalized in the scholarly figure of the footnote, the primary focus of Chapter Two will be those ‘devastating erasures and cataclysmic insertions’\(^{41}\) that form the middle stage of this transition. Briefly mentioned by both Kinbote and Pietsch alike, but finally elided in the published texts, these manuscript marginalia of revision or correction act to recast the autonomous literary work as rather a ‘dizzying multiplication of presences’ – consisting in neither a final copy nor a series of discrete ‘versions’, but in the mechanisms that govern the relations among them.\(^{42}\)

Whereas Kinbote is sure to include an anecdote about Shade’s habit of burning his early drafts in a ‘backyard auto-da-fé’ (not unlike the reported ‘cheery bonfires’ of that other entirely edited great, Pierre Menard),\(^{43}\) the ready availability of Wallace’s

\(^{38}\) Nabokov, Fire, p. 12.

\(^{39}\) Nabokov, Fire, p. 23.

\(^{40}\) In his analysis of the confrontation between deconstruction and textual criticism in the latter part of the twentieth century, David C. Greetham describes G. Thomas Tanselle’s ‘Derridean’ critique of Derrida as ‘a play with the text reminiscent of the elaborate textuality of Nabokov’s Pale Fire’. See ‘[Textual] Criticism, and Deconstruction’, Studies in Bibliography, 44 (1991), 1-30 (p. 12).

\(^{41}\) Nabokov, Fire, p. 12.

\(^{42}\) Here, then, I am drawing a parallel between Van Hulle’s genetic notion of a ‘poetics of process’, and Fredric Jameson’s description of postmodern textuality as cited in Chapter One: ‘those texts that, whether by fragmentation and imperfection or by a dizzying multiplication of presences on the page, somehow evade form and reification’. See Van Hulle, Awareness, pp. 1-12; Fredric Jameson, ‘New’, p. 387.

\(^{43}\) Nabokov, Fire, p. 12. In a footnote, the critic-narrator of Borges’s story recalls Menard’s ‘square-ruled notebooks, his black crossings-out, his peculiar typographical symbols, and his insect-like handwriting. In the evening, he liked to go out for walks on the outskirts of Nîmes; he would often carry along a notebook and make a cheery bonfire’. See ‘Pierre Menard, Author of the Quixote’ (orig. published 1939), in Labyrinths: Selected Stories and Other Writings, ed. by James E. Irby and Donald A. Yates, trans. by James E. Irby (London: Penguin, 2000; orig. published 1962), pp. 88-95 (p. 95n3).
archival documents poses this ‘processual’ notion of the literary work as a question of authority and mediation: as is exemplified by my first epigraph, corrected drafts tend to evoke an ‘Author here’ that simultaneously negates or erases itself as just another ‘abstract narrative persona’ (see fig. 23). And yet, in the case of TPK, which has been the subject of often simultaneous praise and suspicion from Wallace scholars (as we will see), the archive has been presented by Stephen J. Burn as a gauge against which we ‘can start to disentangle what Wallace originally planned from the published text (heroically and painstakingly reconstructed, as it is, by his editor)’. Here the problem of authority and mediation becomes one of authorship and contamination: reading the drafts in order to differentiate between Wallace’s ‘original’ plans and their corrupted representation in Pietsch’s published version. Such a task would then require us to follow my second epigraph in constructing a ‘marginal’ position from which to differentiate between those elements of some ‘central’ text that have been intended by Wallace, and those elements that can be attributed to an external source (see fig. 24). In a basic sense, however, the genetic documents for Wallace’s earlier works regularly show them to have been produced in collaboration with a number of different agents, editors, copy-editors, typesetters, translators, and so on. For example, although he wrote notes informing in-house readers that his drafts ‘contain a certain amount of non-standard syntax, grammar, punctuation, etc.’, and that, ‘[e]xcepting the occasional typo, it’s all intentional and actually the product of considerable noodling and care, and should be stetted’, Wallace also wrote grateful annotations in response to those editorial emendations with which he apparently agreed: on one IJ typescript, next to a note in blue pencil (identified as ‘CopyEd’), ‘Ok to repeat point from 1417?’, Wallace responds in red pencil (identified as ‘AUTH’), ‘Cut / Thanks’. And, as we will see later on, Pietsch’s editorial marginalia often form a sort of dialogue with Wallace’s notes that works to both frame and participate in the revision of the text at hand.

But the present chapter will look to go beyond these fairly banal detections of other hands in the Wallace oeuvre, arguing that even when we consider early or first drafts – texts, in other words, that have been ‘authored’ exclusively by Wallace – the

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44 Burn, “‘Consciousness’”, p. 371.
45 See, for example, fols 4.8-10, 14.3-5, 23.8, 28.2 (HRCDFW-A).
46 ‘SPECIAL ADVANCE NOTE FOR EDITOR, COPYEDITOR, ET AL’, fol. 2.6 (HRCDFW-A).
47 ‘IJ Typescript, copyedited (continued)’, fol. 22.3 (HRCDFW-A).
problems of contamination, authority, mediation, and even authorship, are more likely to proliferate than to simply disappear. This point is underscored by the distinction that Pietsch himself draws between Wallace’s ‘superabundant originality’ and his ‘perfectionistic’ approach to writing. We saw in Chapter One that Wallace has been read in line with the “Romantic” conception of solitary, original genius, as one of those ‘artists who continually push at the edges of the acceptable, continually remake the context in which their work is to be comprehended’; here, the notion of the ‘original’ can evidently co-exist with its ‘continual remaking’, so long as the origin of this revisionary process is the solitary author himself. From an editorial point of view, David C. Greetham proposes that this Romantic dynamic between text and context might also be thought in terms of centre and margin: thus, while manuscript marginalia (deletions, additions, ‘stets’, plans, sketches, and so on) might normally be thought to provide some contextual guidance or indication as to the revision of a central text (the ‘work in progress’), the annotations of the genius can be seen to question the very basis of such inside/outside oppositions. This constructs Wallace’s ‘original intentions’ as at once essential to the meaning of the oeuvre and utterly inaccessible: the authoritative position implied by ‘All typos intentional’ can actually only be occupied by the ‘Author here’ (who might also be an ‘abstract narrative persona’), and invalidates any straightforward notion of the archive as a source from which critics can delineate an ‘uncontaminated’ version of a given text.

Take for example the passage that is referenced as endnote 304 in the published version of *IJ*, in which an E.T.A. student attempts to plagiarise an academic article as his own essay. In the first, handwritten draft – which advertises itself not as an endnote but as a potential ‘Insert’ for another section – the plagiarising student is initially identified as Ted Schacht; this is crossed out and ‘James Albrecht Struck, Jr’ is added above (see fig. 25). Subsequently, the first draft identifies the student as Jim Troeltsch; this is only crossed out in some instances, and only in some instances is it changed to ‘Struck’. In the second, typescript draft, the student is identified only as Struck, and a marginal note in blue pen states: ‘DO AS / FN 366’; in all subsequent drafts the

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48 Greetham, “‘Impossibility’”, p. 727; italics original.
49 Greetham, “‘Impossibility’”, pp. 727-35.
50 *IJ Handwritten drafts, undated*, fol. 15.4 (HRCDFW-A).
51 *IJ Typescript draft fragments, undated*, fol. 16.7 (HRCDFW-A).
student is identified only as Struck, and the passage is constituted as an endnote
(initially as n.366, and later as n.304).\(^{52}\) And, in the published version, as the names of
Schacht, Troeltsch, and the author of the scholarly article are ‘struck’ from the record,
so Struck himself must ‘decide whether it’d be unrealistic or unself-consciously
realistic to keep using his own name as a verb – would a man with anything to
camouflage use his own name as a verb?’ (IJ, p. 1061n394). From the first draft, then,
this depiction of critical forgery performs an anxiety around authorship and authority
that is only intensified as the passage is revised and reconstituted; in turn, this poses the
genetic problem of ‘original’ and ‘revised’ drafts as a faltering opposition between
source and citation, wherein the process of literary composition itself comes to
resemble an act of plagiarism. (I will further consider the specifically institutional or
‘schoolboy’ connotations of this description of Wallace’s writing in sections two and
three).

Each of the drafts of this passage reproduces long stretches of the ‘insufferable’
‘U.S. Academese’ of the article that is being plagiarised, alongside its ‘more earnest
and pubescent rephrasing’ by the student, for whom ‘[o]riginal hopes of at least
originality of topic have long since gone over the side of the boat’ (IJ, pp. 1055-
56n304). Furthermore, the article itself, which contains ‘parts where it seems like the
guy just totally abandons a scholarly tone, and even probably starts making up or
hallucinating details’, also cites long passages from other, fictionalized academic
publications; these are either ‘unfootnoted’ or included as numerical footnotes to the
endnote (in the published version, there are also endnotes in lower-case letters to this
endnote; IJ, pp. 1062n304). In the first draft, such references are added in brackets
within the main body of text, as with (see fig. 26):

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\(^{52}\) ‘IJ Typescript draft (continued)’, fol. 18.6 (HRCDFW-A).
\(^{53}\) ‘Handwritten drafts’, fol. 15.4 (HRCDFW-A).
The marginalia here conspire in the faltering economy of source and citation that is implied by the article’s indeterminate authorship and referencing, a dynamic that is exacerbated by the presence, in the next draft, of another reference to a book called ‘The Cults of the Unwavering I’: although this has a similarly excessive subtitle, it is listed as authored by ‘Hartigan and Perla’. The marginalia on this draft, in black felt tip, immediately work to interrupt this new reference: one instance of Hartigan in the main text is circled and annotated, ‘NO’; Hartigan is also circled in the footnote, and a line is drawn from ‘Perla’ to an annotation that reads, ‘Pxx Perlaal’. 54 In the published version of *IJ*, the listed authors of the referenced book have changed again to ‘Phelps and Phelps’, and the subtitle is also expanded (*IJ*, p. 1058n304n5). However, there have been changes to this footnote even among the published versions of the novel: in the first edition of *IJ*, ‘Kavorkianism’ appears in the subtitle; Wallace’s corrected copy of this edition is held at the Ransom Centre, and contains a note in red pen (‘Kavorkianism – change a to e’; see fig. 27);55 all subsequent editions have carried ‘Kevorkianism’ (while nonetheless preserving other incorrect or unrecognized terms in the same subtitle, such as ‘Acraphobia’). If such differences between original and revised versions seem to threaten the autonomy of the literary work, then the intervening marginalia might promise to contain this instability under the mediatory autonomy of the solitary ‘genius’; indeed, as we will see especially in the later parts of Chapter Two and throughout Chapter Three, this centre/margin dynamic is even incorporated into Wallace’s published texts in the form of their often defective or circuitous footnotes and endnotes, thus posing any potential instability as always intended or anticipated by the author. At the same time, however, the texts (and their ‘pre-texts’) work to question the very notion of ‘origin’ that such a dynamic would imply. Just as in Chapter One – where Wallace’s library marginalia did not allow us to trace an ‘exo-’ or ‘endogenetic’ process through the mind of the genius so much as they challenged the notion of subjectivity itself as clearly delimited, univocal, and ‘accessible’ – I will argue that Wallace’s manuscript marginalia actually work to unsettle the opposition between source and citation, or ‘original’ and ‘revised’. Rather than giving us a glimpse into the workings of authorly

54 ‘Typescript draft fragments’, fol. 16.7 (HRCDFW-A).
mediation (or what Joyce’s Stephen Hero would call the ‘secret of artistic success’),
these notations tend to undermine the possibility of reference, erasing (Pxxx), modifying
(‘Perlaal’), or disputing (‘NO’) the act of original attribution, while multiplying and
thus fracturing the central authority of ‘David Foster Wallace’ among those discordant
authorities of original, revised, and final drafts, first and second editions, and so on.

In this way, while the majority of studies on marginalia have restricted
themselves to notes written in books (interpreted in the ‘communicative’ or
‘conversational’ sense of a meeting between two minds), with manuscript marginalia
then considered as part of the separate area of literary composition, my thesis takes
different kinds of annotation as part of this same problem of text and subjectivity. It
also therefore brings together different strands of English Studies at a moment when an
increased interest in archival research is taking part in the broader turn away from the
‘radical de-centrings’ of Marxist and psychoanalytical post-structuralism, and towards
more expressly humanist, materialist, and ‘affective’ modes of thought. If ‘mediation’
is the term that Fredric Jameson uses in order to think about the relation between
congress social reality and its abstraction in symbolic acts, then the present chapter
will track the problems that Wallace’s case might cause for this as a conceptualisation
of the contemporary act of writing: far from providing a relief from the prolonged
processes of abstraction that have characterised those periods generally called
‘postmodern’ or ‘neoliberal’, I will contend that the dynamic between Wallace’s oeuvre
and archive reformulates artistic mediation as a kind of ‘plagiarism’ that proceeds from
an origin it can no longer identify. I will propose, furthermore, that we can understand
this specifically as a problem of interpretative investment, wherein the apparent
‘sincerity’ of Wallace’s authorial labours not only produces the ‘authority’ of his final
texts, but sets up an analogous relation between readerly labour and readerly authority
– a model of investment that will effectively collapse if the centrality of the author-as-
individual is placed under scrutiny. Finally, in anticipation of Chapter Three, the third
section of the present chapter will trace this relation (between aesthetic value and

56 Joyce, Hero, p. 82.
58 McDonald, ‘Ideas’ pp. 214-16, pp. 222-27; Daniela Caselli, ‘Kindergarten theory: Childhood, affect,
critical thought’, Feminist Theory, 11.3 (2010), 241-54 (p. 245); Hale, ‘Ethics’, pp. 896-97; Hemmings,
individual ‘investment’) as part of the wider contemporary context of the institutionalization of U.S. literary production and the latter’s concurrent reception within the increasingly contested (and repudiated) field of ‘literary theory’.

In the broadest sense of my thesis, then, Wallace can be seen to occupy an indicative position within the general historical development of English Studies from a positivistic to a hermeneutic mode – or, to put this another way, his rise to critical and popular esteem comes at a point when the so-called material disciplines, which were sent into crisis (or at least made unfashionable) by the late century heyday of literary theory, are making a substantial return. 60 This has entailed also a reconsideration of such notions as author, intention, and canon, which we can link back to what Chapter One described (in response to Jameson) as the simultaneous fragmentation and rejuvenation of the bourgeois ego and its psychopathologies; Wallace’s example thus helps us to think about the contemporary status of these longstanding critical concerns. The present chapter proceeds from the contention that, on the one hand, the posthumous assembly and publication of *TPK* work particularly to dramatize the contradictions inherent to modern editorial practice and literary theory; on the other hand, it will demonstrate that the latter contradictions are coterminous with themes that are already foregrounded by the variant texts of the novel, and by Wallace’s texts more generally. My argument turns on a reversal in the way in which literary works have historically been ‘authorized’: whereas with Classical and early modern works, this rested on ‘establish[ing] through editing the text of highest authority’ by ‘retrieving it in a pristine state from extant documents in which it had become corrupted in transmission’, the conditions of modern manuscript transmission have seen this process ‘redefined in terms of authorial acts: the writing and/or authorization of documents’. 61 Bibliographical practice, then, has consistently been about ‘remain[ing] as close to the primary authority’ as possible, whether that authority is conceived of as an ideal original text (‘the pure text of unalloyed authority to be retrieved’) or the intentions of an author; 62 wherever the author is still alive, his or her ‘final’ intentions regarding a text have tended to settle the matter. 63 Broadly speaking, the emergent tension in a

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contemporary context is between a literary text’s intrinsically identifiable ‘style’, and its author’s extrinsically identifiable subjectivity.

We have already started to see here why the case of TPK might complicate this process of authorization: while the light from Wallace’s lamps has tended to stand in as a sort of ‘final intention’ (‘proof he wanted the book published’), we nonetheless know that the manuscript on which that light was fixed was significantly different to the text that was published in 2011. At the same time, however, even the published version of TPK establishes its own value as a ‘memoir’ as relative to the extent of its prior artistic mediation by a figure called ‘David Foster Wallace’ (the ‘real author, the living human holding the pencil’; TPK, p. 66). This economy is established by means of a fictionalized ‘Author’s Foreword’ – the ‘David Wallace’ section that Max tells us was latterly moved by Wallace to the beginning of the manuscript in which ‘Wallace’ makes a series of claims and disclosures. Firstly, he claims that while ‘[t]his book is really true’, and ‘based on several different notebooks and journals I kept during my thirteen months as a rote [tax] examiner at the Midwest REC’ (pp. 67-70), we should also ‘rest assured […] [that] I have no intention of inflicting on you a regurgitation of every last sensation and passing thought I happen to recall’:

Example: A 100 percent accurate, comprehensive list of the exact size and shape of every blade of grass in my front lawn is ‘true’, but it is not a truth that anyone will have any interest in. What renders a truth meaningful, worthwhile, & c. is its relevance, which in turn requires extraordinary discernment and sensitivity to context, questions of value, and overall point – otherwise we might as well just be computers downloading raw data to one another. (p. 259)

This recalls Stephen Hero’s ‘artist who could disentangle the subtle soul of the image from its mesh of defining circumstances most exactly and re-embody it in artistic circumstances chosen as the most exact for its new office’ (a passage which, as we saw in Chapter One, was annotated by Wallace). At the same time, however, ‘Wallace’ admits that he can only describe his book as ‘true’ on the understanding that ‘this

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64 Pietsch, cited in McGrath, ‘Piecing’.
65 Although we will see how strongly the drafts of TPK challenge the division between ‘truthful’ and ‘fictionalized’, I use the latter term here for initial clarity: Wallace never worked at the IRS, although Max reports that he began taking classes on accountancy and federal income taxation as early as 1996 (the year of IJ’s publication); see Ghost, pp. 256-59.
66 See the account cited in the opening pages of this chapter. In the published version, the ‘Foreword’ spans several sections: pp. 66-85, pp. 256-309, pp. 410-14.
67 See above, pp. 88-94.
Foreword is defined by [the book’s legal disclaimer] as itself fictional’, and that there have been ‘some slight changes and strategic rearrangements […] evolving through successive drafts in response to the book’s editor, who was sometimes put in a very delicate position with respect to balancing literary and journalistic priorities […] against legal and corporate concerns’ (p. 67, p. 70). He also states that not only were the ‘notebook entries on which parts of this memoir are based […] themselves literally jazzed up and fractured’, but that ‘my literary ambitions were the chief reason I was on hiatus from college and working at the Midwest REC at all’: this latter period of work at the IRS was prompted by his expulsion on the basis of ‘certain pieces of prose I produced for certain students on certain academic subjects’, pieces which were ‘fictional in the sense of having styles, theses, scholarly personas, and authorial names that were not my own’ (pp. 73-75). In other words, ‘Wallace’ bases the veracity of his whole narrative on his being a well-practiced plagiarist – an occupation that has provided him with not only financial support but also ‘good apprentice training’ in his pursuit of an ‘artistic career after college’ (p. 75). Meanwhile, his overall claim that ‘the larger narrative encompassing this Foreword has significant social and artistic value’ is based on his own ‘three years’ hard labour’, which presumably refers to the mediatory labour involved in his ‘extraordinary discernment and sensitivity to context, questions of value, and overall point’ (p. 259).

The published version of the ‘Foreword’ thus presents itself, on the one hand, as the necessary endpoint of an externally regulated mediation away from some original truth (which is enforced by the publisher as a ‘precondition for acceptance of the manuscript and payment of the advance’; pp. 68-69), and, on the other hand, as the authorized final product of ‘David Foster Wallace’’s discerning and sensitive mediation away from a ‘regurgitation’ of some ‘100 percent accurate’ truth that is not ‘meaningful, worthwhile, & c.’ in its own right. However, if this paratextual or ‘framing’ device now sets up a marginal interpretative position along the lines of ‘All typos intentional’ – assuring us that any instability in the central text has always been intended by the ‘Author here’ – then this is immediately undone by the fact that this published version of TPK has not been ‘authorized’ by Wallace. The marginalia found among the novel’s manuscripts even seem to anticipate this dissolution of central cohesion, with one note
reading: ‘David Wallace disappears – becomes creature of the system’.\(^6\) Readers of the published version might observe in particular that the text is not framed by the ‘Author’s Foreword’, but Pietsch’s ‘Editor’s Note’ – and, moreover, that the ‘Foreword’ is not even positioned at the start of the ‘novel proper’, but appears as §9, on p. 66 of the hardback version. Here is a direct example of Wallace’s apparently final intentions being contravened by Pietsch, in the rearrangement of a text that constitutes its own value in being authored by a figure called ‘David Foster Wallace’. Pietsch has admitted elsewhere the extent to which the manuscript found on Wallace’s desk has been expanded – about half of the published version is made up of those fragmentary materials that were found ‘below’ and ‘around’ the desk – and at the same time significantly rearranged: ‘I don’t believe [Wallace had] decided on a final order of presentation’, writes Pietsch;\(^6\) ‘It’s my version of the novel’.\(^7\) Because of this uncertainty over Wallace’s final intentions and their manifestation in the final version, some scholars have suggested that any interpretations of \textit{TPK} will themselves have to remain ‘speculative’, ‘prototypical’, \(^7\) or ‘provisional’.\(^7\) But what if we were to take Burn’s suggestion, and turn to the archive in order to separate Wallace’s ‘original’ intentions from their external mediation by Pietsch (thus acting less like a modern than a Classical or Elizabethan editor, who would look to authorize a text as ‘by’ Homer or Shakespeare not through an inference of final intention, but by ‘retrieving it in a pristine state from extant documents in which it had become corrupted in transmission’)\(^7\)

This is the question that will structure the next section of the present chapter. To be sure, there are key differences between editing the work of Homer and Shakespeare, and then again between editing a Hawthorne and a Joyce;\(^7\) the overall trend, however,

\(^6\) Pietsch, cited in Burn, ‘“Consciousness”’, p. 372.
\(^7\) Pietsch, cited in McGrath.
\(^7\) In 2011, and thus without full access to the archival materials, Burn wrote that critics were only ‘in the prototype phase of \textit{Pale King} criticism’; ‘our reading of the book’s total architecture is necessarily speculative at this stage’, but even with the materials, ‘it may forever be speculative’; ‘a full reading of the novel’s shape is likely to remain hypothetical’. See ‘“Consciousness”’, p. 372.
\(^7\) For Marshall Boswell, the fact that ‘we have no way of knowing exactly how much of this material would have constituted the finished novel, or how it would ultimately have been presented’ means that ‘just about anything one might say about \textit{The Pale King} is, by necessity, provisional’; see ‘Legal’, p. 26.
\(^7\) Gabler, ‘Textual’, p. 903.
\(^7\) One of McGann’s key concerns in \textit{Critique}, for example, is the easy equivalence that some textual critics have assumed between the kinds of ‘corruption’ that can be implied in different historical
is from ‘objective’ bibliography as a ‘science of editing’ which aimed to reveal ‘the patterns of textual transmission entirely through the black marks on paper, in total disregard of the sense that these marks made or the meanings they carried’ (‘without the intervention of critically interpretive judgement’),\textsuperscript{75} to the more explicitly ‘subjective’ focus on retrieving and then following an author’s latest intentions (as advanced most prominently by G. Thomas Tanselle).\textsuperscript{76} By denying the possibility of an objectively recognizable authorial ‘style’ while also resisting a stable notion of subjectivity, the example of Wallace’s ‘unauthorized’ posthumous novel pushes this historical critical divergence to the point of irresolvable contradiction; not only that, but it dramatizes the latter in the form of a narrative about the 1980s ‘neoliberalisation’ of the U.S. tax service, the veracity of which nonetheless relies on the authority established by the aforementioned ‘Author’s Foreword’. Thus, while some critics have finally taken the ‘Wallace’ of the ‘Foreword’ to be Wallace himself – who then is seen to be using the novel in order to either ‘train’ readers ‘how to do an observant textual practice […] in service of real [communist] emancipation’,\textsuperscript{77} or to ‘affirm’ their attempt to ‘recover the essential human amid a culture devoted increasingly to automation’,\textsuperscript{78} – I will ask how the ‘black marks on paper’ in Wallace’s archive bring any such readings into question, without dooming us to mere critical speculation.

\section*{2.2 Plagiarising Wallace}

The ‘central’, Peoria-based narrative of \textit{TPK} – which is ‘based on’ the notebooks of the self-confessed plagiarist ‘Wallace’ – concerns an ‘involved intra-[IRS] battle’ that took place in the mid-1980s ‘between advocates and opponents of an increasingly automated, computerized tax system’, which was itself related to a ‘deeper conflict over the very contexts: ‘Hawthorne’s early publisher, his editors, his printers are, for [Fredson] Bowers, entirely comparable to those older scribes who sought to preserve and transmit the classical texts, but who introduced, in the process, various contaminations’; ‘It makes no difference, in Bowers’s view, that the author oversaw and accepted this editorial intervention’. For McGann, this transference of authority – from an ‘unavailable original’ classical text to that of an autonomous modern author – is ‘founded in a Romantic ideology’; see pp. 18-22, pp. 37-49. On the difficulties of editing a text such as Joyce’s \textit{Finnegans Wake}, where ‘the very title […] is itself a challenge to editors (and readers) to be aware that games are being played with the “correct” and “incorrect”’, see Greetham, ““Impossibility””, p. 730.\textsuperscript{75} Gabler, ‘Textual’, pp. 901-03.


Shapiro, ‘fix’, p. 1268.

mission and raison of the Service’: ‘Distilled to its essence, the question was whether and to what extent’ tax administration should be prized as ‘an arena of social justice and civic virtue’ or operated ‘like a for-profit business’ (TPK, pp. 82-83; italics original). For the novel’s individual tax examiners, whose job is to ‘process’ the seemingly never-ending ‘stacks of files’ that arrive at their desks each day, the dilemma is thus whether to read completed 1040 tax returns with a view to ‘fairness’ and the ‘common good’, or to their potential profitability for the service itself (p. 378). The reader of Wallace’s voluminous manuscript marginalia, I will suggest, faces an analogous dilemma. Take, for example, the text that is presented by the Ransom Centre as ‘Draft 1’ of the ‘Author’s Foreword’ – a two-page passage, handwritten in a notebook in black, blue, and red pen – which is not a ‘Foreword’ at all but instead constitutes itself, via a note in the margin, as a ‘Dedication’ to a work entitled (see fig. 28):

**ULTIMATE FICTION:**
**FAKE MEMOIR OF JOB AT IRS**
by Fake Name.

This is followed by a ‘Regular disclaimer’, asserting the status of the text as ‘a work of fiction’. The narrator (‘Fake Name’) does not identify himself as ‘David Wallace’, although he presents the text to follow as ‘an account of 18 months I worked for the IRS. The good news is that it’s true’. A note in the margin of the opposite page reads: ‘Whole point – it must be structured as fiction for legal reasons – dealt with in appendix?’; a long line connects this to a note in the bottom margin: ‘[Dumb? The real-or-fiction theme is cool. But it could get annoying, especially if it keeps interrupting the narrative]’ (see fig. 29); here, the ‘real-or-fiction theme’ which is the ‘whole point’ of the text might also serve as an ‘annoying’ interruption of the narrative. The margins of the notebook can thus not only be seen to frame the central text therein, but also the notebook’s own relation to the published text of TPK: is this to be taken as an early draft on which the ‘real’ Wallace based the later versions of the ‘Foreword’, or as one of the notebooks kept by the ‘fictional’ ‘Wallace’ during his time at the IRS, and on

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79 For a cogent plot summary of TPK, see Shapiro, ‘fix’, pp. 1251-52, pp. 1256-58, pp. 1265-68.
which the published version is apparently based? The marginal notes constitute this as at once a ‘dumb’ question and, at the same time, the whole point. They also announce the notebook as serving a different function (‘Dedication’), within a different text (‘ULTIMATE FICTION’), by a different author (‘Fake Name’), and as such establish textual mediation as a dynamic exchange between marginalia and paratextuality.

This calls attention, however, to ‘the specific ways that Wallace’s materials have been mediated since their arrival at the Ransom Centre’ – the archival mediations that have occurred before we can even approach the first notebook drafts of *TPK*. 82 As Schwartzburg puts it, ‘[a]rchival institutions are always caught in a challenging mediatory tug-of-war’ in their attempts to identify, organize, and protect ‘the precious materials entrusted to us’, while seeking ‘to avoid imposing our expectations of scholarly use’ on those ‘researchers [who] will walk in the door with needs we could never imagine’; all the same, cataloguers ‘must mediate the materials to some degree. Even the simplest fact of how one names a collection mediates it’. 83 And, prior even to this layer of mediation, it should be noted that it was the initial arrangement of the manuscripts by Nadell and Green which provided the organizational scheme that appeared on dealer lists. 84 ‘David left his work in a dark, cold garage filled with spiders and in no order whatsoever’, writes Nadell (presumably excluding the pile of *TPK* papers found on his desk); ‘His wife and I took plastic bins and cardboard boxes and desk drawers and created an order out of chaos, putting manuscripts for each book together and writing labels in magic markers’. 85 When the materials then arrived and were processed at the Ransom Centre, their accessioner Stephen Cooper judged it appropriate to adjust this scheme once again, on the basis that ‘original order was never an issue’ (here, ‘original order’ means the order in which the materials were found – so, the ‘final order’ in which they were left by the author). 86 With Cooper’s intervention, and since the publication of *TPK*, the manuscripts are now separated into four large series, each containing subseries when necessary: ‘Works’, ‘Personal and Career

82 Schwartzburg, ‘Conclusion, p. 243.
83 Schwartzburg, ‘Conclusion’, pp. 241-44.
84 In this sense, the collection ‘was, like many archival acquisitions, already “curated” before it arrived in Austin’; see Schwartzburg, ‘Conclusion’, pp. 246-49.
85 Nadell, cited in Dietrich, ‘window’.
86 As Schwartzburg writes: ‘Many writers’ materials arrive arranged much – or exactly – as they were in the writer’s home, office, or storage facility. […] Upon its arrival, Wallace’s collection contained little evidence of Wallace’s organizational scheme, such as it was’; ‘Conclusion’, pp. 248-49.

This latter folder, which contains the manuscript materials that were published as TPK, is meanwhile sub-divided into a series of containers marked ‘ From his desk: clean print outs’, ‘ From his wire basket’, ‘ WPK ZIP disk print outs’, ‘ Black Unlabelled Disk’, ‘ Butterfly notebook, notes and clippings’ (and so on) in a manner that again seems to recreate the scene in Wallace’s garage. It thus seems that the Ransom Centre’s practical considerations as to the cataloguing of the Wallace archive are themselves broadly informed by a logic of centre and margin, holding to this opposition between ‘ clean print outs’ and those ‘ fragments that had evaded his attempt to integrate them’ – even where such a semblance of ‘ order’ is explicitly not in line with the order (or ‘ chaos’) left behind by Wallace.

In this sense, while Wallace’s manuscript marginalia hypothesize a paratextual resolution to the central text’s contradictions (‘ Dedication’, ‘ dealt with in appendix?’), these latter are putatively resolved by the paratextual structure of archival mediation. In the case of TPK’s ‘ Author’s Foreword’, six versions were digitised and made available online by the Ransom Centre in 2011; they are briefly introduced there, by Pietsch, as ‘ a series of drafts’ (‘ Draft 1’, ‘ Draft 2’, ‘ Draft 3’, etc.) that:

show the evolution of the passage that would eventually become chapter nine in The Pale King : the birth of [Wallace’s] idea to make himself a character writing a fake memoir, early handwritten drafts and attempts to expand that idea, and subsequent attempts to polish it once he felt he had written a worthy version.

This organizational scheme, along with Pietsch’s paratext, already establishes a teleological relation among the drafts – each of which is reachable via a series of consecutive links at the side of the page – as the passage ‘ evolves ’ from the ‘ birth ’ of an idea to its realization in a ‘ worthy version ’. And yet, the notebook draft that is labelled as ‘ Draft 1 ’ – but which advertises itself in the margin as a ‘ Dedication ’ to

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87 Wallace annotated the proofs of several works by DeLillo; because these are technically manuscripts, they are housed with the papers rather than the library. See Schwartzburg, ‘ Conclusion ’ , pp. 248-49. For a full catalogue of the Wallace archive, see ‘ Inventory ’.


‘ULTIMATE FICTION’ – already performs an anxiety about its own future mediation. ‘The single most dramatic question in this account will have been resolved already if you are reading this’, writes the narrator (‘Fake Name’):

Because as of now the prospects of getting it published are not very good. This is according to my literary agent, who is Ms. Janet Lear of Turner and Lear Associates in New York, and I am deeply indebted to her. Literally. According This dedication is being written as the manuscript makes its 3rd go-around of the big New York publishing houses. Tremulous nervousness and regret are just the only reactions it has aroused.

[note in bottom left margin, connected by a short arrow] Part way thru – news that this has been accepted, but it’s to be co-edited by Little, Brown’s legal dept. along with Mr. Michael Pietsch, to whom I am deeply indebted. They are now claiming it will have to be done as fiction – refer to the disclaimer

[note in top right margin] Some parts are blacked out by publishers lawyers Cross-outs & black-outs in actual book

As a ‘Dedication’, the function of this passage is different to that of a ‘Foreword’: conventionally, this former sub-type of paratext does not just introduce or frame the text to follow, but announces it as a tribute to some identifiable figure or party; it is a sign of gratitude that simultaneously entreats remuneration. The central text casts doubts on the chances of its being ‘read’ (synonymous with ‘getting it published’), while implying its dedicatee as the narrator’s literary agent, Ms. Janet Lear, to whom the narrator is ‘literally’ indebted. The first marginal note marks a temporal shift (‘Part way thru – news that [the manuscript] has been accepted’), before implying a second dedicatee, Mr. Michael Pietsch, and signalling another layer of mediation (Pietsch and Little, Brown’s legal department); the next marginal note marks another temporal shift, by summoning the possibility that the lawyers will enforce ‘black-outs in actual book’. The marginalia thus interrupt the apologetic, unpublishable central text of the ‘Dedication’ in order to hypothesize the acceptance, editing, and publication of another central text (which ends up as the ‘actual book’); this latter book, however, is never recognizably published, despite the narrator’s statement that ‘[t]he single most dramatic question in this account will have been resolved already if you are reading this’.

91 Genette, Paratexts, pp. 117-35.
92 While, on the one hand, this might refer to an advance that ‘Fake Name’ is apparently unlikely to be able to honour, on the other hand, Wallace never applied for or received an advance for the ‘Long Thing’ that would be published as TPK; however, he had written ‘For LB advance?’ on the label of a disk containing the chapters that were found on his desk; see Pietsch, ‘Note’, p. vi; Max, Ghost, pp. 296-97.
If the manuscript marginalia here set up a distinction between inside and outside that works analogously to ‘internal’ (‘Fake Name’) and ‘external’ (Lear, ‘Pietsch’, the lawyers) forms of mediation, they also work temporally in order to unsettle the identity of the text itself. The notion of the paratext, on the other hand, is defined:

in all its forms [as] a discourse that is fundamentally heteronomous, auxiliary, and dedicated to the service of something other than itself that constitutes its raison d’être. This something is the text. Whatever aesthetic or ideological investment an author makes in a paratextual element (a ‘lovely title’ or a preface-manifesto), whatever coquettishness or paradoxical reversal he puts into it, the paratextual element is always subordinate to ‘its’ text, and this functionality determines the essence of its appeal and existence.\(^{93}\)

This begs the question here, however, of to which ‘text’ the passage that is identified as ‘Draft 1’ of \(TPK\)’s ‘Author’s Foreword’ is ‘subordinate’. If we follow Genette’s more specific remarks on the paratextual status that is afforded to plans and manuscripts (which he calls ‘pre-texts’),\(^{94}\) then Drafts 1-6 sit in a chain of subordination that is finally ‘dedicated’ or ‘auxiliary’ to the published version; no amount of coquettishness on behalf of ‘the author’ can interrupt this logic. This relies, at the same time, on a notion of the text itself as constituted by its author’s ‘aesthetic or ideological investment’; and, ‘[b]y definition, something is not a paratext unless the author or one of his associates accepts responsibility for it’.\(^{95}\) In the case of \(TPK\), however, this opens up a new set of problems: to what extent is the final text Wallace’s own ‘investment’ or ‘responsibility’, and to what extent is it his associates’? If the text is not properly authorized in this way, then to what extent can it possess paratexts? And what if – as we have seen is frequently the case with Wallace’s oeuvre, culminating with the appearance and disappearance of ‘David Foster Wallace’ in \(TPK\) – the text at hand persistently calls into question the stability or even possibility of the identity of ‘the author’?

By tracing the problems that arise with the notion of ‘Draft 1’ as a paratext, I hope not to dismiss the usefulness of Genette’s terms and taxonomy, but rather to ask what relation paratextuality might hold to marginalia: why, for example, do the margins of this passage seem to hypothesize or gesture towards, without ever quite becoming,
paratexts? While it is true that the notion of the ‘margin’ must be constituted in opposition to a ‘centre’, and is fully as entangled in questions of investment and responsibility, what we see here is the relative contingency of this model: the potential reversibility as well as the apparent fixity of its terms, depending on their particular configuration within a particular text and context. Meanwhile, the primary function of all paratexts, writes Genette, is to:

surround [the text] and extend it, precisely in order to present it, in the usual sense of this verb but also in the strongest sense: to make present, to ensure the text’s presence in the world, its ‘reception’ and consumption in the form (nowadays, at least) of a book.  

By providing it with a ‘threshold’ and making it ‘present in the world’, paratexts thus ensure the publication and consumption of the text as a book: they grant the text its commodity status. ‘Draft 1’ first constitutes itself as a ‘Dedication’ to a text that is unlikely to achieve commodity status, thus hoping to function (by its own presence) as the kind of ‘tribute to benefactors’ (Lear and ‘Pietsch’) that tended to accompany works before the professionalization of literature as such; on the other hand, the marginalia project the text’s future mediation and publication, although this will be less a process of ‘presentation’ than one of corruption by external forces: in other words, the marginalia project the text’s future presentation or publication as impossible. This clashes, firstly, with the passage’s paratextual presentation by Pietsch and the Ransom Centre website, and, secondly, with the ‘Author’s Foreword’ that appears in the published version of TPK, wherein the narrator (now identified as ‘David Foster Wallace’) informs us that the manuscript has now been accepted and advanced on the condition of its mediation by the ‘editor’ and its publishers; the names of Lear and Pietsch have been removed as dedicatees, and altogether (TPK, pp. 68-69). The temporal shift projected by the marginalia in ‘Draft 1’ – which we might also think of as the passage’s projected commodification – seems, in the published ‘Foreword’, to have occurred. As a result of this same process, however, the passage is no longer identified by the same title, as belonging to the same work, or as written by the same author – which are nonetheless the three main principles by which the variant texts

96 Genette, Paratexts, p. 1; italics original.
97 As Genette points out, ‘[i]n periods when literature was not really looked on as a profession and when the practice of giving the author rights to a percentage of the sales was almost entirely unknown […], the dedicatory epistle was regularly counted among a writer’s sources of income’; Paratexts, p. 118.
have been organized in Austin under the heading of ‘Additional Pale King Materials’, and on the Ransom Centre website. Unlike the notion of the paratext, then, which would teleologically frame all archival variants into a chain that ends with and is subordinate to the published text, the marginalia figure the mediatory movement among and between the variant texts as a dynamics of fragmentation and disidentification. The paratext grants the published text its commodity status on the basis of its prior mediation; the marginalia present this process of mediation as simultaneously one of commodification, but in which the ‘original’ copy, as well as its author, are already entangled.

All the same, and as is the case with the published version of TPK’s ‘Foreword’, the central or constitutive principle of coherence within the archive remains that of the ‘author’. This is true also in most of the present studies that consider manuscript marginalia as part of the genetic process, whether one favours Shelley’s Romantic notion of the ‘original’ (‘when composition begins, inspiration is already on the decline’), or Pound’s modernist, revisionary ideal of artistic ‘economy’ and ‘perfect control’. The key to either of these notions of composition, as with Genette’s distinction between text and paratext, is the relative investment made, or responsibility taken, by the author in question; manuscript marginalia then tend to stand in as the concrete manifestations (or guarantees) of this authorly labour. As Nadell writes of Wallace’s archive: ‘What scholars and readers will find fascinating […] is that as messy as David was with how he kept his work, the actual writing is painstakingly careful’:

For each draft of a story or essay there are levels of edits marked in different coloured ink, repeated word changes until he found the perfect word for each sentence, and notes to himself about how to sharpen a phrase until it met his exacting eye. Having represented David from the beginning of his writing career, I know there were people who felt David was too much of a ‘look ma no hands’ kind of writer, fast and clever and undisciplined. Yet anyone reading through his notes to himself will see how scrupulous they are. […] We want readers to see how he thought because how he thought was unique and beautiful and precise. So anyone looking through his drafts and even his books will see the levels of thinking that went into every sentence and every page.  

100 Nadell, cited in Dietrich, ‘window’.
Wallace’s manuscript marginalia are figured by Nadell as ‘a window into his mind’, functioning as proof of his scruples and discipline, his exactness and precision, the ‘levels of thinking’ behind ‘every sentence’ that he published. Similarly, Cooper (paraphrased by Schwartzburg) observes that the ‘chaotic conditions’ in which Wallace’s papers were found stand ‘in stark contrast to Wallace’s attention to detail on the page’:

Though his work spaces were disorderly, Wallace’s method was ‘meticulous’: extensive revisions from draft to draft and detailed comments to editors and copy editors (some noted by carefully placed sticky notes) stand apart from those of most writers whose papers Cooper has catalogued.

Overall, there is a focus on Wallace’s manuscript marginalia as exceptional and demonstrative: despite some apparent messiness (in the texts, in the authorly reputation), they can tell us something about the care and precision that was invested in Wallace’s compositional process, which will in turn have implications for the way we approach the oeuvre.

As we have already seen, however, Wallace’s writing tends to question the notion of marginalia as a way into the mind of the original, if ‘continually remaking’, genius. In the case of the ‘original’ version of the passage labelled ‘Dedication’ (or ‘Draft 1’), the narrator ‘Fake Name’ already emphasizes the status of the writing as externally mediated; at the same time, in the published version that we know to have been finally mediated by Pietsch, a narrator called ‘Wallace’ bases the value of the surrounding narrative on its prior artistic mediation by himself: the ‘original’, apparently sincere in its closeness to Wallace, is not ‘by’ him; and the ‘Wallace’ that authorizes the published version has not been deemed a sincere version of the author. Each of the intervening versions similarly makes a claim to authority, or to ‘truth’, based on a sort of mediated authorial immediacy; in ‘Draft 2’ (handwritten), the narrator writes (see fig. 23):

As it happens, there is sometimes such a persona narrating certain stuff in the text to follow, sometimes even in the first-person p.o.v.s, but that narrator will be primarily a protective construction, an entity that exists only to displace liability and facilitate commerce [...] . It will not be me have xx x have no provable connection to me as a living person.

101 Nadell, cited in Dietrich, ‘window’.
102 Schwartzburg, ‘Conclusion’, p. 250.
But this Foreword is me as a real person speaking here – David Wallace [...] in the early springtime of 2005 [...] to inform you that the story to follow is in fact true, not fiction at all.103

In ‘Draft 3’ (handwritten; see fig. 30):

There is, sometimes, such a persona in the text to follow, but that will be mainly just a legal construction, and will have no actual connection to me as a person. But this is me as a living person in the winter of 2005, from my deductible home office at 725 Indian Hill Blvd., Claremont CA, 91711, (909) 607-8357. All this is true. All the following is true.104

While the marginalia here – ‘It will not be me have xx x have no provable connection to me’, ‘mainly just a legal construction’, ‘no truthful actual connection to me’, ‘this is me as a living person [...] in the winter of 2005’ – seem increasingly to perform the work of a plagiarist rather than to confirm the truth of the text at hand, it is only in ‘Draft 4’ (typescript) that the narrator first mentions his proficiency in that practice (see fig. 31):

Without going into a whole lot of detail, let’s just say that there were certain pieces of prose I produced for certain students on certain academic subjects, and that these pieces were ‘fictional’ in the sense of having authorial names, styles and textual personas that were not my own. [...] The main motivation was, as it so often is in the world, financial. [...] Let’s just say, that as a way of positioning myself to repay some of those student loans, I provide a certain service. This service was not cheap, but I was very good at it, and careful.

[Note in bottom margin, connected by a short line] FN? (It takes about five pages of someone’s writing to understand how they put sentences together – and ways of writing are quite distinctive, like fingerprints.)105

If the annotations on the central text here perform the duplicity of the narrator’s ‘very quite good’ and ‘careful’ work of plagiarism, then the projected footnote discloses, with apparent sincerity, the secret of this art (by suggesting that an authorial style is as genetically distinctive as a fingerprint, after all).106 ‘I’m mentioning it all this’, continues

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106 The simultaneous development and erasure of style in these drafts can perhaps help us to elucidate the difficult position that Fredric Jameson takes in an interview with Ian Buchanan: ‘Nobody thinks that people like David Foster Wallace are styleless, but rather that the production of the individual or personal style – maybe even what you find in Pynchon – is no longer of the same order as modernist style and in that sense the transformation in the very possibility of producing style gets linked to the great
this version of ‘Wallace’, ‘only to provide context for some of the fictional looking coded stylistic features of the […] memoir you have (I hope) bought ^ retail and are about to read’.

The ‘Wallace’ of ‘Draft 5’, however, claims that ‘[t]his service was not cheap, but I was quite very good at it, and careful’, the ‘Wallace’ of ‘Draft 6’ and of the published version, on the other hand, both state that ‘[t]his service was not cheap, but I was quite good at it, and careful’ (TPK, p. 75).

What emerges here is not so much a distinction between internal and external forms of mediation (or between ‘Wallace’ and ‘not-Wallace’, ‘author’ and ‘associates’), as a notion of mediation that works precisely by disrupting the possibility of any such distinction: although each of the passages constitutes itself as an abstraction that is nonetheless ‘based upon’ some initial reality, their contestatory dynamics as ‘versions’ of a work known as TPK lead to the fragmentation of both the work and its origin. And, in this sense, their manuscript marginalia work not so much as concrete guarantees of the ‘discipline’, ‘precision’, and ‘care’ that the author has put ‘into every sentence and every page’, than as a further intensification of the problems of identity and value that are so central to Wallace’s oeuvre – questioning all the while what it is that we might mean by this latter formulation.

If the published version of TPK thus sits ‘in the margin’ between Wallace’s oeuvre and archive, then it is no less overt in its performance of this marginality as a matter of paratextuality: which is to say that despite its status as the ‘final’ version of the text, its economy of centre/margin continues to question an identifiable notion of authorly investment and responsibility. Firstly, there is the problem of Pietsch’s explicitly signalled mediation of Wallace. Whereas Nabokov’s Kinbote cunningly tells us of a corrected ‘Pale Fire’ manuscript ‘teeming with devastating erasures and cataclysmic insertions’, but which ‘turns out to be beautifully accurate when you once

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make the plunge and compel yourself to open your eyes in the limpid depths under its confused surface’, 110 Pietsch writes of the TPK materials found in Wallace’s garage:

Some pieces were neatly typed and revised through numerous versions. Others were drafts in David’s miniscule handwriting. Some – those chapters from the desk among them – had been recently polished. Others were much older and contained abandoned or superseded plotlines. There were notes and false starts, lists of names, plot ideas, instructions to himself. 111

Pietsch’s solution to this, far from including an extensive set of endnotes that aim to provide the ‘human reality’ of the otherwise ‘too skittish and reticent’ work at hand, 112 is to append a short section of these ‘Notes and Asides’ in order to ‘illuminate how much a work in progress [TPK] still was’. Here we find notes that were ‘attached to specific chapters’ as well as fragments of marginalia that have been extracted from ‘other parts of the manuscript’: ‘contradictions and complications abound among them’. 113 These erasures and insertions are, again, necessarily selective and ‘edited’, but they come at the conclusion of the text as if to emphasize its inconclusive state, rather than to somehow complete ‘the symmetry of the structure’. 114

Nonetheless, TPK’s ‘Notes and Asides’ provide an echo of the paratextual problem of the 388 endnotes that are appended to IJ as ‘Notes and Errata’ – to the extent that TPK’s structure (‘Editor’s Note’, fragmentary narrative sections, an embedded ‘Author’s Foreword’, and ‘Notes and Asides’), as Henry Veggian has suggested, ‘resembles a Borgesian prank’. 115 This is reminiscent also of the dynamic that Daniela Caselli has analysed in critical attempts to understand Beckett’s oeuvre in relation to his archive. Like IJ, Beckett’s Watt contains a supplementary section (titled ‘Addenda’), which is footnoted with a recommendation that ‘the following precious and illuminating material should be carefully studied. Only fatigue and disgust prevented its incorporation’; 116 critics have tended to take the ‘Addenda’ as a ‘lacking’ margin, which can then be read in light of the ‘fullness’ of the central text. As Caselli argues, this logic has also underpinned interpretations of the compositional process of

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111 Pietsch, ‘Note’, p. vi.
Murphy, wherein the fragmentary outlines found in Beckett’s ‘Whoroscope’ notebook have often been thought best ‘kept out of sight’ – unless, that is, they can be ontologically framed ‘into a teleological structure’, or treated as a ‘prophesy’ of the published novel.117 In the same way, even where TPK is advertised by its ‘Editor’s Note’ as explicitly lacking or unfinished, the presence of its appended paratextual ‘archive’ (full of authorly marginalia) continues to promise or suggest that such textual instability might just constitute what Genette calls the ‘aesthetic or ideological investment an author makes in a paratextual element […]’, whatever coquettishness or paradoxical reversal he puts into it’.118

And secondly, in light of this, there is the problem invoked by the plea that ‘Wallace’ issues to the reader of the published version of the ‘Foreword’: ‘Please know that I find these sorts of cute, self-referential paradoxes irksome, too – at least now that I’m thirty I do – and that the very last thing this book is is some kind of clever metafictional titty-pinch (TPK, p. 67). Alternatively, ‘Wallace’ proposes two reasons for the ‘hard labour’ that he has put into writing and editing the book. The first is financial, given the ‘simple truth […] that I, like so many other Americans, have suffered reverses in the volatile economy of the last few years […] at the same time that my financial obligations have increased along with my age and responsibilities’; he notes that ‘in 2003, the average author’s advance for a memoir was almost 2.5 times that paid for a work of fiction’ (TPK, pp. 80-81). The second reason, as noted above, is that that ‘the larger narrative encompassing this Foreword has significant social and artistic value’, the measurement of which, insists ‘Wallace’, is dependent upon the ‘unspoken contract between [the] book’s author and its reader’:

Our mutual contract here is based on the presumptions of (a) my veracity, and (b) your understanding that any features or semions that might appear to undercut that veracity are in fact protective legal devices, not unlike the boilerplate that accompanies sweepstakes and civil contracts, and thus are not meant to be decoded or ‘read’ so much as merely acquiesced to as part of the cost of our doing business together, so to speak, in today’s commercial climate. [footnote 10]

10. Apologies for the preceding sentence, which is the product of much haggling and compromise with the publisher’s legal team. (p. 73, p. 73n10)

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117 Caselli, Dantes, pp. 81-101.
118 Genette, Paratexts, p. 12.
The self-referential paradox of the ‘Author’s Foreword’ is apparently not meant, then, as a ‘coquettish’ or immature ‘metafictional titty-pinner’, but as a serious claim for TPK’s truthfulness in spite of the legal and economic conditions of ‘today’s commercial climate’; the footnote here even inverts the normal role of contractual boilerplate, in that it apologises for and acknowledges the formality of the main text as ‘the product of much [legal] haggling’. As such, in a movement between centre and margin, the text constitutes its own authority on the basis of the sincerity of the work that ‘Wallace’ has put into it, despite all of the interferences (or ‘costs’) that come with ‘today’s commercial climate’.

This is surrounded in the ‘Foreword’ by other, extended footnotes that similarly figure internal and external mediation as an oppositional process that occurs between centre and margin. At times becoming so expansive as to ‘take over’ the space of the page from the main text, these notes go into the ‘esoteric, contextless’ intricacies of U.S. tax law – for example the (fictionalized) disputes within the IRS about 1987’s ‘Audit-No Audit Tax Discriminant Algorithm’ or 1986’s ‘Spackman Initiative’ concerning the ‘IRS Series 20 Internal Memo’ – that we are invited to ‘skip or skim’ if ‘[we] wish’ because ‘this stuff is solid rock. The eyes roll up white by the third or fourth ¶’ (pp. 68-69n3, p. 84). But, at the end of the ‘Foreword’, ‘Wallace’ informs us that the value of the present book will depend largely on its depiction of the ‘involved intra-Service battle’ that pitted the common ‘fairness’ of taxation against its potential profitability. Despite the fact that ‘if you know how to search and parse government archives, you can find voluminous history and theory on just about every side of the debate’, writes ‘Wallace’, ‘very few ordinary Americans know anything about all’ these ‘deep changes […] that today directly affect the way citizens’ tax obligations are determined and enforced’; ‘the reason for this public ignorance is not secrecy’, however, but that ‘the whole subject of tax policy and administration is dull. Massively, spectacularly dull’ (p. 83). ‘The memoir-relevant point here is that I learned, in my time with the Service, something about dullness, information, and irrelevant complexity’ – qualities that can act as ‘insulation’ against ‘public protest and political opposition’ – and it is implied that this ‘something’, which is ‘right here before us all, hidden by virtue of its size’, will be the subject of the present book (p. 85, p. 83).
In Chapter One, it was Wallace’s book marginalia that promised seductively to disclose the secrets of his artistic mediation; this is succeeded here by a model of investment, whereby the reader’s willingness to laboriously ‘search and parse’ the ‘dullness, information, and irrelevant complexity’ of a given archive – represented analogically by TPK – will result in a payoff that is guaranteed by the mediatory labour that has already been invested in the text by its author. As we have seen, the published version of the ‘Author’s Foreword’ even proposes this model in the form of an interpretive ‘contract’ between author (the ‘real person, David Wallace’) and reader, where the author’s valorisation of the dull specificities of 1980s tax code is contradicted by his invitation to readers to ‘skip or skim’ the ‘solid rock’ of the accompanying footnotes – some of the details of which will turn out to be crucial to TPK’s underlying IRS narrative. However, this also works analogously to the status of Wallace’s archival materials in relation to the published novel: although in the latter, ‘any features or semions that might appear to undercut [‘Wallace’’s] veracity’ are ‘not meant to be decoded or “read” so much as merely acquiesced to’, the availability of the manuscripts works to undermine the ‘veracity’ of the contract itself (by showing ‘Wallace’, as well as his authorial ‘style’, to be the product of fragmentation and plagiarism, rather than ‘sincerity’). In both cases, marginalia function as either a ‘dull’ and ‘irrelevant complexity’ or as a vital interpretative key; they provide either a guarantee on our investment, or its total undoing. As such, these two centre/margin oppositions (which I will refer to in the next few pages as ‘oeuvre’ and ‘archive’, respectively) work to helpfully illuminate the Wallace/not-Wallace problem: that is, they simultaneously demonstrate and deconstruct the logic of oeuvre and archive as ‘investment’ and ‘guarantee’ (indeed as a distinction altogether), while placing the continuing effectivity of such a logic, and such a distinction, within TPK’s socio-historical thematics of (post-)1980s neoliberalisation.

Firstly, with the published version of the opposition (‘oeuvre’): in order to make sense of the surrounding, Peoria-based narrative of TPK, the reader must subvert the ‘contract’ installed by ‘Wallace’ by paying close attention to, or ‘searching and parsing’, the complexities of the footnotes; but such a move will ultimately reinforce the central authority of ‘Wallace’. Indeed, for many of the novel’s readers to date, this has even led to a dropping of the quotation marks around Wallace’s name. Thus,
Despite the uncertainty around Wallace’s actual authorship or ‘authorization’ of the novel, and the consequently ‘provisional’ status of much TPK criticism, Wallace has nonetheless been assumed to be benignly mediating the contents of TPK: in turn, this critical investment in the ‘real’ author allows for critics to claim that Wallace is using the novel in order to either ‘train’ readers ‘how to do an observant textual practice […] in service of real [communist] emancipation’, or to ‘affirm’ their attempt to ‘recover the essential human amid a culture devoted increasingly to automation’. The ‘Spackman Initiative’ – the details of which are hidden in the ‘solid rock’ of the ‘Foreword’’s footnotes – provides a key example of how this mode of interpretation works. This is the name given to the aforementioned ‘intra-Service battle’ between ‘traditional or “conservative” officials’, for whom ‘attitudes about paying taxes seem like one of the places where a man’s civic sense gets revealed in the starkest sorts of terms’, and those ‘more progressive, “pragmatic” policymakers who prized the market model, efficiency, and a maximum return on the investment of the [IRS]’s annual budget’ (pp. 82-83, p. 141). This process, which has generally been interpreted as a figure for Reagan-era neoliberalization, necessitates a shift in the way that individual tax accountants ‘process’ the multitudinous stacks of files that arrive at their desks each day: whereas before, tax returns are selected and read with a view to detecting possible malfeasance in the name of the ‘common good’, the Initiative ensures that ‘there is now only one overriding operational question: Which returns are most profitable to audit, and how are those returns most efficiently to be found?’ (pp. 107-14). This then links back to the contract outlined in the ‘Foreword’, whereby any signs in the Peoria IRS narrative that might undercut the ‘veracity’ of ‘Wallace’ as mediator are meant to be considered as ‘part of the cost of our doing business together’: the ensuing challenge for the reader, faced with almost 550 often sprawling pages of a ‘novel about boredom [that] is, more than occasionally, boring’, is to attempt to read with a view to ‘fairness’ and the ‘common good’ rather than ‘profitability’ or ‘efficiency’.

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119 Shapiro, ‘fix’, p. 1268.
121 Shapiro goes so far as to suggest that ‘the common noun Spackman should be replaced with the more abstract one of neoliberalism’; ‘fix’, p. 1258; italics original.
122 Kakutani, ‘Maximized’.
It is telling, however, that in their attempts to solve this problem one way or the other in the published *TPK*, both the ideologues committed to civic virtue, and those committed to efficiency, turn to the recruitment of rote tax examiners with powers of either total ‘concentration’ or total ‘automation’ (to the extent, in the case of Shane Drinion, that the examiner actually begins to levitate; p. 485). In other words, in order to determine either which completed 1040 tax forms might be most ‘profitable’, or those which are ‘virtuous’ or ‘fair’, examiners must read them with either the mechanisation of a machine or the intuition of a mystic, reminding us of ‘Wallace’’s justification of his artistic mediation of reality: the need for his ‘extraordinary discernment and sensitivity to context, questions of value, and overall point – otherwise we might as well just be computers downloading raw data to one another’. This reiterates, for the reader of *TPK*, the promise of Wallace’s manuscript marginalia: a promise that ‘every sentence and every page’ in front of us has been ‘discerningly’ and ‘sensitively’ mediated by the author, even if the end product is still dull, boring, or irrelevantly complex.\(^\text{124}\) §11, for example, takes the form of a ‘Management & Support’s Office of Employee Assistance & Personnel Overview Internal Memorandum 4123-78(b)’ from the IRS’s ‘Assistance Commissioner of Internal Revenue for Human Resources’, outlining the ‘Conclusion of ACIRHRMSOEAP Survey/Study 1-76 – 11-77: AMA/DSM(II)-authorized syndromes/symptoms associated with Examinations postings in excess of 36 months’; it contains nothing more than a list of forty two mental and physical conditions that have been reported by long-standing rote tax examiners, including ‘Lordosis’ (curvature of the spine), ‘Torticollis’ (twisted neck), and ‘Haemorrhoids’, but also ‘Paramnesia’ (confusion of fact and fantasy) and ‘Dissociative fugues’ (confusion of personal identity) (*TPK*, pp. 87-88). \(^\text{124}\) §25 adopts the double-columned layout of an accountant’s logbook, while describing a short, uneventful passage of time on a regular day in the Peoria IRS examination office:


\(^{123}\) Nadell, cited in Dietrich, ‘window’.

\(^{124}\) Hamilton has problematically attempted to deal with this problem by setting up an opposition between ‘intentional’ and ‘unintentional’ tedium; see ‘Tedium’, pp. 184-85.
Pounder turns a page. Robert Atkins turns two separate pages of two separate files at the same time. Ken Wax turns a page. Lane Dean Jr. turns a page. Olive Borden turns a page. (p. 310)

This goes on for several pages, with the ‘turns a page’ sentence structure interrupted only by a couple of comparatively poetic fragments (including the one that Max chose for the title of his Wallace biography, ‘Every love story is a ghost story’) (pp. 310-13). Meanwhile, TPK’s longest section is narrated by the first character that we see turning a page, whose nickname (‘Irrelevant’ Chris Fogle) stems from his perceived tendency to ‘waste time noodling about every last gap and imprecision in [his] own memory’; as such, his rambling, ninety eight page account of how he came to be an IRS examiner is described by ‘Wallace’ as a ‘prime cautionary example’ of the sort of unartistic ‘regurgitation’ that he vows to avoid (although, in a footnote, ‘Wallace’ also claims that Fogle’s narrative ‘is actually heavily edited and excerpted’; pp. 154-252, p. 257n3). The interpretive contract drawn up by the published ‘Author’s Foreword’, then, seems to hold out the possibility that the reader’s hard physical and mental labour in slowly ‘turning the pages’ of TPK will be rewarded in some way, will yield ‘social and artistic value’ in a manner that somehow resists or counteracts the 1980s neoliberal trajectory towards profit and efficiency that is presented as the historical reality on which the book is ‘based’. The guarantee for this is the sincerity of the ‘hard labour’ that has been put into those pages by the author.

This leads us to the second version of the centre/margin opposition that I set out on p. 143 (‘archive’), between the published version of TPK and its manuscript variants. If the published text challenges readers to ‘get through’ its contents on the basis that, a., it might lead to some common good comparable to ‘getting through’ the dull complexities of the U.S. tax archive, but only because, b., the novel’s contents have been mediated in advance by ‘Wallace’, then, as we have seen, ‘getting through’ the complexities of the archive in Austin might promise to allow us to ‘disentangle’ the authorship and authority of the real David Foster Wallace from any external, contaminating factors. I have argued, however, that Wallace’s manuscript marginalia do not act as guarantees of his authorial mediation, but rather intensify the

125 This passage is pivotal to Ralph Clare’s analysis of the novel, which claims that ‘Wallace engages in a kind of “aesthetics of boredom”’ that ‘reminds us that it takes work to pay attention, to recognize responsibilities that go beyond the immediate self, and to parse social, political, and cultural narratives for relevance and meaning’; see ‘Boredom’, p. 429, p. 444.
contradiction of source and citation that runs throughout the oeuvre. If TPK depicts 1980s neoliberalisation as a loss of those ‘distinctions between one’s essential character and value’ (p. 417), while proposing as a panacea a Tocquevillian ethic of (white, male, white-collar) civic labour – of close, community-spirited reading\(^{126}\) – then an analogously close reading of Wallace’s manuscript marginalia shows this latter as flawed: these marks of revision work only to further entangle the problem of ‘essential character’ and ‘value’.

While paying attention to the comparatively intricate ‘black marks on paper’ of completed 1040 tax forms, the Peoria accountants reach a ‘certain threshold of concentrated boredom’, a trancelike, belaboured state in which it becomes possible to either divine the honesty, or calculate the profitability, of the labour represented by the form in front of them (TPK, pp. 314-16). Similarly, having set out the editorial guidelines that he has followed, Pietsch in the end refers to his assembly of TPK as ‘the best act of loving remembrance I was capable of’,\(^{127}\) recalling Tanselle’s more general theoretical contention that ‘[t]he editor’s critical judgement – his literary taste exercised in the light of his intimate knowledge of the author and all known relevant external evidence – must finally determine the case’.\(^{128}\) The example of TPK and its variants thus illustrates that, even if we take ‘authority [as] a social nexus, not a personal possession’,\(^{129}\) interpretative investment nonetheless tends unerringly towards the individual known as Wallace – a humanist teacher or communist emancipator that we might learn from or follow, so long as he can be clearly identified and disentangled from the contradictions that obtain both between, and within, his archive and oeuvre. Moreover – and as with the examples of Blake, Joyce, and Beckett that we saw in the Introduction – Wallace’s manuscript marginalia have already started to function, in a number of critical readings, as just the kind of ‘dangerous supplement’ that would be necessary to such a process of disentanglement,\(^{130}\) leaving behind only a kind of ‘purified’, benign, and finally uncomplicated notion of the figure of ‘Wallace himself’

\(^{126}\) Shapiro gives the most detailed and optimistic reading of this aspect of TPK in ‘fix’. pp. 1265-68.
\(^{127}\) Pietsch, ‘Note’, p. vii.
\(^{129}\) Here I am responding to McGann’s proposal – offered as an alternative to Romantic relations of autonomy between author, work, and context – that ‘authority is a social nexus, not a personal possession’; Critique, pp. 37-49.
\(^{130}\) Derrida, Grammatology, pp. 141-64.
(as master or ‘leader’). And yet, whether we work ‘objectively’ through the original documents in search of a ‘text of highest authority’, or ‘subjectively’ in the determination (or ‘intuition’) of the author’s sincere intentions, I have contended that the payment of such attention to the intricacies of TPK and its variants will achieve a resolution of neither their meaning, nor their author’s ‘identity’; indeed, I have attempted to demonstrate that even the ‘best act of loving remembrance’ will fail to alter the entanglement of Wallace (as archive, ouevre, or author-function) with the contradictions of late capitalism. To cite Richard Godden and Michael Szalay’s description of the papers found on Wallace’s desk, these materials also remain “‘a temporary and flexible coalescence of assets’, to be scrutinized by an editor acting in the manner of a derivative trader, the better to realize “the value of its component pieces” through the price of the new edition’.132

I will contend in the concluding section that, although the model of authorly/readerly investment that we have been tracing here is especially illuminated by the textual history and thematics of TPK – thus lending weight to its reception as Wallace’s most ‘serious’ work – it has in fact tended to structure the relation between Wallace’s oeuvre and his archive more generally. The section will also serve to introduce Chapter Three’s more in-depth analysis of the pseudo-scholarly marginalia that appear throughout Wallace’s work.

2.3 Choreography and Chaos in ‘Eschaton’; or, the Elegance of Infinite Jest’s Complexity

Towards the end of the months-long promotional tour for IJ – which Max describes as a ‘fantastical success’, although ‘[Wallace] was far from sure the experience had been a pleasant one’133 – Wallace writes to DeLillo:

I […] tried my best to tell the truth and to be kind to reporters who hadn’t read the book and wanted only to discuss the ‘hype’ around the book and seemed wilfully to

131 For an example of a ‘subjective’ reading, see Boswell, ‘Legal’, p. 38.
133 For a full account of IJ’s promotional campaign both pre- and post-publication, see Max, Ghost, pp. 211-26.
ignore the fact that articles about the hype were themselves the hype (for about a week there it seemed to me that the book became the Most Photographed Barn, everyone tremendously excited over the tremendous excitement surrounding a book that takes over a month of hard labour to read).\textsuperscript{134}

Connected to the end of this (typed) sentence by a faintly pencilled arrow is a similarly faint marginal note: ‘So which, clearly, very few people had actually read yet’.\textsuperscript{135} Here, Wallace invokes a figure from DeLillo’s \textit{White Noise} – a barn photographed by tourists so frequently that ‘it becomes impossible to see the barn’\textsuperscript{136} – in order to portray his concerns over the immediate reception of his own novel; the marginal note specifies this as a problem of labour and interpretation. ‘[E]veryone’, suggests Wallace, is ‘tremendously excited over the tremendous excitement surrounding a book that takes over a month of hard labour to read’: the excitement is not over the book, nor over the labour that it takes, but rather over the excitement that is induced by the idea of ‘a book’ that demands (or promises) such a period of readerly labour. The content or specificity of \textit{IJ} itself is apparently less important than its popular cultural status as a challenge to be overcome (it becomes, to cite Jameson, ‘the idea of the work’).\textsuperscript{137}

Wallace’s anxiety emerges as a result of his simple calculation that almost nobody, at the height of the book’s tour and its ‘hype’, can have invested enough time and labour to have ‘actually read’ it.

The aim of the present section is to trace the symmetrical logic of investment that is implied by this annotation: if Wallace’s manuscript marginalia have been advertised as guarantees of the ‘levels of thinking’ he has put into his work (thus redoubling his repeated claim to have ‘worked really really hard’ on \textit{IJ}),\textsuperscript{138} then his note to DeLillo implies that a proper interpretation of that work depends upon the

\textsuperscript{134} Letter to DeLillo, fol. 101.10 (HRCDDL).
\textsuperscript{135} Letter to DeLillo, fol. 101.10 (HRCDDL).
\textsuperscript{136} Don DeLillo, \textit{White Noise} (New York; Viking, 1985; repr. New York: Penguin, 1986), pp. 12-13. These are the words of the protagonist, Murray. Wallace also writes about this much-remarked passage in his essay ‘E Unibus Pluram’: ‘not only are people watching a barn whose only claim to fame is being an object of watching, but the pop-culture scholar Murray is watching people watch a barn, and his friend Jack is watching Murray watch the watching, and we readers are pretty obviously watching Jack the narrator watch Murray watching, etc.’ (p. 48). Meanwhile, Fitzpatrick has noted that Wallace’s reading ‘eliminates the novelist from the regress of watching; DeLillo is somehow exempt from this chain of specatation. […] Wallace suggests that DeLillo is the only player able to escape, and thus to transcend, the threatening culture of visuality’; see \textit{Obsolescence}, p. 122; italics original.
\textsuperscript{137} Jameson, ‘New’, p. 387.
\textsuperscript{138} As Max reports: ‘To anyone who praised [Wallace’s] achievement, he would only repeat that he had “worked really really hard” on \textit{Infinite Jest}, as if he were a child talking about his artwork’; see \textit{Ghost}, p. 222.
reader’s reciprocation of this effort. Such a logic has been particularly important in
TPK’s recent assimilation by leftist critics, whereby the ‘seriousness’ of this late novel
is placed in contrast to the shortcomings of the earlier work (now Wallace ‘offers
something more than the generic postmodern reflexivity that preoccupies his [1993]
essay on television’, 139 finally making ‘postmodernism useful for socially progressive
fiction’).140 Returning again to the scene of Wallace’s suicide – and pointing out that it
occurred on the same day as the start of the 2008 global financial crisis – Godden and
Szalay write:

Wallace printed out the manuscript of [TPK] just before he hanged himself, and left it
in another room, a light shining upon it. His gesture at least implies a conscious
analogy, a mirroring of the body in the air and the body in the text. Put bluntly, the
positioning of the body in relation to the text anticipates the body’s annotation by way
of the text. To suggest as much is potentially tasteless; not to suggest so sets aside the
eleven years of authorial labour during which David Foster Wallace worked at issues
of corporeality within a changing corporate state dedicated to the principles of risk
inherent in the derivative.141

The text of TPK is itself posed here as an annotation on Wallace’s hanging body, an
analogy that we must attend to or risk ‘set[ting] aside eleven years of authorial labour’
that have led to this moment – even Wallace’s suicide is a ‘gesture’ that ‘at least
implies’ this ‘conscious analogy’. In this way, we are urged to make one last
investment in final authorial intention, on the basis of the sincerity of the work that
Wallace has put into his manuscript (even though Godden and Szalay will themselves
go on to describe TPK as ‘not simply difficult but impossible to finish – its volatile
contradictions belonging both to Wallace and to the phase of finance capitalism that he
sought to anatomise’).142

In contrast, the present section will suggest TPK neither as an ultimate
annotation on ‘the man Himself’, nor as indisputable proof of the seriousness of his late
authorly labours; rather, by turning to IJ and its ‘pre-text’, I will argue that
‘seriousness’ in Wallace’s writing functions only as part of a recurrent opposition with
what we have so far seen named variously as ‘shittiness’, ‘fun’, ‘entertainment’,
‘plagiarism’, or, indeed, ‘immature titty-pinching’, and which can be linked in turn to

139 Godden and Szalay, ‘bodies’, p. 1275.
140 Shapiro, ‘fix’, p. 1250.
142 Godden and Szalay, ‘bodies’, p. 1316.
an anxiety over the kind of value that literary writing and reading can be said to represent in a contemporary U.S. context. In other words, I will suggest that the interpretative ‘contract’ that is explicitly set out by ‘Wallace’ in TPK – whereby the reader is compelled to ‘get through’ the extensive, complex, and possibly ‘irrelevant’ content of a text on the basis that it has been mediated in advance by a more or less trustworthy, and more or less ingenious, author – is already implicitly in operation in IJ, and marks a broader interpretative anxiety around authority and labour that is inseparable from what Mark McGurl calls ‘the Program Era’: the modern institutionalization of U.S. literary production, in conjunction with entrenched cultural commodification, the corporatisation of the university, and the advent of mass higher education.\footnote{McGurl, \\textit{Program}, pp. 1-74; McGurl, ‘Institution’, pp. 31-32.} If, by its ‘mixtures of theory and singularity’ and ‘dizzying multiplication of presences on the page’, IJ exemplifies those postmodern ‘“texts” […] that in some fashion […] transcend the old opposition between a work and its criticism or interpretation’,\footnote{Jameson, ‘New’, p. 385 \& p. 383.} I will nonetheless argue that it begins to direct this interpretation by projecting a model of author/reader identification that promises to resolve any attendant anxieties about ‘dizziness’ or fragmentation through a mutual commitment to a certain amount of hard work (that looks, at times, suspiciously like a bit of college sport).\footnote{In his reading of IJ, Mark Bresnan opposes Donna Haraway’s notion of ‘serious play’ – performed by Don Gately during his recovery from drug addiction – to college student Hal Incandenza’s ‘naïve idealization of play as a haven for autonomy’; see ‘The Work of Play in David Foster Wallace’s \textit{Infinite Jest}’, \\textit{Critique: Studies in Contemporary Fiction}, 50.1 (2008), 51-68. Such a manoeuvre, however, ignores the novel’s overarching and ‘enclosed’ structure as described in Chapter One, whereby Don, like the rest of IJ’s content, is seemingly reduced to the level of Hal’s psychological projection. But, just as the autonomy of Hal’s subjectivity is in turn questioned throughout the novel, so my own reading here will not look to explain, in the ‘vulgar’ Marxist sense of the ‘ultimately determining instance’, Wallace’s writing as the effect of his academic background and career; rather, we will see that the opposition of work/play (or ‘hard labour’/literary labour) is produced by the wider social and ideological anxieties that accompany the so-called ‘Program Era’.} We will see throughout that IJ’s manuscript marginalia participate in this disjuncture of inside/outside (or novel/interpretation) in a way that parallels the disjuncture drawn by Wallace between his novel and its reified cultural status as another ‘Most Photographed Barn’.

However, if Wallace was dismayed by the ‘hype about the hype’ about IJ, the latter was nonetheless in direct conjunction with Little, Brown’s sustained promotion of

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\begin{itemize}
  \item[145] In his reading of IJ, Mark Bresnan opposes Donna Haraway’s notion of ‘serious play’ – performed by Don Gately during his recovery from drug addiction – to college student Hal Incandenza’s ‘naïve idealization of play as a haven for autonomy’; see ‘The Work of Play in David Foster Wallace’s \textit{Infinite Jest}’, \\textit{Critique: Studies in Contemporary Fiction}, 50.1 (2008), 51-68. Such a manoeuvre, however, ignores the novel’s overarching and ‘enclosed’ structure as described in Chapter One, whereby Don, like the rest of IJ’s content, is seemingly reduced to the level of Hal’s psychological projection. But, just as the autonomy of Hal’s subjectivity is in turn questioned throughout the novel, so my own reading here will not look to explain, in the ‘vulgar’ Marxist sense of the ‘ultimately determining instance’, Wallace’s writing as the effect of his academic background and career; rather, we will see that the opposition of work/play (or ‘hard labour’/literary labour) is produced by the wider social and ideological anxieties that accompany the so-called ‘Program Era’.
\end{itemize}
the novel (before it was even finished) as ‘his masterpiece’, ‘the biggest literary event of next year’; as Max puts it:

The massiveness of the novel was the central fact to be dealt with. It became a joke at the publisher’s marketing meetings to ask, as one participant remembers, ‘Has anyone actually read this thing?’ Soon Little, Brown realized that the obstacle could be made the point. To read *Infinite Jest* was to accept a dare.¹⁴⁶

And, as Dave Eggers’s ‘Foreword’ to the 2006 reprint makes clear, this is a dare with long-term appeal:

> There are certainly many collegians among you, probably, and there may be an equal number of thirty-year-olds or fifty-year-olds who have for whatever reason reached a point in their lives where they have determined themselves finally ready to tackle the book […]¹⁴⁷

Meanwhile, the archival variants of the novel itself again produce this dynamic between textual obstacle and readerly labour as a relation between manuscript marginalia (*archive*) and paratextuality (*oeuvre*): where the published endnotes seem to invite an investment of readerly labour that is validated by a prior investment of authorly labour, Wallace’s manuscript marginalia work rather to disturb than to buttress this model of ‘investment’ and ‘guarantee’. Take, for example, the ‘pre-text’ of *IJ*’s supplementary section, ‘Notes and Errata’. These endnotes initially appear as a compromise between the ‘dog tired’ Pietsch, who insists that the ‘novel still needs much more cutting. It’s brutally demanding, and long sections in it are still a hard slog’,¹⁴⁸ and Wallace, who wants to ‘feel emotionally like I’m satisfying your request for compression of text without sacrificing enormous amounts of stuff – some just crammed into Notes’.¹⁴⁹ As part of the economizing process by which Wallace must ‘try to make the novel fit whatever length leaves it possible for us to price the book under $30’,¹⁵⁰ he extensively annotates Pietsch’s pages of suggested cuts, while also admitting that ‘some of the time, I’m cutting a big block of regular text, but inserting a

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¹⁴⁶ Max, *Ghost*, p. 211.
¹⁴⁷ Eggers, ‘Foreword’, p. ix. See also Fitzpatrick’s discussion of the various online readings groups that have been established in order to ‘tackle’ *IJ*; ‘Infinite’, p. 192.
¹⁴⁸ Pietsch, letter to Wallace, 22 May 1995, fol. 3.3 (HRCDFW-A).
¹⁴⁹ Letter to Pietsch, 29 April 1994, fol. 3.2 (HRCDFW-A).
¹⁵⁰ This is Pietsch’s suggestion to Wallace in a letter of 21 October 1994, in response to the 1180 pages of the manuscript as it then stood: ‘$30 is tough enough; I don’t believe anyone will buy a book over that price no matter how great they hear it is’; fol. 3.2 (HRCDFW-A).
smidgeon of it in as a FN’.\textsuperscript{151} Even Pietsch’s letters are covered in Wallace’s marginalia; the author has circled in green pen his editor’s repeated request for excision (‘I’m still hoping there are ways to make the novel much shorter’), and placed a question mark next to it (see \textbf{fig. 32}).\textsuperscript{152} At the same time, Pietsch claims to have experienced ‘a horrible sense of This Is It?’ having read the final page of the first full manuscript, and subsequently calls for a much fuller explanation of ‘who or how or why?’\textsuperscript{153} despite the fact that all of the deadlines attached to Wallace’s initial $80,000 contract (signed in 1992) have long since passed (the author is by now determined ‘never again [to] take any $$ for anything before it’s all done: it gives the already predator[ish] anxiety-component of writing a Raptorish set of retractable claws’).\textsuperscript{154}

The need to both shorten and finish the novel thus leads to a paradoxical production of writing: as Wallace writes to Pietsch, ‘I had no idea so many different parts of the book would require so much revision […]. Then these revisions in turn necessitate going back and reredoing earlier bits’.\textsuperscript{155} This compositional paradox of excision and ending is then reproduced in the form of the endnote, which sends readers to the end of the text only for the text to continue to proliferate.\textsuperscript{156}

While the endnotes thus seem initially to accede to Pietsch’s ‘loyalties to readability and readerly pleasure’,\textsuperscript{157} allowing Wallace a ‘discursive, authorial-intrusive style w/o Finneganeizing the story’ or ‘making the primary text so hard to read that nobody but Ph.D.’s’ll even try’,\textsuperscript{158} they nonetheless confer upon the novel what James Wood describes, in another context, as ‘the true scholastic stink’.\textsuperscript{159} As with the previous examples of \textit{Pale Fire} and \textit{Watt}, Wallace’s novel here begins to constitute

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\textsuperscript{151} See Wallace’s annotations on the letter and suggested cuts from Pietsch, 22 December 1994, fol. 23.8; and Wallace, letter to Pietsch, undated, fol. 3.3 (HRCDFW-A).
\textsuperscript{152} See Wallace’s notes on a letter from Pietsch, 22 December 1994, fol. 23.8 (HRCDFW-A).
\textsuperscript{153} Pietsch, letter to Wallace, 21 October 1994, fol. 3.2 (HRCDFW-A).
\textsuperscript{154} Letter to Pietsch, 16 January 1994, fol. 3.2 (HRCDFW-A).
\textsuperscript{155} Letter to Pietsch, 2 April 1994, fol. 3.2.
\textsuperscript{156} The endnotes are thus part of what Frank Louis Cioffi calls \textit{IJ}’s ‘performative quality’: the way in which the ‘back and forth’ movement of endnotes works to spatially and temporally enact the novel’s central themes of divided consciousness, obsession, tennis, addiction, and so on; see “‘An Anguish Become Thing’: Narrative as Performance in David Foster Wallace’s \textit{Infinite Jest}, \textit{Narrative}, 8.2 (2000), 161-81.
\textsuperscript{157} Letter to Pietsch, 16 January 1994, fol. 3.2 (HRCDFW-A).
\textsuperscript{158} Letter to Pietsch, 29 April 1994, fol. 3.2 (HRCDFW-A).
itself in the paratextual apparatus of its own interpretation – the need for a shorter, less ‘brutally demanding’, and more coherent text paradoxically pushes it towards a fragmentary, scholarly form that has been particularly associated with modernist difficulty since Eliot’s ‘The Waste Land’.\(^{160}\) However, while Pietsch at first worries that the endnotes will only make Wallace’s text more ‘unkind’ to readers,\(^{161}\) he later sees a marketing opportunity: ‘You’re right that notes should go at the end. […] Maybe we’ll package [\textit{IJ}] with a bookmark to help readers keep their place’.\(^{162}\) In this way, even the novel’s ‘academic and daunting’\(^{163}\) notes are drawn into the ‘hype about the hype’, which in turn becomes inseparable from the ‘hard labour’ of ‘actually read[ing]’ \textit{IJ} – a dynamic between seriousness and entertainment, or labour and fun, that is similarly traceable throughout the novel and its compositional documents. One of the longest endnotes in the published version of \textit{IJ} is titled ‘JAMES O. INCANDENZA: A FILMOGRAPHY’, which functions as an archive of Incandenza’s filmic oeuvre. Attached to this endnote is a series of further footnotes, the first of which constructs the Filmography as a citation to an article in a fictional academic journal:

From Comstock, Posner, and Duquette, ‘The Laughing Pathologists: Exemplary Works of the Anticonfluential \textit{Après Garde}: Some Analysis of Movement Toward Stasis in North American Conceptual Film […]’. \textit{ONANite Film and Cartridge Studies Annual}, vol. 8, nos. 1-3 (Year of D.P. from the A.H.), pp. 44-117. (\textit{IJ}, pp. 985n24n(a); italics original)

In the first handwritten draft of this note, however, this citation reads:

\begin{quote}
From Comstock and Posner: ‘\textit{xxx} Laughing Pathologists \textit{xxx} Immunizations of the \textit{Après-Garde}, Some Analyses of 2 Parody, 3 Homage 1 Reaction, and \textit{Invalidation} Entertainment in Conceptual Film […]’ \textit{xxx Film and Cartridge Culture}, vol. 7, nos 1-2 (\textit{D Y. D. F. A. H.}) pp. 74-117.\(^{164}\)
\end{quote}

Here, the marginalia seem to emphasize the impossibility of the citation, rendering several words unreadable, while bringing that unreadability into the aesthetic economy of ‘\textit{Invalidation}’ and ‘\textit{Entertainment}’ (or high concept and laughter) that is the subject of the article, as well as Incandenza’s art; Incandenza’s oeuvre is simultaneously produced by, and inseparable from, the archive represented by an academic endnote, while Wallace’s novel itself falls into an analogous gap. As Bradley J. Fest puts it: ‘with the few

\(^{160}\) Kaiser, ‘Disciplining’, pp. 82-83.
\(^{161}\) Pietsch, letter to Wallace, 21 October 1994, fol. 3.2 (HRCDFW-A).
\(^{162}\) Pietsch, letter to Wallace, 22 December 1994, fol. 23.8 (HRCDFW-A).
\(^{163}\) Pietsch, letter to Wallace, 22 December 1994, fol. 23.8 (HRCDFW-A).
\(^{164}\) ‘\textit{IJ} Handwritten drafts, undated’, fol. 15.5 (HRCDFW-A).
exceptions when [Incandenza’s] films are discussed elsewhere in the novel, the majority of aesthetic objects in this archive cannot be approached as objects […] they arrive at some kind of presence in the novel only through their archivization;¹⁶⁵ my focus here is on the ways in which the analogous problem produced by Wallace’s own oeuvre and archive is linked specifically to the attendant confusion of the literary ‘work’ and its academic interpretation. If *IJ*’s scholarly paratexts thus suggest Wallace’s ‘aesthetic or ideological investment’ in the central text – his neat ‘reversal’ or satirisation of academia¹⁶⁶ – then its manuscript marginalia undermine the very stability or presence of a central text or ‘work’ in which to invest; as with the Introduction’s examples of the *Dunciad Variorum*, *A Tale of a Tub*, and *Tristram Shandy*, Wallace’s text(s) become a part of, rather than external to, the critical economy of centre and margin.

Meanwhile, one of the seventy nine listed films from Incandenza’s oeuvre is *The Joke*; in the first, handwritten draft, this entry reads: ‘video cameras in theatre record and project the audience and project its xxx image on screen; audience watching itself watch itself get increasingly uncomfortable and hostile provides involuted narrative flow. Celluloid (limited release)’.¹⁶⁷ In the published version, the entry for *The Joke* reads:

> video cameras in theatre record the ‘film’’s audience and project the resultant raster onto screen – the theatre audience watching itself watch itself get the obvious ‘joke’ and become increasingly self-conscious and uncomfortable and hostile supposedly comprises the film’s involuted ‘antinarrative’ flow. Incandenza’s first truly controversial project, *Film & Kartridge Kultcher*’s Sperber credited it with ‘unwittingly sounding the death-knell of post-poststructural film in terms of sheer annoyance’. NONRECORDED MAGNETIC VIDEO SCREENABLE IN THEATRE VENUE ONLY, NOW UNRELEASED (*IJ*, pp. 988-89n24)

Notably, Incandenza’s film also advertises itself entirely as an artistic obstacle or ‘dare’; as we are told earlier in the novel:

> The art-film theatres’ marquees and posters and ads for the thing were all required to say something like ‘*THE JOKE: You Are Strongly Advised NOT To Shell Out Money To See This Film*’, which art-film habitués of course thought was a cleverly ironic anti-ad joke […]. *The Joke*’s total running time […] ended up being more than maybe twenty minutes only when there were critics or film-academics in the seats, who

¹⁶⁵ Fest, ‘Nuke’, p. 144; italics original.
¹⁶⁷ ‘Handwritten drafts’, fol. 15.5 (HRCDFW-A).
studied themselves studying themselves taking notes with endless fascination and finally left only when the espresso finally impelled them to the loo [...]. (IJ, pp. 397-98; italics original)

We can see here that the ‘central’ content of The Joke, indeed its ‘total running time’, depends entirely upon the relative investment of time and effort made by its audience, most of whom quickly run out of patience with the ‘obvious “joke”’; however, for those who are trendy, academic, or narcissistic enough, this is a work of ‘endless fascination’ that is cut short only by the urge to pee out espresso (another apparent signifier of middle-class pretention and consumption). But while the film disappears from the archive between IJ’s drafts (from ‘limited release’ to ‘NONRECORDED [...] NOW UNRELEASED’), its archival record is finally lengthened by the addition of Sperber’s critique – apparently the ‘sheer annoyance’ of The Joke is a step too far, even for ‘post-poststructural film’. As such, those tensions that guide the centre/margin structure of The Joke – between length and annoyance, ‘high art’ and discomfort, ‘involuted “antinarrative” flow’ and hostility – are turned back upon Wallace’s novel by the opposition between oeuvre and archive. Pietsch focuses his editorial marginalia on IJ’s first typescript draft on ‘places where the readers’ patience is likely to be stretched beyond endurance’, ‘exhausted at having too much data crammed into their heads with very little story to keep them moving through’. In a note responding to Pietsch’s notes on the manuscript, Wallace writes, ‘p. 785ff – I can give you 5,000 words of theorietico-structural arguments for this, but let’s spare one another, shall we?’ Elsewhere, attempting to justify the novel’s ending, he writes that ‘I can (but hopefully will not) give you about 4300 thematic/theoretical reasons why an aclimactic close here is will be best’. We can see now that the question of whether Wallace is a ‘fellow of infinite jest’ or ‘the best mind of his generation’, whether his work is the result of ‘amazingly shitty’ editing or ‘some theoretical-aesthetic’ principle, becomes as much about the projected ‘raster’ of the audience as it is about the text ‘itself’. More specifically, if the folders upon folders of IJ’s manuscripts stand as evidence that Wallace’s own artistic...
labour was no joke – as he writes to Pietsch in 1994, ‘I have been on 12+ hour days since October […] I’m going to die of some kind of nervous exhaustion’ – the oeuvre now begins to construct a kind of ideal reader: neither trendy ‘art habitués’ chasing the hype in downtown New York, nor self-centred academics whose interest in the minutiae of the endnotes extends only so far as themselves, but, it turns out, someone remarkably like Hal Incandenza, the E.T.A.’s ‘ordinary genius’, or ‘David Foster Wallace’, the sincere college plagiarist from *TPK*. I argued in Chapter One that *IJ*’s tightly enclosed form constructs the novel’s content as Hal’s extended, individual ‘projection’, which has subsequently been read by critics as an allegory for Wallace’s authorship of the novel – as one marginal note pencilled at the top of a typescript *IJ* manuscript puts it, ‘Hal’s voice a bit too close to narrative voice?’ (see fig. 33). This moment of identification, however, is also one of uncertainty, and as such forms a parallel with the drafts of *TPK*’s ‘Author’s Foreword’, which paradoxically attempt, by a gradual forging of style and subjectivity, to present a sincere version of ‘Wallace’ on which the value of the surrounding text can then rest. In this sense, although each text presents itself as a serious engagement with some socio-historical problem in U.S.-centric (post)modernity (consumerism and entertainment in *IJ*, neoliberalism and civic virtue in *TPK*), the ‘veracity’ of their respective contents remains dependent upon a recognition of generic framing narratives about college, and even undergraduate plagiarism: beyond the grown-up business of global politics lies the schoolboy game of identification. If Wallace’s plagiaristic manuscript marginalia are thus, on the one hand, guarantees on a serious aesthetic investment, they are at the same time marks of what McGurl calls ‘the shame of institutionality’: a measure of symbolic compensation for the author’s own assimilation into the traditionally elitist but increasingly commodified site of the U.S. university. As a one-time ‘hardcore theory-wienie’ who later

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171 Letter to Pietch, 29 April 1994, fol. 3.2 (HRCDFW-A).

172 In a letter responding to Little, Brown’s plans to throw *IJ*’s launch party at Limbo Lounge, a club in East Village, Nadell writes: ‘David’s novel is not a hip, downtown kind of book. It is, we hope and believe, a major literary novel, and is being taken seriously as such by critics and reviewers. I think the party should be held in midtown at a place where any major literary novel would be celebrated rather than a club which connotes young and “cool”’. See Nadell, letter to Beth Davey, 3 November 1995, fol. 1.9 (HRCBNW). As Max recounts, the party did eventually go ahead at Limbo Lounge; soon afterwards, Wallace wrote to DeLillo that ‘[i]t’s the only Pub Party I’ve ever been to, and if God’s in his heaven it will be my last’; see *Ghost*, p. 222.

173 “‘First two sections’”, fol. 16.6 (HRCDFW-A).

174 McGurl’s major example is Raymond Carver, whose ‘small and simple’ short stories of working class, white male protagonists, are taken as symbolic compensation for the author’s assimilation into the
described modern English Studies as a ‘radical-intellectual fad’, and who spent most of his adult life as an English professor, Wallace provides us with a case study that stands firmly at the intersection of contemporary literary production and its critical interpretation (he was, to cite McGurl, a ‘Program Man if ever there was one’). I would therefore now like to conclude my earlier argument – that artistic mediation in Wallace can be seen as a kind of ‘plagiarism’ that proceeds from an origin it can no longer identify – by considering this compositional dynamic in the light of its notional ‘origin’ in the modern U.S. university.

On p. 30 of Wallace’s corrected first edition of *IJI*, he annotates Hal’s line of dialogue in red pen: ‘I’m twelve for Pete’s sake’; on a sticky note, he again writes: ‘ten for twelve’; and, in black pen in the bottom margin, he makes an editorial aside to Pietsch: ‘M. P. – Need to change Hal’s age to prevent contradiction at p. 223 […]’. In subsequent editions, Hal’s age in this passage has been changed to ten (*IJ*, p. 30).

Here, Wallace’s marginalia simultaneously draw attention to, and participate in, the forgery of *IJ*’s ‘whole sense of animating realism’ (*IJ*, p. 333), a movement towards ‘factual’ standardisation that is often signalled throughout the novel’s manuscripts by the marginal refrain of ‘FIX’ (see fig. 34; as Wallace writes to Pietsch after yet university institution: their depictions of ‘good hard work’, then, stand in opposition to the ‘shame’ produced by Carver’s own removal from ‘everyday life’; see *Program*, pp. 273-321. We might posit that such a compensatory model functions in *IJ* through the opposition of its two protagonists, the college student Hal, and the rehabilitated drug addict and criminal, Don Gately. In *TPK*, meanwhile, the ‘good hard work’ being represented (tax examination) is white-collar rather than blue-collar, with both sides of the model being fulfilled by the character ‘David Foster Wallace’ (who at one point describes his own work of studental plagiarism as ‘good apprentice training for someone interested in so-called “creative writing”’; *TPK*, p. 75).

‘GE’, p. 144; ‘JFD’, p. 256n2, p. 259n7n(b).

On Wallace’s lifelong connection to academia, see Boswell and Burn, ‘Introduction’, pp. ix-xii.


While the notion of writing-as-plagiarism has been discussed by the likes of Harold Bloom (as a form of influence) and Genette (as a form of intertextuality), my move here is not so much to argue with these definitions, as to rethink their implications in light of the conjunction of literary production and the university in the contemporary U.S. – that is, in the linked generic terms of the college essay, academic paper, or Creative Writing piece; see Bloom, *The Western Canon: The Books and School of the Ages* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1994), pp. 74-75; Genette, *Palimpsests: Literature in the Second Degree*, trans. by Claude Doubinsky and Channa Newman (London: University of Nebraska Press, 1997), pp. 1-2. As such, I am broadly following Marilyn Randall’s formulation of plagiarism as ‘not an immanent feature of texts, but rather the result of judgements involving […] some kind of textual repetition, but also, and perhaps more important, a conjunction of social, political, aesthetic, and cultural norms and presuppositions that motivate accusations or disculpations […]’; *Pragmatic Plagiarism: Authorship, Profit, and Power* (London: University of Toronto Press, 2001), p. 4.


See, for example, ‘“First two sections”’, fol. 16.6 (HRCDFW-A).
another missed deadline: ‘it’ll suddenly become important to recall whether some person is right-handed or left-handed, and I spend an hour going back to find him and look up what -handed he is. [...] I am truly sorry’).\footnote{181} Hugh Kenner identifies a similar formal need for ‘everything [to] be necessary and interconnected’ in relation to \textit{Ulysses}, wherein the reader ‘is manoeuvred [...] into the role of the scholiasts whose marginalia encumbered the Alexandrian manuscripts of the Homeric texts; only here is a text designed, as Homer’s was not, precisely for this sort of study’.\footnote{182} However, while Kenner’s hypothesized readerly notes are meant to identify \textit{Ulysses}’s ‘encyclopaedic’ or ‘systematic compendium of arts, sciences, and moral teachings’ – ‘[n]othing is more important, for this sort of enterprise, than consistency of cross-reference’\footnote{183} – we have seen that Wallace’s writing brings the antecedent, plagiaristic labours of the author into this studential game of recognition. In this sense, it is less important to note whether Wallace is a ‘very \textit{quite} good’ or a ‘\textit{quite} very good’ plagiarist, than to note that he is there at all (the ‘D. Wallace’ or ‘David Wallace’ signatures that traverse the margins of the archive\footnote{184} thus correspond to Hal’s promise on the opening page of \textit{IJ}: ‘I am in here’; see \textit{fig. 35}).\footnote{185}

While, in \textit{TPK}, ‘Wallace’’s entrepreneurial production of ‘styles, theses, scholarly personas, and authorial names that were not my own’ is finally exposed not as a result of any plagiaristic shortcoming, but thanks to various ‘phenomenally stupid’ members of one college fraternity (\textit{TPK}, pp. 74-78), we also see, in \textit{IJ}, an example of ‘the apparent self-destructive credulity that characterizes many plagiarists’ (\textit{IJ}, p. 1061n304). This latter is Hal’s characterisation of James Struck during the prolonged endnote that we considered in the opening pages of the present chapter, when (in the published version) Struck ‘disastrously’ decides to copy certain passages from a highly theoretical academic essay about O.N.A.N.ite foreign policy that is itself grammatically, stylistically, and factually questionable (p. 1059n304). The novel, in turn, reproduces around ten pages of the scholarly essay (and its references), while also portraying

\footnote{181}{Letter to Pietsch, 2 April 1994, fol. 3.2 (HRCDFW-A).}
\footnote{183}{Kenner, \textit{Stoic}, p. 35, p. 60.}
\footnote{184}{See ‘\textit{IJ} Handwritten drafts, undated’, fol. 15.7 (HRCDFW-A).}
\footnote{185}{Burn argues that the opening question of \textit{Hamlet} – ‘who’s there?’ – ‘haunts this [opening] scene [of \textit{IJ}], and haunts the rest of the book’; see \textit{Guide}, pp. 45-46.}
Struck at his desk, ‘bogging down’ and ‘hunched blearily over’ as he attempts to ‘carve up each of this diarrheatic […] guy’s clauses into less-long self-contained sentences that sound more earnest and pubescent, like somebody earnestly struggling toward truth instead of flecking your forehead with spittle as he ranted grandiosely’ (pp. 1055-56n304). And, if we look at the variant drafts of this passage, we might say that they portray Wallace’s own authorly forgery of ‘styles, theses, scholarly personas, and authorial names that were not [his] own’. Take, for example, the version in which *IJ*’s copyeditor has added, in blue pencil, an acute accent to the first ‘e’ of every instance of ‘Quebec’ in this passage; although this is a standard grammatical correction, Wallace, in red pencil, then strikes through each of the added acute accents; in the bottom margin, he writes: ‘NO accents in “Quebec” in this note’ (see fig. 36).186 A similar dynamic occurs in the corrected proofs: where the typesetter has added an acute accent to several instances of ‘Quebec’, Wallace’s red pen states in the margin, ‘No accent in Quebec – this note only’.187 At the same time, Wallace’s other annotations on these drafts are directed at a range of ‘bad breaks’ and ‘mss errors’ that need to be corrected; in the typeset version of this particular passage, he points out that there are ‘lots of reversed single-quotes’ (quotation marks that have been typeset the wrong way around).188 If, then, these annotated drafts constitute ‘a challenge to editors (and readers) to be aware that games are being played with the “correct” and “incorrect”’,189 they also return us to the critical challenge of ‘All typos intentional’ – all the more directly because the ‘incorrect’ elements in question are being attributed to the ‘foam-flecked megalograndiosity’ of a cultural studies scholar (*IJ*, p. 1056n304).

So far, we might say that we have traced two, diametrically opposed critical responses to the challenge implied by Wallace’s ‘incorrect’ editorial marginalia, both of which nonetheless play the same game of identification. The first is represented by Wood, who directly compares Wallace’s literary ‘method’ with ‘deconstruction’ (‘[a]nyone puzzled about where theory went after it died in the academy […] need look no further than contemporary American fiction’),190 and concludes that:

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186 *IJ Typescript, copyedited (continued)*, fol. 22.3 (HRCDFW-A).
188 ‘Proof set’, fol. 23.5 (HRCDFW-A).
189 Greetham, “‘Impossibility’”, p. 730.
190 Wood, ‘Digressionist’.
Wallace writes from within his characters’ voices and simultaneously over them […] the language of his unidentified narration is hideously ugly, and rather painful for more than a page or two. […] Wallace’s] fiction prosecutes an intense argument about the decomposition of language in America, and he is not afraid to decompose – and discompose – his own style in the interests of making us live through this linguistic America with him.\textsuperscript{191}

If ‘the novelist’s job is to become, to impersonate what he describes’, continues Wood, ‘even when the subject itself is debased, vulgar, boring’, then ‘David Foster Wallace is very good at becoming the whole of boredom’.\textsuperscript{192} On the other hand, the second critical response to a passage such as n304 is epitomised by Jeffrey Staiger’s contention that Wallace is merely ‘allowing [himself] to appear out of control, overwhelmed, delirious, as a way of being true to [his] sense that the whole [he] reach[es] for is no longer rationally cognizable’.\textsuperscript{193} In either case, then, we can see that the ‘painful’ labour of reading Wallace’s work is valued on the basis of the marginal presence of its author, who is then judged to be either playing the ‘ugly’ and ‘dead’ game of literary theory, or reaching, truly, for ‘meaningful and necessary ways of giving us new access to ourselves’.\textsuperscript{194} My thesis, meanwhile, contends that each of these positions invests a centre with meaning on the basis, primarily, of margins that suggest further fragmentation, rather than synecdoche; by assuming a mediatory ‘whole’ called Wallace, such critics negate in advance the additional interpretative challenges that arise when a novel such as \textit{IJ} begins to enact the atomising processes associated with institutionalised literary theory and its postmodern social contexts; by assuming a single, unified ‘source’, such critics effectively nullify the acute contradictions introduced in my earlier chapters by Wallace’s marginalia in Hix’s \textit{Morte d’Author}: the meta-theoretical question, in other words, of who is speaking about ‘who is speaking’.\textsuperscript{195}

Conversely, I would like to conclude Chapter Two by claiming that the contradictory dynamic between archive and oeuvre can actually help us to understand the concurrent appeal and instability of Wallace’s work, characterised as ‘a

\textsuperscript{192} Wood, \textit{How}, p. 28.
\textsuperscript{193} Staiger is critiquing Wood’s notion of ‘hysterical realism’ as applied to the work of such writers as Wallace, Thomas Pynchon, and Zadie Smith; see ‘James Wood’s Case against “Hysterical Realism” and Thomas Pynchon’, \textit{Antioch Review}, 66.4 (2008), 634-54 (p. 654).
\textsuperscript{194} Staiger, ‘Case’, p. 638.
\textsuperscript{195} Foucault, ‘Author’, p. 101. See my related discussions of Wallace’s notes on Hix, pp. 24-33, pp. 87-88.
degenerative chaos so complex in its disorder that it’s hard to tell whether it seems choreographed or simply chaotically disordered’ (IJ, p. 341). This latter is also one character’s description of ‘Eschaton’, a tennis-based game of ‘elegant complexity’ devised and played by E.T.A. students that variously references Hegel, John Bunyan, and game theory, and relies for its own ‘whole sense of animating realism’ on Jean Baudrillard’s distinction between ‘territory’ (real world) and ‘map’ (the world of the game) (IJ, pp. 320-42).196 A reading of the novel’s successive drafts might then seem to reformulate Baudrillard’s opposition along the lines of archive versus oeuvre, or manuscripts (real world) versus novel (the world of the game), with Wallace’s marginalia forming a promise of coherent or ‘meticulous’ mediation.197 At the end of a long, multiple-page footnote in the first typescript draft of the Eschaton passage – containing sentences such as ‘If \( z = 1 \), \( A(z) \) is good old \( A_2 \)’ – the text reads, ‘If you got all the way through this my hat’s off’. Connected to this by a short line is a marginal note in black pen: ‘PARTICULARLY TO GERRY HOWARD’ (Howard was Wallace’s first editor). To the side of this is a doodle of a (mischievously?) smiling face (see fig. 37).198 The text and its marginalia here present themselves as a barely readable challenge from author to reader. At other times, Wallace’s marginalia construct the text as barely writeable. At the end of a particularly long handwritten draft of a conversation between Hal and Orin, a large, circled note reads, ‘THANK GOD’ (see fig. 38);199 in tremulous cursive at the top of another early draft we find ‘HELP!’ (see fig. 39).200 At the top of one of the archive’s most heavily annotated passages (Don Gately’s pages-long attempt to go through excruciating pain without medication), a note states ‘I DON’T WANT TO BE WRITING please help’, followed by a smiley face (see fig. 40).201 What begins to emerge here is the kind of prolonged ‘degenerative chaos’ that emerges at the end of a doomed ‘Interdependence Day’ game of Eschaton in which the ‘one ground-rule boundary’ between world and game has been disrupted by a sudden snowstorm (the increasingly infuriated players are unable to agree whether it is

197 Schwartzburg, ‘Conclusion’, p. 250.
198 ‘First two sections’, fol. 16.6 (HRCDFW-A).
199 ‘Handwritten drafts’, fol. 15.5 (HRCDFW-A).
200 ‘Handwritten drafts’, fol. 15.5 (HRCDFW-A).
201 ‘Handwritten drafts’, fol. 15.5 (HRCDFW-A).
snowing on the ‘territory’ (the tennis courts) or the ‘map’ (the future world-system that the courts are meant to represent); *IJ*, p. 341).

This uncertainty is further compounded by the succession of intricate diagrams or doodles to be found throughout the margins of *IJ*’s manuscripts, many of which follow a distinct pattern: a straight, solid baseline, from which protrude a multitude of conflicting lines or arrows, calling to mind the tennis court from Hal’s dreams (‘The lines that bound and define play are on this court as complex and convoluted as a sculpture of string’; *IJ*, p. 67). This reiterates the notion of drafts and novel as ‘territory’ and ‘map’, containing any archival complexity within the novel’s ‘lines that bound and define play’; but there are also versions of the diagram in which the baseline is itself beginning to fragment (see fig. 41). Once more, the archive threatens here to make those notions of source and citation, origin and copy, so complex as to be simultaneously barely readable and a direct challenge; and yet, in the second typewritten draft of the Eschaton scene, a note pencilled in the top margin reads ‘Too complex – redo for simplicity’ (see fig. 42). The words ‘CLARITY’ or ‘NOBODY CLARITY’ also run throughout the margins of *IJ*’s drafts, as a kind of refrain (see fig. 43). The labour of complexity (‘THANK GOD’) works in opposition to the labour of simplification (‘CLARITY’), forming a promise that the ‘degenerative chaos’ of the manuscripts might be ‘choreographed’ rather than ‘simply chaotically disordered’ (*IJ*, p. 341). But this is also an opposition between declarative statements that are sometimes connected to an enunciating ‘I’ (‘HELP!’, ‘I DON’T WANT […]’) and a repeated phrase (‘NOBODY CLARITY’) that seems to link transparency or clearness with absence; the manuscripts are quite literally framed by a shifting relation between presence and absence.

Within the game of Eschaton – which uses the ‘Mean-Value Theorem for Integrals’ in order to simulate a dystopian, geopolitical scenario of total nuclear war – players’ feats of political imagination will be rewarded, but only so long as their ‘feel for realism’ corresponds to the dense calculations that have been pre-programmed into an elected ‘game-master’’s hard drive; if they don’t, then chaos will ensue (by the end

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202 ‘Handwritten drafts’, fol. 15.5 (HRCDFW-A).
203 *IJ* “First two sections”, typescript drafts and photocopy, undated’, fol. 16.5 (HRCDFW-A).
204 ‘Handwritten drafts’, fol. 15.5 (HRCDFW-A).
of ‘Interdependence Day’, several players are badly hurt, and the all-important hard
drive ends up surrounded on the concrete by its ‘circuited guts’, ‘blinking ERROR at
the white sky’; IJ, pp. 321-42). Thus, rather than as a guarantee of the ‘levels of
thinking’ that went into every page, IJ’s manuscript marginalia function much like the
snowfall during ‘Interdependence Day’ Eschaton: by calling attention to the gap
between ‘territory’ and ‘map’, ‘drafts’ and ‘work’, these annotations construct archive
and oeuvre as an irresolvable contradiction. If IJ re-stages this dilemma by hosting its
own paratextual ‘archive’ as ‘Notes and Errata’, then the variant manuscripts now
available in Austin seem, once more, to break the rules of the initial game – unless this
expanded archive can respectively be explained as yet more pre-programming on the
part of the game-master; in other words, the extent to which all of this ‘complexity’ can
be considered as ‘elegant’ – the extent to which the reader’s ‘hard labour’ can be
considered worthwhile – is dependent upon the extent of our investment in Wallace
himself, as mediator.

While it is in this latter sense that a number of Wallace scholars have adopted
the notion of ‘Elegant Complexity’ in order to describe IJ, as well as Wallace’s writing
itself205 – thereby subsuming any contradictions under the aegis of an apparently
coherent, masterly, and centralising ‘author function’ that operates more in line with a
‘Joyce’ or a ‘Beckett’, than a ‘Barnes’ or a ‘Plath’ – I hope to have demonstrated
throughout the present chapter that the archive intensifies, rather than resolves, the
question of whether Wallace’s oeuvre is ‘choreographed’ or ‘simply chaotically
disordered’. Wallace’s manuscript marginalia thus serve to complicate the symmetrical
model of labour and investment as a kind of contract between author and reader,
whether the labour in question is the ‘serious’, mature, and mundane duty of rote tax
examination, or the schoolboy game of plagiarism, sustained theoretical complexity,
and the fantasy of modern global politics. This is not, however, to dismiss the evident
cultural, psychic, and commercial appeal of such an interpretative contract. In sum, if
the investment of authorly labour that Wallace’s oeuvre and archive seem to represent
is seen to reintroduce a serious, concrete, or ‘human’ element to the shamefully forged

205 It provides the name, for example, for Greg Carlisle’s reader’s guide, Elegant Complexity: A Study of
David Foster Wallace’s Infinite Jest (Kindle Edition: Sideshow, 2007). Meanwhile, the ‘Eschaton’ scene
has been read by Bresnan as part of the novel’s critique of the ‘naïve idealization of play as a haven for
autonomy’; ‘Play’, p. 66. See also Fest, ‘Nuke’, pp. 139-49.
and institutional worlds of their narrators, then a reciprocal investment of readerly labour promises, via the interpretative dynamics of transference and identification, to resolve a symmetrical anxiety in the reader: ‘If you got all the way through this’, goes Wallace’s note, ‘my hat’s off’.

In the third and final chapter of this case study, I will look more closely at the ways in which these dynamics are enacted and further illuminated by the pseudo-scholarly marginalia which appear throughout Wallace’s published texts. Although these notes frequently attempt to ridicule the broadly Marxist and psychoanalytical models of theory that became dominant in English Studies in the latter parts of the twentieth century, I will begin by contending that this humour can also be seen to dramatize a certain anxiety about the potentially subversive implications of those same theories.
Chapter Three ‘No clue’: Wallace’s Endnotes to Postmodernism

For somebody who not only lives on the same institutional grounds as his family but also has his training and education and pretty much his whole overall raison-d’être directly overseen by relatives, Hal devotes an unusually small part of his brain and time ever thinking about people in his family qua family-members. […] It’s a possible reason Hal avoids Dr Dolores Rusk, who always wants to probe him on issues of space and self-definition and something she keeps calling the ‘Coatlicue Complex’. [endnote 216]

n216. No clue.

- David Foster Wallace, *IJ*, pp. 515-16, p. 1036n216; italics original.

3.1 Theory’s Disappearance and Return

In my epigraph, the therapeutic, psychoanalytical jargon of the Ennet Tennis Academy’s counsellor is satirized through precisely the scholarly apparatus – an endnote – that is normally associated with the archivization and production of institutional knowledge. Dr Dolores Rusk – whose name connotes sorrow, hardness, even infantile consumption¹ – is thus associated with a pedantic and academic form of knowledge in opposition to the ‘hip’ North American everydayness of Hal Incandenza. At the same time, the deadpan ironic detachment of ‘No clue’ articulates not a preferable alternative to Rusk’s tautology but rather a particular problematic coincident with the later stages of postmodernism’s status as a viable conceptual tool: just as the vague and abstract theory of the subject suggested by the ‘Coatlicue Complex’ stubbornly fails to engage this hyper-intelligent and ‘apolitical’ college student (who

¹ In an early typescript draft, Rusk is introduced as ‘Dr. Dolores [Dolores? – dolor?] Rusk’; see “First two sections”, fol. 16.6 (HRCDFW-A).
has already read too much on psychotherapeutic therapy), so Hal’s indifferent response seems to accept and enact that contested postmodern schema described variously as a loss of ‘fixed historical reference’ (Jürgen Habermas), as an ‘incredulity toward metanarratives’ (Jean-François Lyotard), and as ‘a new kind of depthlessness or flatness’ devoid of any historically determined ‘deeper logic’ (Fredric Jameson). We may well laugh, having turned almost 500 pages to be greeted with a shrug; but our response is at the same time bound up with this wider tension, best described perhaps as the entanglement of a certain strain of normative U.S. identity with a critical or theoretical discourse that it seeks persistently to disavow.

In Chapter One, I suggested not only that the high-profile archivization of Wallace’s library participates in a broader cultural reinvestment in the supposedly vanquished category of the Romantic ‘genius’, but also that the marginalia contained therein seem to promise affective access to Wallace himself in the manner of a biographical ‘shadow text’, functioning as immediate and communicative traces of an artistic (but tragically ‘ordinary’) life with which we can then straightforwardly identify. However, I argued that by taking Wallace’s annotations and ‘source texts’ as part of (rather than somehow outside) the interpretative dynamics of his work, we actually serve to problematize the critical deployment of such notions as ‘oeuvre’ and ‘biography’ as alleviative responses to postmodernism’s so-called ‘death of the subject itself’. Far from adding up to the ‘whole of Wallace’, then, both the marginalia and the work were seen to be fully entangled in a set of ideological contemporary discourses around the ‘normal’, ‘fully functioning’, and implicitly white and middle-class U.S. individual. Meanwhile, in Chapter Two, I argued that although Wallace’s revisionary marginalia on the manuscripts of The Pale King seem initially to collude in the development of that text’s symmetrical interpretative ‘contract’ – by functioning as ‘sincere’ marks of authorly labour against which an investment of sincere readerly

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2 I’m a privileged white seventeen-year-old U.S. male. I’m a student at a tennis academy that sees itself as a prophylactic. I eat, sleep, evacuate, highlight things with yellow markers, and hit balls. […] I am just about as apolitical as someone could be’ (pp. 1016n110). While going through therapy in the aftermath of his father’s suicide, Hal ‘chews through’ a series of ‘cutting-edge professional grief- and trauma-therapy’ texts in order to try and ‘deliver the goods’ in each session (pp. 252-57).
3 Habermas, ‘Modernity’, p. 4.
5 Jameson, Postmodernism, p. 8, p. xi.
labour can then be guaranteed – they simultaneously draw any such assumption of univocal artistic mediation or ‘essential character’ into the shamefully plagiaristic frame of the ‘Program Era’. As such, I argued that the mobilisation of ‘serious’ authorly/readerly labour in response to the broader problems of post-1980s neoliberalisation or U.S.-centric globalisation, as exemplified also by the centre/margin dynamic of *IJ*’s ‘Notes and Errata’, is inseparable from an anxiety over the kind of value that literary writing and reading can be said to represent in the contemporary U.S.. And, finally, the present chapter starts from the contention that, in those manifold footnotes and endnotes to be found in a range of Wallace’s published texts, we can see concurrently a conjuncture and one further development of these dynamics. That is to say, if n216 offers the possibility of a ‘real’, ordinary life, capable of shrugging off those embarrassingly reified and jargonistic discourses around ‘issues of space and self-definition’ – appropriated by Rusk via doctorates ‘in both Gender and Deviance’ (p. 1039n234) – nonetheless it does so by subverting the very labour involved in tracing an obscure theoretical reference; the analytical potential of the ‘Coatlicue Complex’ is thus comically undermined by the same cool indifference that it threatens to explain.

I have argued throughout this case study that the tight formal enclosure of *IJ*’s *fabula* and *syuzhet* seems to construe the entirety of the novel’s content as the internal projection of its protagonist Hal. n216, however, is one of many instances in which the novel’s narration is ‘revealed to be mediated and thus contaminated in [its] authenticity’; even if this passage is seemingly focalized through Hal, we might wonder who it is that diagnoses his disinterest in family *qua* family as ‘unusual’, who supplies the psychotherapeutic terminology if he really does have ‘No clue’, and so on. Just as the manuscript marginalia of *TPK* called into question the fundamentally ‘subordinate’ status of its paratexts in accordance with ‘[w]hatever aesthetic or ideological investment an author’ has made in them, so n216 works to complicate the ‘humanly contained’ narration of *IJ* within ‘these boundaries of self’ (p. 82; italics original): Hal might well attempt here to ‘send from [himself] what [he] hope[s] will not return’ in the manner of a ‘well-shot ball’ or an O.N.A.N.ite giant waste displacement catapult, but, as we are reminded by Alain, a ‘foreign academic with […]

Irene Triendl, *Philosophy and Performance in David Foster Wallace’s Infinite Jest: A Reading* (Saarbrücken: VDM Verlag, 2009), p. 32.
the swirling limp of someone with a prosthesis’: ‘What goes around, it comes back around. […] It will keep creeping back in’ (p. 176, p. 229, p. 233). For N. Katherine Hayles, meanwhile, it is through such ‘recursivity’ that *IJ*’s endnotes generate a network of ‘cycles within cycles within cycles’, ‘reinscrib[ing] with toxic force the illusion of autonomy’ in a hyper-commodified and increasingly polluted U.S.: for this novel, then, ‘any starting point would be to some extent arbitrary, for no matter where one starts, everything eventually cycles together with everything else’. But Hayles therefore misses the crucial point that the structural intricacy of *IJ*’s opening pages situates its ‘puncturing’ of the notion of autonomous liberal selfhood within the ‘meta-cycle’ of Hal, the ‘privileged white seventeen-year-old’ U.S. college student who thinks he is ‘out of all loops but one, by design’ (pp. 1016n110). In other words, if Wallace’s endnotes work to produce ‘a world densely interconnected with interlocking complex systems’, they nonetheless do so by ‘suggest[ing] a constant, implied reference to [the] scholarly or academic work’ of Hal’s day-to-day life, standing as the ‘quasi-scientific’ promise of an institutional knowledge that they will simultaneously subvert. To return here to the conclusion of Chapter Two, it is as though *IJ* has compensated for (or even avenged) its own ‘shame of institutionality’ by this concurrent annexation and satirisation of the very forms upon which modern academia is built.

Such a dynamic returns us also to the Introduction, where I suggested that the appearance of footnotes in poetry and fiction has tended historically to mark a disjuncture between the literary text and its own critical interpretation. From the ‘sneer’ of Pope’s *Dunciad Variorum* at the ‘low diversions’ and ‘excessive minutiae’ of the nascent class of professional commentators such as Richard Bentley, to Swift’s satirisation of the critic as a mere ‘discoverer and collector of writers’ faults’ in *A Tale*

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12 I take ‘quasi-scientific’ from Cosgrove’s description of Alexander Pope’s ‘anti-authenticating’ footnotes; see ‘Undermining’, pp. 130-33.
14 Tribble, ‘“Looking-Glas”’, p. 239.
of a Tub, and up to the faulted empiricism of the notes to Beckett’s Watt (‘the figures here are incorrect. The consequent calculations are therefore doubly erroneous’), such marginalia have often worked to call attention to the historical and ideological tensions that inform the literary text’s reception by a particular (and increasingly institutional) community of readers. In the first part of the twentieth century, Eliot’s annotations to ‘The Waste Land’ were especially indicative of such shifts: initially provoking debate over the ‘impersonal’ authority of the modernist poet, they later became central to the New Critical case against the use of ‘external’ documents as straightforward evidence of an author’s intention, reading, or biography, and by extension as ‘keys’ to the meaning of his work. However, if the subsequent assimilation of modernism by English Studies departments both in Britain and the U.S. bore out William Carlos Williams’s claim that Eliot’s footnotes had ‘[given] the poem back to the academics’, we can now read Wallace’s example in the context of not only the ‘Program Era’, but also the widespread institutionalization or ‘centralisation’ of those strands of post-structuralist literary theory that had developed in the 1970s out of largely Marxist and psychoanalytical perspectives. This is not to suggest that such ideology critique was ever somehow ‘outside of the school’ in an uncomplicatedly ‘radical’ sense; yet Wallace’s oeuvre emerges around the same time that the likes of Jameson, Derrida, Spivak, Deleuze, and Foucault were attaining ‘minor celebrity’ status in the U.S. as the pioneers of a distinct new category dubbed ‘Theory with a Capital T’, a reifying process that is registered in turn, I will argue, in Wallace’s co-option of both the terms and apparatus of contemporary literary scholarship.

‘Bird-of-prey-faced Dr Dolores Rusk, M.S., Ph.D.’, however, is less a celebrity theorist than its even more embarrassing by-product: a ‘whatever’s just slightly worse than useless’ college counsellor and self-help author (IJ, p. 437), whose extensive academic expertise consists in that intermingling of theoretical and pop-therapeutic codes that we traced throughout Chapter One:

15 Swift, Tale, p. 45; italics original.
19 Williams, Autobiography, p. 146.
20 McGurl, Program, pp. 1-74.
21 Cusset, French, pp. 17-128.
You go [into Rusk’s office] with an Issue and all [Rusk]’ll do is make a cage of her hands and look abstractly over her hands at you and take the last dependent clause of whatever you say and repeat it back to you with an interrogative lilt – ‘Possible homosexual attraction to your doubles partner?’ ‘Whole sense of yourself as a purposive male athlete messed with?’ ‘Uncontrolled boner during semis at Cleveland?’ ‘Drives you bats when people just parrot you instead of responding?’ ‘Having trouble keeping from twisting my twittery head off like a game-hen’s?’ […] She spends her massive blocks of free time in her Comm.-Ad. office doing involved acrostics and working on some sort of pop-psych manuscript the first four pages of which Axford and Shaw dickied her lock and had a look at and counted 29 appearances of the prefix self-. (p. 437; italics original)

As signalled already by the dismissiveness of n216’s ‘No clue’, Rusk’s adaptation of psychoanalytical practice here is twittery, irritating, and comically ineffectual; at the same time, however, her complacent and apparently lucrative exploitation of theories of the self seems to parody a Lyotardian notion of ‘legitimation by performativity’ (that is, her constitution of the subject is determined in line with its potential commercial exploitability). 23 In this sense, she is at once ridiculous and disturbing, a ‘parrot[ing]’ game-hen as well as a ‘bird of prey’, and her method – abstractedly repeating ‘the last dependent clause of whatever you say’ over cage-like hands (p. 437; italics added) – also places the reader, typically, into the position of the ‘purposive’ male student whose annoyance at being called queer is rising to anger and possible violence. Rusk might not be very good at what she does, but there is something about her approach that bothers Hal and his friends, and by implication the reader. There is perhaps a similar irritation in reaching ‘Coatlicue Complex’ on p. 516 and having, for the two hundred and sixteenth time, to flip to the back of the book in a process of reference-hunting that has already turned up detailed pharmaceutical descriptions of narcotics (p. 983n5), translations of Quebecois French and Bostonian slang (p. 1031n170; p. 998n71), a solitary ‘Sic.’ (p. 1026n143; italics original), notes on James Incandenza’s pedagogical theory and ‘après-garde’ aesthetics (p. 1000n89; p. 996n61), small print on copyright law (p. 1022n114), and citations to both Hegel’s ‘Historical Consciousness’ and ‘Pharmochemical Quarterly 17, 18 (Spring, Year of the Trial-Size Dove Bar)’ (p. 1023n120; p. 1031n169). 24 And yet the eventual ‘cool’ emptiness of n216 will cut all of

23 Lyotard, *Postmodern*, pp. 27–47.
24 For a detailed discussion of the formal effects of IJ’s endnotes, see Cioffi, ‘Anguish’.
this textbook or ‘encyclopaedic’ promise of a world safely back down to the level of Hal’s adolescent anomic: it implies not just bewilderment, but also indifference; not just ‘No clue’, but also, ‘Who cares, man’?

In a similarly defensive vein, David Letzler has likened *IJ*’s frequently ‘meaningless’, ‘boring’, and ‘near-unreadable’ endnotes to a ‘much more carefully, centrally calibrated’ version of Wikipedia-style ‘information overload’, ‘requir[ing] us to develop our abilities to filter information to their maximum capacities […] because they force us to navigate around their junk text to the text that is more important’; ‘In this way, [*IJ*] might help our intelligence and attention from being flooded by data […]’. If this parallels the prevailing critical association of ‘systems’ or ‘encyclopaedic’ novels with alleviative forms of authorly and (therefore) readerly mastery over the ‘multiple new [postmodern] relations among the local and the global, the personal and the planetary, the private and the multinational’, nonetheless it misses something of the anger, or lack of control, that is inherent in the apparent detachment of n216. Indeed, as if in corroboration of a world beyond the margins of Wallace’s text, a number of online reading groups and scholars have gone in search of an ‘actual’ definition of the ‘Coatlicue Complex’, which turns out to have been coined somewhat obscurely, in 1975, after the Aztec goddess who symbolized ‘the power of life and death that each mother holds over her infant’; in analysands, the Complex describes ‘the basis for lifescripts which seek to harm, control, and dominate women […] arising from the early pre-Oedipal mother-child relationship’.

Bearing in mind Chapter One’s analysis of post-Freudian mother-son relations in Wallace’s oeuvre and self-help texts, it is clear that the elision of this definition from n216 is far from ‘meaningless’ or ‘junk’; on the other hand, however, our subsequent discovery of this enigmatic reference, in the (print only, decades-old) back catalogue of an academic

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journal, does not somehow resolve the problem of Hal’s relationship with his mother, or of psychoanalysis in Wallace. Rather, I suggest that the centre/margin (or fort/da)\(^{30}\) dynamic of this endnote at once attests to the (potentially disturbing) analytical implications of post-Freudian ‘theory’ – even in its more questionable manifestations – and at the same time emphasizes the necessary ‘situatedness’ or mediation of all such theoretical discourse through the related socio-historical frames of late capitalist efficiency, the university institution, popular culture, and so on.

My reference here to Freud’s ‘Beyond the Pleasure Principle’ looks to draw a parallel between the comic, back-and-forth movement of n216, and the game of fort/da (or ‘Gone’ and ‘There’) that is played out by the little boy of that essay, an ‘occasional disturbing habit of taking any small objects he could get hold of and throwing them away from him […] so that hunting for his toys and picking them up was often quite a business’.\(^{31}\) Freud is attempting to understand why it is, in light of the alleged ‘dominance of the pleasure principle’, that wounded and traumatized soldiers tend to return mentally to the scene of their injury – why ‘the patient is, as one might say, fixated to his trauma’ – and his observation of the boy’s game allows for a hypothesis:

It was related to the child’s great cultural achievement – the instinctual renunciation (that is, the renunciation of instinctual satisfaction) which he had made in allowing his mother to go away without protesting. He compensated himself for this […] by himself staging the disappearance and return of the objects within his reach.\(^{32}\)

For Freud, the boy’s game not only moves him from a ‘passive’ to an ‘active’ position regarding the psychic disturbance caused by the daily ‘disappearance and return’ of his mother, but also allows him to reconstitute that initial unpleasure as a source of pleasure (linked, at least in part, to the boy’s impulse for revenge upon the mother).\(^{33}\) In n216, then, the role of the mother is being played by the therapist or theorist at hand (Dr Rusk);\(^{34}\) and her concurrent promise and failure to resolve Hal’s problems – her obscure diagnostics, in combination with her perceived incompetence and commercial self-interest – are reworked as a form of satire that is also a kind of revenge. The game

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\(^{33}\) Freud, ‘Beyond’, pp. 16-17.

\(^{34}\) Here I am following Mitchell’s contention that ‘within the clinical [Object Relations] setting the analyst herself or himself speaks from the position of mother as lawgiver’; see Siblings, pp. 49-52.
played by n216 (‘Coatlicue Complex’/’No clue’) is not so much ‘gone/there’ as ‘promise/failure’, or ‘cure/not there’.

We cannot move from this reading, however, to a direct replacement of ‘Rusk’ with ‘Avril Incandenza’, and a correspondingly direct confirmation of Hal’s ‘mother problem’; rather, it points to what Freud finally posits as ‘beyond the pleasure principle’ at the end of his essay, which might be summed up as Hal’s ‘compulsion to repeat’ a disturbance in the form of neither a dream nor a memory, but as a ‘fresh experience’ (akin to the decisive ‘transference stage’ of psychoanalytical treatment). All the same, as Leo Bersani has contended, even Freud’s footnotes can be said to ‘play the role of the psychoanalytic unconscious in [his] work’; my intention here is not to somehow install psychoanalysis as the ‘right answer’ to the questions of Wallace’s oeuvre, but rather to trace the mutual preoccupation of the two in ‘treating’ our ‘deviation from some (imaginary) psychic normality’ while repeatedly ‘tell[ing] us why we can’t be cured’.

In its broadest sense, the present chapter will look to expand this latter disjunction – in which a sort of ‘fixation to trauma’ in Wallace’s work is not only illuminated by, but has also become structurally linked to, psychoanalytical insights – to consider also the contemporary theoretical discourse that Wallace once described, in a series of footnotes to a review of Joseph Frank’s Dostoevsky, as the ‘joy-killing’, ‘radical-intellectual fad’ of our ‘age’, ‘rather as nihilism and rational egoism were for [Dostoevsky’s] Russia’ (‘Joseph Frank’s Dostoevsky’, p. 256n2, p. 259n7n(b)).

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bulk of Wallace’s comments appear in n7, which, along with sub-clauses (a) and (b), take over almost the entirety of p. 259; this note is anchored to a sentence in the main text which praises Frank’s alleged ‘assum[ption] that there’s no such thing as the Intentional Fallacy [footnote 7]’ (pp. 258-59). In n7, Wallace notes that Frank ‘came of age as a scholar at just the time when the New Criticism was becoming entrenched in the U.S. academy’, and thus ‘imagine[s] all kinds of marvellous patricidal currents swirling around’ Frank’s implicit rejection of ‘the IF’ (‘Frank giving an enormous silent raspberry to his old teachers’; p. 259n7). ‘But’, continues Wallace:

if we remember that New Criticism’s removal of the author from the interpretive equation did as much as anything to clear the way for poststructural literary theory (as in e.g. Deconstruction, Lacanian psychoanalysis, Marxist/Feminist Cultural Studies, Foucaultian/Greenblattian New Historicism, & c.) and that literary theory tends to do to the text itself what New Criticism had done to the author of the text, then it starts to look as if Joseph Frank is taking a sharp early turn away from theory […] and trying to compose a system of reading and interpretation so utterly different that it (i.e., Frank’s approach) seems a more telling assault on lit theory’s premises than any frontal attack could be. (p. 259n7)

For Wallace – again writing in a footnote – what literary theory ‘tends to do to the text’ is subject it to a ‘social-dash-ideological criticism’ that assumes ‘that aesthetics can pretty much always be reduced to ideology’ (p. 256, p. 256n2); as he writes in an earlier draft of the review, ‘[o]ne shudders to think what a Terry Eagleton or Gayat [sic] Spivak would make a Dost text into – probably they wouldn’t talk about the text at all’. Just as the eighteenth-century footnote was ‘seized by Pope as a weapon in the constitution of a social and literary hierarchy against those who are seen as its enemies’ – in other words, as a vehicle for the (gentlemanly) appreciation of poetic beauty against the (lowly) ‘pedanticism’ of the emergent class of professional scholars – so it is from the footnotes of his essay that Wallace launches his critique of the apparently ‘abstruse’ ideological reductionism of contemporary theory (p. 256n2). Elsewhere, in an echo of Pope’s incessant scholarly ‘scribblers’ who would append long, quibbling notes about even the correct spelling of the Dunciad’s title, Wallace draws a distinction between intellectual ‘pioneers’ and ‘the grey little people who […] just turn the crank’:

39 “Joseph Frank’s Dostoevsky”, handwritten and typescript drafts, research materials, undated’, fol. 4.12 (HRCDFW-A).
41 Pope, Dunciad, p. 93.
Take a look at some of the critical-theory Ph.D. dissertations being written now. They’re like de Man and Foucault in the mouth of a dull child. Academia and commercial culture have somehow become these gigantic mechanisms of commodification that drain the weight and colour out of even the most radical new advances. It’s a surreal inversion of the death-by-neglect that used to kill off prescient art. Now prescient art suffers death-by-acceptance. We love things to death, now. Then we retire to the Hamptons. (‘ILM’, p. 135)

If there is a sense here that the ‘radical’, pioneering brilliance of a few ‘big name’ theorists has been betrayed through its greedy assimilation by ‘little grey crank-turners’ – an image which recalls Dr Dolores Rusk – Wallace’s nonfictional texts will nonetheless frequently assume this authoritative pose of ‘plain old untrendy’ common sense as against the ‘kind of arcane’ questions of theory:42 as he puts it in ‘JFD’, his admiration for Frank’s biography lies in the fact that, apparently, ‘[Frank]’s not about imposing any particular theory or method of decoding Dostoevsky, and he steers clear of fighting with critics who’ve chosen to apply their various axes’ edges to FMD’s work’ (p. 258, p. 259n7). In this light, we can also trace a parallel critical manoeuvre in the way that Wallace’s nonfictional or essayistic footnotes will frequently spurn the modern protocol of scholarly reference, bound up as it is with the ideology and technical practices of a profession,43 in favour of the sort of arch rhetorical asides that made Edward Gibbon’s History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire simultaneously so famous and so controversial;44 rather than a persuasive critical engagement with (or ‘frontal attack’ on) theoretical arguments, for instance, we find in ‘JDF’’s marginalia the above panoply of ‘straw man’ sideswipes at the entire sweep of ‘poststructural literary theory’.

However, just as the satiric detachment of n216’s ‘No clue’ offers not a preferable alternative to reified critical theory, but rather remains entangled in a sort of postmodern depthlessness or ‘loss of reference’, so Wallace’s nonfictional notes against ‘objective-type textual criticism’ (‘JFD’, p. 259n7n(a)) tend to reinscribe the very problems that the likes of deconstruction, psychoanalysis, Marxism, and so on, will often set out to address. Clearly, it will do us no good to simply proceed ‘as if [the

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43 Grafton, Footnote, p. 5.
44 Grafton credits Gibbon’s text with transforming the scholarly footnote into ‘a high form of literary art’; see Footnote, p. 1. Julia Wick compares Wallace’s annotative style to Gibbon’s in “I Will Slice Open My Head For You”: David Foster Wallace and the Art of Footnotes’, Medium, 5 August 2015, <https://medium.com/just-words/i-will-slice-open-my-head-for-you-89f7577b2310#.mbmhnoq6h> [accessed 28 November 2015].
Intentional Fallacy] didn’t even exist’ (JFD’, p. 259n7; italics original) – using Wallace’s nonfictional utterances in order to explain the fiction – because Wallace not only insists on the need to ‘talk about the text’ (rather than ‘ideology’), but does so from within a (nonfictional) critique of the New Critical strictures on external evidence; as with IJ’s ‘cycles within cycles within cycles’, the ‘marginalized’ status of such contradictory footnotes actually ensures that ‘[w]hat goes around, it comes back around. […] It will keep creeping back in’ (IJ, p. 233). In this way, we can see that the proliferation of pseudo-scholarly marginalia throughout not only Wallace’s fiction, but also his nonfictional texts, works simultaneously to uphold and to unsettle the traditional critical opposition between ‘internal’ and ‘external’, producing a particularly concentrated instance of Jameson’s postmodern ‘mixtures of theory and singularity’ (those ‘texts’ which ‘transcend the old opposition between a work and its criticism or interpretation that held for an aesthetic committed to the concept of the work in general, and to the security of closure and of reified form’). At the same time, if post-structuralist theory has tended to adopt a trope of ‘marginality’ in the face of such a ‘closed’ or ‘reified’ central notion of the literary work, then its received vocabulary and methodologies are challenged afresh by the oscillations between ‘centre’ and ‘margin’ that so frequently animate Wallace’s oeuvre. While, for Mary K. Holland, such a dynamic is indicative of Wallace’s ‘reversal of poststructuralism from within poststructuralism itself’, for Kathleen Fitzpatrick it provides:

the release of the white male author from responsibility through […] a conversion of the forms and gestures of oppressed cultures to his own project of maintaining his cultural (and social) centrality. […] Marginality thus becomes, in a literary culture obsessed with fragmentation and decentring, a paradoxical source of return to dominance, a melodrama of beset white manhood.

Despite the difference in critical perspective here – with Holland in favour of a ‘return to humanism through poststructuralism’, and Fitzpatrick calling attention to the ‘hegemony of whiteness and maleness long served by the structures of traditional humanism’ – both arguments see Wallace as a ‘return to the centre’ in the face of an
apparently threatening or subversive sense of ‘marginality’. For Holland, this latter is a consequence of the textual, formal, and psychic fragmentations of ‘twentieth-century [theoretical] antihumanism’,\(^{51}\) while, for Fitzpatrick, it is merely the *perception* of a still-dominant centre, feeling ‘marginalized by a culture that is finally paying attention to the voices originating on the margins’.\(^{52}\) In both arguments, the margin is finally felt as ‘oppressive’, whether as a kind of theoretical fragmentation of traditional human values, or as merely an ‘attitude of the oppressed’ that can be adopted by the centre in order to oppress some other, presumably ‘realer’ margins; if only by juxtaposition, then, we can see here a demonstration of what Phillip Brian Harper has called ‘the easy appropriability of the signifiers of certain forms of social marginality’, which ‘makes them prime commodities in the mass-cultural drive to market the effects of disenfranchisement for the social cachet that can paradoxically attach to it’.\(^{53}\) In other words, for every reader who takes Hal’s anomie as the epitome of 1990s postmodern ‘dehumanization’,\(^{54}\) another will dismiss *IJ* as yet another of those ‘Books That Literally All White Men Own’;\(^{55}\) and the endnotes then become either a demonstration of ‘the active intellectual and creative energy of Wallace on and off the page’;\(^{56}\) or further evidence that ‘one of the greatest literary works of all time’ is really just ‘one of those sad-boy penis-extension novels’.\(^{57}\)

In the examples that this chapter has considered so far, however, we have seen that Wallace’s pseudo-scholarly marginalia tend to mark his oeuvre’s persistent return to this dynamic of ‘centre’ and ‘margin’, with each note simultaneously asserting and undermining the possibility of a stable position from which to make such a distinction. As such, the following sections will read Wallace’s footnotes as partaking in a kind of (discursive and ideological) ‘compulsion to repeat’: at once an attempt at ‘heal[ing] […] from the dangers of Marxist estrangement and psychoanalytical fragmentation’,\(^{58}\) they

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\(^{51}\) Holland, *Succeeding*, p. 7.

\(^{52}\) Fitzpatrick, *Obsolescence*, p. 209.

\(^{53}\) Harper, *Framing*, p. 188.

\(^{54}\) Timmer, *Syndrome*, pp. 121-80.


\(^{56}\) Nadell, ‘Footnote’, p. 219.


\(^{58}\) Caselli, ‘Kintergarten’, p. 245.
nonetheless reinscribe those dangers, and, with them, the paradoxical collapse and fortification of the ‘bourgeois ego, or monad’ that we have considered throughout this case study. Additionally, the next sections of this chapter will look to place Wallace’s association with renewed notions of humanism, or ‘sincerity’, alongside theory’s own ‘turn to affect’ in the wake of those supposedly more worn-out modes of postmodernist and post-structuralist analysis. I proceed here in particular from a critique of Nicholas Dames’s hypotheses on the so-called ‘Theory Generation’, that group of contemporary U.S. novelists – such as Lorrie Moore, Sam Lipsyte, Jonathan Franzen, Ben Lerner, Jennifer Egan, and Jeffrey Eugenides – who studied for liberal arts degrees in the ‘late 1970s or 1980s’ and were thus ‘exposed to what is universally called Theory’. For Dames, the result has been a ‘swallowing’ of ‘Theory […] by the ordinary developmental processes that it so often sought to disrupt’, with theoretical ideas and terminology ‘becom[ing] an uneasy part of fiction’s content’, or just another step on the path of the typical bourgeois Bildungsroman – as epitomized by the moment in Franzen’s The Corrections when the protagonist, a former Assistant Professor in ‘Textual Artefacts’, decides to sell off ‘his feminists, his formalists, his structuralists, his poststructuralists, his Freudians, and his queers’ in order to pay for expensive meals for a new girlfriend. However, while Dames sees this assimilatory movement as ‘one way in which contemporary realism has its revenge on Theory’, I will contend that the proliferation of footnotes throughout the work of Wallace, as well as the likes of Mark Z. Danielewski and Nicholson Baker, can be seen as a kind of formal interruption of that traditional ‘revenge’ narrative, which in turn calls attention to the ways in which these texts are already being read by, and therefore drawn back into, those same theoretical discourses. Nonetheless, I will suggest that such pseudo-scholarly marginalia still tend to mark the awkward institutionalization or ‘centralization’ of critical theory in the U.S. during the past several decades, thus working to textualize the sorts of contradictions, disavowals, and rationalizations that are necessary not only to the sustenance of normative liberal (U.S.) subjectivity, but also to its critique in the

59 Kelly, ‘Sincerity’, loc. 2109-2167.
63 Dames, ‘Theory’, p. 164.
primarily ‘affective’ forms proposed by such contemporary theorists as Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick and Lauren Berlant.

3.2 ‘Do you feel it too?’: Sincerity and Affect in ‘Octet’

In interviews, Wallace described his protracted use of scholarly marginalia as not only a ‘monkey [on] my back’, but also a ‘very, very addictive’ strategy for regulating readerly seductiveness and difficulty, which, at the same time, allows him to ‘fracture the text’ in accordance with his sense that ‘reality’s fractured right now, at least the reality that I live in’; ‘I mean’, as he explained to Charlie Rose, ‘it’s almost like having a second voice in your head’ (‘ICR’). The critical commonplace in ‘Wallace Studies’ so far – as I discussed briefly in Chapter One – has been to use such nonfictional statements in order to frame interpretations of the fiction: thus, the foregoing comments have frequently been cited in readings of Wallace’s ‘trademark’ annotations as a ‘visual display of his multiple consciousnesses’, an ‘imaginative’ way of reconnecting the reader ‘to the text and the world’, and as symptoms of Wallace’s ‘extreme consciousness’ and ‘colloquial and compassionate’ philosophy in the face of a harsh ‘everyday reality’. Usually by virtue of the fact that Wallace’s nonfiction explicitly laments contemporary fiction’s ‘poisonous’ ‘bequest from the early postmodernists and the post-structuralist critics’ (in however vague and nonspecific a manner), the fiction is then held up as a more or less successful attempt to ‘remedy’ this situation. Perhaps the most strident example of this tendency is provided by Holland, whose overall judgement of *IJ* as an ‘ill-guided and failed attempt at healing’ is made on the basis that it ‘does not fully enact the agenda for fiction [that Wallace] set forth’ in a 1993 interview with Larry McCaffrey – that is, it never manages to ‘give [the reader] imaginative access to other selves’ (‘ILM’, p. 127) – while her subsequent endorsement of the short story ‘Octet’, from 1999’s *Brief Interviews with Hideous Men*, rests on her contention that this piece does finally ‘accomplish the goals [Wallace] set for himself in

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67 The citations in this sentence are from Wallace, ‘ILM’, p. 130, p. 132, p. 137.

the 1993 interview’. The latter story’s numerous footnotes and sub-footnotes are then said to ‘allow the text to sprawl beyond our traditional sense of the text proper’, becoming representative of those ‘multiplying, antirealist devices of poststructuralism’ that have allowed Wallace to ‘creat[e] a world so obviously false, constructed, written, that the voice responsible for writing that world, the man behind the curtain, seems to be sitting next to us here, in our world […]’.70

On the other hand, however – and in line with Wallace’s own language of ‘fracturing’, ‘addiction’, and split subjectivity – we have already started to see that his footnotes tend to subvert the traditional annotative promise of ‘claim/evidence’,71 or even ‘diagnosis/cure’, with some instances then extending to an analogous subversion of the ‘interrogation/revelation’ structure of the modern interview form itself. Here we can turn to Holland’s central (‘successful’) example of ‘Octet’. In this ‘cycle of very short belletristic pieces’ which are ‘supposed to compose a certain sort of “interrogation” of the person reading them’, we are presented with a series of ethical dilemmas followed by a question or demand: ‘Q. Which one lived’, ‘Q. (A) Is she a good mother’, ‘Q. (B) […] Evaluate’ (‘O’, p. 123, p. 111, p. 114, p. 123; italics original). The final piece (‘Pop Quiz 9’) begins: ‘You are, unfortunately, a fiction writer. You are attempting a cycle of very short belletristic pieces […]’ (p. 123). ‘You’/‘the writer’ has thus far been unable to realize his initial wish for the cycle (titled ‘Octet’) ‘to attenuate the initial appearance of postclever metaformal hooey’ through the ‘emergent urgency of the organically unified whole of the octet’s two-times-two-times-two-pieces (which you’d envisioned as a Manichean duality raised to the power of a sort of Hegelian synthesis w/r/t issues which both characters and readers were required to “decide”’ (pp. 127-28). ‘[B]y no means’, states the narrator, ‘do you want a reader to come away thinking that the cycle is just a cute formal exercise in interrogative structure and S.O.P. metatext [footnote 2]’ (p. 124); n2 then continues:

n2. (Though it all gets a little complicated, because part of what you want these little Pop Quizzes to do is to break the textual fourth wall and kind of address (or ‘interrogate’) the reader directly, which desire is somehow related to the old ‘meta’-device desire to puncture some sort of fourth wall of realist pretence, although it seems

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69 Holland, *Succeeding*, pp. 178-79. The eponymous story-cycle in Wallace’s collection also performs an extended parody of the interview format.
70 Holland, *Succeeding*, pp. 178-79; italics original.
71 As Grafton puts it, ‘the text persuades, the notes prove’; *Footnote*, p. 15.
like the latter is less a puncturing of any sort of real wall and more a puncturing of the veil of impersonality or effacement around the writer himself, i.e., with the now-tired S.O.P. ‘meta’-stuff it’s more the dramatist himself coming onstage from the wings and reminding you that what’s going on is artificial and that the artist is him (the dramatist) and but that he’s at least respectful enough of you as reader/audience to be honest about the fact that he’s back there pulling the strings, an ‘honesty’ which personally you’ve always had the feeling is actually a highly rhetorical sham-honesty that’s designed to get you to like him and approve of him (i.e., of the ‘meta’-type writer) […] which more than anything seems to resemble the type of real-world person who tries to manipulate you into liking him by making a big deal of how open and honest and unmanipulative he’s being all the time […] not interrogating you or hav[ing] any sort of interchange or even really talking to you but rather just performing [footnote*] in some highly self-conscious and manipulative way […]).

* {Kundera here would say ‘dancing’, and actually he’s a perfect example of a belletrist whose internurial honesty is both formally unimpeachable and wholly self-serving: a classic postmodern rhetorician}. (pp. 124-25n2, p. 125n*; italics original)

The footnotes thus shuttle back and forth with the main text (and other, sub-footnotes) in attempting to decide whether the cycle is ‘a real piece of belletristic art’ or ‘just a trendy wink-nudge pseudo-avant-garde exercise’, and consequently whether ‘you’/‘the writer’ is ‘just another manipulative pseudopomo Bullshit Artist who’s trying to salvage a fiasco by dropping back to a metadimension and commenting on the fiasco itself [footnote 17]’, or ‘n17. […] at least aware that metacommentary is now lame and old news and can’t of itself salvage anything anymore’, which ‘may lend credibility to your claim that what you’re trying to do is actually a good deal more urgent and real’ (p. 135, p. 135n17).

Perhaps more than anything, however, this trial-by-confession or ‘performance’ – in which an artist is required to move between ‘postclever metaformal hooey’ and ‘100% honest[y]’ (p. 131), between the ‘trendy wink-nudge pseudo-avant-garde’ and his own ‘more urgent and real’ work – calls to mind the strained exchanges of Wallace’s own interviews with McCaffrey and Rose:

Rose: Talking about style – what’s the – what are the footnotes about? I mean, is that just simply – […]

Wallace: There are – there are quite a few. Not – some of them are very short. Some of them are only one line long. It is a way – no, see, this is –

Rose: This is what?

Wallace: Well, I’m just going to look pretentious talking about this.

Rose: Why – quit worrying about how you’re going to look and just be!
Wallace: I have got news for you. Coming on a television show stimulates your ‘What am I going to look like?’ gland like no other experience […]. (‘ICR’)

Even in the earlier, untelevised interview with McCaffrey, the relationship between television, writing, and authenticity was a major theme:

McCaffrey: How would you contrast your efforts […] versus those involved in most television or most popular fiction?

Wallace: […] TV’s ‘real’ agenda is to be ‘liked’, because if you like what you’re seeing, you’ll stay tuned. TV is completely unabashed about this. It’s its sole raison. And sometimes […] I’ll catch myself thinking up gags or trying formal stunt-pilotry and see that none of this stuff is really in the service of the story itself; it’s serving the rather darker purpose of communicating to the reader ‘Hey! Look at me! Have a look at what a good writer I am! Like me!’ (‘ILM’, pp. 129-39; italics original)

However, when McCaffrey cites Fredric Jameson before asking whether ‘this recent huge expansion of the technologies of reproduction, the integration of commodity reproduction and aesthetic reproduction, and the rise of media culture [have] lessened the impact that aesthetic innovation can have on people’s sensibilities’, Wallace responds:

You’ve got a gift for lit-speak, LM. Who wouldn’t love this jargon we dress common sense in: ‘formal innovation is no longer transformative, having been co-opted by the forces of stabilization and post-industrial inertia’, blah, blah. But this co-optation might actually be a good thing if it helped keep younger writers from being able to treat mere formal ingenuity as an end in itself. MTV-type co-optation could end up a great prophylactic against cleveritis – you know, the dreaded grad-school syndrome of like ‘Watch me use seventeen different points of view in this scene of a guy eating a Saltine’. The real point of that shit is ‘Like me because I’m clever’ – which of course is itself derived from commercial art’s axiom about audience-affection determining art’s value. (‘ILM’, pp. 133-34)

While taking part in another genre that ‘of course is derived from commercial art’s axiom about audience-affection determining art’s value’ – the modern, literary interview72 – Wallace’s responses here move between anxiety and assertion in such a way that even the interview’s supposed ‘puncturing of the veil of impersonality or effacement around the writer himself’ becomes indistinguishable from ‘a highly rhetorical sham-honesty that’s designed to get you to like him and approve of him’ (‘O’, p. 125n2). And just as the footnotes in ‘Octet’ persistently fail to reveal ‘the man

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behind the curtain’, but rather continue frantically to oscillate between these positions, nor does the fact that Wallace then comments upon this dynamic ‘in some highly self-conscious way’ mean that we have somehow managed to escape the myriad ‘manipulations’ of ‘classic postmodern’ rhetoric (‘O’, p. 125n2n*).

In this light, Wallace’s response to Jameson’s Marxist critique of culture – as merely the ‘jargon we dress common sense in’, or a symptom of college ‘cleveritis’ – takes on a similarly dismissive/defensive tone to the ‘No clue’ of IJ’s n216. Whether theoretical modes of thought are being satirized in Wallace’s fiction, or criticised in his nonfiction, it seems that this reproval can only proceed if the theory is first mediated through a familiar scene of social realism – some version of those ‘ordinary developmental processes that [theory] so often sought to disrupt’ – and thereby reduced to the level of caricature (college counsellor Rusk) or grad-school ‘blah blah’. A similar dynamic is produced by the hundreds of footnotes that appear throughout Danielewski’s *House of Leaves*, which contain not only ‘real’ citations of the likes of Jacques Derrida, Roland Barthes, W. J. T. Mitchell, Christian Norberg-Schulz, and Harold Bloom, but also a host of fictional references to academic articles about a fictional film about a labyrinthine house (*The Navidson Record*) – while at the same time working to frame a narrative about a filmmaker (Navidson) and his family living in that house making that film, within a *Pale Fire*-esque commentary on the film by the elusive Zampanò, within a further commentary on Zampanò by a ‘more and more disoriented’ L. A. tattooist named Johnny Truant, within (finally) a scholarly commentary on all the previous layers by the anonymous ‘Editors’ apparently behind the book’s eventual compilation. Furthermore, the footnotes themselves will often appear out of sequence, contain contradictory information or incorrect translations, link to text that seems to have disappeared from the page – and so on – so that (to cite N. Katherine Hayles) the book’s ‘apparently distinct ontological levels melt into one another’. And yet, readings of *House of Leaves* have tended to ‘re-contain’ this

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73 Holland, *Succeeding*, p. 179.
74 Dames, ‘Theory’, p. 164.
77 Hayles, ‘Subject’, p. 802.
instability under the aegis of its various generic narratives about the ‘mad’ artist, the nuclear family, the intellectual loner, and so on. For Hayles, ‘the problem with such […] high-theory’ tropes as the ‘death of the subject’ is that:

the majority of mainstream, nonacademic readers continue to believe they possess coherent subjectivities; moreover, they like to read about characters represented as people like themselves, which the recent success of Jonathan Franzen’s The Corrections demonstrates. In House of Leaves, Mark Danielewski has found a way to subvert and have his subject at the same time.78

Here, Hayles’s posthumanist critique seems to overlap with the restored humanism advanced by Holland, for whom the footnotes in House of Leaves produce ‘another clear reality effect of such poststructural narrative techniques: not the death of the author but the massive proliferation of authors in a way that also serves to make present the real author of the proliferation’.79

What we see here is a twist on Wallace’s ‘axiom’: now, it is ‘audience-affection determining theory’s value’, so that the traction of something like Jameson’s Marxist-inflected ‘death of the subject’ is paradoxically dependent upon its popular or commercial appeal (again we are reminded of Lyotard’s ‘legitimation by performativity’). As such, what is at stake in Danielewski’s text is not so much the argumentative effectiveness of theoretical ideas, as the extent of their (often seemingly inexorable) assimilation into a certain strain of North American ‘normality’. Take, for example, footnotes 129 and 130 in Chapter IX, which reproduce French and English versions of an oft-cited passage from Derrida’s ‘Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences’: ‘[In classical thought] [t]he centre is at the centre of the totality, and yet, since the centre does not belong to the totality (it is not part of the totality), the totality has its centre elsewhere. The centre is not the centre’.80 The first (French) note is provided by Zampanò as a reflection on the house’s inscrutable structure (‘an aberration of physics’), while the second is a translation found by an apologetic Johnny Truant (‘Here’s the English. The best I can do’); perhaps unsurprisingly, then, critics have read this citation as not only a meta-reflection on the ‘decentred’ structure of the novel itself – Chapter IX eventually takes on a typographic

78 Hayles, ‘Subject’, p. 779.
79 Holland, Succeeding, p. 184.
layout comparable to Derrida’s *Glas*[^81] – but also as exemplary of the novel’s ability to ‘[recover], through the processes of remediation, subjectivities coherent enough to become the foci of […] sustained [novelistic] narration’.[^82] This is an instance of what Dames would call the ‘swallowing’ of theory by novelistic realism, so that it becomes merely another kind of ‘content’ in ‘ordinary’, everyday life.[^83] after years of repetition or assimilation in the U.S. university and wider culture, those notoriously complex (if not confounding) Derridean constructions – such as the ‘decentred centre’, or ‘no outside of the text’ – seem to have become merely ‘the identifying signature of a certain school of criticism rather than provocations for an urgent reassessment of how we comprehend reality’ (and deconstruction’s own identity is then concretized, in a broad sense, as merely ‘“the theory that does that”’).[^84] At the same time, however – and just as *IJ*’s Hal Incandenza is always careful to avoid Dr Rusk, or else shrug off her diagnoses – Johnny Truant makes sure to follow up his citation of Zampanò’s citation of Derrida with a nonplussed ‘Something like that’,[^85] thus rounding off n130 with the kind of apparently casual dismissal that is actually crucial to the critical ‘containment’ of the more ‘difficult convolutions of deconstructive thought’[^86] within the boundaries of the ‘same old humanism’, or indeed its newer, ‘technologically remediated’ variations.

It is in this sense that Holland’s reading of ‘Octet’ – as Wallace’s successful ‘reversal of poststructuralism from within poststructuralism’ – relies on a notion of critical theory as at best ‘language-obsessed’, and at worst an ‘extreme’ and ‘antihumanistic’ disavowal of ‘truth in language and meaning in literature, the worth of subjective critique, and even the existence of reality itself […]’.[^87] Wallace thus becomes the figurehead of a humanistic anti-post-structuralist that shares, if implicitly, several argumentative impulses with the critique of post-structuralism’s (and particularly Derrida’s) ‘antiessentialist epistemological motive’ that we find in the later work of a critic such as Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick (whose own disputation of anything

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[^81]: Hemmingson makes this comparison, in ‘Floorboards’, p. 273.
[^82]: Hayles, ‘Subject’, p. 781; italics original.
[^84]: Kirby, *Quantum*, p. 2.
[^85]: Danielewski, *House*, p. 112n130.
[^86]: Kirby, *Quantum*, p. ix.
like ‘traditional’ humanism was, as we will see in section three of this chapter, sustained and wide-ranging.\(^{88}\) That is to say: as the later Sedgwick mobilises bodily ‘affect’ in taking a ‘distinct step to the side of the deconstructive project of analysing apparently nonlinguistic phenomena in rigorously linguistic terms’,\(^{89}\) so Holland argues that, with ‘Octet’’s narratorial elision of ‘the writer’ with ‘you’, Wallace ‘articulates the power-defined reader-writer binary only to collapse it’ in an ‘invocation of real presence’, which is also a moment of ‘direct’ empathy between the reader and ‘the newly present author’.\(^{90}\) For both critics, then, it is the alleged ‘linguicism’ of poststructuralism that means it will always miss the ‘something else’ in a given ‘lived’ situation, whether this latter entails ‘aspects of experience and reality that do not present themselves in propositional or even in verbal form’,\(^{91}\) or the ontological priority of a ‘“real-est” plane of reality’ in a scene of literary interpretation (which accommodates the ultimate identification between ‘real’ author and ‘real’ reader).\(^{92}\) The second-person narration of Wallace’s story certainly gestures towards a desire for such a moment, describing ‘your’/‘the writer’’s hope that ‘this same potentially disastrous-looking avant-gardy heuristic form just might itself give you a way out of the airless conundrum’ that it has managed to create, ‘[b]ecause it now occurs to you that you could simply ask her. The reader. […] “This thing I feel, I can’t name it straight out but it seems important, do you feel it too?”’ (‘O’, pp. 130-31; italics original). The final few pages of the piece then lead up to its own version of this question, as posed by the blunt climactic demand: ‘So decide’ (p. 136): is this the work of ‘just another pseudopomo Bullshit Artist’, or something more ‘urgent’ and ‘important’ that we can’t quite name ‘straight out’, that extends even beyond the margins of the text?

We might recognize here also a kind of direct performance of what Lauren Berlant describes as the ‘waning of genre’ – a contemporary rebuttal of Jameson’s ‘waning of affect’ – in which we see a set of post-war, ‘state-liberal-capitalist fantasies’ of normativity ‘adjust[ing] to the [neoliberal] structural pressures of crisis and loss that

\(^{88}\) Sedgwick, *Touching*, p. 6.
\(^{89}\) Sedgwick, *Touching*, p. 6.
\(^{90}\) Holland, *Succeeding*, pp. 178-79.
\(^{91}\) Sedgwick, *Touching*, p. 6.
are wearing out the power of the good life’s traditional fantasy bribe without wearing out the need for a good life’. Although ‘Octet’ begins with a metafictional ‘cycle’ of short narrative dilemmas – of drug addicts huddling together for warmth in a Massachusetts alleyway, of the deteriorating friendship between ‘[t]wo men, X and Y’, of the messy custody battle between ‘a lady and a man’ (pp. 111-14) – the eventual fracturing of the central text by footnotes (after the fourth page of the story) also coincides with the fracturing of its generic capacity to ‘“[work]” as an organically unified belletristic whole’ (p. 133). By the time we reach the heavily footnoted final pages, the story has even given up on the given-up-on metafiction, thus registering what Berlant identifies as the failure of genre as such anymore to stabilize or organize the present moment into something predictable; what emerges then is the present as a ‘precarious’ affect, as whatever ‘makes itself present to us before it becomes anything else’, in other words as something as ‘pathetic and desperate’ as asking: ‘“This thing I feel, I can’t name it straight out but it seems important, do you feel it too?”’ (‘O’, p. 131). Affect thus intervenes as a sudden and potentially catalysing ‘event’, even if it is never clear whether such a ‘new intersubjective scene of sense’ will ‘be able to extend the moment to activity that would dissolve the legitimacy’ of the conditions of its own production, or function simply as ‘an episode in an environment that can well absorb and even sanction a little spontaneous leisure’.

And yet, although Wallace’s story seems in one sense to conclude by impelling us to ‘decide’ on an answer to this ‘pathetic and desperate’ question, in another sense it does not: the word ‘decide’ is succeeded on the final page (at least visually) by footnote 18, which is linked to the previous sentence in the main text:

Rather [asking this question] is going to make you look fundamentally lost and confused and frightened and unsure about whether to trust even your most fundamental intuitions about urgency and sameness and whether other people deep inside experience things in anything like the same way you do… more like a reader, in other words, down here quivering in the mud of the trench with the rest of us, instead of a Writer, whom we imagine [footnote 18] to be clean and dry and radiant of command presence and unwavering conviction as he coordinates the whole campaign from back at some gleaming abstract Olympian HQ.

n18. (at least I sure do…) (p. 136, p. 136n18; italics original)

93 Berlant, Cruel, pp. 6-7.
94 Berlant, Cruel, p. 4.
95 Berlant, Cruel, p. 36.
As with the story’s earlier oscillations between ‘centre’ and ‘margin’, this final footnote works as much to qualify as to reinforce its own descriptions of empathetic ‘urgency and sameness’ between reader and writer – not least (as Iain Williams has pointed out) by the sudden interruption of the main text’s ‘whom we imagine’ by the footnote’s first-person singular pronoun, the only other instances of which occur in n7 and n11. However, rather than transforming ‘O’ into a fundamentally ‘conservative, elitist, individualistic’ and even ‘monomaniacal’ series of ‘direct commands to readers’ about what they feel and think, I take such moments as part of the dynamic of self-assertion and self-contradiction that is enacted formally by the footnotes throughout. This does not imply that the marginalia impose an absolute limit on signification, working to trap us within the ‘airless conundrum’ of the page (p. 130); rather, such persistent oscillations between centre and margin call attention to the ways in which even ‘apparently nonlinguistic phenomena’ are drawn into the dynamics of signification by their very designation as such. And, just as these precarious ‘intersubjective scene[s] of sense’ can be called upon for a politics of the ‘centre’ (the ‘empathetic’ tradition of liberal humanism) or of the ‘margin’ (the ‘affective/Queer studies’ strain of contemporary critical theory), the footnotes to ‘Octet’ work to qualify even the story’s most ‘squeamish’ instances of ‘completely naked helpless pathetic sincerity’ (p. 131):

[...] demonstrate [footnote 7] some sort of weird ambient sameness [...] 

n7. (That might not be the right word [...]). (p. 131, p. 131n7; italics original)

[...] human relationships [footnote 8] [...] 

n8. (Be warned that this has become a near-nauseous term in contemporary usage [...]). (p. 132, p. 132n8)

[...] some nameless but inescapable ‘price’ that all human beings are faced with having to pay at some point if they ever want truly ‘to be with’ [footnote 9] another person instead of just using that person somehow [...] 

n9. (Ibid. on using the verb to be in this culturally envenomed way, too, as in ‘I’ll Be There For You’ [...]]. You’re going to have to eat the big rat and go ahead and actually use terms like be with and relationship, and use them sincerely – i.e. without tone-

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96 Iain Williams, ‘(New) Sincerity in David Foster Wallace’s “Octet’’, Critique, 56.3 (2015), 299-314 (p. 310). Williams is the first critic to note the intrusion of the first-person pronoun in n7 and n18 in ‘Octet’, although he does miss the other instance that occurs in n11.

97 Williams, ‘(New)’, pp. 310-11.

98 Sedgwick, Touching, p. 6.

99 Berlant, Cruel, p. 36.
quotes or ironic undercutting or any kind of winking or nudging [...]. (p. 132, p. 132n9; italics original)

[...] a weird and nameless but apparently unavoidable ‘price’ that can actually sometimes equal death itself, or at least usually equals your giving up something (either a thing or a person for a precious long-held ‘feeling’ [footnote 11] or some certain idea of yourself and your own virtue/worth/identity) whose loss will feel, in a true and urgent way, like a kind of death [...]

n11. Ibid. footnotes 8 and 9 on feeling/feelings too – look, nobody said this was going to be painless, or free. [...] Having to use words like relationship and feeling might simply make things worse. [...] I honestly don’t see what else I can do. (pp. 132-33, pp.132-33n11; italics original).

Here, even as the movements between centre and margin testify formally to the ‘weird and nameless but apparently unavoidable “price”’ that must be paid for the moment of pure identification that ‘Octet’ seems to strive so ‘desperately’ towards, the first-person narrator stresses his powerlessness to escape such a cycle: ‘I honestly don’t see what else I can do’. Perhaps this really is metafictional genre on the wane. But Wallace’s text at the same time functions as powerfully as ever to capitalize on whatever ‘makes itself present to us before it becomes anything else’,\(^{100}\) to already organize it into a form when we first come to it (‘do you feel it too?’), and thus to undo the implication of ontological primacy that is the necessary basis for avowedly affective or empathetic readings of literature. In other words, what finally emerges in ‘Octet’ is another kind of ‘compulsion to repeat’: oscillating between helplessness and ruthlessness, sentimentality and exploitation, centre and margin, the text strives repeatedly for satisfaction in the very objects and places that have always proved disappointing, or even hurtful; it never quite manages to locate that ‘precious long-held “feeling”’ that it wants so badly to ‘give up’.

That said, it is perhaps worth recalling that Berlant’s arguments in *Cruel Optimism* are themselves presented as a ‘politicization’ of ‘Freud’s observation that “people never willingly abandon a libidinal position, not even, indeed, when a substitute is already beckoning to them”’.\(^{101}\) For Berlant, political affect is something like the laughter produced by the back-and-forth of n216, a dramatic ‘encounter’ with ‘infrastructural stress’ that will either allow us to fend off the implications of the

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\(^{100}\) Berlant, *Cruel*, p. 4.

\(^{101}\) Berlant, *Cruel*, p. 27; Berlant is citing from Sigmund Freud, ‘Mourning and Melancholia’, in *Standard*, XIV, pp. 243-58.
‘Coatlicue Complex’ with ease, or conversely, as in the first part of this chapter, force us to ‘suspend ordinary notions of repair [...] to ask whether the survival scenarios we attach to [such] affects weren’t the problem in the first place’. In this way, we might see that the ‘cool, cynical, shut off’ and ‘politically depressed’ attitude of someone like Hal Incandenza – ‘I am just about as apolitical as someone could be. I am out of all loops but one, by design’ (pp. 1016n110) – is in fact ‘not a detachment at all’, but rather just another way of ‘navigating an ongoing and sustaining relation to the scene and circuit of optimism and disappointment’. And yet, if the shift within Wallace’s oeuvre from Hal’s ‘detachment’ to ‘Octet’’s instance on ‘completely naked helpless pathetic sincerity’ (p. 131) is paralleled by critical theory’s own shift from post-structuralist ‘linguisticism’ to the affective ‘event’, then clearly we are not about to break out of any sort of cycle, and affect theory is not the ‘cure’ for whatever ‘flatness’ or ‘political depression’ might ail us in the later stages of postmodernism; rather, it is theory itself which now looks to have taken no lessons from ‘the old experience’ of such claims ‘having led only to unpleasure’. In this sense, ‘Octet’ registers at once that ‘queer urgency about whatever it is you feel’ (p. 124; italics original) – perhaps, in the Humanities, a desire for critical theory as an agent of political change, or at least as the way to a good life – while that final footnote, n18, will always ‘keep creeping back in’ to remind us that realizing those desires will never quite be a matter of just: ‘So decide’ (IJ, p. 233; ‘O’, p. 136).

3.3 Reading (Post)Modern Centrality

In the previous section, we traced a kind of procedural overlap between two contemporary modes of critical response – neo-humanistic and ‘affective’ – which tend to be associated (more or less explicitly) with contrasting political or ideological positions in U.S. literary and cultural studies (broadly characterized above as ‘centre’ and ‘margin’, respectively). This overlap can usefully be summed up with help from the citation of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak that served to introduce my thesis: by positing a ‘real-est’ or ‘nonlinguistic’ realm that ontologically precedes and yet directly impacts upon the act of interpretation, both of these modes of contemporary response.

102 Berlant, Cruel, p. 49.
103 Berlant, Cruel, p. 27.
enact a structurally similar ‘prohibition of marginality’, an interpretative prohibition on some seemingly liminal part of the process of signification that paradoxically determines its outcome. As Spivak goes on to argue, however, whatever ‘inhabits the prohibited margin of a particular explanation specifies its particular politics’. In this sense, what I am describing as this ‘structural similarity’ or ‘procedural overlap’ between the contentions of, on the one hand, the neo-humanists, and on the other, the affect theorists, can also be said to indicate an area of political or ideological overlap between the two. In this final section, I look at how Wallace’s and other pseudo-scholarly footnotes can help us to think through this overlap as symptomatic of a seemingly irresolvable co-dependency between ‘centre’ and ‘margin’ that nonetheless the conditions of ‘normative’ experience in the late capitalist U.S. make it just as seemingly necessary to disavow. One example of this is the way in which the professed ‘urgency’ of the final demand of ‘Octet’ s central text – ‘So decide’ – is undercut by a footnote that suddenly discloses the rhetorical conditions of such an appeal; another is the way in which the sardonically dismissive ‘No clue’ of IJ’s n216 is subverted by the very theoretical framework that it attempts to exclude. And yet, if this restlessly deconstructive logic is what constitutes the alleged post-structuralist ‘linguisticism’ that we saw denigrated by both Holland and Sedgwick in the previous section, it was nonetheless these same oscillations between irresolvability and necessity that informed the latter’s arguments in Epistemology of the Closet (1990):

The analytic move [Epistemology] makes is to demonstrate that categories presented in a culture as symmetrical binary oppositions – heterosexual/homosexual, in this case – actually subsist in a more unsettled and dynamic tacit relation according to which, first, term B is not symmetrical with but subordinated to term A; but, second, the ontologically valorised term A actually depends for its meaning on the simultaneous subsumption and exclusion of term B; hence, third, the question of priority between the supposed central and the supposed marginal category of each dyad is irresolvably unstable, an instability caused by the fact that term B is constituted as at once internal and external to term A. […] To understand these conceptual relations as irresolvably unstable is not, however, to understand them as inefficacious or innocuous. […] I will suggest instead that contests for discursive power can be specified as competitions for the material or rhetorical leverage required to set the terms of, and to profit in some way from, the operations of such an incoherence of definition.

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105 Spivak. ‘Marginalia’, p. 33.
107 Sedgwick, Epistemology, pp. 9-11.
The question that arises from such an outline might now be: how do ideologically divergent groups of contemporary U.S. critics stand collectively to ‘profit in some way’ from casting the terms of cultural interpretation as primarily affective, nonlinguistic, or empathetic (rather than, say, cognitive, linguistic, or non-identificatory)? And, for our own specific purposes, how does this apparently ‘urgent and necessary’ emphasis on making some conclusive ‘decision’ one way or the other (‘O’, p. 125) inform those relationships between ‘theory and singularity’ that I have suggested are implicit in the appearance of pseudo-scholarly marginalia in the work of Wallace and his contemporaries?

If one of the appeals of ‘moving on’ from post-structuralism is that we might also get to act ‘as if [the Intentional Fallacy] didn’t even exist’ (‘JFD’, p. 259n7; italics original) – to make definitive judgements about Wallace’s fiction (term A) based on the generally anti-theoretical and pro-empathetic arguments put forward in his nonfiction (term B) – nonetheless we have already seen the various and persistent ways in which Wallace’s footnotes work to disturb the viability of such a position, demonstrating instead that any critical longing for the supposed securities of ‘inside’ and ‘outside’ will today be confronted by a situation as complex as it ever was. Wimsatt and Beardsley gesture towards this complexity when they argue, in reference to Eliot’s footnotes to ‘The Waste Land’, that:

whereas notes tend to seem to justify themselves as external indexes to the author’s intention, yet they ought to be judged like any other part of a composition (verbal arrangement special to a particular context), and when so judged their reality as parts of the poem, or their imaginative integration with the rest of the poem, may come into question.109

Thus, even in the light of notes such as the one to line 46 – which clearly explains the ‘two ways’ in which the motif of the ‘Hanged Man’ tarot card ‘fits my purpose’ – Wimsatt and Beardsley insist that a properly ‘critical inquiry’ will start from the view that both central text and marginal apparatus are equal, ‘internal’ parts of the same composition; at any rate, they conclude, we ought not try to ‘settle the bet’ by ‘consulting the oracle’, primarily because ‘such an inquiry would have nothing to do

109 Wimsatt and Beardsley, ‘Fallacy’, p. 484; italics original.
with the poem’. At once, then, this argument absolutely rejects the ‘exteriority’ of the marginalia, while at the same time it absolutely rejects the possible ‘interiority’ of any other utterances by their author – a contradiction that becomes especially strained when, as we saw in the case of The Pale King in Chapter Two, the literary text not only starts to incorporate the anti-formalist statements of its avowedly ‘real’ oracle-author (‘David Foster Wallace’), but also fails, by any conventional standard of ‘authorization’, to become what Wimsatt and Beardsley would describe as an ‘integrated composition’. However, if this leaves us with what Sedgwick describes as an ‘incoherence of definition’, she is clear that the next step is not towards some proto-utopian field of postmodernist ‘textuality’ or ‘free play’; rather, ‘a deconstructive understanding of these [ irresolvable] binarisms makes it possible to identify them as sites that are peculiarly densely charged with lasting potentials for powerful manipulation – through precisely the mechanisms of self-contradictory definition, or, more succinctly, the double bind’. By identifying Wallace’s footnotes and endnotes as localized instances of such ‘densely charged’ sites – carrying the potential for both ‘self-contradiction’ and ‘powerful manipulation’ – I now want to suggest that these marginalia might help us to move beyond an entrenched critical understanding of Wallace as either a ‘good’ (traditional, humanistic) or ‘bad’ (conservative, hegemonic) figure of cultural ‘recentralization’, specifically in their persistent attempts to subsume an ‘asymmetrical’ opposite term on which they nonetheless remain dependent for their signification. In this sense, I will contend not only that Wallace’s pseudo-scholarly marginalia seem repeatedly to dramatize an anxiety about the basis of linguistic referentiality that is linked to the same post-structuralist arguments that they seek to surpass, but also that this compulsive tendency towards disavowal is both informed by, and indicative of, the broader turn away from such latter arguments in divergent parts of the contemporary U.S. Humanities; our subject matter then takes on a historical and political aspect that will finally gesture outwards from the North American ‘centre’ of cultural and economic (post)modernity with which Wallace has been so identified.

Common to the various paradigmatic shifts within the modern discipline of English Studies has been a negotiation between, on the one hand, achieving some

112 Sedgwick, Epistemology, p. 10; italics original.
general (‘central’) conception of the significatory function of language, and, on the
other hand, attending to the particular systematic or ideological exclusions (or
‘marginalizations’) that have been inscribed in the former.\(^{113}\) Throughout their 1946
critique of ‘romantic intentionalism’, Wimsatt and Beardsley are at pains to cast their
conclusions in light of the public nature of language – ‘[t]he poem belongs to the
public’\(^{114}\) – the egalitarian implications of which were at least partially registered in
New Criticism before this latter approach, from the 1960s onwards, was itself critiqued
for its exclusionary tendencies and tacitly ‘elitist’ political associations.\(^{115}\) If the last
quarter of the twentieth century then saw the concerted movement of a broadly
psychoanalytical and Marxist post-structuralism from the ‘margins’ of the discipline to
its ‘centre’, nonetheless this development was not without its (often fairly severe)
detractors: in the U.S. in particular, the neo-conservative outrage (Hilton Kramer,
Daniel Bell) had its liberal counterparts in the likes of Richard Rorty, whose concern
for a pragmatic-humanist consensus also shared some points of contention with the
significantly more leftist and Euro-centric arguments of Jürgen Habermas.\(^{116}\) As such,
my own calibration of Jameson’s postmodernism thesis – that Wallace’s oeuvre traces
not only the fragmentation, but also the strengthening, rejuvenation, or
‘recentralization’ of the bourgeois ego – can be taken in the light of Wallace’s
coincidence with the later stages of this most recent paradigm, and the emergence of a
disciplinary impasse that has seen critics shifting decisively one way or the other while
the mechanisms of the late capitalist marketplace grind steadily on, relatively
untroubled (at least by the cries of literature and literary theory). One way of
understanding my thesis overall – with its stubborn procedural adherence to a
contingent and reversible model of centre and margin – is as an effort to work through
the implications of such a scenario from the inside.

And it is also against this backdrop that Wallace launches perhaps his most
strident nonfictional attack on contemporary English Studies, which appears – again in
the form of footnotes and sub-footnotes – throughout his 2001 review of Brian A.

\(^{113}\) The movement between Kant and Derrida, as discussed in the Introduction (p. 58), could be said to
epitomise this tension.
\(^{114}\) Wimsatt and Beardsley, ‘Fallacy’, p. 470.
\(^{115}\) See Matterson, ‘Criticism’, pp. 174-75.
\(^{116}\) For a historical overview, see Andreas Huyssen, \textit{After the Great Divide: Modernism, Mass Culture,
Garner’s *Dictionary of Modern American Usage*. Throughout the central text of this extended piece (61 pages, 81 footnotes, and ‘bonus’ endnotes), Wallace bases his endorsement of the *Dictionary*’s largely Prescriptivist premises on an argument for the necessity of Standard Written English as a grounds for communicative consensus in the U.S., especially in lieu of the ‘metaphysical, capital O-type Objectivity whose postmodern loss had destroyed (I’d pretty much concluded) any possibility of genuine Authority in issues of usage’ (‘AU’, p. 119; italics original). As had been the case in his earlier endorsement of Joseph Frank’s critical approach (‘[Frank’s] not about imposing any particular theory or method of decoding Dostoevsky’; ‘JFD’, p. 259n7), Wallace holds up the author of the book under review as exemplary of his own, broader propositions: so Garner’s work is said to encapsulate a modern, ‘Democratic Spirit’, combining ‘exhaustive citation of precedent’ with ‘clear, logical reasoning’ in order to appeal to ‘authority not in an autocratic sense but in a technocratic sense’ (to a ‘small-o kind of objectivity’; p. 122, p. 119 ; italics original). By the end of the *Dictionary*, concludes Wallace, Garner has thus managed to ‘recast the Prescriptivist’s persona’ from a ‘high-handed’ or ‘elitist’ authoritarian into a figure of ‘passionate devotion’, ‘experience’, ‘exhaustive […] research’, ‘judicious temperament’, and even a ‘sort of humble integrity’; in other words, Garner has become someone that ‘we’, the ‘lay reader’, can ‘like and trust’ (pp. 122-24). And, to take this one step further, such a conclusion also implies that we, as readers of Wallace’s own ‘expert’ analyses of the ‘expert’ analyses of Frank and Garner, face an analogous decision: do we like and trust Wallace, do we ‘identify’ with him (p. 124), by the end of his nonfictional texts?

However, as I suggested earlier in the present chapter, Wallace’s essayistic annotations actually tend to depart from the predominantly evidentiary role played by the modern, scholarly footnote so that, for example, his final endorsements of Garner’s clarity, logical reasoning, extensive citations, and so on, are themselves advanced on the basis of an argumentative structure that differs significantly from the one so approvingly attributed to Garner. Furthermore, it is also on the basis of this divergent argumentative structure that Wallace puts forward his critique of what he sees as the two dominant forms of modern linguistic ‘disruption’ or ‘obscurity’ for which Garner’s ‘Democratic’ rigour is then presented as a salve – namely, Political Correctness, and literary theory (pp. 110-18). The result, as we will see, is a centre/margin dynamic that
invites us paradoxically to identify Wallace with the ‘positive’ or ‘fair’ characteristics that are attributed to Frank and Garner, despite the actual operation of his argument in accordance with the ‘negative’ or ‘obscurantist’ characteristics that are attributed to PC and theory. Far from guaranteeing the erudition and rigour of his work, then, Wallace’s footnotes here attempt, by a subtle invocation of ‘affective’ identification with an embattled white, male, middle-class speaker, to somehow override the plethora of critical and logical contradictions that have mounted by the time of the text’s rousing final paragraphs (Garner’s Dictionary ‘just about completely resolves the […] problem of Authority’ in linguistic usage; p. 120).

Having opened the essay with a succession of footnotes containing comic personal admissions or biographical/familial anecdotes designed concurrently to highlight and explain Wallace’s underlying ‘Prescriptivist’ views on grammar, as well as his anxieties about holding those views while writing an essay about grammar – ‘the anxiety seems worth acknowledging up front’ (p. 68n3) – Wallace turns to written English as a pedagogical issue. ‘Because the argument for SWE is most delicate and (I believe) most important with respect to students of colour’, writes Wallace, ‘here is a condensed version of the spiel I’ve given in private conferences [footnote 61] with certain black students who were (a) bright and inquisitive as hell and (b) deficient in what U.S. higher education considers written English facility’; n61 simply states: ‘(I’m not a total idiot)’ (pp. 107-08, p. 107n61). The ‘spiel’ insists on the need for these students to learn Standard Written English because ‘if you ever want [your] arguments to get listened to and taken seriously, you’re going to have to communicate them in SWE, because SWE is the language our nation uses to talk to itself’ (p. 109). Wallace notes that several students and colleagues have taken offence at his comments – ‘one lodged an Official Complaint’ – but goes on to write that:

This reviewer’s own humble opinion is that some of the cultural and political realities of American life are themselves racially insensitive and elitist and offensive and unfair, and that pussyfooting around these realities with euphemistic doublespeak is not only hypocritical but toxic to the project of ever really changing them. (p. 109)

The next section introduces the two aforementioned forms of this ‘euphemistic doublespeak’ that Wallace considers most ‘confused and harmful’: the first is ‘Politically Correct English’, which ‘functions primarily to signal and congratulate
certain virtues in the speaker [...] and so serves the self-regarding interests of the PC far more than it serves any of the persons or groups renamed [e.g. from “poor” to “economically disadvantaged”]’ (Wallace also implies that PC is the reason that his teacherly ‘spiel’ about the necessity of SWE is seen as ‘insensitive’ rather than simply ‘blunt’; pp. 110-13). This section is further connected to footnote †, titled: ‘EXAMPLE OF A[N] [...] ISSUE IN THE FACE OF WHOSE MALIGNANCY THIS REVIEWER’S DEMOCRATIC SPIRIT GIVES OUT ALTOGETHER, ADMITTEDLY’:

This issue is Academic English, a verbal cancer that has metastasized now to afflict both scholarly writing [...] and prose as mainstream as the Village Voice’s [...]. It probably isn’t the whole explanation, but as with the voguish hypocrisy of PCE, the obscurity and pretension of Academic English can be attributed in part to a disruption in the delicate rhetorical balance between language as a vector of meaning and language as a vector of the writer’s own résumé. In other words, it is when a scholar’s vanity/insecurity leads him to write primarily to communicate and reinforce his own status as an Intellectual that his English is deformed by pleonasm and pretentious diction (whose function is to signal the writer’s erudition) and by opaque abstraction (whose function is to keep anybody from pinning the writer down to a definite assertion than can maybe be refuted or shown to be silly). The latter characteristic, a level of obscurity that often makes it just about impossible to figure out what an AE sentence is really saying [footnote 68], so closely resembles political and corporate doublespeak [...] that it’s tempting to think AE’s real purpose is concealment and its real motivation fear. (pp. 114-16n†; italics original)

Finally, the sub-footnote 68 in this passage cites in full the ‘totally obscure’, ‘long semicolonlic sentence’ with which Jameson opens his Signatures of the Visible, before adding:

Please be advised (a) that the above sentence won 1997’s First Prize in the World’s Worst Writing Contest [...], a competition in which American academics regularly sweep the field, and (b) that F. Jameson was and is an extremely powerful and influential and oft-cited figure in U.S. literary scholarship, which means (c) that if you have kids in college there’s a good chance that they are being taught how to write by high-paid adults for whom the above sentence is a model of erudite English prose. (p. 115n68)

Even in this short series of excerpts from Wallace’s essay, then, we can see that the footnotes paradoxically serve to ‘pussyfoot around’ the central text’s stronger assertions with a kind of ‘euphemistic doublespeak’: mixing, on the one hand, the pleonastic colloquialisms of the capitalized headings (‘ALTOGETHER, ADMITTEDLY’) as a signal of the speaker’s cool ‘ordinariness’, with, on the other hand, a critique of the pleonastic, self-serving rhetoric of academic language that is
nonetheless offered in the technical terminology of ‘vectors’ and ‘rhetorical balance’, they somehow manage to turn an avowedly ‘elitist’ but ‘utilitarian’ (p. 116) argument about race and language into a warning to the parents of college students that Fredric Jameson is teaching their kids how to write. In this sense, Wallace’s marginalia themselves tend to introduce ‘a level of obscurity that often makes it just about impossible to figure out what [his sentences are] really saying’, while at the same time offering the odd wink to a reader who seems already to share a set of basic assumptions or characteristics with the speaker – as in that wily ‘(I’m not a total idiot)’, or the earlier footnote about ‘Derrida and the infamous Deconstructionists [footnote 27]’:

‘n27. (Q.v. the “Pharmakon” stuff in Derrida’s La dissémination – but you’d probably be better off just trusting me.’ (p. 84, p. 84n27).

Taking this essay together with Wallace’s review of Frank’s Dostoevsky, the overall charge that he seems to have laid at the door of literary theory – here sweepingly represented, somewhat ironically, by Jameson117 – is that it is at once too reductively ‘ideological’ (left wing), and at the same time so rhetorically ‘obscure’ as to be incomprehensible, exclusionary, and commercially complicit (right wing); as Wallace wrote in an early draft of ‘AU’’s footnote 32, a two page exegesis of Ludwig Wittgenstein’s notion of ‘language games’: ‘It’s all part of the intricate deal of who gets to play the game and who don’t’.118 Theory’s propensity for ‘opaque abstraction’, suggests Wallace, is the result of a level of scholarly ‘vanity/insecurity’ that is, by extension, the result of English Studies’ near-Orwellian complicity with the ruling political/commercial class; as such, it is ‘not only hypocritical but toxic to the project of ever really changing’ the serious social problems of racism, inequality, and so on. However, when Wallace returns, near the end of the essay, to the issue of ‘the Official Complaint that a certain black undergraduate filed against me’, we realize that he is now proceeding to turn his entire argument about the loss of ‘capital $O$-type Objectivity’ on this anecdotal illustration of ‘the PWM [Privileged White Male] instructor’s very modern rhetorical dilemma’ (p. 117), with which the reader is comically invited to sympathize by the footnotes:

117 I note this irony in light of Jameson’s own tendency to group often quite disparate groups of theorists together under the umbrella category of ‘postmodernism theory’; see Postmodernism, pp. ix-xxii, pp. 181-259.
118 “Authority and American Usage”, Notes and research materials, undated’, fol. 30.2 (HRCDFW-A).
My culpability lay in gross rhetorical naiveté. I’d seen my speech’s primary Appeal as Logical […]. It wasn’t pretty, maybe, but it was true, plus so manifestly bullshit-free that I think I expected not just acquiescence but gratitude for my candour [footnote 71]. The problem I failed to see, of course, lay not with the argument per se but with the person making it – namely me, a Privileged WASP male in a position of power […].

n71. (Please just don’t even say it.) (pp. 116-17, p. 116n71)

We might say, then, that the text’s argument for communicative consensus becomes what Fitzpatrick describes as ‘a conversion of the forms and gestures of oppressed cultures to [Wallace’s] own project of maintaining his cultural (and social) centrality’, a ‘melodrama of beset white manhood’ – charges which have also frequently been aimed, in one form or another, at communicative pragmatists such as Habermas. At the same time, however, Wallace’s footnotes already seem to inscribe a form of self-critique within the argument itself, or at least an anxiety that the ‘real purpose’ of the text’s centre/margin dynamic is ‘concealment’ and its ‘real motivation [is] fear’ (p. 116n†) – that it is already guilty, in Wallace’s words, of manipulating ‘the intricate deal of who gets to play the game and who don’t’.

The oscillation of Wallace’s essay between ‘central’ consensus and ‘marginal’ dissension thus serves to prove his own Wittgensteinian point that ‘language is not only non-private but also irreducibly public, political, and ideological’ (p. 88n32; italics original): the ‘language games’ argument is, itself, necessarily part of a language game. That this must be the case is indicated by the fact that some version of Wittgenstein’s argument works to inform opposing sides of the ‘postmodernism’ debate in critical theory. On the one hand, Habermas argues against the over-specialization or professionalization of literary criticism: ‘distance has grown between the culture of the experts and that of the larger public’ because ‘[w]hat accrues to culture through specialized treatment and reflection does not immediately and necessarily become the property of everyday praxis’. On the other hand, Lyotard argues that the alternative ideal of ‘ordinary’ or ‘everyday’ consensus ‘does violence to the heterogeneity of language games’. Although Wallace’s anecdote about the ‘Official Complaint’ is advanced in support of the Habermasian understanding that ‘as soon as [aesthetic]…

119 Fitzpatrick, Obsolescence, p. 233.
120 See, for example, Huyssen, Divide, pp. 199-216.
122 Lyotard, Postmodern, p. xxv.
experience is used to illuminate a life-historical situation and is related to life problems, it enters into a language game which is no longer that of the aesthetic critic’—which we can link also with Dames’s hypotheses about the avenging realism of the ‘Theory Generation’—nonetheless Wallace’s footnotes serve as a kind of implicit reminder of the Lyotardian ‘violence’ or heterogeneity that is potentially masked by the very notion of ‘ordinary life’; the centre/margin dynamic of Wallace’s Dictionary review, as well as the other texts considered throughout this chapter, can thus be said to enact a sort of contemporary and specifically North American version of the broader Habermas/Lyotard debate (sometimes characterised as a deliberation between the very categories of ‘modernity’ and ‘postmodernity’).

However, while this debate has usually been rendered in polemical terms, whereby it is possible only to follow one side (central consensus) or the other (marginal dissension), my thesis has insisted throughout on the contingency and reversibility of the ‘centre/margin’ model. I have argued that even the seemingly most straightforward or powerfully felt moments of identification involve a ‘prohibition of marginality’, a manipulation of some ‘incoherence of definition’ that we can trace in the operations of literary marginalia; on the other hand, such manipulations can sometimes be achieved by assuming to advance one’s own argument ‘from the margins’, as we have seen in the case of ‘AU’’s lamentation of ‘the PWM instructor’s very modern rhetorical dilemma’. However, this frequently comic and identificatory dynamic in operation throughout Wallace’s work can also be seen as a kind of exchange, in which the pleasure of empathy or laughter is always predicated upon some element (Rusk, psychoanalysis, n18 in ‘Octet’, ‘Academic English’, Jameson, the ‘black students’) that it can never quite manage to exclude. If part of the appeal of Wallace’s work thus seems to reside in what Howie, the narrator of Nicholson Baker’s The Mezzanine, describes as the ‘luxuriant incidentalism of the footnotes [footnote 1],’ nonetheless that luxury is consistently shown to be anything but incidental. In a similar vein, in the accompanying n1, office worker Howie confesses that he tends to buy Penguin Classics in Philosophy mainly to read the ‘tiny truths’ and biographical ‘tidbit[s]’ that digressive scholarly marginalia will often provide: that Spinoza ‘liked to entertain himself by

124 Baker, Mezzanine, p. 121.
dropping flies into spiders’ webs, enjoying the resultant battle so much that he occasionally burst out laughing”; that Hobbes ‘liked during college […] to get up early in the morning and trap jackdaws with sticky string’; that Wittgenstein ‘loved to watch cowboy movies […] every afternoon’ and for ‘hours at a time’. However, although Howie ‘crave[s] knowledge of this kind of detail’, it also works to disable ‘any interest I might have had in reading [the books] any further’:

As our knowledge of these philosophers is brought within this domestic and anecdotal embrace, we can’t help having our estimation of them somewhat diminished […]. Can you take seriously a person’s theory of language when you know that he was delighted by the woodenness and tedium of cowboy movies?

By the end of n1, Howie has described scholarly marginalia variously and poetically as a ‘rough protective bark of citations’, a ‘hors d’oeuvre’, a ‘switch’ in a railway line, and ‘finer-suckered surfaces that allow tentacular paragraphs to hold fast to the wider library of reality’; and yet meanwhile, in the central text, he has admitted that he only buys the Penguin Classics (most of which he has read for ‘no more than twenty pages’) because ‘I liked to see them lined up on my windowsill, just above the shelf that held my records’. Here, much like the humour of IJ’s n216, or ‘AU’’s ‘(I’m not a total idiot)’, the ‘domestic and anecdotal embrace’ of the Penguin footnotes works to insulate The Mezzanine’s narrator from the potentially ‘serious’ challenges of the main texts’ philosophical content; in turn, the ‘luxuriant incidentalism’ of Baker’s own footnotes about luxuriantly incidental footnotes helps his text to become the kind of ‘glossy’ and diverting commodity we as readers can line up on the windowsill, merely to admire.

However, as much as the fort/da movement of these footnotes bespeaks a kind of luxuriant pleasure in the holding off of theoretical or philosophical challenges to the subject, their apparently implacable need for such comic self-assurance or ‘revenge’ tells another story. Howie, on his lunch break from a tedious and fatiguing job, begins his digression about biographical footnotes because a certain sentence in Aurelius’s

125 Baker, Mezzanine, p. 121n1.
126 Baker, Mezzanine, p. 121n1.
127 Baker, Mezzanine, pp. 120-24, pp. 121-23n1.
Meditations has momentarily proved ‘too much for me’: “Observe, in short, how transient and trivial is all mortal life; yesterday a drop of semen, tomorrow a handful of spice and ashes”. Wrong, wrong, wrong! I thought. Meanwhile, we have seen throughout this case study that the attempts of Wallace’s characters to maintain some standard of ‘inner truth’ – rather than admitting anything so ‘joy-killing’ as critical theory into consideration – have unanimously been followed by various degrees of disaster and self-dissolution: solipsism, in the case of Hal Incandenza; ‘pathetic’ desperation in the case of the narrator of ‘Octet’; suicide, for both IJ’s James Incandenza and Neal from ‘Good Old Neon’; and, in The Pale King, ‘David Foster Wallace’’s complete disappearance into ‘the system’ (of taxation, of the text). I do not mean here merely to fall into the trap of Fitzpatrick’s ‘melodrama[s] of beset white manhood’ – directing my analysis of the fragmenting effects of late capitalism towards their most privileged and discursively powerful victims – but rather to recognize that, in these texts, we see that ‘the conditions of ordinary life in the contemporary world even of relative wealth, as in the United States, are conditions of the attrition or the wearing out of the subject’. The back-and-forth movement of the footnotes therefore attests not only to an exercise in pleasure, but also to a sense of structural inescapability and its attendant anxiety: as the narrator of ‘Octet’ puts it in n11, ‘I honestly don’t see what else I can do’ (p. 133n11). And it is by paying close attention to such a movement that we can begin to understand the ideological dynamic whereby a sense of helplessness and anxiety, or a lack of rational comprehensibility of the global system of capitalist relations at its very centre, is vital to that system’s healthy reproduction.

At the end of his discussion of the novelistic depictions of literary theory by Franzen, Egan, Lerner, et al, Dames writes:

If [Theory] was meant to socialize you at all, it was meant to socialize you for the different world to come: a world of genuine difference genuinely encountered, a world less in thrall to the false gods of Normality and Pathology, a world that would be more transparent and, as a result, less painful. In their variously rueful ways, these novels remind us of the utopianism of Theory by writing its epitaph. Theory, it turns out, is less intellectually powerful than emotionally useful; it habituates you to the anomic,

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129 Baker, Mezzanine, pp. 120-24.
130 Berlant, Cruel, p. 28.
precarious existence you were destined to lead in any case. It was like a drug after all: not hallucinogenic or mind-expanding, but rather pleasantly sedating.\textsuperscript{131}

For Dames, the ‘convulsive, revolutionary political energy’ of theory is shown by these contemporary authors simply to have been ‘just another part of growing up a college-educated American’, sometimes even functioning as a ‘nostalgic’ pause in the narrative between childhood and the apparently inevitable but no less ‘restricted alternatives of adulthood’ (‘lovers, children, bosses’).\textsuperscript{132} However, the pseudo-scholarly footnotes that we have looked at throughout this chapter have emphasized the ways in which theoretical discourse – by not only taking part in, but also calling attention to the various inter-subjective, political, and historical power structures by which such normative alternatives are maintained – can be felt as \textit{either} a joke or a disturbance, a desperate plea for empathy or a monomaniacal command, a pragmatic call for societal equality or a clever suppression of genuine difference. If critical theory thus ‘habituates’ us to the ‘anomic, precarious existence’ that we were always ‘destined’ to lead, then it also offers us some analytical tools with which we might see that destiny as socially, historically, and discursively produced, and therefore mutable – even if the ideological effect of ‘daily life’ is the prohibition of such critical thought by any means necessary, as has been the case in many of the texts discussed throughout this chapter.

In the following Conclusion, I will look at how certain of Wallace’s marginalia can help us to reflect on the accelerated processes of U.S.-centric, late capitalist cultural assimilation and reification that have informed the archivization and canonisation of his work, before offering a summary of the overall arguments of my thesis.

\textsuperscript{131} Dames, ‘Theory’, p. 167.
\textsuperscript{132} Dames, ‘Theory’, p. 159.


## Conclusion

### 4.1 ‘… which transcription ended up making the book valuable, in terms of reproduction, decades later’: Wallace in the Margins of Modernism

At one point during *The Pale King*, ‘David Foster Wallace’ recounts his arrival for his first day of work at the IRS Regional Examination Centre in Peoria. Forced to wait ‘for what felt like a very long time’ in a ‘hot and stuffy’ reception area, he passes the time by annotating an ‘insipid self-help book’ that he has been given by an unnamed ‘immediate relative’:

> [I]n essence I was reading the book only to place certain tart, mordant margin-comments next to each bromide, cliché, or cloying bit of inauthentic pap, which meant just about every ¶. The idea was that I would mail the book back to this immediate relative a week or two hence, along with a voluble thank-you note [...] the overwhelming sarcasm of which this relative would not detect until he opened the book and saw the acerbic marginalia on every page. [...] It was just a fantasy, though. The truth was that I would never mail the book and note; it was a total waste of time [footnote 61]. (*TPK*, pp. 302-03)

In the attached n61, however, ‘Wallace’ tells us that after a little while he overheard ‘an oral exchange [...] involving two or possibly three unseen voices in the narrow hallway my chair was near the ingress of’:

> I actually transcribed parts of the conversation in real time in a kind of personal shorthand on the inside of the pop-psychology book’s front cover, in order to transfer it later to the notebook (which is why I am able to recount it in such potentially suspicious looking detail); to wit: [...]. (p. 303n61)

‘Wallace’ then recounts the conversation, before concluding: ‘… which transcription ended up making the book somewhat valuable, in terms of reproduction, decades later. So it was both a waste and not, depending on one’s perspective and context’ (p. 303n61).

We see in this passage a conjunction of the three categories of marginalia that have provided the ‘genetic’ structure of my thesis: from reading or ‘source’ notes, to notebook drafts and manuscripts, and finally to the complex movement between text and interpretation that is signalled by the pseudo-scholarly footnote. There is a suggestion that, while it might be a ‘total waste of time’ to read Wallace’s marginalia
as evidence of his thought, feelings, or sources, those same jottings have nonetheless ended up becoming ‘somewhat valuable […] decades later’: ‘So it was both a waste and not, depending on one’s perspective and context’. As I have argued throughout this thesis, the spatial dynamic of centre and margin – which always implies an aggregation of position and value – can also shift temporally, in accordance with the varying socio-political mechanisms of cultural reception and assimilation. The overarching framework of the thesis has attempted to account for this by tracing the temporal (or ‘sociological’) movement of the literary text from inception to composition to reception,¹ even if that tracing is, in the overwhelming majority of cases, only available to us retrospectively – that is, an author’s source texts and manuscripts are normally enumerated, acquired, and ‘officially’ archived only after their published oeuvre has accrued significant cultural capital.² Note, for example, how the ‘Wallace’ of TPK uses the conversation that he has ‘transcribed’ in the ‘insipid self-help book’ as evidence against, and in opposition to, the ‘waste’ that is produced by mere forgery or plagiarism: the annotated book becomes valuable retrospectively, on account of the role that it has (evidently) come to play in the genesis of the published text of TPK.³ The purpose of this Conclusion is to think briefly about this problem of time and value, especially as it pertains to the accelerated processes of U.S.-centric, late capitalist cultural assimilation and reification that have informed the archivization and canonization of David Foster Wallace, and which we have been tracing throughout the present thesis.⁴ Through readings of the novella ‘The Suffering Channel’ – fragmentary drafts of which are to be found in Wallace’s copies of Nightwood by Djuna Barnes and Disgrace by J. M.

¹ McKenzie, Sociology, p. 12.
² On the relatively late position of the archive and personal library within the conventional ‘ecosystem’ of literary scholarship, see Alan Gribben, ‘Private Libraries of American Authors: Dispersal, Custody, and Description’, Journal of Library History, 21.2 (1986), 300-14 (pp. 300-02).
³ We can see here how the trope of transcription works to counteract the ‘plagiaristic’ anxiety that we analysed throughout Chapter Two: the value of these marginalia becomes linked to their concrete role in the production of a text by David Foster Wallace, regardless of their actual content.
⁴ I mean here to refer to the various and interconnected ways in which Wallace’s work has been received and/or appropriated thus far, as analysed in the preceding chapters: the assimilation of his work and ‘author function’ into a range of broadly neoliberal discourses around autonomous selfhood, sincerity, and ‘genius’ (all the more rapidly as a result of his suicide); the critical mobilisation of his oeuvre against certain Marxist, psychoanalytical, and post-structuralist theoretical discourses, which is now paradoxically combined with its more recent appropriation by Marxist critics; the reification (or ‘Cobainification’) of the image of ‘DFW’, as evidenced perhaps most clearly by James Ponsoldt’s 2014 Hollywood film; and the steady ‘institutionalization’ of his writing, not only on account of his lifelong involvement with the university institution, but also in light of the archivization of his papers by the Ransom Centre, and the sustained growth of the specialized critical field of ‘Wallace Studies’ since the year of Wallace’s death.
Coetzee – as well as of a selection of Wallace’s teaching materials, I will reflect on the participation of both Wallace’s writing, and the present thesis, in these assimilatory processes as such. I will finish by summarising the arguments of the thesis overall.

Barely a year after his death, Wallace’s archive was installed, at considerable cost, alongside the full or partial Ransom Centre collections for the likes of Edgar Allan Poe, William Faulkner, James Joyce, Ezra Pound, D. H. Lawrence, Samuel Beckett, Virginia Woolf, Anne Sexton, Jorge Luis Borges, Christine Brooke-Rose, Don DeLillo, and Thomas Pynchon.\(^5\) If this bespeaks an unusually rapid process of popular and cultural assimilation, we saw in the second section of Chapter One the spatio-temporal complexities that can arise when, as part of the Wallace collection, we find his annotated copies of texts that are nonetheless ‘authored’ by the likes of Joyce, Plato, Tolstoy, and so on. And indeed, while there is reportedly no other writer’s library in Austin ‘that contains as much – or as consistently substantive – marginalia as Wallace’s’, further difficulties arise in a considerable number of cases where the book marginalia are ‘so substantive that if the notes had appeared on a sheet of paper, they would certainly be considered (small) stages of [Wallace’s] compositional process’.\(^6\) As the Ransom Centre librarian Molly Schwartzburg goes on:

In such cases, one might argue that the [library] book is a manuscript: its annotations ‘trump’ the published book. We might place such an item in the manuscript collection with other draft materials to ensure that researchers can track all parts of a work’s compositional process. But in Wallace’s case, this would have meant placing the majority of the books in manuscript boxes – a terribly inefficient method of storage, and one that might skew researchers’ interpretation of the volumes and obscure other potential paths of research within that volume and the library as a whole. On top of these problems, any number of books contain annotations related to multiple projects, and deciding which manuscript the book should be stored with would be far too subjective an endeavour.\(^7\)


\(^7\) Schwartzburg, ‘Conclusion’, p. 248; italics original.
As a result, the relevant members of Ransom Centre staff made a collective decision to store Wallace’s library almost entirely separately to his manuscripts\(^8\) – a decision that has been reproduced in the structure of my thesis.

This practical problem of storage and efficiency, then, is also a theoretical one of time and value: no matter whether the relevant book-object is ‘insipid self-help’ or a canonical text of English literature, or whether the marginalia therein constitute reading notes or original manuscript, its value anyway ‘ends up’ being determined by its status as annotated-by-Wallace.\(^9\) Hence ‘Wallace’’s ambivalence, in *TPK*, about the by turns forged and ‘transcribed’ annotations in his pop-psychology book – what matters is not their particular quality, but their retrospective participation in the production of his oeuvre (which is simultaneously an expansion and consolidation of ‘Wallace’ as an author-function). We might think back here as well to my Introduction’s outline of the traditional critical usage of marginalia, whereby they seldom obtain the status of the ‘work’, but can be called upon nonetheless as useful supplementary materials for interpretation: their value is frequently indexed to the cultural status of their author (Foucault), rather than any ‘organic’ judgement of literary quality (Wordsworth).

We find an analogous conjunction of time and value in Wallace’s 2004 novella ‘The Suffering Channel’, which tells the story of a ‘very very shy’, middle-aged Midwesterner (Brint Moltke) who is reputedly able to excrete fully-formed faecal sculptures that are ‘arresting in their extraordinary realism and the detail of their craftsmanship’ (‘TSC’, p. 270, p. 254). Moltke’s talent is soon investigated and reported on by a journalist (Skip Atwater) working for *Style*, a magazine outfit whose main offices are located on the sixteenth floor of 1 World Trade Centre, and whose editors are currently commissioning content for the next edition – to be published on the tenth of September, 2001. The novella itself, however, makes only a handful of glancing references to the coming terrorist attacks – we are told at one point, for example, that one *Style* intern has ‘ten weeks to live’ (p. 326) – and, as such, places its thematic entanglements of ‘shit’ and ‘art’ in the past of a catastrophic future that is both

\(^8\) Schwartzburg, ‘Conclusion’, p. 248. Other than the annotated DeLillo proofs mentioned above, in p. 132n87, Wallace’s corrected first edition of *Infinite Jest* is the only book stored as manuscript.

\(^9\) As Oram points out, heavily annotated authors’ books are occasionally even recognized as ‘works’ in their own right, providing ‘a source of grist for the scholar’s mill and the cataloguer’s and conservator’s despair’; see ‘Libraries’, p. 20.
absent and present; it suggests, in other words, that narratives of global politics, cultural value, and North American masculinity might ‘have consequences beyond the private realm of one man’s toilet training’.  

While ‘TSC’ offers a succession of traumatic depictions of mother-son toilet training – which are referred to by Olivia Banner as the ‘primal scenes’ of its male protagonists – we also find, on a consideration of Wallace’s library, that one such scene first takes place on the inside back page of Wallace’s copy of Barnes’s *Nightwood* (1936). Written in purple pen at the bottom of the back catalogue of books offered by *Nightwood*’s publisher, New Directions, we find (see fig. 44):


\[
B g: \text{No toilet training whatsoever, but an abrupt withdrawal of diapers at 4, so that the child was forced by consequence to find the toilet’s use. Rather like the child who’s taught to swim by being rowed out and thrown in.}\]

An expanded version of this experience is then attributed, in the published text, to ‘Little Roland Corliss’, who, now an adult, is the ‘high concept mogul’ in charge of the eponymous U.S. cable television channel that will attempt to broadcast one of Moltke’s ‘extraordinary’ excretions in real time (p. 296, p. 272). As with the psychoanalytical and economic dynamics implied by ‘TSC’ – between primal scene and adult desire, shitty mothers and beautiful shit – Wallace’s marginalia here reconstitute the meaning and value of Barnes’s own ‘posthumous and improper’ text; the past of Wallace’s work, converging with the New Directions literary back catalogue, becomes the future of hers. In this sense, although Wallace taught *Nightwood* on his spring 2003 class at Pomona College, titled ‘SELECTED OBSCURE/ECLECTIC FICTIONS’ (‘170R’), the retrospective value of his annotated copy shows us that Barnes can become marginalised even in her own ‘masterpiece’.

Meanwhile, if even the syllabi for Wallace’s Pomona classes have now become publishable material (not to mention the extensive ‘vocabulary lists’ that he compiled from various dictionaries), visitors to the archive in Austin will also find his early college essays on Shakespeare and Melville, a high school poem about pollution that

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10 Banner, ‘“Shit”’, p. 88.
11 Banner, ‘“Shit”’, p. 82.
14 Selections from Wallace’s ‘vocabulary lists’ appear on the intervening pages of the essays posthumously collected in *Both Flesh and Not*. 
won a local writing prize in 1974, and a range of (corrected) junior school spelling tests and writing exercises (see fig. 45).\textsuperscript{15} We might say that these marginal materials—which seductively repeat the promise to tell us something ‘secret’ about the individual who went on to become the ‘visionary’ DFW\textsuperscript{16}—function at the same time like Moltke’s sculptures of shit: mixtures of art and abjection that masquerade simultaneously as the interpretative key to U.S.-centric (post)modernity, and the ‘embarrass[ing] and distaste[ful]’ waste products of a troubled Midwesterner ‘on the throne, producing’ (p. 245, p. 240).\textsuperscript{17} As such, they work only to further complicate those basic evaluative questions that were central to the course description for ‘SELECTED OBSCURE/ECLECTIC FICTIONS’: ‘It would […] be good to talk this term’, writes Wallace:

about the dynamics of the Lit canon and about why some important books get taught a lot in English classes and others do not— which will, of course, entail our considering what modifiers like ‘important’, ‘good’, and ‘influential’ mean w/r/t modern fiction. (‘170R’, p. 609)

Here, Wallace’s newly-published teaching materials call attention to (and now participate in) the spatio-temporal problem that we have encountered throughout this case study, namely the inseparability of the oeuvre and its reception, or of some ‘central’ work and its ‘marginal’ or contextual materials (including Wallace’s own still-expanding body of critical and non-fictional publications, as well as the output of ‘Wallace Studies’, biographers, fan-run websites, and so on). \textit{IJ} was called a much-hyped masterpiece before it was finished; the ‘boom’ of the so-called ‘Wallace Industry’ only occurred upon the author’s death;\textsuperscript{18} and \textit{TPK} is seen as his most serious and political work, even though its questionable status as a ‘Wallace novel’ helps to illuminate certain contradictions of authority and value that can then be traced back throughout his writing. The standard process of modern literary ‘canonisation’— from

\textsuperscript{15} See fols 31.6-9 (HRCDFW-A).
\textsuperscript{16} Smith, ‘looking’.
\textsuperscript{17} As Peter Boxall has argued in relation to a similar dynamic running through the oeuvres of Beckett and DeLillo, we might think of the apparent inseparability of cultural value and waste in terms of a failure of oppositional logic in the contemporary, Western imagination: neoliberal models of globalisation tend to constitute ‘wealth’ in relation to ‘more wealth’, rather than ‘poverty’; see "‘There’s no Lack of Void’: Waste and Abundance in Beckett and DeLillo’, \textit{SubStance}, 37.2 (2008), 56-70. See also Godden and Szalay, ‘bodies’, pp. 1289-93.
publication, to popular and critical recognition, and finally to institutionalization and archivization\textsuperscript{19} – is thus with Wallace both historically observable and yet temporally more complex; if, for instance, the archive’s value is at first indexed to the pre-existing cultural capital of the oeuvre, we have seen in the earlier sections of Chapter Two that reading one alongside the other tends to destabilise the centre/margin dynamic of their initial opposition (as well as their oppositional status altogether). In the cases of both \textit{IJ} and \textit{TPK}, the economy of oeuvre/archive is one neither of authorized or ‘fully-formed’ text versus its waste products, nor of ‘sincere’ original versus its ‘contaminated’ copies; rather, the very notion of ‘Wallace’ as a principle of aesthetic mediation is rendered as fragmentary as the manuscript marginalia themselves.

And yet, all the same, the example of Wallace’s \textit{Nightwood} shows us the power of unification and classification that still inheres in the name of the author. Just as the signature ‘D. Wallace’ seems to insert itself between the words ‘Djuna’ and ‘Barnes’ at the top of the biographical sketch at the front of the book (see \textbf{fig. 46}),\textsuperscript{20} so the protected cultural status of this object is produced by the conjunction of these two recognizably ‘important’ names: it becomes, primarily, ‘Wallace’s Djuna Barnes’. At the bottom of the same page, Wallace lists four aesthetic classifications in bullet points (see \textbf{fig. 47}):

- Symbolist
- Surrealist
- Expressionist
- Modernist\textsuperscript{21}

While ‘the dynamics of the Lit canon’ can tend to look similarly like a procession of familiar names and generic periodizations, the aim of my own single-author thesis has been to understand these movements between centre and margin, identification and difference, coherence and fragmentation, as themselves a matter of ideological investment. In this way, my thesis has attempted to trace a cluster of widespread (cultural, economic, affective) investments in Wallace by making its own substantial investment in Wallace. At the same time, however, I have argued throughout that Wallace’s writing is always implicated in the concurrent production \textit{and} troubling of its

\textsuperscript{19} Gribben, ‘Dispersal’, pp. 300-02.
\textsuperscript{20} Wallace, in Barnes, \textit{Nightwood} (HRCDFW-L).
\textsuperscript{21} Wallace, in Barnes, \textit{Nightwood} (HRCDFW-L).
own value, its own worthiness of certain ‘modifiers like “important”, “good”, and “influential”’ – even on the front page of the manuscript of ‘TSC’ that he sends to Pietsch for consideration, Wallace warns that its contents are ‘Possibly Bad…’. Among a separate set of ‘TSC’ marginalia on the inside back cover of Wallace’s copy of *Disgrace* by Coetzee (1999) – another author whose work Wallace taught at Pomona – he writes ‘what if story is bad rather than a grotesque allegory?’ (see fig. 48). Once again, the margins of this novella about shitty U.S. art are drawn inexorably into its centre.

If the oeuvres of both Barnes and Coetzee are written in the margins of a ‘central’ modernism to which they nonetheless resist assimilation – with Wallace’s here quite literally being written in the margins of their books – my thesis has attempted to analyse the myriad ways in which the centre/margin dynamics of Wallace’s case can be seen to trouble, in a contemporary U.S. context, the very notion of modernist (or postmodernist) aesthetics as a stable, ‘central’ category against which some more ‘marginal’ project can comfortably be defined. Granted, Wallace now looks set to occupy a fairly stable position at the centre of the contemporary North American canon; and yet it has been my contention throughout that it is his work’s persistent compulsion towards this same sense of (apparently transparent, normative, ‘ordinary’) centrality that tends to ‘disclose […] the undisclosed margins’ of its political logic and widespread appeal. By thus attending to the ways in which the centre is implicated in the margin, and the margin in the centre, I have hoped here not so much to relativize or to ‘flatten’ the political dynamics of cultural explanation, as to suggest a range of more sensitive and reflexive ways in which that process might be understood in the contemporary moment.

4.2 Concluding Notes

I argued in the Introduction that marginalia have constituted a specific and often paradoxically ‘central’ problem in the history of modern literary interpretation. The

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22   “‘The Suffering Channel’, typescript draft, undated’, fol. 24.9 (HRCDFW-A).
dynamics of this problem shifted significantly with Romanticism, during which period the value of annotations became increasingly indexed to the pre-existing cultural capital of their author; S. T. Coleridge, the first such figure to publish his own reading notes, is even credited with bringing the term ‘marginalia’ from Latin into English, and therefore with the invention of a whole new ‘genre’ of writing. In Coleridge’s wake, modern, authorly marginalia have frequently been associated with a range of fundamental notions such as truth, character, voice, identity, and genius, without ever quite being granted the same status as the literary oeuvre to which they are linked – they tend to stand, at once, as the ‘unique’ allegorical ‘keys’ to the ‘true meaning’ of a particular literary work, and, at the same time, as so many scribblings to be sold at auction, or consumed online. They are thus fetishized, supplementary, and trivial, but also a form of ‘concrete’ evidence in the case against a critical overinvestment in either that ‘modernist icon’ of the ‘text itself’, or indeed the apparently ‘exhausted’ abstractions of literary theory: in order to expose and resist ‘the easy invocation of the “marginal” in contemporary theory’, it has been argued that we should focus on ‘historical or real margins’, that is, margins in ‘books, the text embodied’. These arguments have tended to imply that the signifiers of social or political marginality became too ‘easily appropriable’ in late twentieth century cultural criticism, and must now be concurrently differentiated from, and contained by, a focus on those self-evidently ‘present’ margins to be found in the material book-object.

On the contrary, my thesis has argued that the signification of any form of marginalia is determined in accordance with a model of ‘centre’ and ‘margin’ which is contingent and reversible, depending upon its particular configuration within the text and context of a given interpretative situation. By working through a series of shorter case studies in the Introduction, followed by a ‘central’ case study on David Foster Wallace, I have contended that the relative reversibility of centre and margin does not indicate one side’s ultimate identity with the other, but is instead determined in relation to the particular ideological investment that is marked by the circumstances of a given

26 Jackson, Marginalia, pp. 1-17.
29 Tribble, Marginality, p. 103, p. 1.
30 Harper, Framing, p. 188.
exchange. Furthermore, I have argued that the particular ideological aspect of this investment has often been related, in critical discourse, to the cultural ‘function’ of a given author’s name. In this sense, while marginalia have frequently been invested with meaning on account of the relative ‘centrality’ of a related ‘author function’ – thus giving us stable grounds (the ‘life’, ‘mind’, or ‘truth’) on which to read the complexities of their work – I have argued, with Gayatri Spivak, that such a production of ‘cultural explanation’ requires an inherent ‘prohibition of marginality’ that is irreducibly political. Thus, while critics have historically attempted to resolve the contradictions of the literary text by straightforwardly identifying the (often equally ambiguous) marginal note with some putatively ‘external’ index of authority, marginalia have only tended to serve to keep everything in its proper order: so Sylvia Plath’s underlinings in *Thus Spake Zarathustra* are confirmation of her role as the politically and personally ‘dangerous’ woman, while William Blake’s self-contradictory notes on Sir Joshua Reynolds have been read as perfect synecdoches for his masterful ‘theory of art’. Meanwhile, if manuscript annotations by the likes of James Joyce and Samuel Beckett have tended to constitute characteristically brilliant forms of aesthetic mediation, similarly ‘chaotic’ marks by Djuna Barnes are just more proof of her enfeeblement and embitterment in old age.

We also saw, in the course of my Introduction, how the so-called ‘trope of marginality’ of critical theory – which has been adopted in the advocacy of a range of political positions, from feminist, to post-colonialist, to Marxist – became simultaneously more ‘central’, more powerful, but also less stable or rhetorically ‘trustworthy’ in the latter parts of the twentieth century. I argued that this ambiguity can be traced in the back-and-forth movement of the contemporary fictional footnote, a formal feature that has historically tended to mark a disjunction between the literary text and its institutional interpretation (my examples here ranged from Alexander Pope’s *Dunciad Variorum* to T. S. Eliot’s ‘The Waste Land’). In texts such as Manuel Puig’s *Kiss of the Spider Woman* and Susan Daitch’s *L. C.*, I argued that the centre/margin dynamic of the footnotes works simultaneously to ‘threaten the (illusory

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32 Rowe, ‘Margin’, pp. 36-40.
but comforting) security of the centred, totalizing, masterly discourses of our culture’,\(^{33}\) and to prompt wider political suspicions about the necessarily ‘constructed’ or ‘slippery’ nature of that threat.\(^{34}\) I eventually placed this tension within the expanded theoretical framework of ‘modernity versus postmodernity’, with the Kantian project of rational (‘central’) consensus on one side, and its (‘de-centred’) post-structuralist critique on the other.

The case of Wallace has allowed us to trace the continuing implications of this tension within a contemporary (and pointedly ‘recentralized’) context. For, although readings of Wallace’s book marginalia, manuscript annotations, and pseudo-scholarly footnotes have thus far tended to place him in the traditionally ‘masterly’ category of a Blake or a Joyce, yet each of the chapters in my thesis has focused on the kinds of interpretative ‘prohibitions’ that are necessary to the logic of such readings, while attending to the potentially de-stabilising consequences of such a focus. In Chapter One, for example, I argued that by reading Wallace’s personal library and marginalia in conjunction with his oeuvre, what looks like a return to transparent notions of ‘genius’, ‘sincerity’, and the ‘human’, is in fact discursively and ideologically entangled with the (frequently disastrous) commodification and reproduction of ‘normative’ (U.S., white, male, middle-class) subjectivity. In Chapter Two, I argued that while Wallace’s manuscript marginalia seem initially to function as a sort of ‘window into his mind’ that can guarantee the ‘levels of thinking’ behind ‘every sentence’ that he published,\(^{35}\) they are at the same time performative of the extreme levels of economic and subjective abstraction that occur within late capitalism, and that his posthumous novel, *The Pale King*, attempts to thematise. Finally, in Chapter Three, I argued that the generally comic effects of Wallace’s multitudinous pseudo-scholarly marginalia are inseparable from an anxiety about the same forms of contemporary academic discourse that they seek, commonsensically, to surpass; the back-and-forth movement of these notes thus seems to dramatize a particularly ‘centralized’ version of the ‘modernity versus postmodernity’ debate, indicating not only the mutual implication of these terms, but also the failure of even the most seemingly ‘normative’ forms of thought to fully exclude the potentially ‘de-centring’ effects of its margins.

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\(^{33}\) Hutcheon, *Politics*, p. 83.


\(^{35}\) Nadell, cited in Dietrich, ‘window’. 
The so-called ‘marginal obsession with marginalia’ shows little sign of abating.36 In summer 2015, the University of East Anglia launched the British Archive for Contemporary Writing, which aims to ‘borrow’ the papers, drafts, and reading materials of authors who are in the middle (or even at the beginning) of their literary careers.37 Also in the last eighteen months, the Ransom Centre has acquired the archives of such figures as Ian McEwan ($2 million) and Kazuo Ishiguro ($1 million), signalling the still-increasing participation of archival materials in the processes of literary canonisation.38 Meanwhile, this steady valourization of material or ‘concrete’ forms of marginalia stands in contradiction with the emergence of the internet as a remarkably public and popular platform for comment (for example, Sam Anderson has recently suggested that we think of Twitter as ‘basically electronic marginalia on everything in the world’).39 However, if the meaning and value of the ‘marginal’ in literary interpretation continue to be informed by some version of Coleridge’s opposition between ‘marginalia’ and ‘copious notes’, 40 my thesis has nonetheless insisted on the critical importance of rethinking this dynamic in relation to the particular function of a given author’s name, as well as that author’s particular socio-historical moment – for, as we have seen in the examples of Blake and Plath, Joyce and Barnes, as well as Nabokov, Beckett, Puig, Daitch, Baker, Danielewski, and Wallace, the literary margin continues to be a space where contradictions can either be confronted or tucked away, almost out of sight.

39 Anderson, ‘Rolling’.
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Appendix

Figure 1 – David Foster Wallace, annotation in H. L. Hix, *Morte d'Author: An Autopsy*, HRCDFW-L (Reproduced courtesy of the Harry Ransom Centre, Austin, TX).

"George Washington," he uses a name that means definite descriptions: for example, “the first president of the United States,” or “the man who wore wooden dentures.” Second, a proper name “has other functions than that of signification”: To learn that George Washington during his presidency was nothing more than a puppet of the French government would alter the meaning of the proper name. The name of an author is like any other proper name in oscillating "between the poles of description and designation," but "the link between a proper name and the individual being named and the link between an author's name and that which it names are not isomorphous and do not function in the same way" (122).

Foucault gives several examples, but one is sufficient to make his point. To say that Pierre Dupont does not exist is not the same as saying that Homer never existed. The first says only that there is no one whose name is Pierre Dupont, while the other says that there is no one as Homer was not.

Figure 2 – David Foster Wallace, annotation in H. L. Hix, *Morte d'Author: An Autopsy*, citing Michel Foucault, HRCDFW-L (Reproduced courtesy of the Harry Ransom Centre, Austin, TX).
The word 'writing' appears in different meanings: (1) the act of writing, and (2) that which is written. So far in his essay, Barthes has concentrated almost exclusively on the first sense of the word, as if what he means by “author” is what Nehamas called the writer. But here the focus shifts. That language functions without any need for the person of the interlocutors changes, according to Barthes, the temporality of the text. The author is no longer “the past of his own book,” standing in relation to it as father to child, nourishing it. Instead, “the modern scriptor is born simultaneously with the text, is in no way equipped with a being preceding or exceeding the writing, is not the subject with the book as predicate”: The text is no longer written by an author once and for all, but “every text is eternally written here and now.” This means that Barthes is free to conflate writing (act) and writing (what is written), there is no longer any difference. “Writing” is no longer “an operation of recording, notation, representation, ‘depiction’” but is “what does writing do to itself.”

Figure 3 – David Foster Wallace, annotation in H. L. Hix, Morte d’Author: An Autopsy, citing Roland Barthes, HRCDFW-L (Reproduced courtesy of the Harry Ransom Centre, Austin, TX).
Figure 4 – Miles Coverdale’s 1537 revision of the Matthew Bible (Reproduced courtesy of http://printinghistory.org.uk).
other craft as in that of the sea do the hearts of those already launched to sink or swim go out so much to the youth on the brink, looking with shining eyes upon that glitter of the vast surface which is only a reflection of his own glances full of fire. There is such magnificent vagueness in the expectations that had driven each of us to sea, such a glorious indefiniteness, such a beautiful greed of adventures that are their own and only reward! What we get—well, we won’t talk of that; but can one of us restrain a smile? In no other kind of life is the illusion more wide of reality—in no other is the beginning all illusion—the disenchantment more swift—the subjugation more complete. Hadn’t we all commenced with the same desire, ended with the same knowledge, carried the memory of the same cherished glamour through the sordid days of imprecation? What wonder that when some heavy prod gets home the bond is found to be close; that besides the fellowship of the craft there is felt the strength of a wider feeling—the feeling that binds a man to a child. He was there before me, believing that age and wisdom can find a remedy against the pain of truth, giving me a glimpse of himself as a young fellow in a scrape that is the very devil of a scrape, the sort of scrape greybeards wag at solemnly while they hide a smile. And he had been deliberating upon death—confound him! He

Figure 5 – Sylvia Plath, annotation in Joseph Conrad, *Lord Jim* (Reproduced courtesy of Sotheby’s).
Figure 6 – William Blake, annotation in Sir Joshua Reynolds, *The Works of Sir Joshua Reynolds* (Reproduced courtesy of the British Library).
Figure 7 – Vladimir Nabokov, annotation in Franz Kafka, *The Metamorphosis* (Reproduced courtesy of Pan Press).
Figure 8 – David Foster Wallace, annotation in Cormac McCarthy, *Suttree*, HRCDFW-L. (Reproduced courtesy of the Harry Ransom Centre, Austin, TX).

qt Milk.

Half pound smelts.

(O of that balanced beast, the Unicorn.)

Abused by too much love; I praise

When he first fell into his mothers lake

That pool where human faces mix come

and go

Figure 9 – Djuna Barnes, ‘Jefferson, 675-2277’ (Reproduced courtesy of The Authors League Fund and St. Bride’s Church).
If Barthes longs for the imperial artist’s demise, Gass longs for that same imperial artist’s eternal life. Barthes tries to shift the meaning of the term “writing” to include only what is written and to exclude the act of writing; Gass reverses this, and tries to shift the meaning to include only the act of writing and to exclude what is written. Gass says that, “when the work of writing has been done, the essential artistic task is over.” The text on his view is “a thing whose modulated surfaces betray the consciousness it contains, and which we read, as we read words, to find the hand, the arm, the head, the voice, the self, which is shaping them, which is arranging those surfaces—

Figure 11 – David Foster Wallace, annotation in H. L. Hix, *Morte d’Author: An Autopsy*, citing William H. Gass, I, HRCDFW-L (Reproduced courtesy of the Harry Ransom Centre, Austin, TX).

Figure 12 – David Foster Wallace, annotation in H. L. Hix, *Morte d’Author: An Autopsy*, citing William H. Gass, II, HRCDFW-L (Reproduced courtesy of the Harry Ransom Centre, Austin, TX).
“think it would take this long to do this thing I’m doing."
“Nobody’s talked about moving on,” he said.
“What about your book?”
“There is no book, Davy. There’s eleven pages and seven of them don’t have any words on them. And I’m not making any great claims for the other four.”
“I thought you were writing all the time you were up in Maine. How long were you up there?”
“Almost a year,” he said.
“What did you do all that time?”
“I don’t know. I really don’t remember much of it. I guess I was stoned most of the time. I think I blew a fuse or something. My head went dead. That’s the only way to put it. Something in there burned out and blew away. Went dead.”

Figure 13 – David Foster Wallace, annotation in Don DeLillo, Americana, HRCDFW-L (Reproduced courtesy of the Harry Ransom Centre, Austin, TX).

Figure 14 – David Foster Wallace, annotation in Lewis Hyde, The Gift: Imagination and the Erotic Life of Property, HRCDFW-L (Reproduced courtesy of the Harry Ransom Centre, Austin, TX).
Figure 15—David Foster Wallace, annotation in James Joyce, *Stephen Hero*, HRCDFW-L
(Reproduced courtesy of the Harry Ransom Centre, Austin, TX).
Before you have decided what to write about, the number of options is daunting. You can write about anything in the world—that is, anything you can think of. The limitations are already established because that is you making the choices. Once you have decided what to write about, the options narrow further because you have discarded the rest of the possibilities to concentrate on this one. As you work, each choice along the way opens a new avenue of choices, and each of these choices is individual because you are an individual.

The science fiction writer Brian Aldiss reported seeing a Czech cartoon at a film festival. At each step the audience was invited to choose one of four options for the cartoon characters. If Fuzzy fell into the manhole, was he going to: A. Climb back out; B. Bounce back out; C. Rise majestically on a waterspout from a broken pipe; or, D. Start on a journey through the sewers? Each audience choice channeled the story into a new set of four choices designed for that particular story line, but the masterminds who planned the cartoon had to come up with possible story lines for every choice among each set of options at every step along the way and the number of potential stories they had to develop increased geometrically so that the total was astronomical.

Writing, you are dealing with more choices than the Czech cartoonists...
others are infected by the same feelings of admiration, fear, respect, or love to the same objects, persons, and phenomena.

And it is upon this capacity of man to receive another man’s expression of feeling and experience those feelings himself, that the activity of art is based.

If a man infects another or others directly, immediately, by his appearance or by the sounds he gives vent to at the very time he experiences the feeling; if he causes another man to yawn when he himself cannot help yawning, or to laugh or cry when he himself is obliged to laugh or cry, or to suffer when he himself is suffering—that does not amount to art.

Art begins when one person, with the object of joining another or others to himself in one and the same feeling, ex-

Figure 18 – David Foster Wallace, annotation in Leo Tolstoy, What is Art?, HRCDFW-L (Reproduced courtesy of the Harry Ransom Centre, Austin, TX).

Figure 19 – David Foster Wallace, annotation in John Gardner, On Moral Fiction, HRCDFW-L (Reproduced courtesy of the Harry Ransom Centre, Austin, TX).
benevolent universe, and it is on our side. The universe, it reassures us, is radical grace. Therefore, we do not need to be afraid. *Scarcity* is not the primary experience, but abundance. Knowing this, we can relax and let go.

“Be not afraid” is the most common single line in the Bible. Look for yourself if you don’t believe me.

As Mary Anne Williamson says in her book *Return to Love*, the “fear” worldview and the “love” worldview do not know one another. What I’m calling the fear worldview is what John calls “the world.” It is “the system.”

Women faced their problem-with-no-name by breaking their isolation and organizing. The solutions offered to men generally require them to see themselves in ever more isolated terms. Whatever troubles the American man, the outlets of mass culture from Hollywood to pop psychology to Madison Avenue tell him, can be cured by removing himself from society, by prevailing over imaginary enemies on an imaginary landscape, by beating a drum in the woods until he summons the “deep masculine,” by driving ever faster on an empty road. Instead of collectively confronting brutalizing forces, each man is expected to dramatize his own struggle by himself, to confront arbitrarily designated enemies in a staged fight—a fight separated from society the way a boxing ring is roped off from the crowd. It is a fight that society watches and may applaud but does not participate in and has no influence over.

Popular accounts of the male crisis and male confusions are almost unrelievedly ahistorical. The conditions under which men live are ignored and men themselves are reduced to a perennial Everyman—as women...
functions as a clearinghouse for sensations, perceptions, feelings, and ideas, establishing priorities among all the diverse information. Without consciousness we would still “know” what is going on, but we would have to react to it in a reflexive, instinctive way. With consciousness, we can deliberately weigh what the senses tell us, and respond accordingly. And we can also invent information that did not exist before: it is because we have consciousness that we can daydream, make up lies, and write beautiful poems and scientific theories.

Over the endless dark centuries of its evolution, the human nervous system has become so complex that it is now able to affect its own states, making it to a certain extent functionally independent of its genetic blueprint and of the objective environment. A person can make himself happy, or miserable, regardless of what is actually happening “outside,” just by changing the contents of consciousness. We all know individuals who can transform hopeless situations into challenges to be overcome, just through the force of their personalities. This ability to persevere despite obstacles and setbacks is the quality people most admire in others, and justly so; it is probably the most important trait not only for succeeding in life, but for enjoying it as well.

To develop this trait, one must find ways to order consciousness so as to be in control of feelings and thoughts. It is not best to expect that shortcuts will do the trick. Some people have a tendency to become very mystical when talking about consciousness and expect it to accomplish miracles that at present it is not designed to perform. They would do well not to think of as the

Figure 22 – David Foster Wallace, annotation in Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, *Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience*, HRCDFW-L (Reproduced courtesy of the Harry Ransom Centre, Austin, TX).
Figure 23 – David Foster Wallace, ‘Draft 2: Handwritten draft’, *Harry Ransom Centre Website*, <http://hrc.contentdm.oclc.org/cdm/compoundobject/collection/p15878coll20/id/64#nav_top>, p. 1 (Reproduced courtesy of the Harry Ransom Centre, Austin, TX).

Figure 24 – David Foster Wallace, ‘IJ “First two sections”, typescript drafts and photocopy, undated’, fol. 16.6, HRCDFW-A (Reproduced courtesy of the Harry Ransom Centre, Austin, TX).
Figure 25 – David Foster Wallace, ‘IJ Handwritten drafts, undated’, fol. 15.4, HRCDFW-A (Reproduced courtesy of the Harry Ransom Centre, Austin, TX).

Figure 26 – David Foster Wallace, ‘IJ Handwritten drafts, undated’, fol. 15.4, HRCDFW-A (Reproduced courtesy of the Harry Ransom Centre, Austin, TX).
Figure 27 – David Foster Wallace, ‘Digital copy printouts of corrections of typos/errors for paperback printing of *Infinite Jest*, from 1st edition, 2nd printing *Infinite Jest* hardcover, 1996’, fol. 23.7, HRCDFW-A (Reproduced courtesy of the Harry Ransom Centre, Austin, TX).

Figure 28 – David Foster Wallace, ‘Draft 1: Wallace’s workbook’, *Harry Ransom Centre Website*, <http://hrc.contentdm.oclc.org/cdm/compoundobject/collection/p15878coll20/id/66#nav_top>, p. 1 (Reproduced courtesy of the Harry Ransom Centre, Austin, TX).
Figure 29 – David Foster Wallace, ‘Draft 1: Wallace’s workbook’, *Harry Ransom Centre Website*, <http://hrc.contentdm.oclc.org/cdm/compoundobject/collection/p15878coll20/id/66#nav_top>, p. 1
(Reproduced courtesy of the Harry Ransom Centre, Austin, TX).

Figure 30 – David Foster Wallace, ‘Draft 3: Handwritten draft’, *Harry Ransom Centre Website*, <http://hrc.contentdm.oclc.org/cdm/compoundobject/collection/p15878coll20/id/56>, p. 1
(Reproduced courtesy of the Harry Ransom Centre, Austin, TX).
upper-class students were spoiled, among others; others were under great family pressure and failing, for whatever reason, to work up to what their parents considered their true grade potential. I’m sure you get the picture. Let’s just say I provided a certain service. This service was not cheap, but I was very good at it, and careful. E.g., I always demanded enough of a sample of a client’s prior writing to understand how they tended to think and sound, and I never made the mistake of producing pieces that were unrealistically superior to someone’s own previous work. You can probably see why this

Figure 31 – David Foster Wallace, ‘Draft 4: Typed, with Wallace’s edits’, Harry Ransom Centre Website, <http://hrc.contentdm.oclc.org/cdm/compoundobject/collection/p15878coll20/id/52>, p. 7 (Reproduced courtesy of the Harry Ransom Centre, Austin, TX).

recognizes it, except distantly).

I’m still hoping there are ways to make the novel much shorter, not because any one piece of it isn’t wonderful but because the longer it is the more people will find excuses not to read it. On the attached pages I’ve suggested chapters and scenes that maybe can come out without killing the patient.

You’re right that notes should go at the end. A novel with lots of long

Figure 32 – David Foster Wallace, annotation on a letter from Michael Pietsch, 22 December 1994, fol. 23.8, HRCDFW-A (Reproduced courtesy of the Harry Ransom Centre, Austin, TX).

is grammatically ill-formed. Name the English grammatical error clause why the ill-formed clause (6A) communicates its meaning more clearly than

Figure 33 – David Foster Wallace, ‘IJ “First two sections”’, typescript drafts and photocopy, undated, fol. 16.6, HRCDFW-A (Reproduced courtesy of the Harry Ransom Centre, Austin, TX).
and pulsing nicely onto cartridges everywhere, the ranks of Altick's program-pumpers had been pared back to the old-movie-and-afternoon-doubleheader major-market regional systems of the early 1980s. Passive pickings were slim, now. American entertainment became inherently active, consumer-driven. Because ads were now out of the question -- any halfway-sensitive PC's CPU could edit out anything shrill or ungratifying in the post-receipt Review Function of an entertainment-pulse -- cartridge-production (meaning both the dissemination of made-to-order programing pulses and the recording of that programming on packaged 4.5-mb diskettes playable on any cutting-edge laser-scan PC cartridge-production, though tentacularly controlled by an Interlace that had patented the FAX-transmission-process for moving images, was Hobbesianly free-market. No more Network reluctance to make a program

Figure 34 – David Foster Wallace, ‘IJ “First two sections”, typescript drafts and photocopy, undated’, fol. 16.6, HRCDFW-A (Reproduced courtesy of the Harry Ransom Centre, Austin, TX).

Figure 35 – David Foster Wallace, ‘IJ Handwritten drafts, undated’, fol. 15.7, HRCDFW-A (Reproduced courtesy of the Harry Ransom Centre, Austin, TX).
Figure 36 – David Foster Wallace, ‘IJ Typescript, copyedited (continued)’, fol. 22.3, HRCDFW-A, (Reproduced courtesy of the Harry Ransom Centre, Austin, TX).

Figure 37 – David Foster Wallace, ‘IJ “First two sections”, typescript drafts and photocopy, undated’, fol. 16.6, HRCDFW-A (Reproduced courtesy of the Harry Ransom Centre, Austin, TX).
Figure 38 – David Foster Wallace, ‘IJ Handwritten drafts, undated’, fol. 15.5, HRCDFW-A (Reproduced courtesy of the Harry Ransom Centre, Austin, TX).

Figure 39 – David Foster Wallace, ‘IJ Handwritten drafts, undated’, fol. 15.5, HRCDFW-A (Reproduced courtesy of the Harry Ransom Centre, Austin, TX).
Figure 40 – David Foster Wallace, ‘IJ Handwritten drafts, undated’, fol. 15.5, HRCDFW-A (Reproduced courtesy of the Harry Ransom Centre, Austin, TX).

Figure 41 – David Foster Wallace, ‘IJ Handwritten drafts, undated’, fol. 15.5, HRCDFW-A (Reproduced courtesy of the Harry Ransom Centre, Austin, TX).
Figure 42 – David Foster Wallace, ‘IJ “First two sections”, typescript drafts and photocopy, undated’, fol. 16.5, HRCDFW-A (Reproduced courtesy of the Harry Ransom Centre, Austin, TX).

Figure 43 – David Foster Wallace, ‘IJ Handwritten drafts, undated’, fol. 15.5, HRCDFW-A (Reproduced courtesy of the Harry Ransom Centre, Austin, TX).
Figure 44 – David Foster Wallace, annotation/fragmentary draft of ‘The Suffering Channel’, in Djuna Barnes, *Nightwood*, HRCDFW-L. (Reproduced courtesy of the Harry Ransom Centre, Austin, TX).
Figure 45 – David Foster Wallace, ‘Early schoolwork, 1971-1977, undated’, fol. 31.9, HRCDFW-A (Reproduced Courtesy of the Harry Ransom Centre, Austin, TX).

Figure 46 – David Foster Wallace, annotation in Djuna Barnes, Nightwood, HRCDFW-L (Reproduced courtesy of the Harry Ransom Centre, Austin, TX).
German.

The Antiphon, a tragedy in verse, issued simultaneously here and in Britain (1958), has been translated into Swedish both for book publication and for production at the Royal Dramatic Theatre in Stockholm by Mr. Dag Hammarskjöld and Mr. Karl Ragnar Gierow.

Djuna Barnes’s work is represented in many anthologies here and abroad. She was a member of the National Institute of Arts and Letters. Although she spent many years in Paris, she later settled in New York City, where she died in 1982.

- Symbolist
- Surreal
- Expressionist
- Modernist

Figure 47 – David Foster Wallace, annotation in Djuna Barnes, *Nightwood*, HRCDFW-L (Reproduced courtesy of the Harry Ransom Centre, Austin, TX).

Figure 48 – David Foster Wallace, annotation in J. M. Coetzee, *Disgrace*, HRCDFW-L (Reproduced courtesy of the Harry Ransom Centre, Austin, TX).