“ADD TWO EGGS”: A WAY OUT OF THE CAGE OF AESTHETIC SUSPICION IN *THE FAERIE QUEENE* AND *INFINITE JEST*”

by

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(Under the Direction of Charles Doyle)

ABSTRACT

Edmund Spenser’s epic poem *The Faerie Queene* and David Foster Wallace’s novel *Infinite Jest* are compared on the basis of their views of the dangers of aestheticism and over-involvement in works of art.

INDEX WORDS: Edmund Spenser, David Foster Wallace, Faerie Queene, Infinite Jest, Aesthetics, Pragmatism

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"ADD TWO EGGS": A WAY OUT OF THE CAGE OF AESTHETIC SUSPICION IN *THE FAERIE QUEENE* AND *INFINITE JEST*"

The only arena in which one would immediately seek to compare Edmund Spenser's sixteenth-century epic *The Faerie Queene* and the late David Foster Wallace's 1996 novel *Infinite Jest* is that of length. Both books can serve as well for a doorstop as for literary entertainment. Not that Wallace's work lacks valid comparisons to Renaissance literature. Frances Higgins, in her master's thesis "Narrative Infinity in the Encyclopedic Novel: Manipulations of Dante Alighieri's *Divina Commedia* in David Foster Wallace's *Infinite Jest*" (University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill, 2006) explores some fairly tenuous connections to Dante's poem, and, of course, the title of the novel references *Hamlet* ("Alas, poor Yorick! I knew him, Horatio, a fellow of infinite jest, of most excellent fancy," 5.1). Baldessare Castiglione's *The Book of the Courtier* mentions tennis several times as a suitable pastime for the court dweller, and Wallace uses the game throughout his novel as a metaphor for life (the restrictions of the game provide important boundaries that help one define oneself) in a fashion of which Castiglione might approve. The students at Enfield Tennis Academy, where much of the book is set, follow the classical trivium/quadrivium that was rediscovered and pursued during the Renaissance, with the slight modification of substituting optics as a study for astronomy, an equally important arena of study in the earlier era (IJ 188).

Nonetheless, despite Wallace's wide learning and the vast respect I have for him as an author, I am not so foolhardy as to attempt to make an argument here that any similarities between *The Faerie Queene* and *Infinite Jest* are intentional on his part.[1] That said, there *are* similarities, and they are more than superficial. Both works are crucially concerned, perhaps

even obsessed, with the dangers art presents, especially the more elaborately embroidered and beautiful it becomes, and both are themselves exceptionally arty works of art that could quite easily be accused of the exact sins they point to in other works they condemn. *Infinite Jest*'s central fatal entertainment shares its name with the novel (I will distinguish it here by placing it in Roman type and within quotation marks, as opposed to the italicized title of the novel), a film so entertaining, so compellingly watchable, that those who catch sight of it want to do nothing *but* watch it repeatedly, soiling themselves, starving, even cutting off their own fingers to be allowed to continue watching it. It's not exactly a subtle embodiment of the idea that the consumption of art can be perilous to the consumer. *The Faerie Queene* casts aspersions throughout on things that might be excessively committed to art over nature, most obviously in Acrasia's Bower of Bliss at the end of Book 2 but also, for example, in the House of Busirane (Book 3) and the false Florimell (Book 3 and elsewhere), and yet Spenser creates numerous examples of healthy art, as in the Temple of Venus (Book 4) and the Garden of Adonis (Book 3).

Wallace, too, seems not immune to the healing potential of art; even the now deceased creator of "Infinite Jest," James Incandenza, communicating from the beyond with semi-comatose Don Gately, says he attempted the addictive entertainment as a means to get through to his increasingly anhedonic son, Hal (838–39). And, of course, as mentioned above, both *Infinite Jest* and *The Faerie Queene* can be viewed as putting forth the "do as I say, not as I do" philosophy—the older work indeed seeking to transcend nature, just as it warns against, and the more recent one encouraging a circular reading, with the "anticonfluential" end feeding right back to the beginning of the text, in a cycle that could continue ad infinitum, just like the process of viewing "Infinite Jest." But accusing Spenser and Wallace of hypocrisy is uninteresting and reductive. Let us assume they know what they are about and examine why these two authors

have such similar concerns, especially considering the divergent nature of the Renaissance and the late twentieth century. What do they propose, through their texts, as the way out of the problems they diagnose, and what are the differences between the particular problems they pinpoint and the solutions they present? What can we learn from reading them alongside one another, and are they successful in the projects they lay out for themselves?

Both authors explain their programs elsewhere, and while, as English scholars, we must be ever careful of the intentional fallacy, it is nonetheless useful to hear from them what they think they are attempting to do. Spenser's letter to Sir Walter Raleigh, which precedes the text of the poem, sets it out: "The generall end therefore of all the booke is to fashion a gentleman or noble person in vertuous and gentle discipline: Which for that I conceiued shoulde be most plausible and pleasing, being coloured with an historicall fiction, the which the most part of men delight to read, rather for variety of matter, then for profite of the ensample" (15). Wallace's discussion of his aims preceded the publication of *Infinite Jest* and appeared, at greatest length, in an interview conducted by Larry McCaffery, published in 1993, immediately preceding Wallace's own essay "E Unibus Pluram," about the damaging effects of television on contemporary literature, which I will also discuss. While Wallace never mentions his novel, by then in progress, in the interview, it is clear if one has read the book that the concerns he addresses here, in response to McCaffery's question about the difference between his work and television shows, are the ones that operate with it:

> I had a teacher I liked who used to say good fiction's job was to comfort the disturbed and disturb the comfortable. I guess a big part of serious fiction's purpose is to give the reader, who like all of us is sort of marooned in her own

> skull, to give her imaginative access to other selves. Since an ineluctable part of being a human self is suffering, part of what we humans come to art for is an experience of suffering, necessarily a vicarious experience, more like a sort of "generalization" of suffering. Does this make sense? We all suffer alone in the real world; true empathy's impossible. But if a piece of fiction can allow us imaginatively to identify with a character's pain, we might then also more easily conceive of others identifying with our own. This is nourishing, redemptive; we become less alone inside. It might just be that simple. But now realize that TV and popular film and most kinds of "low" art—which just means art whose primary aim is to make money—is lucrative precisely because it recognizes that audiences prefer 100 percent pleasure to the reality that tends to be 49 percent pleasure and 51 percent pain. Whereas "serious" art, which is not primarily about getting money out of you, is more apt to make you uncomfortable, or to force you to work hard to access its pleasures, the same way that in real life true pleasure is usually a by-product of hard work and discomfort. So it's hard for an art audience, especially a young one that's been raised to expect art to be 100 percent pleasurable and to make that pleasure effortless, to read and appreciate serious fiction. That's not good.

He says elsewhere, in a 1996 interview by Laura Miller, "I wanted to do something sad. I'd done some funny stuff and some heavy, intellectual stuff, but I'd never done anything sad. And I wanted it not to have a single main character. The other banality would be: I wanted to do something real American, about what it's like to live in America around the millennium."

Neither of these responses from the author is as clear or illuminating as Spenser's, but *Infinite Jest* is in some ways a more slippery work than *The Faerie Queene*, less explicitly didactic and, while technically finished, in some ways equally incomplete, considering the amount of information it leaves out.[2] To summarize these two projects: Spenser is attempting to serve up his medicine with a spoonful of sugar, and Wallace, while he isn't entirely anti-sugar, is trying to make his reader more cognizant and desirous of the medicine involved.[3] Both projects seem simpler in their goals, too, than they end up being.

Wallace aims, in "E Unibus Pluram," collected in his first book of nonfiction pieces, *A Supposedly Fun Thing I'll Never Do Again*, to look at the specific impact of the widespread consumption of large amounts of television on contemporary fiction, something he does rather well in that essay, saying, in passing, "You can trace the opposition between what persons do and ought to desire at least as far back as Plato's chariot or the prodigal's return. But the way entertainments appeal to and work within this conflict has been transformed in televisual culture" (41). In fact, in that essay, he goes out of his way to narrow the scope of his argument, repeating over and over that he does not think television itself is evil; it's only when it's consumed in excess that it becomes a problem: "One can rest while undergoing stimulation. Receive without giving. In this respect, television resembles certain other things one might call Special Treats (e.g. candy, liquor), i.e. treats that are basically fine and fun in small amounts but bad for us in large amounts and *really* bad for us if consumed in the massive regular amounts reserved for nutritive staples. One can only guess at what volume of gin or poundage of Toblerone six hours of Special Treat a day would convert to" (37).[4]

But who defines excess? Remy Marathe and Hugh Steeply, a Canadian terrorist/double- or possibly triple-agent and an employee of the U.S. Office of Unspecified Services, debate these

issues atop a mesa in Arizona in a section of *Infinite Jest* that appears in chunks throughout the novel and reminds one of Spenser's Book 2, devoted to the idea of temperance as personified in Sir Guyon. The golden mean, allowing for pleasure in some things but not in others and never too much, is far easier to espouse in the abstract than to follow as a way of life or clearly delineate at length as a path, and neither book seems to get it quite right. Some cases present obvious examples of too-muchness, as with Steeply's story of his father's life-end obsession with the television show *M*A*S*H*, culminating in letter-writing to characters on the show, notebooks crammed with tiny and coded interpretations, and hours upon hours of watching the program, sitting in an easy chair in much the same posture as many of the victims of the fatal "Infinite Jest." Marathe says, in response to the story, "This is unbalance. . . . This attaching of excessive importance" (641), which certainly seems true, but if we examine Steeply's father's theories, insane as they seem at first, with his belief that the show, and specifically the character of Major Burns, signified something "about an end to our familiar type of world-time and the advent of a whole different order of world-time" (644), one can make a case that there is something to them. After all, the novel takes place in a world in which time has become subsidized, each year sponsored by a corporation whose product the Statue of Liberty holds aloft, which could be interpreted as "a whole different order of world-time." There are hints, as well, that something even more apocalyptic is at hand; note 114 refers to "the very last year of Subsidized Time," which could mean either that the idea of product placement has run its course or that time itself is coming to a conclusion. The point is not whether Steeply's father is correct or not—and the idea that he might be is not one I have seen in any other interpretation of the novel—but that, if the possibility is raised, his example is perhaps not such an obvious cautionary tale after all. Again, who defines excess?

Book 2 of the *Faerie Queene*, as mentioned above, makes the idea of the golden mean seem comparably simple and easy to achieve, especially at the beginning of the book, but progressively complicates the issue for the thoughtful reader. The palmer who advises Guyon lays out the case for the middle way thus:

> But temperance (said he) with golden squire
> Betwixt them both can measure out a meane,
> Neither to melt in pleasures whot desire,
> Nor fry in hartlesse griefe and dolefull teene.
> Thrise happie man, who fares them both atweene. (2.1.58.1–5)

It certainly seems easy enough to follow such a route, and yet Guyon, our embodiment of temperance, begins the book by falling for Archimago's wiles and setting off to attack the Redcrosse knight "with fierce ire/And zealous hast" (2.1.13.1–2), not exactly a temperate response (although one that mirrors the actions of Book 1, in which Redcrosse, too, almost immediately literally strays from the right path). One could make the case that this early error is remedied by the end of the book, but the narrator describes Guyon's destruction of Acrasia's Bower of Bliss as an extreme action: "Ne ought their goodly workmanship might saue/Them from the tempest of his wrathfulnesse,/But that their blisse he turn'd to balefulnesse" (2.12.83.3–5). Yes, the Bower of Bliss is a place devoted to the intemperate pursuit of sensual pleasure, created by and home to a woman whose name, Acrasia, means "without control," but is an intemperate response warranted as a result? Rather, if one follows his progression through the Bower, tempted by all its delights, one can see his behavior as perhaps an overcorrection to his lusts, inflamed by the two naked maidens in the fountain ("His stubborne brest gan secret pleasaunce to embrace," 2.12.65.9). Interestingly, a few cantos prior, in the Castle of Alma, a place that stands as an extended allegory for the human body, mind, and soul, we witness several examples of how involving art can be and see that pleasure is not out of place nor, necessarily,

intemperate. The ladies who dwell therein, for instance, represent a variety of desires and emotions:

> Diuerse delights they found them selues to please;
> Some song in sweet consort, some laught for ioy,
> Some plaid with strawes, some idly sat at ease;
> But other some could not abide to toy,
> All pleasaunce was to them griefe and annoy:
> This fround, that faund, the third for shame did blush,
> Another seemed enuious, or coy,
> Another in her teeth did gnaw a rush:
> But at these straungers presence euery one did hush. (2.9.35)

This fair acknowledgment of the array of directions in which we feel ourselves pulled every day hardly seems the statement of the harsh moralist Spenser is sometimes characterized to be. Even the words "delight" and "beguile," which often serve as red flags of warning in the poem (e.g., Una and Redcrosse, straying from the path, "led with delight, they thus beguile the way," 1.1.10.1), are not always indicative of danger. Guyon and Arthur (the latter probably the best example of a balanced and godly human in the poem) read their history in the castle and lose track of time, "Beguild thus with delight of nouelties,/And naturall desire of countreys state" (2.10.77). If we, the readers, do not have a Palmer to guide us on our path (and, really, he seems a bit overly negative and pleasure-denying, if necessary for Guyon, who's tempted by everything, from Phaedria to mermaids), how are we to determine in what art it is acceptable for us to lose ourselves?

Wallace makes this point in a section of *Infinite Jest* devoted to what you will learn if you are ever in a halfway house:

> That purposeful sleep-deprivation can also be an abusable escape. That gambling can be an abusable escape, too, and work, shopping, and shoplifting, and sex, and

> abstention, and masturbation, and food, and exercise, and meditation/prayer, and sitting so close to Ennet House's old D.E.C. TP cartridge-viewer that the screen fills your whole vision and the screen's static charge tickles your nose like a linty mitten. . . . Not to mention, according to some hard-line schools of 12-Step thought, yoga, reading, politics, work, political activism, N.R.A. membership, cleaning, plastic surgery, cartridge-viewing even at normal distances, the loyalty of a fine dog, religious zeal, relentless helpfulness, relentless other-folks'-moral-inventory-taking, the development of hard-line schools of 12-step thought, ad damn near infinitum . . . . (202, cont. in 998n70)

The easy thing to pick out from this passage is the inclusion of entertainment, in the form of the cartridge viewer, as an example of abusable escape, both in excess (sitting way too close) and, according to some, in moderation. Again, the excess can be fairly easy to spot. Joelle Van Dyne, about to intentionally overdose on freebase cocaine, about thirty pages on, helps make clear the analogy between surrender to entertainment (even down to sitting too close to the screen) and drug use as she reminisces about her childhood:

> The only other thing besides what she's about to do too much of here right now she'd ever come close to feeling this about: In Joelle's childhood, Paducah, not too bad a drive from Shiny Prize, still had a few public movie theaters. . . . And she never saw even one film there, as a girl, that she didn't just about die with love for. It didn't matter what they were. She and her own personal Daddy up in the front row . . . let the screen fill their whole visual field. . . . she'd never so

> much again as in that line felt so taken care of, destined for big-screen entertainment's unalloyed good fun, never once again until starting in with this lover [i.e., cocaine]. . . . The punter [Orin Incandenza, Hal's older brother] never made her feel so taken care of, never made her feel about to be entered by something that didn't know she was there and yet was all about making her feel good anyway, coming in. Entertainment is blind. (237)

The structure of the novel often sets up parallels this way, through proximity, that are invisible until one goes through the book multiple times, reading closely, and examining it in chunks; the language that draws the two sections together ("fills your whole vision" and "fill their whole visual field") is not so showy or memorable as to be obvious, and even the image in question is common enough not to stick out, but the fact that we have two examples, so close together, of televisual or cinematic entertainment experienced in mild excess (at least compared to the excess produced by "Infinite Jest") analogized to drug use is important.

We keep coming back to the question of what, exactly, constitutes excess? From the passage of *Infinite Jest* quoted above about "abusable escapes," it seems that almost anything can, and, indeed, if we are familiar with Teresa of Avila's work *Interior Castle*, she does describe one form of excess in meditation/prayer/asceticism and warns against it:

> There is one peril of which I want to warn you, though I have spoken of it elsewhere; I have seen persons given to prayer fall into it . . . . some women, because of prayers, vigils and severe penances, and also for other reasons, have poor health. When they experience any spiritual consolation, therefore, their

> physical nature is too much for them; and as soon as they feel any interior joy there comes over them a physical weakness and languor, and they fall into a sleep, which they call "spiritual," and which is a little more marked than the condition that has been described. Thinking the one state to be the same as the other, they abandon themselves to this absorption; and the more they relax, the more complete becomes this absorption, because their physical nature continues to grow weaker. So they get it into their heads that it is *arrobamiento,* or rapture. But I call it *abobamiento,* foolishness; for they are doing nothing but wasting their time at it and ruining their health. (76)

Teresa appears throughout the novel, alluded to in ways both subtle (one man in Alcoholics Anonymous who has been clean for a long, long time refers to sobriety as "a whole new unique interior spiritual castle," 365) and obvious. Gianlorenzo Bernini's famous sculpture of the saint is a key plot point in James Incandenza's film *The Pre-Nuptial Agreement of Heaven and Hell*, where it plays a positive role ("the film's climactic statue's stasis presented the theoretical subject as the emotional effect—self-forgetting as the Grail—and—in a covert gesture almost moralistic . . . —presented the self-forgetting of alcohol as inferior to that of religion/art," 742). This statue, however, is also what Joelle sees "at the apex" of her freebasing experiences (235), and, in one of the more unforgettable stories that result from AA, what the expression on the face of a recently incestuously diddled thoroughly retarded and paralyzed girl reminds her adopted sister of (373). Wallace uses Teresa to remind us that, while self-forgetting through focus and asceticism may seem like the obvious answer to the selfish problems of the contemporary era, it

bears an uncomfortable similarity to any other kind of self-forgetting. Excess is excess, no matter what it results from, and the definition of "too much" may not have a single answer.

Teresa also stands for the dangers of beauty in the novel. Incandenza's film *"The Medusa v. the Odalisque"* features "Mobile holograms of two visually lethal mythologic females duel[ling] with reflective surfaces onstage while a live crowd of spectators turns to stone" (998). It is explained elsewhere that the second character is the Odalisque of Ste. Thérèse, "a character out of old Québecois mythology who was supposedly so inhumanly gorgeous that anyone who looked at her turned instantly into a human-sized precious gem, from admiration" (396). This invention of the author serves, again, to point to the double-edged sword of art/beauty; if not for its association with a noted symbol of the examined, spiritual life, it would be far easier to see only the negative side of the attractions of art and beauty. Even "Infinite Jest" itself is not without its positive side. Joelle wonders, "Was the allegedly fatally entertaining and scopophiliac thing Jim alleges he made out of her unveiled face at the start of Y.T.S.D.B. a cage or really a door?" (230), and, near the end of the book, Marathe seems to suggest to Kate Gompert, another Ennet House resident suffering from paralyzing and horrible depression, that she should consider watching the film as a way out (781). When the wife of the first victim we learn about discovers him, she notes that "the expression on his rictus of a face nevertheless appeared very positive, ecstatic, even" (78–79), and this choice of words is important. Not only does it call to mind Theresa once again (Bernini's statue is titled *The Ecstasy of St. Theresa*), but "ecstatic" also means, in its root, "out of self," or the very goal of many of the characters in the book: to get out of their own heads.

As Joelle thinks about *The Pre-Nuptial Agreement of Heaven and Hell* and the specific function of the Bernini statue within it, she muses, "The statue, the sensuous presence of the

thing, let the alcoholic sandwich-bag salesman escape himself, his tiresome ubiquitous involuted head, she saw, was the thing. . . . Freedom from one's own head, one's inescapable P.O.V." (742). Indeed, this facilitation of ecstasy is exactly what James Incandenza says his goal was in making the film: "To concoct something the gifted boy [Hal] couldn't simply master and move on from to a new plateau. Something the boy would love enough to induce him to open his mouth and come *out*—even if it was only to ask for more. . . . His last resort: entertainment. Make something so bloody compelling it would reverse thrust on a young self's fall into the womb of solipsism, anhedonia, death in life. A magically entertaining toy to dangle at the infant still somewhere alive in the boy, to make its eyes light and toothless mouth open unconsciously, to laugh. . . . The scholars and Foundations and disseminators never saw that his most serious wish was: *to entertain*" (838–39). This passage, nearly at the end of the book, introduces a fair amount of confusion after the pages of anti-entertainment thought that precede it, as in this quietly horrified description of the current state of things that even uses the word itself: ". . . 94% of all O.N.A.N.ite paid entertainment now absorbed at home: pulses, storage cartridges, digital displays, domestic decor—an entertainment-market of sofas and eyes. Saying this is bad is like saying traffic is bad, or health-care surtaxes, or the hazards of annular fusion: nobody but Ludditic granola-crunching freaks would call bad what no one can imagine being without. But so very much private watching of customized screens behind drawn curtains in the dreamy familiarity of home. A floating no-space world of personal spectation. Whole new millennial era, under Gentle and Lace-Forché. Total freedom, privacy, choice." Is "Infinite Jest" a cage or a door? Perhaps a return to the *Faerie Queene* and its own seeming inconsistencies in how to approach the object of art can assist us in determining an answer.

We have already briefly discussed Acrasia's Bower of Bliss, perhaps the most obvious example in the poem of aesthetic suspicion. Much like Spenser's description of Duessa (1.2.13), got up in "scarlot red/purfled with gold and pearle of rich assay," with a headdress that resembles a "Persian mitre" and seated on a "wanton palfrey," the first extended description of the Bower of Bliss screams danger, even to the unsubtle reader:

> There Atin found Cymochles soiourning,
> To serue his Lemans loue: for he, by kind,
> Was giuen all to lust and loose liuing,
> When euer his fiers hands he free mote find:
> And now he has pourd out his idle mind
> In daintie delices, and lauish ioyes,
> Hauing his warlike weapons cast behind,
> And flowes in pleasures, and vaine pleasing toyes,
> Mingled emongst loose Ladies and lasciuious boyes.
>
> And ouer him, art striuing to compaire
> With nature, did an Arber greene dispred,
> Framed of wanton Yuie, flouring faire,
> Through which the fragrant Eglantine did spred
> His pricking armes, entrayld with roses red,
> Which daintie odours round about them threw,
> And all within with flowres was garnished . . . . (2.5.28.1–29.7)

Not only do we get the use of the word "wanton" again and the idea that art is attempting to compete with nature, but we also specifically see an example of the effects of this place on Cymochles, the previously doughty knight now reduced to lounging on the ground in "lust and loose liuing." A similar description appears late in Book 2, when Guyon arrives at the Bower:

> Thus being entred, they behold around
> A large and spacious plaine, on euery side
> Strowed with pleasauns, whose faire grassy ground
> Mantled with greene, and goodly beautifide
> With all the ornaments of Floraes pride,
> Wherewith her mother Art, as halfe in scorne
> Of niggard Nature, like a pompous bride
> Did decke her, and too lauishly adorne,
> When forth from virgin bowre she comes in th'early morne. (2.12.50)

As with Duessa, Spenser alludes to whorishness in his descriptions of the overlay art provides to nature and suggests the use of cosmetics, an adornment frequently railed against by Renaissance writers. See, for example, Ben Jonson's short poem "Simplex Munditiis," which, after establishing its subject as powdered and perfumed, declares "Lady, it is to be presumed,/Though art's hid causes are not found,/All is not sweet, all is not sound." John Webster's play *The Duchess of Malfi* contains much stronger invectives against artificially applied beauty, referring to "a lady in France that, having had the smallpox, flayed the skin off her face, to make it more level; and whereas before she looked like a nutmeg-grater, after she resembled an abortive hedgehog" (2.2.23–25).[5] Still, other parts of this section are more ambiguous, as in 2.12.59, in which Spenser describes art and nature competing in this place:

> One would haue thought, (so cunningly, the rude,
> And scorned parts were mingled with the fine,)
> That nature had for wantonesse ensude
> Art, and that Art at nature did repine;
> So striuing each th'other to vndermine,
> Each did the others worke more beautifie;
> So diff'ring both in willes, agreed in fine:
> So all agreed through sweete diuersitie,
> This Gardin to adorne with all varietie.

The idea that this competition necessarily has negative results would seem to spring as much from context as anything else, but we cannot ignore that context, nor the contrast with the Garden of Adonis that is relatively easy to see. C. S. Lewis, in *The Allegory of Love*, contrasts the naturalness of the latter with the repeated emphasis on artificiality in the former and concludes, "only prejudice can continue to deny the deliberate differentiation between the Bower and the Garden. The one is artifice, sterility, death: the other, nature, fecundity, life" (326). Even though the two contain strong similarities (the Bower described as "strowed with pleasaunce" [2.12.50.3], the Garden as a place that "All other pleasant places doth excell" [3.6.29.7], to point

to one vocabulary coincidence), Lewis is correct to point out that the Garden's art is natural, as in the contrast between its "pleasant arbour, not by art,/But of the trees owne inclination made" (3.6.44.2-3) and the Bower's "traile of yuie" made of gold that mimics the real stuff (2.12.61). Any hint of craft in the Garden results either from the natural world's natural leanings or from the creator (3.6.12.5, 3.6.29.3). Spenser's contrast of the real and false Florimells serves as a nice parallel to the Bower-Garden comparison, with the artificial version not only confusing spectators, but "euen Nature selfe enuide the same,/And grudg'd to see the counterfet should shame/The thing it selfe" (3.5.8.4–6). Even when the two are both present, the false version is preferred by most, and Spenser uses an analogy that calls to mind his earlier golden ivy:

> For all afore that seemed fayre and bright,
> Now base and contemptible did appeare,
> Compar'd to her, that shone as Phebes light,
> Amongst the lesser starres in euening cleare.
> All that her saw with wonder rauisht weare,
> And weend no mortall creature she should bee,
> But some celestiall shape, that flesh did beare:
> Yet all were glad there Florimell to see;
> Yet thought that Florimell was not so faire as shee.
>
> As guilefull Goldsmith that by secret skill,
> With golden foyle doth finely ouer spred
> Some baser metall, which commend he will
> Vnto the vulgar for good gold insted,
> He much more goodly glosse thereon doth shed,
> To hide his falshood, then if it were trew:
> So hard, this Idole was to be ared,
>
> That Florimell her selfe in all mens vew
> She seem'd to passe: so forged things do fairest shew. (4.5.14–15)

When Arthur places them side by side, though, the false Florimell literally melts and the real one appears, "Like the true saint beside the image set."

The poet's contrast of the House of Busirane and the Temple of Venus is another clear example of the superiority of nature over art and, once again, we get the image of gold overlay as a sign of exactly that:

> Much fairer, then the former, was that roome,
> And richlier by many partes arayd:
> For not with arras made in painefull loome,
> But with pure gold it all was ouerlayd,
> Wrought with wilde Antickes, which their follies playd,
> In the rich metall, as they liuing were:
> A thousand monstrous formes therein were made,
> Such as false loue doth oft vpon him weare:
> For loue in thousand monstrous formes doth oft appeare. (3.11.51)

Considering that the Masque of Cupid in this place concludes with an imprisoned woman carrying her own heart in a bowl, it is not difficult to see this place does not mean well when it comes to love. Indeed, every signal it sends is a dangerous and negative one, from the beautiful tapestries near its entrance, the gold in which Spenser compares to a snake lurking in the grass (3.11.28), to the statue of Cupid that encourages "fowle Idolatree" (3.11.49), and the poet repeatedly establishes the effect of all its splendor on Britomart's senses:

> That wondrous sight faire Britomart amazed,
> Ne seeing could her wonder satisfie,
> But euermore and more vpon it gazed,
> The whiles the passing brightnes her fraile sences dazed. (3.11.49.6–9)

> The warlike Mayde beholding earnestly
> The goodly ordinance of this rich place,
> Did greatly wonder, ne could satisfie
> Her greedy eyes with gazing a long space: (3.11.53.1–4)

> . . . the rare sweetnesse of the melody
> The feeble senses wholly did confound,
> And the fraile soule in deepe delight nigh dround. (3.12.6.3–5)

Similarly, "All that her [the false Florimell] saw with wonder rauisht weare" (4.5.14.6) and Cymochles, allured in the Bower of Bliss, "his fraile eye with spoyle of beautie feedes"

(2.5.34.3). The idea of being overcome, especially through the eyes but occasionally through the ears, with sensory delight recurs in these sections where Spenser focuses on the seductive powers of evil art, but Lewis overstates the case when he writes that, with the exception of the chamber of Phantastes in the Castle of Alma, "Everywhere else Spenser uses art to suggest the artificial in its bad sense—the sham or imitation" (327), and even visual ravishment can result from the good, as when Britomart dazzles her traveling companions upon removal of her armor:

> Which whenas they beheld, they smitten were
> With great amazement of so wondrous sight,
> And each on other, and they all on her
> Stood gazing, as if suddein great affright
> Had them surprised. At last auizing right,
> Her goodly personage and glorious hew,
> Which they so much mistooke, they tooke delight
> In their first errour, and yet still anew
> With wonder of her beauty fed their hungry vew.
>
> Yet note their hungry vew be satisfide,
> But seeing still the more desir'd to see,
> And euer firmely fixed did abide
> In contemplation of diuinitie: (3.9.23.1–24.4)

Likewise, the combination of art and nature at the Temple of Venus is praised, not damned, and though Lewis writes that here "art is allowed only to supplement Nature, not to deceive or sophisticate as it does in the Bower of Bliss" (327), he finesses the issue a bit. He is correct in that, in this place, art and nature work together rather than competing and that art merely adds to the picture rather than taking the place of nature, but the art on display here does not "suggest the artificial in its bad sense" and it enthralls as much as its less well-motivated counterpart (pay attention to the last line in particular of this quoted passage):

> For all that nature by her mother wit
> Could frame in earth, and forme of substance base,
> Was there, and all that nature did omit,
> Art playing second natures part, supplyed it.

No tree, that is of count, in greenewood growes,
From lowest Iuniper to Ceder tall,
No flowre in field, that daintie odour throwes,
And deckes his branch with blossomes ouer all,
But there was planted, or grew naturall:
Nor sense of man so coy and curious nice,
But there mote find to please it selfe withall;
Nor hart could wish for any queint deuice,
But there it present was, and did fraile sense entice. (4.10.21.6–22.9)

The statue of Venus that resides in its center also has obvious contrasts to the statue of Cupid placed in the House of Busirane, being made of a transparent, unidentifiable substance rather than the gold we now know frequently carries negative connotations, but, even though it "in shape and beautie did excell/All other Idoles, which the heathen adore" (4.10.40.1–2), we might still expect more suspicion of idolatry in such a Christian poem. One could argue that Sir Scudamore narrates this description, but the same justification cannot prevail when Britomart encounters the Temple of Isis in the next book, home to yet another idolatrous statue, this one even more clearly manmade and equally inspiring of wonder:

She wondred at the workemans passing skill,
Whose like before she neuer saw nor red;
And thereuppon long while stood gazing still,
But thought, that she thereon could neuer gaze her fill.

Thence forth vnto the Idoll they her brought,
The which was framed all of siluer fine,
So well as could with cunning hand be wrought,
And clothed all in garments made of line,
Hemd all about with fringe of siluer twine.
Vppon her head she wore a Crowne of gold,
To shew that she had powre in things diuine;
And at her feete a Crocodile was rold,
That with her wreathed taile her middle did enfold. (5.7.5.6–6.9)

No less than Venus, Isis is a pagan goddess, and while Spenser obviously incorporates and Christianizes much pagan mythology, it is interesting to see these two instances of statue-worship condoned and contrasted with the one in the House of Busirane. All three even

incorporate a reptilian aspect at their feet (Cupid has his foot upon a wounded dragon, Venus's legs entwine with a snake biting its tail, and a crocodile at Isis's feet curls its tail around her midsection), further tying them together, and each one appears in a similar place within its book (Cupid and Venus in Canto 10 of theirs and Isis in Canto 7 of hers). The careful reader can analyze differences in appearance, composition, and vocabulary, but the biggest contrasts are in the editorializing on the poet's part. Remove Spenser's framing of the first statue as obviously bad and the latter two as more clearly good, shuffle the deck, and we might not be able to tell which is which. This world has very clear-cut answers much of the time, but they result from the motivation of the artist, by which I mean both Spenser and the supreme artist who determines the moral content of all.

The importance of context is perhaps clearest in Book 6, devoted to the virtue of courtesy, which contains the poem's third instance of a pleasant place in Mount Acidale, where Sir Calidore encounters Colin Clout (a parallel to the poet first encountered in Spenser's *The Shepheardes Calendar*) and the three Graces, dancing in a circle. According to the standards set earlier in the work, Acidale should be more than acceptable as a place of leisure:

> . . . a place, whose pleasaunce did appere
> To passe all others, on the earth which were:
> For all that euer was by natures skill
> Deuized to worke delight, was gathered there,
> And there by her were poured forth at fill,
> As if this to adorne, she all the rest did pill. (6.10.5.4–9)

> And on the top thereof a spacious plaine
> Did spred it selfe, to serue to all delight,
> Either to daunce, when they to daunce would faine,
> Or else to course about their bases light;
> Ne ought there wanted, which for pleasure might
> Desired be, or thence to banish bale:
> So pleasauntly the hill with equall hight,
> Did seeme to ouerlooke the lowly vale;

Therefore it rightly cleeped was mount Acidale. (6.10.8)

Acidale has similarities to the Bower of Bliss to be sure, as in the birdsong that fills it (6.10.6.6–9), but Spenser is very clear that its beauties result entirely from nature's hand, with no interference from art, which would seem to move it closer to the Garden of Adonis on the moral scale. He establishes Calidore as unlikely to fall for the charms of the artificial immediately before he begins describing the hilltop:

> For who had tasted once (as oft did he)
> The happy peace, which there doth ouerflow,
> And prou'd the perfect pleasures, which doe grow
> Amongst poore hyndes, in hils, in woods, in dales,
> Would neuer more delight in painted show
> Of such false blisse, as there is set for stales,
> T'entrap vnwary fooles in their eternall bales. (6.10.3.3–9)

Its association with Venus herself and with the noble art of poetry likewise sets up this place as clearly a good example of the ornamented and pleasure-inducing natural sort of art (I think one could make a case that not only does it stand for pastoral poetry in general, but also specifically for *The Shepheardes Calendar*), and yet there are hints that even that is not good enough. As with previous negatively colored examples of art, Spenser focuses on Calidore's eyes to excess ("There he did see, that pleased much his sight,/That euen he him selfe his eyes enuyde," 6.10.11.6–7) and suggests his distraction from more pressing duties:

> And with delight his greedy fancy fed,
> Both of his words, which he with reason red;
> And also of the place, whose pleasures rare
> With such regard his sences rauished,
> That thence, he had no will away to fare,
> But wisht, that with that shepheard he mote dwelling share. (6.10.30.4–9)

This situation seems a bit more perilous than Redcrosse's desire to remain on the heavenly mount with Contemplation at the end of Book 1, Canto 10, although that section of the poem alludes to this same place ("that pleasaunt Mount, that is for ay/Through famous Poets verse each

where renownd,/On which the thrise three learned Ladies play/Their heauenly notes, and make full many a louely lay," 1.10.54.6–9), largely due to the words "greedy" and "ravished." Thankfully, when Calidore emerges from the wood, the scene that fascinates him vanishes, leaving him no opportunity to become further enmeshed in its delights. We can distinguish Acidale, therefore, from both the Bower of Bliss (clearly bad, meant to entrap) and the Garden of Adonis (clearly good, with significant progress in time and generative functions glorified) as a more neutral example of artistic creation and the different effects it can have upon the senses. Indeed, even the Bower of Bliss, the closest analogy to "Infinite Jest" in *The Faerie Queene*, has a far different effect on Guyon and the Palmer than on Cymochles, and not just because the two able to resist its charms are good and morally strong.[6] Cymochles's servant, Atin, manages to do the same. Not only is the result of art's attractions dependent on the desires and motivations of its creator, as Judith Dundas contends in *The Spider and the Bee: The Artistry of Spenser's* Faerie Queene, but it is affected as well by the individual experiencing it.[7]

Dundas's book is particularly welcome because she argues that not only is Spenser not anti-art, but that he sees art as "a force affecting how man lives" (49), that "he goes beyond recognizing illusions as the chief goal of both poetry and painting by insisting that art must be judged not only by the craftsman's skill but also by what the work of art represents. . . . It is only in a world which reveres the beauty of craftsmanship as much as Spenser's does that art possesses the power to corrupt" (47), and that "When we turn to decorative art in particular settings, the moral significance of subject matter becomes even more apparent; now art must be judged by its decorum, which means not only its appropriateness to the setting but its purpose within that setting. This indeed is the ultimate criterion by which Spenser judges art" (52). She makes sensible points about art's imitation of nature, pointing out that, in an era in which

mimesis was the highest of artistic goals, faulting a work of art for its accuracy would seem foolish. Rather than see him as hypocritical, relying on the same devices he condemns, she recognizes that parsing out when ornament is allowed (e.g., Belphoebe's buskins at 2.3.27, Charissa's crown in 1.10.31.5–7) versus when it seems to be condemned (e.g., Radigund's clothing, 5.5.2–3) can make one's head hurt: "But how are we to come to terms with a mode of perception that selects the ornamental features in nature, in people, in architecture, in battles, in dragons—in short, in everything—while at the same time asking us to take seriously the moral struggle between equally patterned elements?" Nonetheless, there is an answer, and that answer is decorum, an irritatingly nonspecific concept for a post-Christian era such as ours, in which a shrug and a tautology (good things are good because they are good) seems insufficient. Even Dundas backpedals from this conclusion a bit and suggests that, for example, "A subtle decorum governs the method of description, influencing our response in ways that we may not be conscious of. How, for example, does Spenser convey the difference between the false simplicity of Archimago's pose as a hermit and the true simplicity of the palmer?" (139). Well, he doesn't really. Let us compare the first time in the poem each appears. Archimago shows up early in Book 1, Canto 1:

> At length they chaunst to meet vpon the way
> An aged Sire, in long blacke weedes yclad,
> His feete all bare, his beard all hoarie gray,
> And by his belt his booke he hanging had;
> Sober he seemde, and very sagely sad,
> And to the ground his eyes were lowly bent,
> Simple in shew, and voyde of malice bad,
> And all the way he prayed, as he went,
> And often knockt his brest, as one that did repent. (1.1.29)

The Palmer shows up slightly earlier in his book, but is painted in similar colors:

> Him als accompanyd vpon the way
> A comely Palmer, clad in blacke attire,

Of ripest yeares, and haires all hoarie gray,
That with a staffe his feeble steps did stire,
Least his long way his aged limbes should tire:
And if by lookes one may the mind aread,
He seemd to be a sage and sober sire,
And euer with slow pace the knight did lead,
Who taught his trampling steed with equall steps to tread. (2.1.7)

Yes, one can argue that Archimago's breast beating and loud praying are too showy, but both appear clad in black, with long gray hair, and are called seemingly sober. Without an editor's notes to help us along and point out how important the use of "seemd" is in the first instance, we might fall for Archimago's wiles as easily as Redcrosse, and what lets us know that the nearly identical Palmer *is*, in fact, what he seems to be? As naive readers, we are either suspicious of both initially or equally credulous with regard to both, unless our teacher or the editor of our edition points us in the right direction. What truly determines the fact that one is bad and the other good is their behavior and how it is borne out in the poem, just as (in the bigger picture) we figure out that the Bower of Bliss is bad because of its general effects on its denizens and that, while Mount Acidale is generally good, if it distracts Calidore from his knightly quest, it might not be so good for him. In other words, even as Spenser's universe is suffused with morality and ruled by a benevolent God, appearances are often deceptive, as we discover from the very beginning of the poem, and the only ways we can deduce that something appearing good actually is are 1) the poet telling us so, directly, and 2) paying attention to its results, in a pragmatic way.

At this point, we return to *Infinite Jest*, which has no such helpful narrator for the most part, but a series of shifting, unreliable voices. Marathe and Steeply's debates atop the mesa supply a useful dialogue about the various issues surrounding submission to aesthetic pleasure, the necessity of choice and free will, and what the differences are between the American answer to these questions and the answers of other nationalities, but they do not supply answers. When

Marathe says, “Look: the facts of the situation speak loudly. What is known. This is a U.S.A. production, this Entertainment cartridge. Made by an American man in the U.S.A. The appetite for the appeal of it: this also is U.S.A. The U.S.A. drive for spectation, which your culture teaches. This I was saying: this is why choosing is everything. . . . now is what has happened when a people choose nothing over themselves to love, each one. A U.S.A. that would die—and let its children die, each one—for the so-called perfect Entertainment, this film. Who would die for this chance to be fed this death of pleasure, with spoons, in their warm homes, alone, unmoving . . . . This appetite to choose death by pleasure, if it is available to choose—this *appetite* of your people unable to choose appetites, *this* is the death” (318–19), and Steeply responds, “Now you will say how free are we if you dangle fatal fruit before us and we cannot help ourselves from temptation. And we say ‘human’ to you. We say that one cannot be human without freedom” (320), it sounds like the questions and answers Milton puts forward in *Paradise Lost*. Marathe replies, “But what of the freedom-*to*? Not just free-*from* . . . . How to choose any but a child’s greedy choices if there is no loving-filled father to guide, inform, teach the person how to choose?” (320), summing up the era and location in which we find ourselves, not only in the setting of the novel (not so many years in the future now even as when it was written—consensus is that 2010 is the Year of the Tucks Medicated Pad, one of the last of the book’s timeline), but in the present place and time.

While that “loving-filled father,” God, is not unheard of, the idea of a Higher Power appears mostly in the sections of the novel that deal with Alcoholics Anonymous, where it becomes a highly flexible concept (see pages 443–45, for example). That said, AA’s tenets provide both an example of the difficulty of making moral determinations and a potential answer to that problem. Geoffrey Day, an academic with a red-wine-and-Quaalude problem and a

capacity for abstract thought that does anything but benefit him, spends his time arguing about the former with Don Gately: "By AA's own professed logic, everyone ought to be in AA. If you have some sort of Substance-problem, then you belong in AA. But if you say you do *not* have a Substance-problem, in other words if you *deny* that you have a Substance-problem, why then you're by definition in *Denial*, and thus you apparently need the Denial-busting Fellowship of AA even more than someone who can admit his problem" (1002n90). What, in other words, is the cage and what is the door? How do we tell which is which when they appear identical and we have no benevolent father, whether deity or author, handing down clear answers?

The whole idea of the cage results from James Incandenza's filmography, which appears early in the notes and contains three separate films called *Cage*. The first one and the very first film listed is a "Soliloquized parody of a broadcast-television advertisement for shampoo, utilizing four convex mirrors, two planar mirrors, and one actress" (986). *Cage II* consists of two convicts, one blind and one deaf-mute, together in a cell, attempting to find ways to communicate (987). *Cage III—Free Show*, the most memorable, features "The figure of Death . . . [presiding] over the front entrance of a carnival sideshow whose spectators watch performers undergo unspeakable degradations so grotesquely compelling that the spectators' eyes become larger and larger until the spectators themselves are transformed into gigantic eyeballs in chairs, while on the other side of the sideshow tent the figure of Life . . . uses a megaphone to invite fairgoers to an exhibition in which, if the fairgoers consent to undergo unspeakable degradations, they can witness ordinary persons turn gradually into giant eyeballs" (988). *Cage IV* and *Cage V—Infinite Jim* exist but are only described as unfinished as well as unreleased. The metaphors present in all three of the *Cage* films relate fairly obviously to the novel's preoccupation with the circular, addictive nature of entertainment and the difficulty of communicating, even via art, in a

clear and direct manner, and the last one, judging by its title, seems to be morphing into "Infinite Jest."

The narrator makes very clear the connection between this circularity (or "annularity," as the novel would have it, in a visual and verbal element that repeats throughout, in everything from the process of fusion that Incandenza invented and is largely responsible for the events of the novel due to its souring of the relationship between the United States and Canada to the moonlike symbols that precede various sections to the structure of the story) and visual entertainment, as well as the solipsism that drives that involvement and leads to ever greater involution. In the middle of one of the Hal sections, which generally use free-indirect dialogue to convey his thoughts, is the following passage, which does not appear to be entirely from his perspective, judging from the dip back into it at its conclusion:

> It's of some interest that the lively arts of the millennial U.S.A. treat anhedonia and internal emptiness as hip and cool. It's maybe the vestiges of the Romantic glorification of Weltschmerz, which means world-weariness or hip ennui. Maybe it's the fact that most of the arts here are produced by world-weary and sophisticated older people and then consumed by younger people who not only consume art but study it for clues on how to be cool, hip—and keep in mind that, for kids and younger people, to be hip and cool is the same as to be admired and accepted and included and so Unalone. Forget so-called peer pressure. It's more like peer hunger. No? We enter a spiritual puberty where we snap to the fact that the great transcendent horror is loneliness, excluded engagement in the self. Once we've hit this age, we will now give or take anything, wear any mask, to fit, be

> part-of, not be Alone, we young. The U.S. Arts are our guide to inclusion. A how-to. We are shown how to fashion masks of ennui and jaded irony at a young age where the face is fictile enough to assume the shape of whatever it wears. And then it's stuck there, the weary cynicism that saves us from gooey sentiment and unsophisticated naïveté. Sentiment equals naïveté on this continent. . . . Hal, who's empty but not dumb, theorizes privately that what passes for hip cynical transcendence of sentiment is really some kind of fear of being really human, since to be really human . . . is probably to be unavoidably sentimental and naïve and goo-prone and generally pathetic, is to be in some basic interior way forever infantile . . . (694–95).

So, theoretically, the arts should bring us closer together, allowing us to transcend our self-involvement by making us aware of our similarities, but because they are produced by "world-weary and sophisticated older people" they instead result in greater self-consciousness on the part of the young who consume them and then, no doubt, eventually become world-weary and sophisticated themselves before their time, leading to an unending cycle of cynicism, deception, masking, solipsism, and despair. But knowledge of the motivations of a work of art and/or its creator is impossible to get at, and, as established elsewhere in this paper, the novel has a very commonsense view that different people react differently to specific works of art.

Another example of this principle can be found in the screening of *Blood Sister: One Tough Nun* at Enfield Tennis Academy, in which Hal is joined by some girls close to his own age and some younger denizens of the school. The film is, according to Hal, a "metacinematic parody" of the revenge genre, an "idea [that] itself was aloof and over-clever, to Hal's way of

thinking, and he's not comfortable with the way Himself always seemed to get seduced by the very commercial formulae he was trying to invert" (703–4).[8] Hal is the only one thinking about the film in this way while watching it, and "All the littler kids are consummate spectators and are sucked immediately into *Blood Sister*'s unfolding narrative, and the older females seem to take some kind of psychic cue from the little boys and subside, too, and watch, until after a while Hal's the only person in the room who isn't 100% absorbed" (704). Bridget Boone comments on its anti-Catholic leanings, explained slightly later on as, in fact, being more about Boston AA than about Catholicism, but even she is able to get out of her own head and enjoy the film as a pure entertainment, regardless of its creator's desire to put forward a message about either the limitations of commercial genres or the same points about AA that Geoffrey Day was presented as making earlier (i.e., that it's authoritarian while pretending not to be).

Similarly, Wallace also has several of his characters refer to "Infinite Jest," the so-called "perfect entertainment," as a myth or a joke. Molly Notkin—filmmaker, friend of Joelle Van Dyne, and *extremely* unreliable source—says, "the entire perfect-entertainment as *Liebestod* myth surrounding the purportedly lethal final cartridge was nothing more than a classic illustration of the antinomically schizoid function of the post-industrial capitalist mechanism, whose logic presented commodity as the escape-from-anxieties-of-mortality-which-escape-is-itself-psychologically-fatal, as detailed in perspicuous detail in M. Gilles Deleuze's posthumous *Incest and the Life of Death in Capitalist Entertainment*," as she's being interviewed by the OSS (792). In the same interview, she also supplies numerous inaccuracies, such as that Joelle's real name is Lucille Duquette, a fact we get nowhere else in the novel, but her general lack of truthfulness and the fact that she has been steeped in literary theory do not necessarily make her wrong in her statement about the film (795). Joelle, too, in the course of *her* interview,

says, “He talked about making something quote too perfect. But as a *joke*. He had a thing about entertainment, being criticized about entertainment v. nonentertainment and stasis” (940). Randy Lenz, in the course of one of his lengthy monologues, refers to the “perfect piece of digito-holographic porn . . . circulating somewhere in the form of a bootleg Write-Protect-notched software diskette,” a statement that could be dismissed were it not for its placement among several other urban legends we have found to be true, such as the manner in which Les Assassins des Fauteuils Rollents lose their legs (560, 1055–62n304). Indeed, the preponderance of urban legends in American culture appears as a subtle theme in the novel, with many that are familiar being related as having happened not only in reality but specifically to these characters (e.g., the burglary-toothbrush-camera story is part of Don Gately’s backstory; the bricklayer who injures himself repeatedly due to the forces of physics is presented as an insurance claim). In other words, while the reader assumes “Infinite Jest” is both real and a threat, the novel undermines that assumption at many turns. It is entirely possible that the film is as deadly as presented, but just as possible that it is not; again, I mention Randy Lenz as an example of a viewer less susceptible to its paralyzing charms. Just as in *The Faerie Queene*, we may have to determine good and evil from the results, no matter how clear those concepts may seem at first.

Wallace’s first novel, *The Broom of the System*, contains a similar idea that may help reinforce my contention that *Infinite Jest*, while ostensibly anti-entertainment and fundamentally suspicious of aesthetic pleasure, is more flexible in its stance than it at first appears. The earlier novel’s main character, Lenore Stonecipher Beadsman, talks about her grandmother’s obsession with Wittgenstein’s *Philosophical Investigations*, which contains the theory that meaning is determined by use:

> . . . that, to repeat what I heard for years and years and suspect you've been hearing over and over, yourself, something's meaning is nothing more or less than its function. Et cetera et cetera et cetera. Has she done the thing with the broom with you? No? What does she use now? No. What she did with me—I must have been eight, or twelve, who remembers—was to sit me down in the kitchen and take a straw broom and start furiously sweeping the floor, and she asked me which part of the broom was more elemental, more fundamental, in my opinion, the bristles or the handle. The bristles or the handle. And I hemmed and hawed, and she swept more and more violently, and I got nervous, and finally when I said I supposed the bristles because you could after a fashion sweep without the handle, by just holding on to the bristles, but couldn't sweep with just the handle, she tackled me, and knocked me out of my chair, and yelled into my ear something like, 'Aha, that's because you want to sweep with the broom, isn't it? It's because of what you want the broom for, isn't it?' Et cetera. And that if what we wanted a broom for was to break windows, then the handle was clearly the fundamental essence of the broom, and she illustrated with the kitchen window, and a crowd of domestics gathered . . . . (149–50)

It does not require a huge leap to extend this idea to the realm of morality and to see entertainment as the broom within *Infinite Jest*. Overcoming addiction is presented in similarly pragmatic terms, in the analogy Eugenio Martinez relates to Don Gately about AA as a box of cake mix: "The box came with directions on the side any eight-year-old could read. . . . all Gately had to do was for fuck's sake give himself a break and relax and for once shut up and just

follow the directions on the side of the fucking box. It didn't matter one fuckola whether Gately like *believed* a cake would result, or whether he *understood* the like fucking baking-chemistry of *how* a cake would result: if he just followed the motherfucking directions, and had sense enough to get help from slightly more experienced bakers to keep from fucking the directions up if he got confused somehow, but basically the point was if he just followed the childish directions, a cake would result. He'd have his cake" (467). I mean "pragmatic" fairly specifically, too. William James describes the pragmatic method as "a method of settling metaphysical disputes that otherwise might be interminable . . . . The pragmatic method in such cases is to try to interpret each notion by tracing its respective practical consequences. What difference would it practically make to anyone if this notion rather than that notion were true? If no practical difference whatever can be traced, then the alternatives mean practically the same thing, and all dispute is idle" (18). Wallace alludes nowhere to this work by James, but Randy Lenz does keep his cocaine supply in a hollowed-out copy of James's *The Principles of Psychology with The Gifford Lectures on Natural Religion*, kind of an interesting coincidence and one that suggests familiarity on the part of the author with James's other works. I do not contend that either Spenser or Wallace deliberately represents a pragmatic view of the world as a way to escape the difficulties of determining the morality of a particular work of art. Obviously, the former author vastly predates James's ideas and would no doubt find blasphemous the application of those ideas to the religious sphere (God exists because we believe in him), and the latter's uncomfortableness with the continuing equation of the "Freedom to Choose and the Right to Be Entertained" likewise suggests that he remains suspicious of such a utilitarian measurement of morality. Still, the way both authors independently present the dangers of man-made art, which can easily entrap the unaware, and then show that, while there are obvious cases in which art can

be dangerous, many instances present complications to this view and, ultimately, the only real way in which the reader can label a work of art as "good" or "evil" is by considering context and "respective practical consequences" certainly calls James's philosophy to mind. Whether Spenser and Wallace *mean* to espouse pragmatism as a valid method for approaching their works of art is irrelevant; the fact is that, in practice, they do to at least some extent.

NOTES

[1] Even taking into account the appearance in Spenser's Mutabilitie Cantos of a veiled version of personified Nature:

> That some doe say was so by skill deuized,
> To hide the terror of her vncouth hew,
> From mortall eyes that should be sore agrized;
> For that her face did like a Lion shew,
> That eye of wight could not indure to view:
> But others tell that it so beautious was,
> And round about such beames of splendor threw,
> That it the Sunne a thousand times did pass,
> Ne could be seene, but like an image in a glass. (7.6)

This description bears more than a passing resemblance to the character of Joelle van Dyne/Madame Psychosis in *Infinite Jest*, veiled either because of a horrible accident with some acid or because her extreme beauty is a variant of deformity. She describes herself thus: "Don, I'm perfect. I'm so beautiful I drive anybody with a nervous system out of their fucking mind. Once they've seen me they can't think of anything else and don't want to look at anything else and believe that if they can only have me right there with them at all times everything will be all right. Everything. Like I'm the solution to their deep slavering need to be jowl to cheek with perfection" (538).

[2] This is not to say the views Spenser ends up putting on display in the poem are less subtle or complex than the ones Wallace seeks to convey—only that his expressed goal is instructional, while Wallace's is representational. As for what Wallace leaves out, the novel begins with a

question, “What’s happened to Hal to turn him into a gibbering, thrashing creature incapable of communication on the simplest level?” that it never answers. A large hunk of time goes missing between the end of the book (the second-latest period in time, if one were to map the sections on a timeline) and the beginning (the latest). I’m sure I’ll refer to the book as “anticonfluential” as much as the eponymous film within it that Wallace describes as such, meaning it never really comes to much of a conclusion about anything and certainly doesn’t follow the classic rise-and-fall graph of traditional entertaining narrative.

[3] An extremely imperfect analogy might be to the contemporary practice of deliberately flavoring energy drinks so they taste “mediciney,” or “good for you,” a practice no less artificial than making them taste good but one, in this case, preferred by the audience in question.

[4] Note that Toblerone appears a couple of times in *Infinite Jest*, most memorably with the Saudi Prince Q___, who refuses to eat almost anything else and, as a result, has a near continual thrush infection, serving as one of the earliest examples of how far-reaching and wide-ranging addiction can be (33–34).

[5] For many more examples and analysis, see Farah Karim-Cooper’s *Cosmetics in Shakespearean and Renaissance Drama* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006).

[6] I make the claim that the Bower and “Infinite Jest” are similar not only because of their effects on those subject to their charms (and please note that, while “Infinite Jest” is presented in the novel as irresistible, at least one character, Randy Lenz, fails to become comatose and, when

presented with the option of cutting off his own fingers in order to be able to continue watching it, chooses instead to cut off the fingers of a fellow watcher, suggesting a level of brain activity far higher than that in most of its victims), but also due to the position in which they place their subjects. Acrasia bends over her man ("right ouer him she hong,/With her false eyes fast fixed in his sight," 2.12.73.1–2) as she performs what Spenser at least suggests is a kind of fellatio, while Joelle/Madame Psychosis, as the lead actress in "Infinite Jest," assumes a similar posture ("A crib's eye view," 939). Acrasia wears slightly more clothing, but the effect is the same, both with their breasts bared. Clearly, there must be something fundamentally appealing about the perspective of the viewer, dating back to infancy, which seems to be what Wallace, at least, is working with as a trope.

[7] It is interesting but likely coincidental that Dundas, whose thoughts on Spenser's poem remind me to some extent of the arguments Wallace puts forward in *Infinite Jest*, taught in the classics department of the University of Illinois. Wallace's father, James, taught in the philosophy department of the same institution, literally just down the block, at right around the same time and remains a professor emeritus there.

[8] It's rather clever (not to say over-clever), too, to insert a meta-interpretation of the revenge genre in a novel that takes its title from *Hamlet*, which can itself easily be seen as a meta-interpretation of the revenge genre, albeit one that transcends it beautifully and makes considerably more out of the obligatory material than do its sources, or perhaps that is part of the point.

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