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“OUR ATTACHMENTS ARE OUR TEMPLES”:
ADDICTION, RECOVERY, AND THE METAMODERNIST MOVEMENT

by

ASHLIE MEGHAN CONTOS

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts
Department of Literature and Languages
Carolyn Tilghman, Ph.D., Committee Chair
College of Arts and Sciences

The University of Texas at Tyler
May 2017

The University of Texas at Tyler
Tyler, Texas

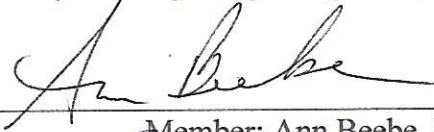
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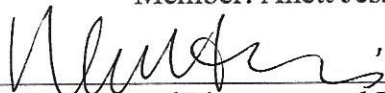
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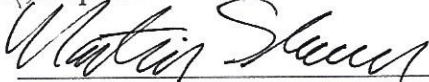
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For Catherine Brook Contos

1991-2005

who died of a heroin overdose at the young age of 23

*Extinguish my eyes, I'll go on seeing you.
Seal my ears, I'll go on hearing you.
And without feet I can make my way to you,
without a mouth I can swear your name.*
– Rainer Maria Rilke

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Abstract

“OUR ATTACHMENTS ARE OUR TEMPLES”: ADDICTION, RECOVERY, AND THE METAMODERNIST MOVEMENT

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The University of Texas at Tyler
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There is currently a profound debate occurring across the globe regarding the nature of addiction: whether or not addiction is a disease. Within the last decade, addiction research and publications have flooded the market, which challenge the disease model for understanding addiction. This new research suggests that addiction is a learned behavior thus addiction begins as a habit that, if continued, becomes an ingrained behavior, but it is not a disease, like diabetes or heart disease.

Concurrently, there is much discussion within academia as to what is presently occurring in literary and critical theory trends. Although there is still much debate about the beginning and end of (post)modernism and the definitions of both eras, researchers are now observing a shift in literary aesthetics, critical theories, and cultural dynamics. Leading scholars of this new movement, Timotheus Vermeulen and Robin van den Akker, assign the term “metamodernism” to this shift because the prefix “meta” signifies the fluidity of the movement: it is at once between and beyond (post)modernism

It is with these two contemporary shifts in mind (both of which are decidedly influenced by previously held ideologies) that I will examine how contemporary authors and their fiction depart from preceding paradigms. I will draw a parallel between certain predominate characteristics of postmodern literary styles and critical theories (i.e. irony, play, cynicism, paranoia, etc.) and the discomfort that most addicts experience (i.e. shame, anxiety, cynicism, paranoia, etc.). I will then analyze how metamodern authors—specifically David Foster Wallace, Jonathan Safran Foer, and Zadie Smith—and their novels continue postmodernism’s experimentation with form while moving away from postmodernism’s detachment to again explore modernism’s themes such as authenticity and sincerity. These attributes—sincerity, vulnerability, etc.—ultimately enable the addict to cognitively and behaviorally reframe their engagement with their addiction, and I will argue that these very qualities also push the literary community out of the postmodern refrain.

Introduction

*Fiction's about what it is to be a fucking human being.
If you operate, which most of us do, from the premise
that there are things about the contemporary U.S. that
make it distinctively hard to be a real human being,
then maybe half of fiction's job is to dramatize what it is
that makes it tough. The other half is to dramatize the fact
that we still "are" human beings, now. Or can be. [...]
I just think that fiction that isn't exploring what it means
to be human today isn't art. -- David Foster Wallace*

*Every form of addiction is bad, no matter whether the
narcotic be alcohol, morphine or idealism. -- C. Jung*

*Metamodernism shall be defined as the mercurial condition
between and beyond irony and sincerity,
naivety and knowingness,
relativism and truth,
optimism and doubt,
in pursuit of a plurality of
disparate and elusive horizons.
We must go forth and oscillate!
-- Luke Turner*

I stumbled upon David Foster Wallace, *Infinite Jest*, and metamodernism in my first year of graduate school. While preparing a historical bibliography on Jonathan Safran Foer's *oeuvre*, I read Robert L. McLaughlin's "Post-Postmodern Discontent: Contemporary Fiction and the Social World," which was my "gateway drug" to the conception of the post-postmodern. The idea that postmodernism was over and that something had taken its place was liberating and exciting as a first-year graduate student. McLaughlin centers the essay around literature's "social mission" and traces several contemporary writers who are "responding to the perceived dead end of postmodernism, a dead end that has been reached because of postmodernism's detachment from the social world, its immersion in a world of

nonreferential language, and its tendency, as one writer once put it to me, to disappear up its own asshole”¹ (55). This description of postmodernism gave me an accurate, concise explanation as to why I had been so frustrated with its theories and literature as an undergraduate. As a fledgling, idealistic graduate student, I wanted to study and promote theories, literature, and pedagogies that have Real World meaning, purpose, and involvement, but that kind of idealism is difficult to maintain in academia when postmodern theories, especially deconstruction and poststructuralism, remain entrenched in the discourse, paradigm, and syllabi. This is not to say that metamodernism—via its theories, literature, and cultural framework—is the answer to all of postmodernism’s failings. It doesn’t and it can’t. What metamodernism does provide is another lens in which to examine or to approach language, meaning, truth, literature, and theory. The metamodern movement adopts certain attributes of modern and postmodern philosophical movements and fuses them together to form a kind of “informed naivety, a pragmatic idealism” in which the cultural industry replaces “tactics such as pastiche and parataxis for strategies like myth and metaxis, melancholy for hope, and exhibitionism for engagement” (Vermeulen and van den Akker 5). Metaxis, hope, and engagement are all emphasized without the promise of actual fulfillment of them. Metamodernism is a striving-for not necessarily the attainment-of. It is a cultural condition, a philosophical hypothesis, and aesthetic movement focused on the effort, the intention with the hope of fulfillment but not the guarantee of it.

In this way, I correlate the metamodern movement to the path towards sobriety or well being—a persistent endeavoring for capital-H Health—that recovering addicts practice

¹ Though Dr. McLaughlin does not mention the name of writer who describes postmodernism’s detachment and self-referential language as a tendency to disappear up its own posterior, I like to think that perhaps Wallace said this to him, especially considering that they taught together at Illinois State University for seven years (from 1993-2002).

daily. Although temptations and relapses often persist and recovery is not assured, the recuperating addict strives for abstinence and/or temperance, though the attainment of sobriety is challenging, often painful, and must be exercised over and over again One Day at a Time but sometimes one hour, one minute, and even one second at a time. Similarly, the path out of postmodernism can be challenging for those who have championed its theories and methods, its style and mode. Transitioning one's intellectual engagement away from pessimism, away from the persistent use of irony, away from mistrust or pervasive doubt, away from deconstructing texts and language does not come easily or even naturally; however, there are certain aspects of the postmodern condition that have not served us well and have, to certain degrees, created a cultural condition similar to that of an addictive state.

In preparing for this thesis, I chose three contemporary novels that in some way or another explore addiction and obsession: Jonathan Safran Foer's *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* (2005), Zadie Smith's *White Teeth* (2000), and David Foster Wallace's *Infinite Jest* (1996). I researched addiction by referring to the literature of medical and mental health professionals, cultural commentaries on addition, and the socio-historical presence of drugs and the drug war in the U.S. Though the body of work on metamodern is not as plentiful as (post)modernism, I relied heavily on the intellectuals of Europe, who are leading the way in this post-postmodern discussion.

Chapter 1

Somewhere Altogether Different That We've Already Been Before:

A Brief History of the Metamodern Movement

The postmodern founders' patricidal work was great, but patricide produces orphans, and no amount of revelry can make for the fact that writers my age have been literary orphans throughout our formative years. We're kind of wishing some parents would come back. And of course we're uneasy about the fact that we wish they'd come back – I mean, what's wrong with us? [...] And then the uneasiest feeling of all, as we gradually start to realize that parents in fact aren't ever coming back – which means we're going to have to be the parents. – David Foster Wallace, 1993

In 2004, *symplokē* published its twelfth volume entitled “Fiction's Present.” It featured essays with titles such as “To Have Done with Postmodernism: A Plea (or Provocation) for Globalization Studies” and “Post-Postmodern Discontent: Contemporary Fiction and the Social World.” A year later, Jeremy Greene published *Late Postmodernism: American Fiction at the Millennium*. Alan Kirby declared the end of postmodernism in 2006 with his *Philosophy Now* essay entitled “The Death of Postmodernism and Beyond,” and three years later, he published an expanded version of the essay entitled *Digimodernism: How New Technologies Dismantle the Postmodern and Refigure Our Culture*. In 2009, young European scholars Timotheus Vermeulen and Robin van den Akker began the webzine *Notes on Metamodernism*, which is “an ongoing research project documenting developments in aesthetics and culture that can no longer be explained in terms of the postmodern, but should be conceived of by another discourse; one that we have come to call

metamodernism” (n. pag.). Theories on the burgeoning cultural, aesthetic shift(s) flooded the market and academic discourse at the beginning of the new millennium, and this new movement has been given a superfluity of names: post-postmodernism (po-pomo), digimodernism, metamodernism, post-irony, new sincerity, transmodernism, etc. Despite the evident experimentation for an adequate title, scholars do agree that what has been occurring in aesthetics, especially in literary aesthetics, since the late-1980s is definitively not postmodern. The literary shift, specifically, explores a wider range of human emotion than postmodern authors generally did. Although form and style are continuing to be experimented with by the metamodernists, the content of contemporary fiction harkens back to modernist concerns of connection, engagement, emotional exploration, and ethics. In conducting my own examination of this movement and its literature, I will use the term metamodernism to refer to this contemporary movement that is in the process of supplanting postmodernism. This term is chosen mindfully specifically because of its prefix—“meta”—which perfectly connotes the fluidity of the movement: it is at once between and beyond (post)modernism.

Make It New (Again): The Rebirth of Modernism in the Twenty-First Century

Although contemporary authors and theorists recognize that we can never go back to the Belle Époque or even the less festive era of the Fin de Siècle, there are certain aspects of the modernist period that have experienced a rebirth in the last years of the twentieth century into the twenty-first. The sensibilities expressed by Pound, Forester, and Woolf echo through to their metamodern descendants. Ezra Pound’s dictum “make it new” can be heard again in Jonathan Safran Foer’s first novel, *Everything Is Illuminated* (*EIL*); however, the context of Pound’s idiom has altered within the present metamodern perspective. Pound and other

modernists sought, “to modify if not overturn existing modes of representation, partly by pushing them towards the abstract or the introspective” and in this way created a new tradition (Childs 4). Now, Foer and other metamodernists “make it new” by working through the traumas of the past century and expressing sensibilities that have been largely neglected by the postmodernists. Foer’s protagonist in *EIL*, Alex, resonates with Pound’s pronouncement when he admits, “You cannot know how it felt to have to hear these things and then repeat them, because *when I repeated them, I felt like I was making them new again*” (*emphasis added* 185). Though the metamodernists’ concerns and themes are certainly not new—they are repeating the anxieties of mass markets, globalization, and technology once voiced by the modernists—they are bringing forth a new literary age of the “anti-rebel” artist. After postmodernism’s reign of deconstruction, “The Death of the Author,” and post-structuralism, it should not be much of a surprise that emerging artists would again seek to construct new meaning and modes of engagement. These “anti-rebels,” as David Foster Wallace (DFW) conceptualizes them, are described as being “born oglers who dare to back away from ironic watching, who have the childish gall actually to endorse single-entendre values. Who treat old human troubles and emotions...with reverence and conviction” (“E Unibus Plarum” 192-3). If contemporary artists feel a lack of reverence and conviction from their literary fathers—the Updikes, DeLillos, and Pynchons—they subsequently turned to their literary forefathers—the Foresters, Dostoevskys, and Lawrences—to retrace what postmodernists could not or would not explore: belief, addiction, sincerity, literature’s social mission, etc.

The modernist concerns of language, communication, and sensibility reappear in many metamodernist texts. There remains a desire to be understood (by the reader) yet

authors from both periods experience the burden of language. If the modernists concern of communicability is most famously represented in T. S. Eliot's "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock"—"It is impossible to say just what I mean! [...] Would it have been worth while / If one, settling a pillow or throwing off a shawl/ And turning toward the window, should say: 'That is not it at all/ That is not what I meant, at all,'"—the metatmodernist's exemplar exists in the almost hyper-neurotic narrator of DFW's "Octet," who feels as though an author like her/himself²:

"runs the risk of compromising the queer *urgency* about whatever it is you feel you want the pieces [i.e. the text] to interrogate in whoever's reading them. This is an urgency that you, the fiction writer, feel very...well, urgently, and want the reader to feel too—which is to say that by no means 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" (lines 104-110; *original emphasis* 46-7).

As depicted in this short excerpt, the metamodernist's concern about the transposition of meaning through language is doubled: not only do they understand the mutability and ambiguity of language, they also took up the pen after postmodernism's reign of narrative play that could often be described as grueling because of its prevalence for self-referentiality, temporal distortions, prevalence for play over meaningful dialogue or purpose, etc. DFW's narrator understands that (s)he must be careful when addressing the reader and when forming the structure of the text because too much play could simply be seen as intellectual

² The narrator in this short story does not reveal her/his gender. In this way, the reader can assign gender of the narrator, experiment with both genders—reading the piece as though it were written by a woman and then again as a man—or even negate gender altogether and read the text as a gender-blind recipient, which is arguably not yet possible.

masturbation. Although (meta)modernists, to a certain degree, separate themselves from mass or low-brow culture, metamodernist artists strive to be more clear, less obscure than their modernist forefathers. The headiness of Joyce and Eliot are not necessarily found in the texts by Franzen and Eggers, but the length, themes, and sensibilities are retained. Jeremy Green observes that the metamodernist generation, whom he calls the “late postmodernists,” “cannot be disintricated [*sic*] from the concerns of modernism; indeed, if anything, late postmodernism returns with urgency to those concerns, and thereby rejects, or at least revises, some of the bold pronouncements of the first generation of postmodernism” (13). Metamodernists make art new by writing about feelings and sentiments again, in equally complex and myriad ways as the modernists once did.

Postmodern Theories: Violence and Power

After World War II and the Shoah, the landscape of literary, critical, and social engagement dramatically altered. Postmodernism replaced the modernist theory of New Criticism, structuralism, and the conservative literary canon with deconstruction, post-structuralism, and relativism. Barthes and Derrida’s critical theories superseded those of artists like Eliot and Woolf, the theories of Structuralists and New Critics, and literary critics like Leavis. The idealism and power structures of the modernist period—which includes imperialism—could not withstand the upheavals of the Second World War and its aftermath. According to Chris Snipp-Walmsley, “Postmodernism is a site of conflict, negotiation, and debate” and though it initially began as an artistic (r)evolution, it “has evolved into a wholesale relativism that has infringed upon all areas of knowledge and interest, leading to a wholesale skepticism about truth, ethics, value, and responsibility” (405). The 1960s and 70s witnessed the sweeping mistrust of authority (especially entrenched, systematic power-

structures), a disdain for tradition, “ontological uncertainty and epistemological skepticism,” and the dissolution of capital-T Truth. This revolt against modernist sensibilities and ideologies was—to a certain extent—beneficial for artists, academia, and society at large. The literary canon opened up to include many texts and authors that were once ostracized. Under postmodernism’s influence, feminist theories, minority studies, and non-Western texts entered into the literary programs of the Western world. Yet along with this rapid expanse of critical theories and texts came the dismantling of other, perhaps, equally advantageous theories.

To say that certain postmodern critical theorists were obsessed with the pronouncement of violence would be an understatement. Roland Barthes’s “The Death of the Author” (1968) includes such imagery as: “the negative where all identity is lost” and “the author enters into his own death” and “linguistics has recently provided the destruction of the Author” and “having buried the Author” and “we know that to give writing its future, it is necessary to overthrow the myth” and “the birth of the reader must be at the cost of the death of the Author” (1466-70).” The binary system proves to be quite staunch in Barthes’s theory. The reader and writer, according to Barthes, cannot coexist—or at the very least cannot experience mutual importance to a text. Just as Barthes called for the death of the author, Francis Fukuyama called for the end of history in the late 1980s. He claimed that the world was experiencing an end of history. Fukuyama stated, “What we may be witnessing is not just the end of the Cold War...but the end of history as such: that is, the end point of mankind’s ideological evolution and the universalization of Western liberal democracy as the final form of human government,” as if mankind, but very specifically the Western first-world countries, had triumphed over human inadequacies and would now be able to settle

into a global democracy³ (4). Many influential scholars of the postmodern age were consumed by the need to declare the end of or the death of things. The intellectual pendulum swings far to one side or the other; thus, theorists and philosophers made a name for themselves and marked their place in history via grand gestures, which sought to disenfranchise themselves from previous ideologies. Jacques Derrida, much like Barthes, established a critical theory that remains influential and practically unavoidable to all contemporary critical and literary theorists; the power and dominance given to language by Derrida and other post-structuralists remains daunting to theorists even today. Derrida's theory of deconstruction is intriguing, intellectually rigorous, but proves just as detrimental as it is stimulating. In *Of Grammatology*, Derrida asserts that the user of language is under the authority of language—"When we speak of the writer and of the encompassing power of the language to which he is subject"—and it is not just the author or philosopher who is under the dominion of language, it is so for anyone or "everyone writing" (1826). The writer "is inscribed in a *determined* textual system" (*emphasis added* 1826). Derrida does not expressly indicate who/what determines the textual system in which the individual writes. Considering that Derrida sought to challenge the prevalent theory of structuralism, it is not farfetched to interpret this passage as an indication that the textual systems that one uses in

³ Forget about asking whether the rest of the world wants the Western world's—or let's be transparent here, the U.S.'s—conception of government. Forget about recognizing that the liberalizing aspect of democracy is also what makes it precarious: it is meant to be a rule by the whole population, and not just rule by the person(s) that an individual agrees with or invests in. Which means, a globalization of democracy would mean compromise on the Western world's part. Clearly, this negotiation of promoting democracy on a global scale has not been entirely embraced: 9/11, the Iraq War, the war in Afghanistan, recent terrorist attacks throughout Western first-world countries, etc. Fukuyama even goes on to say, "For our purposes, it matters very little what strange thoughts occur to people in Albania or Burkina Faso, for we are interested in what one could in some sense call the common ideological heritage of mankind" (9). The grand narratives that were embraced by the modernists, which were supposedly no longer of value according to the postmodernists, reappears here. This contradiction is a feature of the postmodernist age, and according to Snipp-Walmsley, postmodernism "is riddled with contradictions and perpetuated through paradoxes," which can be seen in this one example I have presented with Fukuyama, as this postmodern ideology at once "advocates the dissolution of the grand narratives and is, in itself, the grand narrative of the end of grand narratives" (405-6).

writing are determined not by the individual but by the power structures that surround her. In the U.S., the writer would be said to be determined by Western philosophy⁴, democratic thinking, patriarchal paradigms, capitalistic standards, etc. In this way, Derrida delineates that in any text—he uses Rousseau’s *Confessions* as an example—the language of a culture (or the language of psychoanalysis that Rousseau employs in his text) is already-there. No writing is original because of the power structures that influence language and the writer herself. The *logos* with which we structure our thoughts and writings is not our own, *per se*, but inseminated in us via those looming, entrenched authorities in which we are subject: “[a]round the irreducible point of originality of this writing an immense series of structures, of historical totalities of all order, are organized, enveloped, and blended” (1827). And this is not altogether untrue, but the extent to which the language-user’s agency or determinism is negated within Derrida’s hypothesis is concerning⁵. The qualms I, and other metamodernists, have with deconstruction is not in terms of its correctness or legitimacy, rather in terms of the degree to which it is granted its own dominance or power over our thinking. Derrida couches his theories, especially his earlier theories, in signifiers of power, dominance, and control, and the writer or language-user is not in the position of control.⁶ Ultimately, this post-structuralist ideation asserts that “any attempt at uncovering or revealing meaning is a comforting myth...no sign or system of signs is ever stable; meaning is always

⁴ Platonic, Aristotelian, and Enlightenment philosophers.

⁵ Without delving too deeply into Derrida’s treatise on language and meaning, I do think it is relevant to point out that he writes and promotes deconstruction during a time in which minority groups were advocating for their agency and *ipso facto* challenging the power and narrative structures of the majority—i.e. the reigning authoritative systems—thus the use of language and meaning/intention was very important for such groups and demonstrates the individual and community’s ability to question, challenge, and supersede old(er) modes of thought.

⁶ The metamodernists will address the domination of language, not to denounce deconstruction and post-structuralism, but to shift the focus of certain aspects of those theories. More will be said about this in subsequent pages of this essay. I’m writing this aside to cue the reader that this is not the end of this specific aspect of language-use.

deferred, and any system or explanation is always undone by the elements it contains but needs to suppress” (Snipps-Walmsley 411). If the modernists were partially concerned about saying just exactly what they mean even while understanding the difficulty of doing so⁷, deconstructions, like Derrida, would counter that meaning is not stable thus the anxiety over saying just what one means is ultimately moot. Deconstruction, as well as poststructuralist and other postmodern theories, grounds itself in “[s]kepticism, doubt, and paranoia” (Snipps-Walmsley 411). Admittedly, skepticism and doubt are, to a certain extent, healthy modes of thought and are certainly natural after dynamic global, political, and economic shifts like those experienced after WWII through the end of the 1980s, but a sustained existential outlook of paranoia and cynicism is often harmful. Yet the postmodern age existed in such a state for several decades; there was a reliance on disengagement, pessimism, suspicion, and irony. These attitudes aided in the social, artistic, and theoretical advances of the postmodern period; unfortunately, artists, scholars, and theorists did not, and perhaps could not, account for the degree to which mass culture would co-opt and then disseminate such concepts.

Postmodern Culture: Art as Insurgence and then Commodity

As postmodern critical theorists contested and dismantled the once prevailing systems of metaphysics, language, and reality, postmodern authors expressed the mistrust, paranoia, and rebellion of postmodernity in their fiction. Kurt Vonnegut’s *Slaughterhouse-Five* and Joseph Heller’s *Catch-22* still stand as the great dark comedies of the postmodern WWII

⁷ Think of, not only Eliot’s J. Alfred Prufrock, but also Virginia Woolf’s characters in *Mrs. Dalloway*, especially Septimus Warren Smith; Gabriel Controy in James Joyce’s “The Dead” in *The Dubliners*; any of the novels by Franz Kafka—think of poor Gregor Samsa who is misunderstood by his own family throughout the entire tale; the poetry of E. E. Cummings, who uses such simplistic language in intricate ways so as to express the most complex human experiences and emotions—like the inhumanity of war in “next to of course god America I,” “lis,” and “my sweet old etcetera.”

novel. Both authors employ detachment, black humor, and irony to explore the trauma suffered by those who served during WWII. The glory and grandeur trumpeted by the victorious Allies is undermined by the psychological and emotional breakdown of the individuals who participated in the global violence. Despite these novels' success at revealing the paradoxes and internal strife experienced by soldiers, the humor and irony with which these novels did so began to lose its power to enlighten—the ability to adeptly debunk socio-cultural norms and assumptions—as the mass culture industry began to subsume those techniques into its own systems of entertainment and jest.

Authors, who were less obvious or conventional with humor and more experimental with form, voice, and content, were no less influential to the postmodern high- and low-brow culture. John Barth's *Lost in the Funhouse*, specifically the short stories "Night Sea Journey"⁸ and "Lost in the Funhouse" (1968), Thomas Pynchon's *The Crying Lot of 49* (1966), and Italo Calvino's *If On A Winter's Night A Traveler* (1979) represent some of the greatest short stories/novellas of the postmodern era. These three pieces exemplify postmodern literature's tendency for language games⁹, self-reflexivity, narrative experimentation, metafiction, etc. The characters of these stories—and by extension the reader—experience a kind of disorienting narrative escapade, and the stories' conclusions are as mystifying as the sequence of events that make up the plot. Despite the extraordinarily brief summation given of these postmodern texts, I want to state very plainly and firmly that my intention is not to disparage these works nor their authors. These texts are funny, heady,

⁸ A Yale student astutely states that this story was enjoyable because "I thought it was the profoundest joke I'd ever read" ("ENGL 291" n. pag.).

⁹ Barth's *Lost in the Funhouse* almost announces itself a game with the mobius strip from the beginning of the text, which once properly aligned reads, "Once upon a time there was a story that began once upon a time there was a story that began once upon a time" (1-2).

challenging, were revolutionary in their heyday, and they remain popular and powerful, entertaining and thought provoking¹⁰. It is because of their success and impact on the culture at large that the culture industry closely began to, in the words of Horkheimer and Adorno, appropriate the techniques of postmodern literature “for the purpose of mechanical reproduction” (1227).

The predicament I have been laying out here is not the fault of the texts, artists, or even postmodernity, in and of themselves, but the inevitable amalgamation that would occur once mass culture and late capitalism observed the popular acceptance of such intellectual and aesthetic habits. As the auspicious techniques of the postmodern artists were recognized and subsequently co-opted by the culture/entertainment industry, such tools for critique were altogether rendered unserviceable. As DFW observed in his famous 1993 essay “E Unibus Plurum”:

the culture’s TV-defined pop ethic has pulled a marvelous touché on the postmodern aesthetic that originally sought to co-opt and redeem the pop. Television has pulled the old dynamics of reference and redemption inside-out: it is now *television* that takes elements of the *postmodern*—the involution, the absurdity, the sardonic fatigue, the iconoclasm and rebellion—and bends them to the ends of spectation and consumption. As early as ’84, critics of capitalism were warning that ‘What began as a mood of the avant-garde has surged into mass culture.’¹¹ (*original emphasis* 182)

As can be heard in the above analysis by DFW, the paradigm of postmodernism should not altogether be condemned, as certain postmodernists¹² sought to do with modernist

¹⁰ *Slaughterhouse-Five*, *Catch-22*, and *The Crying of Lot 49* all appeared on the 2010 Time’s 100 Best Novels Since 1923 list published by Lev Grossman and Richard Lacayo.

¹¹ Here Wallace quotes Fredric Jameson’s “Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logical of Late Capitalism.”

¹² Derrida, Foucault, Jameson, Lyotard, among others.

theories. Instead, DFW and other metamodernists alter and refocus (post)modern critical conceptions so as to contribute to and advance art, aesthetics, theory, and awareness in an age of technological, commercial, and global transformation.

They Came of Age Under Postmodernity¹³

The novelists attributed to the metamodern generation—though highly influenced by the postmodern greats like Pynchon, Barth, Borges, DeLillo, etc.—have taken an altogether different approach to writing, the relationship between writers and readers, and the “duty,”¹⁴ as Zadie Smith defines it, authors have towards readers. Metamodernist authors tend to focus on “the emphatic expression of feelings and sentiments, a drive towards inter-subjective connection and communication, and also a sense of ‘presence’ and ‘sameness’” (Timmer 13). For metamodernists, presence, sameness, and empathy are in stark contrast to deconstruction’s focus on the trace, the supplementary, and absence. Artists born under the influence of postmodern literature and critical theory, though indebted to the movement, needed new ways of expressing and breaking through the entrenched social and literary paradigms of late capitalism and the technological revolution. As irony, black humor, cynicism, detachment, and “hip sophistication” became a part of the status-quo, young artists and critical thinkers of the late twentieth century and the early twenty-first would strive to create a symmetry between the dynamic aspects of the (post)modern eras. They simultaneously work towards creating empathetic connections between individuals and communities while realizing that postmodernity was not sufficient to a rapidly globalizing

¹³ Phrasing taken from Zadie Smith’s “Fail Better” (2007).

¹⁴ According to Smith, authors do have an obligation, and it is simply to “express accurately their way of being in the world. [...] That is what I am looking for when I read a novel; one person’s truth as far as it can be rendered through language. This single duty, properly pursued, produced complicated, various results” (“Fail Better” n. pag.).

world that needed to create possibilities rather than bow to the death of things (“An Expanded Interview” 48).

A Brief, Concise Definition of Metamodernism

Timotheus Vermeulen and Robin van den Akker adopted the term metamodernism in 2010 with their article published in the *Journal of Aesthetics and Culture*. These two scholars designate the metamodern movement as being “situated epistemologically with (post)modernism, ontologically between (post)modernism, and historically beyond (post)modernism” (2). What does this actually mean or look like in action within literature? Metamodernist authors and philosophers unite some of the trends of the (post)modern movements; they embrace narrative experimentation and metafiction while exploring sentimentality and a recommitment to “single entendre values.”¹⁵ Vermeulen and van den Akker define metamodernism as “the modern outlook vis-à-vis idealism and ideals”—which they depict as, “fantastic and/or naïve”—coupled with the postmodern mentality of the “apathetic and/or skeptic” (5). They understand this duality to be rooted in “the current generation’s *attitude*,” and they summarize this overarching outlook as “a kind of informed naivety, a pragmatic idealism” (*emphasis added* 5). Despite metamodernism’s reliance on (post)modern styles and modes, it moves beyond these two ideologies. Jeremy Greene’s observation of the metamodern duality of (post)modern techniques denotes that it is, “a return to earlier modes and concerns,” but such revisiting is “the way forward” (25). Metamodernists are making-it-new-again by (re)exploring “the less contentious issues and paradigms that postmodernism supposedly destroyed” but within the context of the present

¹⁵ A phrase used by David Foster Wallace in his seminal 1993 essay “E Unibus Plarum.”

moment and all of its complexities¹⁶, thus there is a “return to transparency and representation” (Greene 25). Metamodernists artists strive for new interpretations and perspectives that are relevant and necessary in a global, technological age without resorting to cynical, ironic conclusions and without blindly relying on abstract, idealistic values to carry us to a peaceful utopia.

¹⁶ The ability to access information anywhere, anytime with the Internet; the constant exposure to advertising (via TV, the Internet, our mobile devices, the classic roadside billboard, etc.); big data/data mining; speed of travel; global economics; etc. We are at once empowered and vulnerable in extremes.

Chapter 2

Hungry Ghosts, Tantalus, the Evil Wolf:

the Contemporary Reality of Addiction

*[P]eople jeopardize their lives for the sake of making
the moment livable. Nothing sways them from the habit—
not illness, not the sacrifice of love and relationship,
not the loss of all earthly goods, not the crushing of their dignity,
not the fear of dying. The drive is that relentless.
-- Gabor Maté, In the Realm of Hungry Ghosts*

The story of addiction is not a modern tale; the curse of addiction has been told again and again since humankind began telling stories. The tragedy of addiction does not discriminate; its victims can be found in every culture, from every economic class, within every race, religion, gender, age, etc. Chinese tradition wove tales of hungry ghosts; the Greeks explored addictive behaviors with the myth of Tantalus; Native Americans told stories of the battle between the good wolf and the evil wolf living inside each person. In 2017, the narrative of addiction that is most familiar in the United States is that of the 1990 crack epidemic or the more recent media coverage of the current heroine crisis. With the widespread knowledge of Alcoholics Anonymous, addiction to alcohol has long been recognized in the United States and across the Western World. The less public forms of addiction, though lacking habit-forming chemicals or substances, are no less enslaving. In the twenty-first century, scholars and clinicians now recognize that addictive behaviors extend well beyond alcohol and illegal drugs; addiction and addiction-studies now include prescription drugs, nicotine, sex, gambling, food or diet addiction, the Internet, shopping, work, etc. Some of these addictive- or compulsive-behaviors are so readily accepted by the

present culture—especially work-addiction (workaholic) or food-centric addictions¹⁷—that many would not call them addictions but lifestyles or regimens. Consider Naomi Wolf’s observation in her 1992 treatise *The Beauty Myth*: “A culture fixated on female thinness is” one in which there is “an obsession about female obedience. Women's dieting has become...a ‘*normative obsession*,’ a never-ending passion play given international coverage” that employs pervasive “*emotive language that does not figure even in discussions of alcohol or tobacco abuse*” (*emphasis added* 187). It is when healthy or non-harmful behaviors become obsessions that the addictive-state begins. Kevin Griffin, co-founder of the Buddhist Recovery Network, describes addiction as an experience that exists on a “continuum of craving and attachment that in this sort of middle zone, we call it normal. And then when you get out to more the edges of that continuum, we call that addiction,” thus Griffin acknowledges, “addiction [isn’t] something outside the normal human behavior” (n. pag.). Considering that addiction is not outside of normal human behavior and there is now an excess of substances/objects an individual can become addicted to, I would like to provide a concise, clear definition of addiction.

In defining addiction, I present two frameworks: the first is that of drug/substance addiction, which most readers of the Western world are familiar with, and the second is that of more socially accepted, behavioral forms of addiction. In examining substance addiction, I rely heavily on the research and publications of Vincent Felitti, MD, Gabor Maté, MD, Marc Lewis, Ph.D. Vincent Felitti, MD, defines drug/substance addiction as “an

¹⁷ On the one hand, the weight-loss or diet industry grossed \$6.3 billion in 2015 (Hill n. pag.), while McDonald’s grossed \$25 billion in the same year (MarketWatch n. pag.).

understandable, unconscious, *compulsive* use of psychoactive materials¹⁸ in response to abnormal prior life experiences, most of which are concealed by shame, secrecy, and social taboo” (*my emphasis* 9). Felitti finds that for many individuals who live through or in “abnormal” conditions, especially as children, substance abuse can be an overwhelming obstacle to recover from because the substance provides “chemical relief from the ongoing effects of old trauma” (8). Although not all addicts undergo traumatic or harmful events, individuals who do experience such events are more likely to seek relief via some substance(s) or compulsive behavior(s). Maté similarly reports that what the addict really yearns for is, not the drug per se, but “the absence of the craving state,” so the underlying problem is not the drug itself, it is the emotional pain the drug is soothing (114). Although not all addicts experience a traumatic life-event, they are all escaping from the emotional and psychological toll of being present in their life, families, communities, etc. The Department of Preventive Medicine Kaiser Permanent Medical Care Program reports that unrecognized Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE)¹⁹ “are a major, if not *the* major, determinant of who turns to psychoactive materials and becomes ‘addicted’” because such experiences cause, “neurodevelopmental and emotional damage” in children (*emphasis added* Felitti 8). Although not all drug addicts experience ACE, according to the Kaiser research, ACE are the largest determining factor or common demoninator when evaluating why people turn to drugs and become addicts. Such neurodevelopmental and emotional damage is explained more thoroughly by Dube, SR, et al.: “Children and adolescents, who are exposed to the

¹⁸ The Department of Preventive Medicine Kaiser Permanente Medical Care Program began by observing food-addiction–overeating and obesity–in the 1980s; they expanded their addiction observations in their 2004 report to include smoking (nicotine), alcoholism, and injection of illegal drugs.

¹⁹ ACE as researched by the Kaiser Program were limited to: recurrent and severe physical abuse; recurrent and severe emotional abuse; contact sexual abuse; growing up in a household with an alcoholic or drug-user, a member being imprisoned, a mentally ill, chronically depressed, or institutionalized member, the mother being treated violently, both biological parents *not* being present (Felitti 4).

types of childhood experiences that we examined may have feelings of helplessness, chaos, and impermanence and may have problems self-regulating affective states. Thus, illicit drug use may serve as an avenue to escape or dissociate from the immediate emotional pain, anxiety, and anger” (586). Within the three novels, which will be discussed in subsequent chapters, the characters who suffer from drug/alcohol addiction or compulsive behaviors all experience some kind of adolescent trauma or unhealthy familial environments. Though the authors are from various backgrounds, cultures, and nationalities, they share a common understanding of the nature and slow escalation of addiction.

The second framework of addiction that I want to discuss lies in behavioral addictions. Dieting (i.e. anorexia/bulimia), food, sex²⁰, gambling, nicotine, Internet, shopping, and work are all very real addictions for large segments of the Western population. Though these dependencies are perhaps not as radical as drug addiction, they are no less harmful and enslaving to the user and the user’s familial/social circle. Seemingly responsible citizens addicted to sex or shopping self-medicate when they compulsively engage in their addictive behavior; sex or shopping soothes some inner *DIS-EASE*. The citizen-addict and the drug-addict both seek to escape from their *DIS-EASE* albeit in different ways using different mediums of comfort. Despite the similarities between these types of addicts, society habitually rejects, judges, and imprisons the drug-addict, while some of our own addictions go undetected or are even encouraged in our present culture (i.e. workaholism or

²⁰ According to an Associated Press article from 2012, sex addiction is on the rise in the U.S. and U.K. This article includes an interview with Dr. Rodney Collins, who provides clear examples of sex addiction: “[T]hings like excess masturbation...excess pornography, escorts, fetishes etc., really it's not the sexual activity in and of itself, it's the process of addiction, the lack of control” (n. pag.). Though the behavior in and of itself is not “bad” or “wrong” or “unhealthy,” the behavior becomes so when “things perhaps increase in some way, maybe if it's pornography they started off using a very low level of pornography very infrequently, but more and more they need to use explicit pornography and it's beginning to concern them (i.e. the addict) in some way. So I think the level of discomfort that comes from that lack of control should be taken very seriously and for that reason I think sex addiction is real” (n. pag.).

work-dependency²¹). The way society privileges and defends many of its behavioral addictions does not transfer to drug addictions, which are largely corrected (i.e. intensive, inpatient drug treatment programs) or punished (i.e. criminal prosecution and incarceration). Maté recalls a conversation with one of his patients—Ralph, whom Maté describes as a “God-starved, pseudo-Nazi poet”—in which Ralph challenges the illusory distinction between the responsible-citizen and addict. Ralph makes the following comparison:

You collected a hundred shekels of gold [...] But what are you looking for? What have you spent your whole day searching for? That same bit of freedom or satisfaction that I want; we just get it differently. What’s everybody chasing all the money for if not to get them something that will make them feel good for a while or make them feel they’re free? How are they freer than I am? (263-264)

Society is “freer” in that most of our functioning addictions do not lead to psychological collapse or imprisonment; however, proper emotional/psychological/mental treatments for drug-addicts are less favored and ill funded compared to incarceration.

Moreover, U.S. society largely discourages and denies the self-reflection and emotional dialogue necessary to address painful experiences that lead to any kind of addiction. Brené Brown, Ph.D., LMSW, observes that “[w]e are the most in-debt, obese, addicted, and medicated adult cohort in U.S. history” (Brown n. pag.). Despite the United State’s, and I would also argue most of the Western world’s, unhealthy habits and behaviors,

²¹ According to a 2016 published study on work addiction, workaholics are “made” by “an excessive work climate” as well as “both personal and organizational characteristics—as well as cultural characteristics” (Andreassen, et. al. 14). Rachel Shifron and Rebekah Reysen observe that workaholism, like other addictions, “are holistic in nature. These behaviors are expressed physically, biologically, psychologically, cognitively, and socially” (139). They find that workaholism “not only affects the workaholic and family but also the entire global culture. Shifron et. al. (2010) view this as a culture addicted to power” (141).

there remains segregation between the drug addict and their citizen counterpart, who is just as caught up in the addiction spiral but the drug-of-choice is not an illegal substance. Yet both the citizen-addict and the drug-addict suffer from some inner discomfort, some *DIS-EASE* that needs soothing. Citizen-addicts, like many drug-addicts, are enslaved to their addiction and seeking help is arguably more difficult for the individual addicted to work, shopping, or dieting because there is an absence of a community focused on sobriety—like Alcoholics Anonymous (AA), Narcotics Anonymous (NA), or Sexaholics Anonymous (SA). And one of the reasons society largely neglects the self-reflection required in order to begin addiction recovery is because, as Brown observes, society is, “constantly overwhelmed with feelings of fear, blame and disconnection. This creates an ‘us and them’ world” (Brown 145). “Us and them” referring to the seemingly responsible citizen addicted to sex versus the negligent citizen whose status as such is denied and demeaned to the title of “junkie” or “crack head” or “low-life.” Brown concludes her examination of society’s compulsion to distance ourselves from “them,” from those whose way of life seems drastically different from our own, by recognizing that “[w]e are ‘those people.’...we are the others” (Brown 145). Pia Mellody’s psychological research affirms Brown’s social observations. Mellody discusses the effects of an emotionally disengaged culture, and she asserts that in contemporary U.S. society “[w]e are taught...that it is absolutely ok to medicate pain and to remove it into not feeling it” (n. pag.). Thus, addicts—whether the seemingly responsible citizen addicted to porn or gambling or the drug addict—are essentially the same: they both have emotions and try to soothe painful experiences via external sources, but society rejects the addict and resists the introspection required for healing and change.

One of the many reasons why society judges and ostracizes addicts is due to the primary models for understanding addiction. According to the neuroscientist and professor of development psychology, Marc Lewis, the three predominant models for talking about addiction are the disease, choice, and self-medication models. The disease model is most familiar to readers in the Western world because AA, NA, SA, etc. promote it. Alcoholics Anonymous claims that addiction is a disease, and their literature proliferates this ideology regarding addicts: “I am no longer at the mercy of a disease that tells me the only answer is to drink”; “I understood that it was not the world’s job to understand my disease”; “I learned that alcoholism isn’t a sin, it’s a disease”; “It helped me a great deal to become convinced that alcoholism was a disease, not a moral issue” (317, 336, 344, 416). The disease model innately implies that the “cure” for addiction must be sought “at the hands of experts—generally medical experts (including psychiatrists) but also the burgeoning band of treatment personnel” (Lewis 3). Such professionals, though all seeking to understand the nature of addiction, in doing so, their categorization and prescription regarding addiction “operates to pathologise and regulate individuals and *demonise* certain forms of consumption²²” (*emphasis added* Fraser, et al. 7). An individual who overworks herself is seen as loyal, hungry, and self-motivated; another individual who overdrinks is considered a drunk, lazy,

²² Although the scope of this essay is limited, it is important to acknowledge the historical reasons behind why some forms of consumption were and still are demonized. In *Chasing the Scream: The First and Last Days of the War on Drugs*, Johann Hari writes, “The arguments we hear today for the drug war are that we must protect teenagers from drugs, and prevent addiction in general. We assume, looking back, that these were the reasons this war was launched in the first place. But they were not. [...] The main reason given for banning drugs—the reason obsessing the men who launched this war—was that the blacks, Mexicans, and Chinese were using these chemicals, forgetting their place, and menacing white people. [...] Harry [Anslinger] told the public that ‘the increase [in drug addiction] is practically 100 percent among Negro people’ which he stressed was terrifying because already ‘the Negro population...accounts for 10 percent of the total population, but 60 percent of the addicts.’ He [Harry Anslinger] could wage the drug war—he could do what he did—only because he was responding to a fear in the American people. You can be a great surfer, but you still need a great wave. Harry’s wave came in the form of a race panic” (26).

and self-indulgent. Yet both of these hypothetical addicts are trying to control their immediate experience—one by working, the other by alcohol—both seek to devote themselves to something as a means to feel an inner comfort or to pacify an inner *DIS-EASE*. Maté notes that the disease model “*ought* to discourage anyone from blaming or punishing the sufferer. No one, after all, blames a person suffering from rheumatoid arthritis for having a relapse, since relapse is one of the characteristics of chronic illness,” but in reality such compassion and understanding are rarely extended to the addict (*emphasis added* 155).

The second conception of addiction is the choice model. This model relies on cognitive theories rather than the biological theories that ground the disease model. Lewis finds that “[w]hile few people imagine that addiction is a good choice, it is often considered a rational one, at least in the short run—as when the pleasure or relief derived from one’s addiction seems to outweigh other possible choices” (2). For the bulimic, the choice to purge after consuming a large amount of food provides a sense of relief in that the individual is controlling what the body is doing; the pleasure derived from the food is chosen and the pleasure derived from ejecting that food is also chosen. The bulimic chooses this experience despite the side effects being, at the very least uncomfortable, at the very worst deadly. Maté recognizes that, “*the power to choose exists only when our automatic mental mechanisms are subject to those brain systems that are able to maintain conscious awareness*” (*original emphasis* 304). Yet, “conscious awareness” is rare, even for individuals who are not suffering from addiction, and so Maté concedes, “Realistically, very few people could ever be found operating at the positive extreme, truly conscious and consistently free” (305). The danger of the choice model is that those working to help addicts must be constantly mindful that healthy choices are not always an easy decision, especially when an addict comes from a

disturbed or stressful environment. The tendency to judge and blame the addict is more prevalent when understanding addiction within the choice model because “it provides a convenient platform for those who consider addicts indulgent and selfish...addicts are deliberately inflicting harm on themselves and, more seriously, on other” (Lewis 2). In understanding addiction as a choice, it is imperative that the addict, medical professionals, family, friends, and community remember that choosing is complicated because it is influenced by the addict’s emotional, psychological, economic, environmental, and social conditions, which are all too often not within the addict’s ability to control or change.

The final model for addiction that I will review here is the self-medicating model. This model suggests that, as an individual undergoes more and more stressful, traumatic situations, she will seek to alleviate the emotional turmoil by finding relief. For many, relief comes in the form of drugs and alcohol, but relief can also take other, more behavioral forms, as I have detailed. Lewis states that, whether or not the individual intentionally chooses or stumbles upon their fix, “[t]he point is that drugging and drinking make you feel better. Until they don’t” (3). Addiction leads to ever more painful experiences: the loss of control, bank accounts running dry, family and friends becoming ever more concerned, perhaps even losing connections to family and friends, homelessness, etc. Maté insists, “Addictions always originate in pain, whether felt openly or hidden in the unconscious,” and so the idea that the addict is self-medicating that pain is understandable, even logical to a certain degree (36). The body interprets physical and emotional pain in the same way: “on brain scans they [the brain centers] ‘light up’ in response to social ostracism just as they would when triggered by physically harmful stimuli. When people speak of feeling ‘hurt’ or of having emotional ‘pain,’ they are not being abstract or poetic but scientifically quite precise” (36).

The habit of addiction, therefore, is not always grounded in pleasure and desire, but according to the self-medication model, addiction is just as likely a result of anxiety, depression, PTSD, etc., which the addicts seeks to ameliorate via drugs/alcohol/behavioral modifications so as to relieve those negative feelings.

Despite these three reigning models of addiction, within the past decade, advances in science and medicine have broadened the scope for understanding the origins and mechanisms of addiction. As Maté observes from his years of work with addicts in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside, "Addiction is 'all about' many things" (138). It is not simply a disease or disorder, a matter of choice, or even self-medicating. Each of the above models in some way limits one's understanding of addiction. Marc Lewis's research on addiction examines the condition as one of learned behavior. I do not wish to insinuate that his neurological approach to addiction is the new and ultimate model of addiction; however, it does provide addiction scholars and medical professionals with another "tool" when considering and treating addiction. This is the newest lens in which we can examine and contemplate addiction. And so before discussing addicts/addiction in literature, I would like to briefly introduce the relatively new approach to addiction as defined by Marc Lewis and others. Lewis's research finds that "the neural consequences of behavioural addictions indicate the same cellular mechanisms and the same biological alterations that underlie drug addiction" (23). The argument that drugs and alcohol alter the chemical make up of the brain is now also being seen regarding non-substance addictions like gambling, sex and/or porn addiction, Internet addiction, eating disorders, etc. Maté similarly notes, "the constellation of behaviors we call addiction is provoked by a complex set of neurological and emotional mechanisms that develop *inside* a person. [...] There is no addiction center in the brain, no

circuits designated strictly for addictive purposes. The brain systems involved in addiction are among the key organizers and motivators of human emotional life and behavior” (157-8). Though addiction may not be healthy, the neuro-biological systems that react to emotions, which are relievable by an addiction, are natural, and they are within each one of us.

Neuroscience has now shown that “the kind of brain changes seen in addiction,” which leads some to the disease model, “also show up when people become absorbed in a sport, join a political movement, or become obsessed with their sweetheart or their kids” (Lewis 26).

Thus familiar attachments we all have—to sports, politics, religion, love, etc.—change the brain in similar ways as that of addiction. Just as learning a sport requires habitual practice, so does addiction. Lewis states, “[b]rains have to change for learning to take place,” and so a simple example of this is when a child learns to play soccer, the child’s brain changes as she learns, and she learns more adroitly with practice (25). Practice builds habitual patterns in the mind and body. As Lewis notes, “brain changes almost always settle into habits. And once formed, habits—even minor habits—remain in place, sometimes for the rest of our lives” (31). So too with addiction. Lewis delineates three major attributes of addiction: 1) “it’s a habit of thinking and feeling—a mental habit—not just a behavioral habit,” 2) there is an element of desire, and 3) the habit becomes a compulsion (33). Though we are accustomed to talking about desire in positive terms—desire for love, sexual desire, desire for prosperity, desire for beautiful clothes or fast cars—for some, the desire is to avoid negative feelings, and Lewis admits, “the habits of desire that characterize addiction are often intermingled with habits born of anxiety or shame” (34). Though this may seem discouraging—after all, habits can be extremely difficult to break, especially if those habits involve powerful chemical substances—the brain is able to restructure itself even when facing neurological challenges

such as addiction but also when recovering from strokes and cerebrovascular accidents. Dr. Jeffrey Schwartz and his fellow researchers at UC Los Angeles perceive that, “the brain remodels itself throughout life” (253). Therefore, habits can be learned and unlearned, but more importantly to my argument here, the brain “retains the capacity to change itself as the result not only of passively experienced factors such as enriched environments, but also of changes *in the ways we behave and the ways we think*” (*emphasis added* 253-4). Two imperative factors to learning—whether that be learning new habits of addiction or re-learning habits of health/sobriety—are emotional significance and repetition. For the habit(s) to stick the learning experience must contain emotional significance to the individual; if the individual does not care, they will not learn or rehabilitate their behavior. Repetition, according to Lewis, “is the engine that strengthens and perpetuates learning, changing it from a temporary gloss to a deep engraving of the world” (40). Just as the child who practices as soccer everyday over and over again thereby “engraves” her experience, so too does the addict “engrave” her experience each time she engages with her substance (drugs or alcohol) or occupation (sex, gambling, shopping, etc.). Addiction, like many activities, is a learned behavior, but this should not be depressing because the brain and so the individual can learn different behaviors. Though one’s slate can never be wiped clean, the neuroplasticity within the brain allows for change, thus the addict *can* learn behaviors of health, equanimity, and self-regulation. This is perhaps the most difficult part of recovery: learning to choose new ways of thinking and being.

Chapter 3

Of Human bondage: The Metamodern Novels of Foer, Smith, and Wallace

As I have detailed at length in previous chapters of this study, addiction is not an abnormal human behavior, and there are always reasons why a person turns to alcohol, drugs, or compulsive behaviors as a means to either feel in control of their unmanageable life and/or to find relief from it. Isolation, alienation, shame, and secrecy can instigate and then exacerbate addiction. Addiction is a vicious cycle: pervasive, negative feelings and/or experiences can drive an individual to seek relief in a substance or in a certain compulsive behavior, which does temporarily alleviate negative feelings, but the substance/behavior further divorces the addict from others as she becomes more and more dependent on it for comfort. As the compulsion or desire consumes the addict, specific responses characteristically resonate in the addict's outlook: cynicism, detachment, mistrust, and paranoia. Paradoxically, these characteristics are commonly attributed to the postmodern condition, and it is with these commonalities that I compare the postmodern condition to an addictive state.

The postmodern and addictive condition both signify a certain, extreme, often negative, reaction to previous events—intellectual, existential, historical, personal, or otherwise. Clare Hayes-Brady notes, “Postmodern cultural production...was an inherently catastrophic form of art, which in response to radical and traumatic shifts in consciousness ‘moves through the extremes and thus brings thought to turn on itself in its

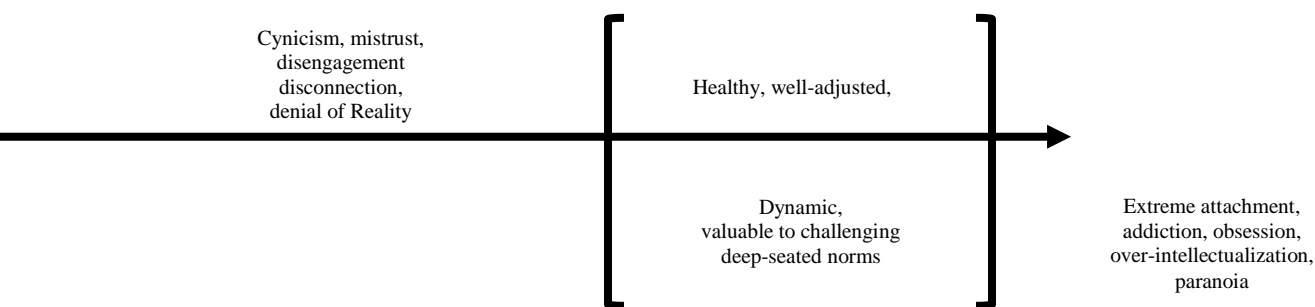
most extreme consequence,’ as [Theodor] Adorno had predicted” (7). The addict responds similarly to her experiences and is “in a constant state of reactivity—not to the world so much as to her own interpretation of it” (Maté 368). In his investigation of postmodernity, Chris Snipp-Walmsley reports that postmodernist theorists sought “to create ontological and epistemological doubts as we accepted, and became intimate with, chaos” (407). Chaos is also a primary attribute of the addictive condition²³. As much as the addiction seeks to escape from the chaos of an addict’s lived-reality, the postmodern condition reacts to chaos by adopting defensive mechanisms. Postmodernism founded itself on “[s]kepticism, doubt, and paranoia,” which led to the belief that “agreement is always enforced, that truth is merely a coerced consensus, and everything is relative” (Snipp-Walmsley 408). Lyotard’s work challenged reigning grand narratives; Derrida’s theory of deconstruction introduced “languages games” into the conception of discourse; Foucault’s theories generally emphasized the surreptitious yet almost absolute influence traditional institutions have on society’s ideas of truth, morality, and individuality. Colin Davis discusses the price we have paid for existing within this postmodern *Zeitgeist* and asserts, “[Y]ou enter into it, become part of it” and so “postmodernism is not simply a set of beliefs which any individual may or may not hold. *It is a condition*, and as such part of a shared context. Some may prefer to be elsewhere, but they have little choice in the matter” (*emphasis added* 28). The postmodern

²³ From *Alcoholics Anonymous*: “Occasionally, some sliver of pride would work its way through the chaos, resentment, and fear and cause me to look at my life. But the shame was too great, and I would drive it back down with bottles of vodka and cases of beer”; “At home there was chaos and no one would tell me what was happening, so I withdrew and began to block out the reality around me” (424, 438).

From *In the Realm of Hungry Ghosts*: “The erratic mishmash he [the addict] calls history reflects his inner chaos, confusion and fear” (80).

From *The Biology of Desire*: “We used to use together, same stuff in the same way involving the same chaos”; “[T]his trance-like present tense [brought on by methamphetamine] blocked the conduit between his past and his future, making it impossible to perceive the larger story of his life from the chaos of his momentary existence” (23, 201)

condition embraces the dissolution of unity; although certain High Modernists previously sought unity while recognizing the nature of fragmentation, many postmodern thinkers celebrate the breakdown of such cohesion. Snipp-Walmsey finds that postmodern art, and I argue specifically its literature, “denies the possibility of depth, offering a sweeping array of surfaces and superficiality in which the primary modes of representation are irony, parody, and pastiche” and are “[a]cutely self-referential” (410). The primary modes of representing reality, narratives, feelings, and the human experience were expressed with techniques that favor distance and detachment over genuine, emotive dialogue. I conceive of the postmodern condition, theories, and literature as a kind of continuum, much like the addiction continuum.



In the center of this continuum, postmodernism is dynamic and valuable to challenging deep-seated norms, which did and still does offer us the opportunity for exploration and development—personal, interpersonal, and communal/global. However, it is on the outer edges of postmodern’s continuum in which the disadvantages arise: the paranoia, cynicism, disengagement, mistrust, and the denial of capital-R Reality.

It is the outer edges of postmodernism’s continuum that I have discussed here that I will relate it to the state of addiction. Addiction, too, is a condition. It is a state in which one enters into thus the addiction becomes part of you. The postmodern condition shares similar characteristics with that of the addictive state, specifically the drug-induced paranoia, the

disengagement from the familial and social world, the cynical outlook on life, and the denial of possible alternative realities other than the one in which the addict inhabits. Gabor Maté, M.D., counsels and treats addicts in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside. His revolutionary text on addiction and recovery details the many conversations he has had with his drug-addicted patients as a way for the reader to hear and try to understand the thoughts of an addict. One specific patient, Dean, confesses, "'Cynicism is rife down here...We have the feeling that no one is going to look after us—for most people down here, no one ever has'" (102). Cynicism is a reaction to and a defensive mechanism against feelings of isolation, abandonment, and rejection. Maté observes that the emotional and cognitive manifestations of addiction, even within him²⁴, are an "underlying anxiety and sense of emptiness...chronic, low-grade depression and irritability" and cynicism, which he defines as "the negative side of the healthy skepticism and independent thinking" (356-7). Cynicism, whether that of an addict or postmodernist, ultimately indicates an experience of fear and/or pain that the individual defensively reacts to, but by adopting a cynical pose, she does not have to directly address the offending catalyst. Dean, Maté's patient, admits that cynicism arises for many addicts because they do not feel as though they have been or are cared for by their families and/or communities. Likewise, the postmodern condition, which arose partly because postmodern ideologies were disseminated throughout cultural (i.e. literature and art) and pop-culture narratives (television, popular music, and now the Internet), avoids directly addressing those factors that cause cynicism or the cynical repose. The power structures and cultural hegemonies that must be continually confronted, even today in the twenty-first century to

²⁴ Maté admits his own addiction is to shopping, specifically for classical music CDs. At the lowest point in his addiction, he left one of his patients in the midst of labor to buy a CD across town at Sikora's Classical Records, and the child was delivered without him (120).

maintain the reaction, resistance, and dissention touted by postmodernists is exhausting. Maintaining this kind of struggle in the Real World and on all fronts (i.e. social, intellectual, economic, political, global, existential, etc.) is daunting, but if one lives and operates within the postmodern condition or *Zeitgeist*, the cynical path equates to the path of least exhaustion and enables the passive existential stance of distaste and judgment.

As the postmodernist and the addict embraces cynicism—that kind of non-engaged reaction enabling reflexive critique and blame—the need to question and doubt increases. Trust and belief become liabilities that expose one’s vulnerabilities. Whereas mistrust becomes a tool of protection that can be shrewdly disguised as intellectual expertise and/or a sharpened intuition. While paranoia remains a term of mental, psychological instability, its foundation in distrust connects it to both addiction and certain postmodern theories²⁵ and narratives²⁶. Maté details the physical harm addicts inflict upon themselves when they are in paranoid states. He relates that his patients’ addictions and thus paranoia “make every medical treatment encounter a challenge. [...] At times, one literally has to coax them into a hospital,” but Maté acknowledges that addicts often have sensible reasons for not trusting the medical and law enforcement authorities²⁷. Every day he witnesses and tries to alleviate the price his patients pay to escape their fears—real or imaginary—via drugs and alcohol: “some patients have chronic draining wounds. Blood also seeps from blows and cuts inflicted by their fellow addicts or from pits patients have scratched in their skin during fits of cocaine-induced paranoia” (14). Though the paranoia addicts suffer from often leads to physical

²⁵ e.g. Foucault’s *Discipline and Punishment: The Birth of the Prison* and *The Archeology of Knowledge*

²⁶ e.g. Pynchon’s *The Crying of Lot 49*

²⁷ For more the corrupt criminal justice system and the war on drugs, see: Johann Hari’s *Chasing the Scream: The First and Last Days of the War on Drugs*, Michelle Alexander’s *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorlessness*, David Simon’s *The Wire*, and Eugene Jarecki’s documentary *The House I Live In*

harm, the repercussions of paranoia within the postmodern condition are no less harm inducing, albeit in completely different ways. Civil disobedience and political insurrections proliferated during the 1960s and 70s: the student riots in France, the civil rights movements in the U.S., the liberation of Czechoslovakia from the Soviet Union, the anti-war movement that protested global violence and atrocities, etc. These liberal, idealistic movements were met with forceful resistance and their outcomes were not as successful as had been hoped. Though the first steps toward improving many issues—gender, sexuality, environmental, and abortion—gained traction and led to actual socio-political change, the success of the movements was dulled by the violence and loss that coupled the progress: riots in France were quashed, Martin Luther King and JFK were assassinated, Czechoslovakia was again invaded by the Soviet Union, and war and genocide continued to proliferate. Considering these brutal retaliations to the reformist movements, it is understandable why “[p]ostmodernism is, in many ways, part of the harvest sown in the 1960s. The scars of betrayal and stings of disillusionment have never really been healed,” and so the members of progressive groups “began to construct and perpetuate the myth of failure and betrayal: a myth that is manifest in the aura of pessimism and frustration lying at the heart of the postmodern enterprise” (Snipp-Walmsley 414). By the leaders of such movements not recognizing and owning their victories and subsequently dispelling the myth of failure and betrayal, they poisoned several generations of civilians, intellectuals, activists, artists, and politicians. The mistrust of government and authority coupled with defeatist attitudes led to cynicism, which led to disengagement. If these feelings go unchecked, paranoia can set it. And so although those living within the postmodern condition may not scratch themselves from imaginary bites until they bleed, they have instead created an existential repose of

detachment, distrust, and disengagement. The literature of postmodernism is full of black humor and irony with protagonists²⁸ who are just as lost, miserable²⁹, pessimistic, selfish, and lonely as the addicts Mat  treats today.

Despite the postmodern condition’s cultural prevalence, a shift in sensibilities and perspective began in the late 1980s and continues today: the metamodernist movement. The artists who are attributed to metamodernism were educated under postmodernism’s influence; however, their contributions to art and theory depart from their predecessors’ agendas and ideologies. As these artists have come into their own literary successes, they have negotiated the complications of reality, truth, and meaning in postmodernism’s wake. Though postmodern theorists dismantled these concepts, their inheritors seek to reconstruct meaning, engagement, and sincerity in their works. Nicoline Timmer finds this regeneration unsurprising: “it is not unthinkable that after endless proposals for *deconstruction*, a desire to *construct* will break through” (*original emphasis* 21). This constructive break through has not come easily for those who have found themselves leading this new path out of postmodernism. Zadie Smith acknowledges that novelists—and she includes herself amongst them—“who came of age under postmodernity” are “naturally sceptical of the concept of authenticity, especially what is called ‘cultural authenticity’—after all, how can any of us be more of or less authentic than we are? We were taught that authenticity was meaningless”

²⁸ Examples include but are not limited to: Jack Kerouac’s Sal Paradise and Dean Moriarty from *On the Road*, Henry Chinaski from Charles Bukowski’s *Post Office*, Salinger’s world-famous Holden Caulfield from *The Catcher in the Rye*, Bret Easton Ellis’s Patrick Bateman from *American Psycho*, Billy Pilgrim, with his “so it goes,” from Kurt Vonnegut’s *Slaughterhouse-Five*, or *The Children’s Crusade: A Duty-Dance with Death*, you (the reader) in Italo Calvino’s *If on a winter’s night a traveler*, and Ambrose from John Barth’s short-story collection *Lost in the Funhouse*.

²⁹ In David Foster Wallace’s review of John Updike’s *Toward the End of Time* (1997), he describes Mailer, Updike, and Roth as “the Great Male Narcissists,” and concludes the review by pointing out that Ben Turnball’s—the protagonist of Updike’s newest novel—“unhappiness is obvious right from the novel’s first page. It never once occurs to him, though, that the reason he’s so unhappy is that he’s an asshole” (51, 59).

(n. pag.). Smith's negotiation of authenticity is complex because she believes that "writers have only one duty...the duty to express accurately their way of being in the world," and so the question becomes, if authenticity *is* meaningless, how do authors resurrect it, especially when considering that in order to accurately express your way of being in the world seems to demand an honest or at least less evasive expression of authenticity than those offered in postmodern literature (n. pag.)?

For many metamodernist writers, the rehabilitation of authenticity, sentimentality, the expression of feelings (versus the emphasis on the psyche in postmodern fiction) is done via metaxy/metaxis, not pastiche or irony, which were favored *modus operandi* throughout postmodern literature. Metamodernist authors frequently explore the middle ground, the in-between, or both/and ways of being in the world, yet they do not participate in this multiplicity with cynicism or mistrust. For David Foster Wallace, the resurrection of "literature's social mission, its ability to intervene in the social world, to have an impact on actual people and the actual social institutions in which they live their lives" comes down to choosing (McLaughlin 55). Wallace insists over and over again that we all get to choose our thoughts, our interpretations, and how we interact in the real world. In 2005, Wallace gave Kenyon College's commencement speech and what is now considered his life's philosophy:

"[L]et's talk about the single most pervasive cliché in the commencement speech genre, which is that a liberal arts education is no so much about filling you up with knowledge as it is about, quote, 'teaching you how to think.' [...] Probably the most dangerous thing about an academic education, at least in my own case, is that it enables my tendency to over-intellectualize stuff, to get lost in abstract thinking instead of simply paying attention to what's going on in front of me. [...] 'Learning

how to think' really means learning how to exercise some control over *how* and *what* you think. It means being conscious and aware enough to *choose* what you pay attention to and to *choose* how you construct meaning from experience. [...] The only thing that's capital-T True is that you get to decide how you're going to try to see it. This, I submit, is the freedom of real education, of learning how to be well-adjusted: You get to consciously decide what has meaning and what doesn't. (*original emphasis* 48-95)

Wallace's fiction upholds the same principle. In "Brief Interviews with Hideous Men," Wallace's narrator insists, "you can choose to be more if you want, you can choose to be a human being and have it mean something" (123). In *Infinite Jest*, the French spy, Marathe, says to his American counterpart, "But someone sometime let you forget how to choose, and what. Someone let your peoples forget it was the only thing of importance, choosing" (319). For the metamodernist, choosing equates to freedom and autonomy. Timmer observes that within the metadmodern engagement the ways in which one uses language is emphasized *over* language itself. Self-determination begins with the language we choose to use. Freedom and the application of freedom (i.e. choosing) exists when language-use "is governed by what language is used *for*, and this will differ from situation to situation (or from one cultural setting to another)" (*original emphasis* 34). Though Timmer acknowledges that "the self is mediated, structured in language," deconstruction maintains that language is dominant over the self (i.e. the language-user) does not remain within the metamodernist paradigm because "the focus is on language *use* and for that what is needed is a conception of the self as language user, or: as *storyteller*" (*original emphasis* 41). Language, meaning, and truth are once again made subject to the language-user, but instead

of meaning being definitive, empirical on the one hand or else relative, slippery on the other, meaning is chosen and created by the community engaging with it³⁰.

A reinvestment in meaning and truth is not a choice of naive idealism. Metamodern scholars often highlight the double binds riddled throughout metamodern literature and theories. Timotheus Vermeulen and Robin van den Akker describe metamodernism as a movement that “moves for the sake of moving, attempts in spite of its inevitable failure; it seeks forever for a truth that it never expects to find” (5). Although this may seem futile, it is a similar gesture to the moment an addict decides to trust in her ability to change her behaviors and attachments, and when practiced daily, this can ultimately lead to sobriety. And so, I would like to compare the metamodernist’s movement away from postmodern techniques and ideologies with the addict’s path toward recovery; both methods progress through a similar five-step process, which Gate Maté promotes and I have appropriated for the purposes of this thesis: relabel, reattribute, refocus, revalue, and recreate. Relabeling requires that you (re)describe “the addiction thought or urge for what it is, not mistaking it for reality” and in doing so “we give up the language of need” (377). Reattributing is the practice of acknowledging, “very clearly where that urge originated” and this step is “directly linked with compassionate curiosity toward the self” (378). Refocusing is quite literally what it sounds like: refocusing the mind on something else or as Maté puts it so simply: “find something else to do” so as to “teach your brain that it doesn’t have to obey the addictive call. It can exercise the ‘free won’t’³¹” (379). Revaluing asks that “you devalue the false gold”—the drug, the behavior—by recalling “why you’ve gone to all this trouble [to get sober].

³⁰ Wallace was highly influenced by Wittgenstein’s philosophy on language. Katrian Amian and Susanne Rohr draw much of their analysis of contemporary aesthetics and theoretical dynamics to Charles S. Peirce.

³¹ “Free won’t” contrasts free will.

The more clearly you see how things are, the more liberated you will be” (381). The final step—recreating—enables reconstruction, which includes recreating a new life, new habits, and new patterns of engagement. Maté insists that this final step is so important because “[t]he road to hell [i.e. addiction, obsession, postmodernism] is not paved with good intentions. It is paved with lack of intention” (384). With these five steps to wellbeing and health and well-adjustment in mind, I will explore these steps of recovery through three contemporary novels: Jonathan Safran Foer’s *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* (2005), Zadie Smith’s *White Teeth* (2000), and David Foster Wallace’s *Infinite Jest* (1996).

Chapter 4

“My life story is the story of everyone I’ve ever met”:

Trauma and the Self in *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close*

The characters in Foer’s second novel, *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close*, are set upon by trauma of various degrees: death, alienation, aphasia, loss of a parent/spouse/son in the September 11 terrorist attacks, “the prison house of language,”³² and loss of a pregnant girlfriend/sister in the bombing of Dresden. As Foer explores such devastating events, he manipulates words, emoticons, visual media, and narrative structures in a familiar postmodern fashion thereby demonstrating language’s limitations when one seeks to speak of suffering, grief, angst, and death. Trauma always demands a new aesthetic, new cadence, and/or new forms of expression³³ because the traditional mode(s) of communication are not habitually used to express such pain and suffering. Rachel Greenwald Smith observes that “[w]e look to trauma to offer opportunities for new ways of seeing and new ways of thinking, and we expect this upheaval in sensory, emotional, and intellectual experience to transform literature on the level of form,” which is seen throughout *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* (154). Foer transfigures the novel by emphasizing the inexpressible nature of violent

³² Termed by Frederic Jameson in *The Prison-House of Language: A Critical Account of Structuralism and Russian Formalism*.

³³ Consider the ways in which Gerard Manley Hopkins challenged poetic meter and language with his sprung rhythm and eccentric use of language, especially in his poems that address death, disasters (i.e. shipwreck of *SS Deutschland*), religious frustration, etc. Many WWI poets, like Wilfred Owen and Siegfried Sassoon, experimented with the poetic form with the abundant use of parhyme and assonance in order to express the terrors and psychological trauma of trench and chemical warfare. Even postmodern writers, like Heller and Vonnegut, experimented with the form and structure of the novel as a means to further convey the disorienting nature of trauma.

events via altering and experimenting with its form and structure. Oskar, the nine-year-old protagonist of the novel, and “the renter”/Grandfather struggles with the traditional narrative of I-tell-you-the-reader, so as they endeavor to more fully communicate their emotional interior, they embrace other ways of communicating with the reader. As much as these two characters tell you-the-reader, they also show you-the-reader via pages of photographs or images that emotionally affect them. Though the narrative incorporates both linguistic and pictographic communication, it is language that ultimately binds Oskar to his family and alleviates his emotional burdens. Contrary to deconstructionist suppositions—that language as a form of communication is unstable and therefore meaning is always deferred—Foer promotes the revaluing of language and recreates the space in literature to address emotions and feelings, even in the face of tragedies in human existence.

Despite Foer’s negotiation and reconstruction of deconstruction, metamodern theorists concede, to a certain extent, to the notion that definite meaning cannot be achieved through language; however, they recognize that much of contemporary fiction “now searches for the experience of emotion” (1). Katelyn Schoop’s conception of metamodernism accords with the definition promoted by the editors at *Notes on Metamodernism* who describe the movement as one that “oscillates, swings back and forth between the global and the local; between concept and material; between postmodern irony and a renewed modern enthusiasm...it strives for sincerity without lacking humour, it engages precisely by embracing doubt” (“Discussing Metamodernism” n. pag.). Doubt incites the individual to reach out of herself and her subjective experience to investigate and create room for those things that challenge her paradigm or those things that agitate her fear and anxiety. Metamodern authors, like Foer, shift their literary discourse toward broadening the reader’s

subjectivity so that it can³⁴ connect with another's subjectivity, thence "empathy becomes the site at which fiction's social purpose can be realized" (Schoop 2). Meaning is not solely dependent on words and signifiers; it can also be constructed through our ability to feel; to recognize another's feeling-state and identify a similar emotion or experience within oneself; and then to share one's story with another, therein experiencing connection with another person and to meaning. Connections are constructed across the inner-subjectivity of individuals and allow for inter-subjective associations based on common emotions and/or experiences. Meaning is as much an emotional process as an intellectual one; however, the emotional element in the construction of meaning has been largely ignored in the postmodern condition—both in its theory and its literature. Foer constructs meaning through emotional and linguistic devices, as much through the words he manipulates as the emotions he strives to elicit.

"I wanted to hear their heartbeats, and I wanted to hear mine": Finding Emotional Connection via Suffering

Foer's protagonist in *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close*, the nine-year-old Oskar Schell, is precocious, sensitive, and very sad. He describes his emotional dejection, which resulted from his father's death in the 9/11 terrorist attacks, as having "heavy boots." The

³⁴ The use of the subjunctive verb "can" here is intentional because it is ultimately the reader's choice to try to connect or try to identify with the Other—whether that be Foer's protagonist, Oskar Schell, or some other Real World person/ideology/experience, etc. The willingness to try to connect or to try to identify with drastically opposing worldviews or experiences is promoted by many metamodernist authors; however, in the Real World, this proves extraordinarily difficult. Simply consider the Right, Left, Center, Green, Liberal, Conservative Party's unwillingness to hear and acknowledge the reality of any other side during last year's presidential election season. This is a Real World example of how choosing one's thoughts and one's way of engaging is so hard because we often operate from a "default-setting," what DFW describes as a way of thinking that "tends to be so easy and automatic it doesn't *have* to be a choice. [...] It's the automatic, unconscious way that I experience the boring, frustrating, crowded parts of adult life when I'm operating on the automatic, unconscious belief that I am the center of the world and that my immediate needs and feelings are what should determine the world's priorities" (*original emphasis* 81-3).

novel begins with Oskar being self-consuming, biting towards his mother, and plagued by his decision to secretly delete the messages his father left on the family's answering machine while he was still alive in the World Trade Center on 9/11. Oskar is consumed by secrecy, guilt, shame, and alienation, and he thinks that he must protect his mother from all of these things. He convinces himself that "I couldn't tell her that I missed him *more*, more than she or anyone else missed him, because I couldn't tell her about what happened with the phone. That secret was a hole in the middle of me that every happy thing fell into" (*original emphasis* 71). In his secrecy and grief, Oskar consoles himself that he is sadder, more hurt than anyone else, even his mother; thereby, he spends much of the time thinking about himself. Oskar talks incessantly of his own trauma and feelings; he has trouble comprehending why anyone other than himself would have a reason to cry after the 9/11 terrorist attacks. His emotional education begins and matures through his quest to solve the mystery of the key labeled "Black" that he found in his father's closet after 9/11. When he visits the first location in the "Black" key adventure—Abby Black's townhouse—Abby begins to cry during their conversation. Oskar is baffled by her emotional breakdown: "I thought, I'm the one who's supposed to be crying," and when he uncomfortably tries to console her by telling her not cry, she asks "Why not?" to which he has no answer because he fails to ask her what is troubling her (96). One year after his father's death in the World Trade Center, it is unsurprising that Oskar is consumed by his grief. He is not interested in finding solace and connection with those around him, like Abby or his mother, because he persuades himself that learning the truth about the mysterious "Black" key will bring him closer to his father in some way and then he will then feel better. Poignantly, it is his obsession with the origin and purpose of the "Black" key that teaches him that grief is omnipresent. It is when Oskar

meets Mr. Black, a neighbor in his building, that Oskar grasps how truly connected humans are to one another and how emotionally isolated so many people are from those around them. Mr. Black tells Oskar that despite experiencing so much during his life, he had not left his apartment in twenty-four years. Oskar describes his emotional response to Mr. Black's seclusion the same way he describes his depression because of his father's death: "My boots were so heavy that I was glad there a column underneath us" (163). Yet, Oskar does not wallow in this melancholy, but instead considers how he could have communed with Mr. Black had he known of his solitude. Oskar thinks to himself, "How could such a lonely person have been living so close to me my whole life? If I had known, I would have gone up to keep him company" (163). As the novel concludes, Oskar strives to identify with many other individual emotional experiences. He even goes on to imagine everyone's (his own, his family's, NYC's, the reader's, etc.) sadness resulting from the 9/11 terrorist attacks. He discovers that his experience of loss and grief is not singular or unique; it occurs all around him, every day, to many people. Though we all do not necessarily share the same suffering-experience, humans suffer together, alongside one another, and so as Oskar journeys through his quest to find the answer to the mysterious key, he comes to realize that subjective experience is not insular on two accounts: firstly, Oskar realizes that the subjective experience of suffering is not particular to him and therefore unidentifiable to another human being. At some point in every individual's life, she too will experience at least one moment, although it is more likely that she will experience many moments, of suffering. Secondly, Oskar's experience of suffering is felt, informed, reacted to by those people and influences around him. His experience of suffering is informed by his mother's suffering and her reaction to it, as well as by Grandmother's and "the renter's"/Grandfather's interaction with

Oskar. His suffering is also informed by others' related experience of loss and grief: Shakespeare's Hamlet, the photograph of an elephant crying, and the many individual accounts of sadness that Oskar witnesses as he attempts to solve the "Black" key mystery.

The importance of interpersonal engagement and dialogue is pivotal to Oskar's transformation from solipsism to engagement—intimacy and empathy. Kristiaan Versluys notes that the men who assist Oskar in the quest are also in need of help and connection. She observes that A. R. Black, William Black, Stephan Hawking, and the "renter" (i.e. Grandfather) are "truly interlocutors, in that their sympathy for Oskar originates in the personal experience of suffering and deprivation" (118). Their ability to empathize with Oskar is due to their own experience(s) with suffering. Though words may prove clumsy or inadequate in expressing the character's individual grief and sympathy, they are able to traverse language's complications because the need to connect and to feel is of greater concern than needing words to mean exactly and precisely what they mean to say. Consequently, Oskar discovers that he can relate to these men's experiences just as they can empathize with his loss, and so his subjective paradigm is thereby amplified beyond himself: "Everyone could know what everyone else felt, and we could be more careful with each other" (163). Oskar finally realizes what is at the heart of metamodernist literature: empathy. It is only when Oskar digs up his father's grave with the "renter"/Grandfather, buries the unsent letters, and reconciles with his mother that he lets go of his obsession with the "Black" key mystery. At this point, Oskar sets aside his own grief so that he can reach out to his mother—his only remaining parent—whom he has kept an emotional and physical distance from until now:

“I told her, ‘It’s ok if you fall in love again.’³⁵

She said, ‘I won’t fall in love again.’

I told her, ‘I want you to.’

She kissed me and said, ‘I’ll never fall in love again.’

I told her, ‘You don’t have to make it up so I won’t worry.’

She said, ‘I love you.’

I rolled onto my side and listened to her walk back to the sofa.

I heard her crying. *I imagined* her wet tears. Her tired eyes” (*emphasis added* 324-25).

Oskar practices empathy here with his mother; he visualizes her grief, just as those he met along the “Black” key quest commiserated with him and his sorrow. Though Oskar struggles with expressing his anger, confusion, and depression after his father’s death, he finally bridges the verbal divide once he is enlightened as to the universal complexity of expression, meaning, and human emotion. In other word, Oskar begins to verbally communicate in a healthy, productive way about his feelings once he learns that others also struggle with expressing their suffering and grief. Oskar imitates the behavior of those who shared their stories with him by talking with his mother and Grandfather about his feelings surrounding his father’s death. His thoughts and feelings are no longer limited to the reader’s knowledge; he reveals his subjective experience to his family via words (i.e. talking honestly and openly with this mother) and physical expressions (i.e. crying, hugging, etc.). Although language often falls short of expressing the glorious highs and torturous lows of the human

³⁵ At the beginning of the novel, Oskar thinks that his mother is being courted by her friend Ron and this assumption creates resentment and fear in Oskar—resentment and fear that his father is being replaced by another man in his mother’s heart.

experience, it remains the best medium we have—that Oskar has—for telling others know what we are thinking, how we are feeling, and connecting and reconciling with one another. Foer rejects the postmodern disillusionment with language and truth. Instead, language or communication is rendered a “welcome problem, because once overcome it unites rather than diffuses” (Feßler n. pag.). Much as Oskar learns to connect with others via their shared experience of loss or suffering, Foer petitions the reader to find similar connections to the characters and with others in the real world. Foer shrewdly transitions from a postmodern semantic play (photographs, Morse-code, inserted edit marks, empty pages of Grandfather’s inexpressible thoughts and feelings, phrases like “I was already out of words when I met your mother,” etc.) into a metamodernist refrain of authentic engagement via a child-narrator who desperately seeks to understand the “Stuff That Happened To Me” (28, 52). Oskar’s need to narratively process the death of his father and the trauma of 9/11 is helpful, even necessary, because “the way we talk about our selves, and structure our sense of self by constructing our life stories, is most important” (Timmer 27). Foer explores Oskar’s attempt to make sense of who he is and what it means to be a human being under devastating circumstances, and to the extent that he resolves the question within the novel, he demonstrates the human need of others—family, friends, mentors, elders, and community—and the necessity to share and connect with them.

9/11 and Hiroshima: Local and Global Narratives of Violence and Loss

Foer not only implies the need for meaning on an interpersonal level, he extends this necessity into an international stratum. In Chapter 1, metamodernism is noted to be a balance between global and local concerns. This duality is woven throughout *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* as Foer demonstrates a mindfulness of war, violence, and trauma

both at home on American soil and across the seas. Foer expounds on the victimization of United States during 9/11 when he tells Oskar's story, but he also depicts the bombings of Dresden and Hiroshima—catastrophes comprised of American involvement and which created thousands of victims. Oskar's suffering is surpassed by the horror detailed in Grandpa's narrative and the transcription of the female survivor of Hiroshima. Though *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* is not a political novel, *per se*, Foer implores the reader to become conscious of how governments, armies, and citizens of nation-states affect one another—interpersonally, interculturally, and transnationally. For his class project, Oskar plays a recorded interview of a woman named Tomoyasu about her experience of the atomic bombing of Hiroshima. The carnage detailed is gut-wrenching: “[I] saw one of my neighbors standing almost naked. His skin was peeling off all over his body. It was hanging from his fingertips” (187). After the explosion, Tomoyasu saw many people in need of medical care and attention—“Many of them were lying on the ground. They were calling for their mothers and asking for water”—but in her desperate attempt to find her daughter, Masako, she does not stop to aid them (188). When Tomoyasu finds her daughter, there is nothing she can do for her: “There were maggots in her wounds and a sticky yellow liquid. I tried to clean her up. But her skin was peeling off. The maggots were coming out all over. I couldn't wipe them off, or I would wipe off her skin and muscle” (188-9). Oskar's choice of subject for his class project seems disturbing and grotesque for a boy of his age. Though he claims to find the physical and chemical reaction of the A-bomb “fascinating,” Tomoyasu's narrative does not mention any of the scientific aspects of the explosion (189). Tomoyasu's narrative is one of fear, horror, loss, and sorrow. The inclusion of Japan's national trauma is a narrative strategy that enables Foer to draw “9/11 into conversation with other, older collective

traumata,” and such conversation “suggests an attempt to engage in the pain of others and to consider the myriad ways in which global power structures implicate one’s own vulnerability in that of others” (Saal 455). Though Oskar is still learning how to engage with the pain of others, Tomoyasu’s narrative resonates with him. Just as Oskar’s father disappeared from his life—even his father’s body is absent³⁶—Tomoyasu’s daughter dissipates before her eyes. As Oskar’s experience parallels that of Tomoyasu’s experience—both lose a family member at an unnatural time in their life³⁷ and in devastating ways—Foer allows the particular-narrative³⁸—or the local narrative—to depict the national suffering and communal grief of two countries across different time periods after destructive events.

“Everyone was losing everyone”: With the Loss of Language Comes the Loss of Connection

The traumas of World War II are much nearer to Oskar’s familial history than he is aware. Grandfather and Grandmother Schell survived the bombing of Dresden when they were young adults. They cope with their loss and suffering very differently, yet they both extend their trauma of the past into the present. Grandfather ceases to speak. He writes to his son—Oskar’s father—and explains that his “silence overtook me like a cancer, it was one of my first meals in America, I tried to tell the waiters ‘The way you just handed me that knife, that reminds me of—’ but I couldn’t finish the sentence, her name wouldn’t come” (16). Grandfather did not lose Grandmother in the bombing of Dresden, but he lost Grandmother’s sister, Anna. He lost words one at a time, starting with “Anna” then “and” and “want,” until

³⁶ When Oskar digs up his father’s grave with Grandfather, he confesses, “I was surprised again, although I shouldn’t have been. I was surprised that Dad wasn’t there. In my brain I knew he wouldn’t be, obviously, but I guess my heart believed something else” (321).

³⁷ In Tomoyasu’s case, the daughter dies before her mother; in Oskar’s case, the father dies when his son is still a child.

³⁸ This harkens back to James Joyce’s aphorism: “In the particular is contained the universal.”

he could no longer speak words at all. According to Sien Uytterschout and Kristiaan Versluys, Grandfather's aphasia "testifies to an unwillingness to cope with his traumatic past" (222). Grandfather believes and says that suffering is infinite: "The end of suffering does not justify the suffering, and so there is no end to suffering" (33). Unlike Oskar, Grandfather does not or cannot work through his experiences, and so he processes his emotional disturbances by acting out physically. While refusing to use his voice, Grandfather instead uses his inked hands or pen and paper. He keeps the past and present at a distance because "[u]sing language suggests at least some form of coming to terms or comprehension" with his experiences or his reality³⁹, "and that is what Thomas [i.e. Grandfather] wants to avoid at all costs" (Uytterschout and Versluys 222). Grandfather does not want to come to terms or comprehend leaving his family to find Anna while the city of Dresden burned; "the dead and dying people" who were being trampled in streets; a woman running with a silent baby in her arms⁴⁰; shooting animal after animal that had escaped the zoo; hearing, seeing, and smelling the people being consumed by the flames so that they were "standing in the molten, burning streets like living torches, screaming for help that was impossible to give" (211-14). How could language ever adequately describe such terrors? In Grandfather's case the inadequacy of language is moot. His psyche does not or cannot process the events via language because language is how the individual processes, relates, and ultimately accepts her reality. Denying the use of one's voice—i.e. communicating one's experience, emotions, or reality—is a form of denying one's lived-experience. Though

³⁹ Pia Mellody defines reality as having four components: one's body ("how we look and how our bodies are operating"), one's thinking ("how we give meaning to incoming data"), one's feelings ("our emotions"), and one's behavior ("what we do or don't do") (22).

⁴⁰ Through the chaos and horrors of the bombings, Grandfather remembers that "through the sounds of collapsing buildings I hear the roar of that baby's silence" (213).

Grandfather's rejection of language differs from postmodern theorists' mistrust of language, the avoidance of investing in language—in its ability to assist the individual in expressing him/herself—is similar. If there is always a separation between the “sentence meaning” and “speaker's meaning,” which is the foundation of deconstruction's distrust of language, then Grandfather's abstinence from language-use takes deconstruction one step further. If the individual's use of words and sentences is at best slippery in the every-day world of mundane communication, then what service is language to the individual who has experienced the inexpressible?

Grandmother has no trouble speaking. She talks with Oskar throughout the novel about love and pain. Grandmother's chapters resemble a journal account of her lived-experiences, and though her narrative is presented to the reader, in the reality of the novel the pages are blank. Grandmother's effort to write her story proves futile because Grandfather had pulled the ribbon from her typewriter⁴¹ and only later realized she could not even see the pages. The action of sabotaging his wife's story and her use of written language as a tool to give witness to her life parallels deconstruction's and post-structuralism's efforts to destabilize the creation of meaning via language and narratives. As poststructuralism decenters the author—Barthes even goes so far as to call for the death of the author—Grandfather removes Grandmother as the author of her narrative in that he quite literally takes away the medium her narrative is transmitted. Much as poststructuralism insists that narratives should be informed by things outside of the text and not the text's creator, Grandfather insists that Grandmother (the author) have no text at all. Grandmother becomes

⁴¹ In one of Grandfather's chapters, he confesses, “years before I had pulled the ribbon from the machine, it had been an act of revenge against the typewriter and against myself...as if it would protect me from my actual life. But worse...I realized that your mother couldn't see the emptiness, she couldn't see anything” (124).

a symbol of the dead author on two separate counts. Firstly, her narrative as presented by Foer could be put through a poststructuralist analysis thereby dismissing the identity of the author (i.e. Grandmother), and secondly, her role of author is negated by Grandfather's action of removing the ink strip from the type-writer. Grandmother's narrative technically does not exist because Grandfather removes the ink that should but never will meet the page⁴². Sociologists James Holstein and Jaber Gubrium assert, contrary to poststructuralist theories, that "[p]ersonal accounts are built up from experience, differently combined, and actively cast in *preferred* vocabularies, even while this is sensitive to the circumstances" (*emphasis added* 103-4). Individual or local narratives, like Grandmother's "insinuate themselves to construct diversity and difference in the stories that emerge," which is why Grandfather and Grandmother's narrative about their childhood, the bombing of Dresden, and their present reality differ. Though they both experienced the same traumatic event and shortly after immigrating to the U.S., their individual stories provide an example of the diversity of narrative mentioned by Holstein and Gubrium. Though individuals are influenced by institutions, power structures, and cultural majorities, "the technology of self construction extends *beyond* the institutional apparatus that designate subjectivities into the integral everyday interpretive work *done to locally construct who and what we are*"

⁴² Which is an interesting extension of the poststructuralist argument because if we were to literally remove an author from the text, for intense if we were to completely wipe out any traces of Jonathan Safran Foer from the world as we know it, then the text too would need to be dismissed as it is an artifact of the person. The author's name is a part of the paratext of the physical form of the novel. Zadie Smith analyzes the predicament of poststructuralism by comparing Barthes to Nabokov, and I for one find that she favors Nabokov's theory. As Smith details Barthes's "Death of the Author," she observes that "Nabokov refused to lie down and die," and perhaps one reason for this is because "Nabokov saw the Author as the very principle of individualized Western freedom" (46-7). Oddly enough, Barthes "saw precisely the same thing, but didn't like it" (47). Smith finds that "Nabokov asks that we admit it is the author's gift in the design, rather than our gift at connecting the dots, that is truly meaningful, and meaning producing. No matter how I try to slot them together, Nabokov goes a certain way along with Barthes and no further. Reading is creative! Insists Barthes. Yes, but writing creates, replies Nabokov, smoothly, and turns back to his note cards. Maybe we can say that Nabokov makes his readers so very creative that we are liable to feel that we ourselves have made something" ("Rereading Barthes and Nabokov" 54).

(*emphasis added* 104). Grandmother's writing is her individual, or "local," interpretation of who she is, what she has lived through, and her feelings⁴³. Grandmother believes that the pages she has written are her gift or contribution to bear witness to her account of history and her life after she is gone.

Surmounting Our Boundaries: The Universalizing Nature of Foer's Novel

One of the most interesting aspects of Foer's second novel is that the protagonist's family are German-American immigrants. Foer is a Jewish-American; his first novel centers of the Holocaust and is a fictional account of his actual journey to Eastern Europe to explore his ancestral roots. Foer writes empathetically about a nationality that sought to demolish his familial roots in World War II. He negotiates the interaction between offenders and victims inside and outside of his literature; an intercourse that is, "unthinkable in postmodern world where we tend to experience the story through the victim's eyes" (Feßler n. pag.). Foer chooses to identify with the German casualties of WWII by depicting the trauma and repression experienced by Oskar's grandparents, and consequently, how their suppression affects later generations. Versyluys notes that by contrasting victims of different nationalities and different wars, *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* "universalizes grief" (n. pag). When Oskar and the reader are repeatedly presented with the suffering every individual, family, community, and country experiences, Foer emphasizes the overarching event of grief that serves as the common denominator of all human beings. Metamodern theories seek to overcome postmodernism and deconstruction's dismantling of language so that authors and readers can once again reinvest in language and in our own ability to express our sentiments, thus leaving behind cynicism and chagrin. Metamodern theorists recognize

⁴³ Which is the title of her first chapter.

the need for a verbalization of the anxieties and limitations humans feel due to the nature of language as well as the overwhelming sublimity of life's ordeals without the plunge into fatalism generated from deconstructive premises. Our investment in words and language must not be abandoned because of its deficiencies. Wallace "explicitly calls for, and questions the possibility of, a kind of writing that could learn from the linguistic and aesthetic insights of the post-moderns while retaining the traditional meaning of fiction, which he describes as exploring 'what it feels like to be a fucking human being'" (McAdams 5)⁴⁴. Foer takes this investigation of what it feels like to be a human being to the extreme as he analyzes human suffering; an emotion that every individual will experience in life. In *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close*, he writes about a subject that is inherently universal, and he does so while bringing Oskar outside of his isolated and alienated subjectivity.

⁴⁴ Wallace quote can be found in the 1993 interview with Larry McLaffery in the *Review of Contemporary Fiction*.

Chapter 5

“People making a connection across continents, across seas”:

Redevising Immigrant Relationships in Zadie Smith’s *White Teeth*

“Every moment happens twice: inside and outside,
And they are two different histories.”
Zadie Smith, *White Teeth*

Our children will be born of our actions. Our actions
will become their destinies. Oh, the actions will
remain. It is a simple matter of what you will do when
the chips are down, my friend. When the fat lady is
singing. When the walls are falling in, and the sky
is dark, and the ground is rumbling. In that moment
our actions will define us. And it makes no difference
whether you are being watched by Allah, Jesus,
Buddha, or whether you are not.
Zadie Smith, *White Teeth*

Zadie Smith’s first novel, *White Teeth*, follows the lives of two families—the Iqbal and the Jones family—from the early 1900s through the 1990s. Whereas Foer’s *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* rifts off postmodern gimmicks while (re)embracing modernist sentiments, Smith’s novel more closely resembles the modernist works of E. M. Foster than the postmodern works of, say, Julian Barnes or Salman Rushdie. Satirical humor and sincerity operate through Smith’s first novel. Nick Bentley compares Smith’s *White Teeth* to Julian Barnes’s *England England* (1998) and asserts that Smith’s novel “engages more openly with the debates around Englishness and multiculturalism and attempts to offer a reframed model of national identity” (123). While Barnes—whom I consider a thoroughly postmodern writer—employs “a philosophical deconstruction of the premises and assumptions on which our understanding of Englishness has traditionally rested,” Smith approaches the conception of Englishness with a metamodernist approach as she “attempt[s] to *construct a*

new model of Englishness that is suited to the country's multicultural makeup at the beginning of the twenty-first century" (*emphasis added* Bentley 485). Smith's new model of Englishness insists that colonizers are just as influenced by the colonized people—like the Iqbals—as the colonized are affected by the colonizers—like the Chalfens. The relation between the colonizer and colonized is not dichotomized in *White Teeth* as much as the relation is shown to be more nuanced than a binary system. The relationships in the novel, especially those between the Iqbal and Jones families, are complex so that the colonize/colonized relation is more synthesized. In a parallel analysis to Bentley's, Mara Maticevic contrasts *White Teeth* with Salam Rushdie's postcolonial novels and observes, "While Rushdie's postmodern subject was nomadic, rootless, and always differing from any designated identity...she [Smith] is very keen to describe subjects as an integral part of their social, cultural, and historical surroundings. [...] Smith's characters are always part of something that forms them: an immigrant group, a London suburb, or most importantly, a family" (n. pag.). *White Teeth* demonstrates that, while immigrant citizens may seem nomadic or rootless, they in actuality participate and contribute to the families, communities, and culture(s) in which they live. Certain predominate postmodern theories and literatures emptied out the position of the subject, but metamodernist authors, like Smith, resurrect the conception of a subjective self by examining the individual in relation to others. The association between the individual and others is central to the metamodernist aesthetic, as Timmer states, "the self in these [metamodern] texts needs *others*. Feelings...are not 'private' and 'inner' but neither are they 'free floating'; they are *inter-personal*" (*original emphasis* 45). As I explore the metamodern workings in *White Teeth*, I limit my focus to the Iqbal family and will later concentrate on Millat Iqbal. Millat is the novel's representation of

addiction, the postmodern condition, and the cynical, paranoid self. Millat's familial and social environments greatly affect him; he adapts to his circumstances with traditional postmodern disengagement and mistrust. Despite these antics, Smith's rendition of the pessimistic, aggressive, and addicted Millat counters the typical postmodern narrative in that she emphasizes Millat's relation to other people. Irene Pérez Fernández finds that *White Teeth* "concentrates on how a multiethnic society affected and was reflected in the space of family" (154). Smith's novel of interpersonal and social relations harkens back to modernist works and themes⁴⁵; her characters' subjective experiences are depicted and contextualized in respect to their relationships—familial, communal, cultural, and historical. In exploring *Millat Iqbal*, a kind of postmodern character being played out in a metamodern novel, I examine the Iqbal family dynamics beginning with Samad Iqbal's negotiation of being a migrant in the colonizer's country, which is the seed of the Iqbal's rootlessness and what instigates much of *Millat Iqbal*'s emotional suffering.

The Colonized in the Colonizer's World: the Iqbal Father & Sons

Samad Iqbal immigrates to England from Bangladesh sometime in his early 20s. He completes his secondary education in India and then serves in the British Army during World War II. During his unit's deployment to Eastern Europe, Samad serves with Archie Jones, who will remain his closet friend. As their mission drags on and the men see no actions, Samad begins to complain. Whereas Archie is grateful for the absence combat, Samad's attitude festers. He rants that his education and training should have granted him a more prestigious position and opportunities; any such advancement was withheld from Samad because of his previously crippled right arm. He believes that because he was educated and

⁴⁵ Themes such as connection, the individual in the urban city, alienation, etc.

trained that he should be “soaring with the Royal Airborne Force, shelling from on high!” (74). Samad’s idea of masculinity and heroism are informed by his great-grandfather, Mangal Pande—one of the Indian soldiers who led the Indian rebellion in 1857. His grandfather’s legacy of bravery during combat drives Samad to follow in his footsteps. For Samad, “there was no stronger evocation of the blood that ran through him, and the ground which that blood had stained over the centuries, then the story of his great-grandfather” (84). The need to uphold one’s familiar legacy was not uncommon for many soldiers from Britain’s colonies. Ashley Dawson remarks, “As was true for many soldiers from the colonies, his [Samad’s] quest for glory in the European war is motivated primarily by his desire to sustain family honor” (157). Though Samad venerates the legend of his great-grandfather and the Indian mutiny against the British, he immigrates to the very country that Pande and India resisted. Thus, Samad’s life remains in a state of conflict between his cultural heritage—familial lineage, Bangladeshi homeland, Islamic faith and practices—and the Western society in which he lives and raises his family. Dawson observes that Samad comes to realize that “he has become a mimic man, a colonial subject attempting to conform to the contradictory dictates of assimilation set out by the empire” (159). And because Samad assimilates into the empire instead of opposing it, he does not live up to Mangal Pande’s measure of heroism and masculinity.

Not only does Samad grapple with assimilation on a socio-historical level, he struggles to support his family financially. In London after WWII, Samad works as a waiter in his uncle’s restaurant while his wife, Alsana, works as a seamstress for an S&M clothing shop. Their economic position in England is tenuous at best, especially once the couple must provide and care for their twin sons, Magid and Millat. When Samad must ask his uncle for

a raise in order to support his growing family and is denied, he feels ashamed and emasculated. His inability to prosper and succeed in England is detrimental to Samad's concept of self because, not only has he assimilated with the culture and country that his great-grandfather resisted but he can barely make his own way in England. Samad, like many colonial soldiers, "internalized the values and social codes set out for them by the British Empire of the past," but once the war was won and Samad endeavored to make a life for himself in the empire's capital state, Samad—and others—confront the fact that they now possess "confused masculinities in search of a cultural identity and a life *they have been promised as men* in a society that was so committed to patriarchal values during the establishment of an imperialist regime" (*emphasis added* Beukema 3). To exert some control over his disorientated reality, Samad imposes his will upon his family and home in a similar manner as the British Empire subjected the colonial peoples; the more he believes that or "feels [that] his own identity fragmenting, the more Samad insists on imposing a rigidly conceived ethic and religious identity on his sons" (Dawson 162-3). Alsana, remarks that her children will always be caught up with the past because of their father: "they will always have daddy-long-legs for their fathers. One leg in the present, one in the past. [...] Their roots will always be tangled. And roots get dug up" (68). Magid and Millat grow up with tangled roots because Samad transposes the past into the present in detrimental ways: he sends Magid to Bangladesh to grow up in the Iqbal-Bangladeshi tradition and culture while Millat remains with his mother and father in England so that Samad can keep a close eye on his more wayward son. Jennifer J. Gustar observes that "[t]he repetition of heroic masculinity, its relationship to imperialism, colonialism and violence, reveals the hollowness at the core and causes Samad to repeat and repeat his genealogy in his attempt to be whole, to

be seen” (336). Samad cannot control the fundamental aspects of his life—social standing, economic stability or advancement, the children’s education, his family’s religious devotion, etc.—and his attempts to govern his life are influenced by the power structures he knows—domination, annexation/division, and violence. His callous, cruel actions hurt the Iqbal family, especially Magid and Millat, and they also hurt Samad himself. As his (re)actions become more extreme, he begins to repress the emotional responses he feels. When he kidnaps Magid and quietly takes him to Heathrow airport to board the plane for Bangladesh, the narrator reveals that this event “will be history that Samad tries not to remember. That his memory makes no effort to retain. A sudden stone submerged” (174). Samad suppresses the reality and consequences of his patriarchal actions. As his relationship with his wife unravels, Samad must continually rationalize and defend his conduct so that he continually validates his decisions and actions thus, in some sense, maintains his control over an unmanageable life. Samad reacts to much of his life from a place of fear and shame: fear of actually being the “sad little man” that his younger co-worker described him to be and the shame of not living up to his own expectations. As Samad resists the forces that he believes are corrupting his family and prosperity, he brings sorrow to those who could give him solace, love, and belonging: his wife and children.

Smith’s “juvenile delinquent...determined to beat the rest”: The Upbringing of the Millat Iqbal

Millat Iqbal grows up in a volatile home with two immigrant parents, who both negotiate raising a family in a foreign land, toil to sustain themselves financially, and create a home and community in London, England. From a young age, it is evident that Millat is incorrigible while his older twin brother, Magid, is amendable. Millat is social and

rebellious; Magid is intellectual and quiet. Though the twins diverge in physical, emotional, and intellectual ways, their souls and fates are bound together. Despite their differences, the novel concludes with both boys being charged for the crime of trying to assassinate a genetic scientist. Much as Oskar in *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* processes the pain and anger he feels after his father's abrupt death, in *White Teeth* Millat navigates the emotional distress of growing up in a toxic environment and his subsequent upheaval after Magid is covertly sent to Bangladesh. The home in which Millat grows up, for the majority of the time without his brother, undermines his sense of love and belonging, and as Millat matures into adolescence, his repressed emotions come out as aggression, blame, and detachment. Because the twins have been separated so dramatically and without warning, Millat's sense of family and stability is forever disturbed. He is described as "schizophrenic," with "one foot in Bengal and one in Willesden. In his mind he was as much there as he was here. He did not require a passport to live in two places at once, he needed no visa to live his brother's life and his own" (183). The severing of Millat's family is not due to overt power structures—i.e. the British Empire, Fascist political regimes that split apart families, or capitalist industries that entice mothers and fathers to leave their children to financially provide for them by working in another country. The aggressor to the Iqbal family unit lies much closer to home; Samad is more damaging to the Iqbal family's daily lives than the power structures that postmodern theorists, like Foucault, exposed. The Iqbal family is defenseless against Samad's whims, and though Alsana and Millat argue and rail against Samad, he remains a daunting force in their lives. Millat grows up, not only sensing that his life exists in two places because his other-half lives in Bangladesh, but that he is not valued and loved by his remaining family members. With the absence of belonging with the very people who should

love and embrace him, Millat seeks refuge in an extremist group that conflates his desire to be both Eastern and Western, to feel strong and dynamic in the community he lives in, and to be embraced as a brother—a member of a family—that he is so desperately desires and needs. Much as the Bengali life is cut off to Millat (and he is literally disconnected from Magid), his family-life and youth in London are tumultuous. He does not have access to his family's heritage, to the Bengali culture that his brother experiences, so Millat seeks an alternative: KEVIN—Keepers of the Eternal and Victorious Islamic Nation, an extremist political group operating in London. Millat's reliance on outside stimuli to feel relief, comfort, and acceptance is not an unexpected reaction for one so young and indignant. His patterns of addiction are not limited to one medium; he is sexually unrestrained, he smokes marijuana, he drinks copiously, and finally, he seeks refuge with a fanatical group. Underneath active vice lies Millat's suffering, and although his reckless behavior brings about more pain, the seat of his pain resides in his familial relations and history. Before delving in to Millat's recruitment by KEVIN, it is important to understand how and why he turns to radical behavior and communities in his adolescence.

Before Millat falls victim to KEVIN's propaganda, he acts out his insecurities and fears via a cynical, callous attitude. He idealizes the Western entertainment industry's image of the Hollywood gangster⁴⁶ and inner-city thug life⁴⁷. Smith thus depicts Millat as a young man who wants to be “hip” and “cool” in term of the Western culture that he knows. Smith

⁴⁶ Once Millat is promoted through KEVIN's ranks, he becomes “their greatest asset, he was in the forefront, the first into battle come jihad, cool as fuck in a crisis, a man of action, like Brando, like Pacino, like Liotta” (368).

⁴⁷ Millat and his friends have a kind of uniform: “They each dripped gold and wore a bandana...The trousers were enormous, swamping things, the left leg always inexplicably rolled up to the knee; the sneakers were equally spectacular, with tongues so tall they obscured the entire ankle...And they walked in a very particular way, the left side of their bodies assuming a kind of loose paralysis that needed carrying along by the right side; a kind of glorified, funky limp like the slow, padding movement that Yeats imagined for his rough millennial beast” (193).

certainly does not depict Millat as a psychopathic, crazed terrorist from an isolated Islamic community—Millat has a community, albeit an imprudent one, in England—rather she depicts his familial life as one of judgement, abuse, and neglect⁴⁸. Although he joins an extremist group, his character up to the end of the novel is more insubordinate and immature than extreme. He is a young man struggling to find a place where he is accepted, praised, and loved. The fact that he does not know what love and belonging is—he even pushes it away when it is offered to him—does not negate his yearning for it. Upon meeting Millat for the first time, Mrs. Joyce Chalfen perceives that within him “there was a deeper sadness, a terrible loss, a gaping wound. A hole that needed more than education or money. That needed love” (270). She tries to encourage, support, and mentor Millat, but instead of accepting the love she offers, he exploits her generosity. For although Mrs. Chalfen offers love and affection, she does not extend the offer of belonging to Millat; she treats him more like social experiment than a human being whose emotions are quite raw. Katina Rogers perceptively points out that Mrs. Chalfen is “the most explicit and ludicrous promotion of hybridity” within the novel because, “while Joyce is tremendously proud of her own experimentation in hybridization⁴⁹ and is outwardly fascinated by Millat and Irie Jones—a childhood friend and daughter of Archie Jones—because of their multicultural backgrounds, she does not seem to trust that they are in fact ‘better able to cope’ with their situations and insists on trying to patch things up” (56). Millat accepts Mrs. Chalfen’s care, concern, and

⁴⁸ As will be detailed later in this chapter, Samad judges and criticizes Millat sharply; Magid and Millat witness the physical abuse Samad inflicts on Alsana; and Samad and Alsana neglect Millat’s emotional and psychological nurturing, especially after Magid is sent to Bangladesh.

⁴⁹ In one of her publications, Mrs. Chalfen wrote, “The fact is, cross-pollination produces more varied offspring, which are better able to cope with a changed environment. [...] If my one-year-old is anything to go by (a cross-pollination between a lapsed-Catholic horticulturalist feminist and an intellectual Jew!)” (258).

open pocketbook. He allows her to trip over her liberal ideologies without berating her⁵⁰, but he only allows her into his life to a point. His interactions with Mrs. Chalfen are both vulnerable and cruel. One day he arrives at the Chalfen house to find the door open and he reproaches Mrs. Chalfen by threatening, “One day somebody’s going to wander in here and murder the fucking lot of you,” and then sits at the table, “with violence and eyes that looked like they had recently seen tears” (274-5). The pain within Millat expresses itself as anger and hate. When Millat realizes how comfortable the Chalfen family is, he considers their money to be “lazy money, money that was just hanging around this family not doing anything in particular, money in need of a good cause that might as well be him,” he should capitalize on the Chalfen bounty (268). Much as the drug addict will hustle for any amount of money with which to score a hit, Millat shakes down Mrs. Chalfen for money while keeping her tenderness and offer of nurturing at a distance. He cannot accept Mrs. Chalfen’s care and affection, though he longs for it, so he instead engages with her generosity by exploiting it.

Millat’s dismissal of love may seem cruel and self-defeating; however, his rejection of love is unsurprising given the environment he grew up in. Not only does Millat experience trauma during his childhood when his father dissects the family, before Magid is sent away, the boys witness the violence of their parent’s abusive relationship. Samad and Alsana frequently argue to the point of physical altercations, yet “they always *held* each other after these fights, a hug somewhere between affection and collapse” (*emphasis added* 167).

⁵⁰ When Mrs. Chalfens asks where Millat and Irie Jones are from, Millat answers that he lives in Willesden; after which she qualifies she question: “‘but where *originally*?’

‘Oh,’ said Millat, putting on what he called a bud-bud-ding-ding accent. ‘You are meaning where from am I *originally*.’

Joyce looked confused. ‘Yes, *originally*.’

‘Whitechapel,’ said Millat, pulling out a fag. ‘Via the Royal London Hospital and the 207 bus’” (265).

Samad and Alsana set the example for the twins of how men and women, husbands and wives, interact, and more importantly, what the nature of love is. Their violent actions and spiteful words all indicate that love is strife with a winner and a loser. Millat and Magid are so accustomed to their parents' rows that they bet on who will win:

“‘Abba’ said Magid, after surveying the state of play for a moment. ‘Definitely Abba.’

‘Cha, man. No way,’ said Millat, blinking in the light. ‘I bet you two orange lollies Amma’s going to kick the shit out of him.’

‘Oooooooo!’ cried the twins in unison, as if it were a firework display, and then ‘Aaaaaah!’

Alsana had just ended the fight with a little help from the garden rake” (*original emphasis* 167).

One of the primary motivating factors that causes addiction is adverse childhood experiences (ACEs), as was detailed in chapter two. An abusive family home, which Millat grows up and learns about relationships in, negatively affects him as a child. If the environment is not ameliorated, the residual effects are debilitating. Millat cannot fully embrace the kindness of Mrs. Chalfen, the friendship and romantic interest of Irie, nor the love given by his girlfriend, Karin, because his lived-experience has proven to him that love is violent and painful. For Millat, the vulnerability that love demands from those who engage in it is not worth the cost, and his sense of self—underneath his cocksure attitude—fears the exposure of being seen for what he is: a young boy living a life without love in a home with a family that offers little love yet a plentitude of disparagement.

As he becomes more influenced and involved with KEVIN, Millat pushes those closest to him away. He challenges his father, instigates arguments in the Iqbal home, and lashes out at Irie. He trades one set of attachments and addictions for another. He grows up consuming and idolizing Hollywood's gangsters, yet when KEVIN insists the Millat submit to their doctrine, he diffidently complies:

he knew, he *knew* that if you wanted an example of the *moribund, decadent, degenerate, oversexed, violent state of Western capitalist culture and the logical endpoint of its obsession with personal freedoms* (Leaflet: *Way Out West*), you couldn't do much better than Hollywood cinema. And he knew (how many times had he been through it with Hifan?) that the 'gangster' movie, the Mafia genre, was the worst example of that. And yet...it was the *hardest* thing to let go. He would give every spliff he'd ever smoked and every woman he'd ever fucked to retrieve the films his mother had burned, or even the few he had purchased more recently that Hifan had confiscated (*original emphasis* 368).

Giving up his hybridity, his entwined Western and Eastern affiliations, is difficult for Millat. He identifies with the macho, hustle and rule that the Hollywood gangster videos portray in men. The same way that Samad idolizes his great-grandfather so too does Millat look up to the Hollywood bravados, and, for him, forsaking one's hero is difficult, even painful. As Millat says, he would give up any of these other vices to hold on to these films. Taryn Beukema finds that as each of the young males in White Teeth—Magid, Millat, and even Joshua—begin to devote themselves to causes that they believe “will help him define to others who he is,” and in this way “the boys are being taught the same values their fathers are committed to, creating feelings of loss in the children who were once capable of straddling

the boundaries between cultures” (8-9). Millat aligns himself with the radical religious aspects of his culture in Britain, which is unsurprising for this is the very subject that Samad emphasizes: “When you get to my age, you become...concerned about your faith, you don’t want to leave things too late. I have been corrupted by England...Maybe I have thought intellect more important than faith” and “My son [Magid] is for God, not men. He is fearful of his duty. He is not fearful to be a real Bengali, a proper Muslim” and “If Allah says there will be storm, there will be storm. If he says earthquake, it will be earthquake. Of course it has to be! That is the very reason I sent the child [Magid] there—to understand that essentially we are weak, that we are not in control” (120-2, 179, 240). What Samad does not realize is that Millat internalizes what he hears from his father, believes it, and acts on it.

Millat’s continued indoctrination into KEVIN causes him to become distant and paranoid towards his current girlfriend, Karina. He begins to verbally and emotionally abuse Karina, much like Samad victimizes Alsana. Millat criticizes and shames her after reading KEVIN’s literature about Western sexuality. He scorns her attire and even insults her sexual responses to him: “When they made love, he said, ‘Don’t do that...don’t offer it to me like a whore. Haven’t you heard of unnatural acts? Besides, I’ll take it if I want it—and why can’t you be a lady, don’t make all that noise!’” (309). Although KEVIN may exacerbate Millat’s anger and shame, the example of domestic violence lives inside the Iqbal home. After arguing, Millat and his girlfriend end their relationship, and he represses his memories of her even though “she liked him. [...] And she looked after him when he was down and he looked after her too, in his own way...She seemed distant now, like the conker fights and childhood. And that was that” (311). Millat represses this painful memory and the reality of how/why their relationship dissolved just like Samad buries his memory of sending Magid away by

himself in the Heathrow airport. The intimacy and fondness shared between the two teenagers erodes as KEVIN becomes a more consuming force in Millat's life, just as drug abuse consumes the addict, thereby estranging her from social connections, so too does KEVIN divide Millat from those who care for him.

Familial and Social Correlations to Addiction: Samad and KEVIN's Impact on Millat

Much of the scholarly work on Smith's *White Teeth* analyzes the racial, political, and social aspects of the novel; these are the expected critical theories with which to study post-colonial texts. Smith is not a post-colonial author⁵¹; although *White Teeth* briefly details the lives of the Iqbal ancestors, who were colonized by the British Empire, most of the Iqbal narrative speaks to their life in England. Magid and Millat are not immigrant children; they are born and raised in London, until Magid is shipped back to Bangladesh. This novel is full of characters who are neither/nor's and both/and's: Samad is neither solely Bengali nor is he truly British; he is neither a faithful Muslim nor an unrepentant sinner; Millat is both a product of Eastern and Western ideologies; he is both a fearful, hurting child and a chaotic, violent young man. The Iqbal family members each negotiate a life of hybridity: "First-generation characters...undergo physical dislocation when they leave their countries of origin to come to Britain. Second-generation characters may not have undertaken a diasporic journey, but—due to the fact that they inhabit a border space, a hybrid space, a third space" (Fernández 154-5). As the Iqbal family traverses the experience of hybridity, they do not come closer together, and the fissure within the family only widens once Samad sends Magid away. In examining the influences that cause Millat to join KEVIN, I will briefly discuss the larger socio-political stimuli surrounding Millat and the Iqbal family, but my focus is on

⁵¹ Smith was born and raised in England. Her mother is Jamaican; she immigrated to England in the late 1960s. Smith's father is English.

Millat's home-life and familial relationships. I do not wish to discount the underlying, entrenched socio-economic-political forces that impact the individual's life, but in examining addiction and its root causes, the three vital environmental conditions that a child needs for healthy brain development are "nutrition, physical security, and consistent emotional nurturing. [...] The third prime necessity—emotional nurture—is the most likely to be disrupted in Western societies" (Maté 193). Millat grows up in a home with parents that provide for his food and shelter, but the Iqbal parents do not provide a sense of security nor emotional nurturing. As Millat begins to mature into young adulthood, he finds a community—a sense of belonging—and a relief from his family's abuse. Just as addictive substances/behaviors initially provide relief and escape until the cravings become a prison unto itself, belonging to and acting with KEVIN feels good to Millat even though the group is detrimental to him and ultimately instigates his downfall.

As he becomes further indoctrinated into KEVIN, Millat gives up his romantic/sexual partners, his favorite forms of entertainment, and a part of his Western identity in exchange for fulfilling his idea of heroism and cultural fidelity/assertion. This desire to be a hero is a family aspiration, as Jennifer Gustar observes, "Millat's desire is almost an exact repetition of his father's own historical desire to construct himself as a hero" because Millat seeks to "inscribe his name on English soil, as his father once tried to do by forging a heroic identity during the war" (Gustar 337). Despite their shared dreams of greatness, Samad and Millat do not relate or bond with one another because of the former's harsh attitude towards his son and because of the latter's defiance. Father and son "focus on the crises of the past and become too rooted in history and localism"—Samad more so on the past and Millat on the local (Rogers 49). Samad's continued dependence on the past transposes onto Millat as a

kind of misconstrued understanding of his heritage and the Iqbal's place in England. The narrator of *White Teeth* explains that:

immigrants have always been particularly prone to repetition—it's something to do with that experience of moving from West to East or East to West or from island to island. Even when you arrive, you're still going back and forth, your children are going round and round. There's no proper term for it—*original sin* seems too harsh maybe *original trauma* would be better. A trauma is something one repeats and repeats, after all, and this is the tragedy of the Iqbals. (*original emphasis* 135-6)

Much as Samad goes “back and forth” with his desire to remain true to his Bengali culture while living and working in the colonizer's world, Millat goes “round and round” to find a place where he is valued for who he is. The Iqbal's struggle—the immigrant and second-generation's struggle—is not unfamiliar in addiction studies. Maté asserts that “among tormented, dislocated, and, most fundamentally, disempowered people—pain and suffering are transmitted from one traumatized generation to the next” (276). That Samad's pain is transmitted to Millat is a known process for those people who are dislocated and disempowered. In Samad's life, he experiences both dislocation and disempowerment; Millat lives with disempowerment from a family that does not love and nurture him and from the British community that fears and excludes him. Due to the neglect and abuse in the Iqbal home, Millat is an easy target for KEVIN because he already feels victimized and ostracized from the most intimate sphere of adolescence: his family. Thus he “joins the group not because of a fundamental belief, but as a way to assert ‘some degree of local agency’ over the constantly changing world that surrounds him” (McMann 628). I would argue that KEVIN, not only allows Millat to assert his agency within the changing world around him,

but also, in a more “local” sense, in a home that threatens his agency, his independence, and his self-worth. KEVIN embraces Millat’s audacity and aspirations thus providing him with a community that accepts and encourages him, unlike his family. KEVIN provides Millat an escape from his abusive family life, yet unlike substance addiction that often dulls the emotion(s) of the addict, the fundamentalist group taps into Millat’s emotions and harnesses them for social disruption.

His agency is continuously impeded at home by his parents’ lack of nurturing and boundaries. Millat’s willingness to mimic the Hollywood motif of a gangster that he admires—with their hardhearted, macho, violent attitude and behaviors—can be partially attributed to his father’s constant chastisement of Millat versus his praise of Magid. Marc Lewis states, “Low self-esteem sensitizes us to opportunities for feeling masterful” (178). Considering that Millat grows up repeatedly hearing how stupid⁵² he is, it is then unsurprising that he would attach himself to activities or people who make him feel “masterful” or empowered. When Magid sends a photograph of himself in Bengal, Millat suggests that his twin brother looks like a chief, to which his father replies, “It is good that you see the difference between you two boys, Millat, now rather than later. [...] Others may scoff, but you and I know that your brother will lead others out of the wilderness. He will be a leader of tribes. He is a natural chief” (*original emphasis* 180). Though Samad refrains from specifically stating what Millat lacks in comparison to his twin brother, he implies that Millat is not of the same cut or quality as Magid; Millat is not a “natural chief.” Samad does not comprehend that his dismissive, even unfavorable, opinion of Millat hurts his son. Smith

⁵² Samad describes Millat to his teacher thusly: “Sadly...Millat is a good-for-nothing” (113). In a conversation with Alsana, Millat prepares to act out Samad’s typical rendition of Mangal Pande, whom he calls “Great-grandfather.” Alsana immediately corrects him: “*Your great-great-grandfather, stupid*” (*original emphasis* 188).

demonstrates that when the father “misses the desperate longing” of his son, who want “to be a hero in his father’s eyes, to make his mark,” the effects of such disconnection can be disastrous (Gustar 340). That Millat turns to KEVIN for belonging and validation is understandable—though not condonable—given that “[t]he greater the void within, the more urgent the drive to be noticed and to be ‘important,’ and the more compulsive the need for status” (Maté 258). If Millat cannot be a “natural chief” in his father’s eyes, he can be in the eyes of the boys and men of KEVIN who relate to his experience of hybridity, his inner rage, and his need for belonging.

Millat’s place in British society is just as disparaged as it is at home. Millat knows that the immigrant and his children and their children are misconstrued by the native population. He recognizes that in London the immigrant, specifically Eastern immigrants, “smelled of curry; had no sexual identity; took other people’s jobs; or had no job and bummed off the state; or gave all the jobs to his relatives [...] that he should go back to his own country; or stay here and earn his bloody keep; that he worshipped elephants and wore turbans” (194). Such non-inclusion and condemnation from one’s homeland causes a form of dispossession, as Maté asserts, “[t]he precursor to addiction is dislocation” which means “the loss of psychological, social, and economic integration into family and culture—a sense of exclusion, isolation, and powerlessness” (274). Millat feels such exclusion and powerlessness within his home and outside it: “he knew he had no face in this country, no voice in this country, until the week before last when suddenly people like Millat were on every channel and every radio and every newspaper and they were angry, and Millat recognized the anger, thought it recognized him, and grabbed it with both hands” (194). Taryn Beukema observes that Millat “begins to recognize his exclusion in society—an

exclusion based strictly on his being a minority. [...] Millat's realization that society labels him as an essentialized 'other' contributes to this feeling of instability," which is one reason why the headstrong, dynamic, and vocal presence of KEVIN is so attractive to Millat (9). KEVIN provides Millat a connection to his heritage and a medium with which to gain social traction in a country that is largely unconcerned the immigrant families and their place in the community.

"We are split people": Smith's Return to Emotive and Relational Exploration

Smith's depiction of Millat's addiction(s)—first to alcohol, drugs, and women and then to the teachings and dictates of KEVIN—and the unhealthy, harmful environment his addiction stems from is an example of metamodern literature's willingness to explore the complex workings of the individual within her surroundings. The narrative of Millat's unhappiness and escapist behavior is similar to that of certain postmodernist works—specifically Holden in *Catcher in the Rye*, who is also a cynical, resentful youth, or Jay McInerney's protagonist in *Bright Lights, Big City*. Nevertheless, Smith's examination of the interpersonal relationships and social groups—familial, emotional, social, economic, spiritual, and political—that shape Millat and in which he participates goes beyond the isolated and fragmented self as portrayed in typical postmodern fiction. Christian Moraru finds that the narrative worlds Smith creates are those of "relations rather than as assemblage of separate entities. [...] To be is to be with others" (133). Millat's relations—both healthy and unhealthy—shape his reality, perhaps more so than the absence of his twin brother. Millat's sense of self is as equally divided as he is physically separated from his twin, and the narrator conveys this by relating that "Millat was neither one thing nor the other, this or that, Muslim or Christian, Englishman or Bengali; lived in the in between, he lived up to his

middle name, *Zulfikar*, the clashing of two swords” (291). From this both/and or neither/or existence, Millat’s sense of self is susceptible to dangerous influences. His emotional turmoil, though noticed and even addressed by those around him, is not something that he can overcome as his sense of self is so very splintered. Recalling the quote from Timmer at the beginning of this discussion on *White Teeth*, it is the expression of feeling and the impact of others that metamodernist literature revivifies. Timmer stresses that such novels, “seem structured around feelings, more so than that they are centered around individual human psyches (however fractured)” (45). Timmer’s point is true of Smith’s *White Teeth*, for although she creates several storylines of individuals who are as equally perplexed as Millat, she also illuminates the emotional connections, disconnections, longings, confusion, repression, and fulfillments, and in doing so she reuses modernist themes and concerns and translates them for a contemporary, twenty-first century readership.

Chapter 6

“No single, individual moment is in and of itself unendurable”:

Addiction and Recovery in DFW’s *Infinite Jest*

*I woke up from a movie
I immediately forgot
I got a heartache on the bottom
And a headache on the top
The part of me that hurts
The most is the one I just can't spot
And it's all American made.*
Margo Price, “All American Made”

*I wanted to do something real
American, about what it's like
to live in America around the
millennium...There's something
particularly sad about it...
a stomach-level sadness.*
David Foster Wallace,
“The Salon Interview”

At the center of David Foster Wallace’s *Infinite Jest*, there is addiction, but woven throughout the novel—in almost every chapter, subchapter, and footnote—there is a message about choosing: the importance of learning how to choose. The novel follows addicts of many shapes and sizes and all at different points of the addiction or recovery process, but all are choosing something: recovery, addiction, violence, kindness, mistrust, belief, etc. As Wallace expounds on the state of maladjustment (i.e. addiction) alongside the state of becoming well-adjusted (i.e. the recovery process), he experiments with creating a new kind of literature—something other than the postmodern. Wallace chooses to write a novel by employing postmodern techniques while something that postmodern literature largely lacks: authenticity and empathy. He truthfully depicts the agonizing, humorous, challenging, and

pitiable nature of addiction, but he does so without glamorizing it as many postmodern novels do. Postmodern fiction, which typifies the ethos of a rebellious youth and counterculture, popularizes drug addiction and alcoholism. Postmodern novels like Kerouac's *On the Road* (1957) and *The Dharma Bums* (1958), William S. Burroughs's *Naked Lunch* (1959), Hunter S. Thompson's *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* (1972), Bret Easton Ellis's *Less Than Zero* (1985) popularizes and glorifies the defiant and seemingly entertaining life of those individuals consumed by an addiction⁵³. Contrary to postmodernism's rendition of addiction, Wallace examines the lives addicts lead from the first hit to the overdose that kills. He conveys addicts' thoughts and emotions respectfully, empathetically, and realistically, without over-sentimentality or judgment for each addict makes a choice, as Hal Incandenz acknowledges, "We are all dying to give our lives away to something, maybe. God or Satan, politics or grammar, topology or philately—the object seemed incidental to this will to give oneself away, utterly" (900). Choosing what we give ourselves away to and doing so moderately is the most difficult part of deciding, and Wallace's novel traces characters that all struggle with this existential lesson.

Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) and Addiction: Examining the Boyhoods of Hal Incandenza and Don Gately

As detailed in Chapter 2, addiction does begin out of a vacuum. There are reasons and causes in the individual's life that lead to dependence. As Gabor Maté, M.D., professes, "The addict...is not born but made" (272-3). Abusive, traumatic childhood experiences often cause the individual to retreat into compulsive behaviors that relieve the damaged psyche.

⁵³ Literature is not the only artistic medium to normalize substance abuse. The music industry was (and arguably still is) just as smitten with substance abuse, particularly drugs: The Rolling Stones's "Dead Flowers" and "Brown Sugar," Pink Floyd's "Comfortably Numb," and Jefferson Starships entire album *Surrealistic Pillow*.

Maté, M.D. redirects the familiar question, “Why the addiction?” to ask the more relevant and pertinent question, “Why the pain?” (36). Wallace details the pain of his two protagonists, both of whom are addicts, by revealing aspects of their childhood. Don Gately, who acts as Wallace’s model of sincerity, engagement, and recovery, began his addictive behaviors in childhood. The narrator notes that Gately’s mother was an alcoholic and his father was an abusive husband who abandoned Gately’s mother before she gave birth to him. His mother’s reliance on cruel, neglectful men continues as Gately grows up: “His mother was subsequently involved with a live-in lover, a former Navy M.P. who used to beat her up on a regular schedule” (446). Gately witnesses the “M.P.” physically, methodically hurt his mother: “At 8-10 Heinekens he used to all of a sudden throw his Reader’s Digest against the wall and get her down and beat her with measured blows...she tried to ward off the blows with a fluttered downward motion of her arms and hands, as if she were beating out flames” (447). Gately grows up watching his mother ease her sorrows with a bottle of vodka, and he begins sneaking drinks after she passes out. When he was ten or eleven years old, Gately would cautiously “pretend to listen and watch TV on the floor but really be dividing his attention between how close his Mom was to unconsciousness and how much Stolichnaya [vodka] was left in the bottle. [...] Don’d take the bottle and mix the first couple vodkas with Diet Coke and drink a couple of those until it lost its fire, then drink it straight” (447). Gately adopts the coping mechanism he observes at home; although this is not an excuse for becoming an addict, it is one reason—a pitiable reason—why many individuals like Gately turn to alcohol and/or drug in adolescence. Children who suffer from neglect, abuse, and trauma are more susceptible to addiction because individuals naturally seek to avoid painful experiences, as Marc Lewis notes, “Drugs, booze, gambling, and porn take us out of

ourselves. They focus our attention elsewhere. [...] We find something that relieves the gnawing sense of wrongness, we take it, we do it, and then we do it again” (179). When the individual turns to such devices as a child who lives in a dysfunctional home with little to no supervision⁵⁴, there is little hope that the unhealthy addictive behavior will be corrected. Historically, many addiction studies attribute addiction to one’s biology (i.e. a disease); however, researchers like Lewis, Maté, and many others recognize that addiction is grounded in painful experience and that the addict attempts to soothe herself over and over again via a compulsive behavior.

Whereas Gately is physically and emotionally abused as a child, Hal Incandenza is emotionally and psychologically traumatized two times in his life. As a young child, Hal finds some kind of mold and his mother, Avril Incandenza, finds him eating it. Hal says that his older brother Orin hazily remembers the event and how “The Moms”—the brothers’ cognomen for Avril as—only responded by frantically running around the garden screaming. Hal relays Orin’s memory to the reader:

“...the Mom’s path around the yard is a broad circle of hysteria:

‘God!’ she calls out.

‘Help! My son ate this!’ she yells in Orin’s second and more fleshed out recollection, yelling it over and over, holding the speckled patch aloft in a pincer of fingers, running around and around the garden’s rectangle while O. [Orin] gaped at his first real sight of adult hysteria.” (*original emphasis* 10)

⁵⁴ Often such children take on the parenting role as they try to care and/or protect their parents. This can be seen in Gately’s case when he attends to his mother after she passes out in drunken stupors: “Sometimes, well in the bag himself, when he turned off the uncabled set and covered her with the afghan, easing the mostly empty Stoly bottle back onto the little TV Guide table by the bowl of darkening chopped peppers, his unconscious Mom would groan and titter and call him her Doshka and good sir knight and last and only love, and ask him not to hit her anymore” (448).

Avril does not, and it seems as though she cannot, respond appropriately to Hal's predicament. Her reaction to her son's contamination is one of repulsion and mania, so she cannot properly care of the possibly poisoned Hal. According to Pia Mellody, parents who are irresponsible with their feelings – in this case Avril respond irresponsibly with her feelings by letting them control her reaction and her entire physical body – affect the child, who “gets inordinately shamed more and more” (100). Throughout the novel, members of Arvil's family comment on her obsessive-compulsive nature⁵⁵ and so it is understandable how her emotional distress or trauma impresses onto her children. Orin recalls how he stood and “gaped” and Hal had stopped crying during the mold incident when Avril “kept yelling, running a tight pattern just inside the square string...even in her hysterical trauma her flight-lines were plumb, her footprints Native-American-straight, her turns, inside the ideogram of string, crisp, and martial” (10). The boys grow up recognizing that to a certain extent they have to take care of themselves, especially when it comes to subjects/events that paralyze their mother. Although Hal does not act as his mother's caretaker as Gately does his, Hal must become his own caregiver as a child and into his teen-hood.

The emotional damage that Hal's mother inadvertently causes is nothing in comparison to that inflicted by Hal's genius but alcoholic father, James O. Incandenza. When Hal is thirteen years old, James sticks his head inside of a microwave that he has reconfigured and kills himself by blowing up his head. Hal is the first person to find his father's body. In a conversation years later with Orin, Hal informs his brother about where and how their father

⁵⁵ Hal tells his brother Mario that “she's just an *agoraphobic* workaholic and obsessive-compulsive” and James O. Incandenza says, “Well, it's been pretty obvious since early on out in Weston that Moms has O.C.D. Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder. The only reason she's never been diagnosed or treated for it is that in her the Disorder doesn't prevent her from functioning. [...] What I'm trying to say is she's compulsively efficient even about her obsessions and compulsions” (42; 1039-40).

committed suicide:

[Orin]: ‘Nobody ever said microwave.’

[Hal]: ‘I think it came out generally at the funeral.’ [...]

[Orin]: ‘So where was he found, then?’ [...]

[Hal]: ‘The microwave was in the kitchen I already explained, O.’ [...]

[Orin]: ‘Can I ask you who it was who found him? His – who found him at the oven?’

[Hal]: ‘Found by one Harold James Incandenza, thirteen going on really old.’ [...]

[Orin]: ‘I didn’t even think a microwave oven would go on unless the door was closed. What with microwaves oscillating all over, inside. I thought there was like a refrigerator-light or Read-Only-tab-like-device. [...] You were totally shocked and traumatized. He was asphyxiated, irradiated, and/or burnt. [...] You must have been traumatized beyond fucking belief.’

[Hal]: ‘Your concern is much appreciated, believe me.’” (248-52).

Hal’s nonchalant, factually driven responses to Orin’s concern indicate Hal’s emotional inability or unwillingness to process the event. Even when Avril sends Hal to see a psychologist immediately after James’s death, Hal attempts to give the psychologist what he thinks the doctors wants; Hal cannot provide an authentic narrative of what happened and how he felt about it. Hal tells Orin that his experience with the psychologist was

“nighmarish. I just could not figure out what the guy wanted. I went down and chewed through the Copley Square library’s grief section. Not disk. The actual books. I read Kübler-Ross, Hinton. I slogged through Kastenbaum and Kastenbaum. I read things like Elizabeth Harper Neeld’s *Seven Choices: Taking the Steps to New*

Life After Losing Someone You Love, which was 352 pages of sheer goo. I went in and presented with textbook-perfect symptoms of denial, bargaining, anger, still more denial, depression. I listed my seven textbook choices and vacillated plausibly between and among them. I provided etymological data on the word acceptance all the way back to Wycliff and 14th-century *langue-d'oc* French. The grief-therapist was having none of it. It was like those final exams in nightmares where you prepare immaculately and then you get there and all the exam questions are in Hindi.” (253)

Hal tries to use his intellect—he is potentially a genius like his father—to learn about grief so as to perform those emotions for the psychologist, but he cannot express his own emotional disturbance surrounding his father’s suicide. Much as Hal denies himself the opportunity to express his grief by repressing his personal narrative and substituting it with clinical renditions, he also guards his addiction and rituals. The narrator notes, “Hal likes to get high in secret, but a bigger secret is that he’s as attached to the secrecy as he is to getting high” (49). Hal is introverted, which is not unhealthy in and of itself, but he is unwilling to process and communicate his feelings⁵⁶. The narrator goes on to explicate Hal’s desire for secrecy saying, “when he gets high he develops a powerful obsession with having nobody—not even the neurochemical cadre—know he’s high. [...] The amount of organization and toiletry-luggage he has to do to get secretly high in front of a subterranean outtake vent in the pre-supper gap would make a lesser man quail” (54). Hal feels more secure living with(in) his secrets than he does with those around him—probably due to those individuals’ emotional/psychological instability. Maté observes, “Not all addictions are rooted in abuse or trauma”—though Hal and Gately’s very much are—addictions “can all be traced to painful

⁵⁶ “Like most North Americans of his generation, Hal tends to know way less about why he feels certain ways about the objects and pursuits he’s devoted to than he does about the objects and pursuits themselves” (54).

experience. A hurt is at the center of all addictive behaviors. [...] The wound may not be as deep and the ache may not be as excruciating, and it may even be entirely hidden—but it's there" (38). As much as Hal may withdraw into his secret consumptive behavior, he cannot escape the pain he is trying so much to hide and relieve. Hal's unwillingness to engage with anyone intimately demonstrates his need to control all interpersonal engagements and to shield himself from others, even those trying to help him, so he ultimately denies himself the mediums and opportunity to emotional and psychologically healing.

“Freedom of Choice and the Choice of Freedom”⁵⁷: Negotiating the Freedom of Choosing the Addiction or Recovery

By recognizing that addiction is grounded in painful experiences, often rooted in childhood,⁵⁸ it becomes more understandable why the addict struggles to choose the path of sobriety. The path to recovery is long, challenging, and it often stirs up painful memories or reactions within the addict. The freedom to choose recovery is *almost* impossible. The impossibility of choice is a point made in Wallace's *Infinite Jest* when French assassin, Marathe, questions his American counterpart, “What of freedom-*to*? How for the person to choose freely? 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? How is there freedom to choose if one does not learn how to choose?,” and he later remarks, “Not everybody learns it in childhood, how to balance his interests” (*original emphasis* 320; 420). Maté states that “the dilemma of freedom in addiction may be phrased this way: a person driven largely by unconscious forces and automatic brain mechanisms is only poorly able to exercise any

⁵⁷ The title of chapter 26 in Gabor Maté's *In The Realm of Hungry Ghosts*

⁵⁸ Although this is a reason why an individual succumbs to addiction, I am in no way suggesting the pain—psycho-emotional or otherwise—is an excuse. The intention is to understand, not to pass judgement or defend the behavior.

meaningful freedom of choice” (302). Maté describes the addict’s obsession about getting the next high as “brain lock” (305). The addict who chooses recovery possesses⁵⁹ the ability to keep an open mind; she can hold space for thinking about her life not as it currently is, not as being under the control of her compulsive behavior(s). The addict’s ability to reattribute her desire for the drug/alcohol/compulsive behavior, her willingness to refocus when cravings return, and the practice of revaluing her life are crucial because the path to sobriety centers on taking responsibility for one’s actions. This is extraordinarily difficult, especially for chemically-addicted individuals⁶⁰ because recovery demands the reorienting of the addict’s entire life: her behavior, her thoughts, her lifestyle, her friends, sometimes her family, even where and with whom she lives. Thus, in beginning and continuing the life of sobriety, the addict faces challenges on multiple fronts—physical, emotional, psychological, economic, social, etc.—and it is the addict’s ability to remain present and ever-conscious of her desires, thoughts, and actions that enables her to choose sobriety over addiction.

As he explores addiction and recovery in *Infinite Jest* via Don Gately, Wallace centers Gately’s narrative around his ability to be aware of his thoughts and feelings. Gately is arguably one of the most reflective characters in the novel. Wallace understands awareness to be the defining factor in how the individual chooses. For him, “‘Learning how to think’ really means learning how to exercise some control over *how* and *what* you think. It means being conscious and aware enough to choose what you pay attention to and to choose how you construct meaning from experience” (*original emphasis* 53-54). Gately begins to take

⁵⁹ Addicts often do not attempt sobriety once, but do so again and again. Not all of them succeed. Consider that Alcoholics Anonymous has a 30% success rate (Denzin 355).

⁶⁰ In *Infinite Jest*, Wallace depicts the physical agony Boston AA newcomers experience. He describes them as “dead-eyed and puke-white and with their face hanging down around their knees...They are like Hindenburg-survivors⁶⁰” (349).

control of his thoughts and actions, but he does not do so in isolation or independently. In other words, the individualism so central and prided in the United States' conception of self, civic/political life, and culture does not serve the addict well. Contrary to the ideal that the individual should be able to take care of herself, Gately learns to depend on the supportive environment of the Ennet house and AA meetings for rehabilitation. Though the recovery community is pivotal for the recovering addict, the assistance from the community and 12-step programs only Works If *You* Work It. The duality of the individual *and* a like-minded, supportive community are both vital for the addict's successful recovery. The habit of choosing comfort via the compulsive behavior must be replaced by new habits that actively strive for sobriety; these new habits must be practiced every day (over and over again), but the recovering addict cannot do this alone. Whereas addiction increases alienation, successful recovery essentially demands interaction, engagement, and community.

The recovery process therefore relies on the addict's willingness to engage with herself and others in ways that are typically different from—if not contrary to—the addict's previous way of behaving. It is especially challenging if the addict suffered neglect or abuse. As the addict begins to refocus and revalue her behavior and choices, she learns that authenticity—genuine engagement—is required. Much as postmodern literature relies on cynicism, doubt, and obfuscation, the overarching culture of the Western world, specifically in the U.S., promotes such disengagement and self-shielding. In examining the present culture's need for detachment, Garrick Harden and Marcus Aldredge observe that the “overwhelming consistency of potential embarrassment and constant guard necessary in shielding oneself, inevitably reflects a larger cultural pattern of anxiety,” thus society restrains genuine emotional exchanges, which breeds emotional constriction (6). Pia

Mellody's psychological research affirms Harden and Aldredge's sociological theory; she discusses the effects of an emotionally shut-down culture and finds that contemporary U.S. society acts as though "It's not ok to have feelings. That is you are a mature, well-controlled adult person who is successful, you stay out of your feeling-reality at all times and stay up in your head" (n. pag). Sincere engagement grounded in emotional transparency is not embraced much less practiced. For the addict to recover from her reliance on her compulsion, the isolation of addiction, and the skeptical perspective that often comes with addiction, she must learn to reengage in an Honest-Open-Willing (HOW) manner, which is the exact opposite of the postmodern temperament. Throughout *Infinite Jest*, Gately navigates authenticity through the Boston AA meetings and the 12 Steps.⁶¹ Wallace uses Gately's participation in the Boston AA White Flag Group meetings as the site in which to confront postmodern irony and cynicism with sincerity and trust. The members and attendees of the White Flag Group are all "aiming for total empathy with the speaker...Empathy...is called Identification" (345). The ability of each recovering addict to Identify with the others requires that they each share their story, their experiences. Members of AA are willing to narrate their life of addiction within AA's narrative format, and in this way, "the selves that emerge under AA's auspices draw upon a *shared stock of interpretive resources* from which selves may be crafted. [...] The combination of common resources, artfully articulated, gives us the possibility of individualized selves that nonetheless bear a

⁶¹ The following AA steps actively require the recovering addict to engage in authentic behavior: 4) Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves; 5) Admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs; 8) Made a list of all persons we harmed, and became willing to make amends to them all; 9) Made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others; 10) Continued to take personal inventory and when we were wrong promptly admitted it. These steps are worked, at least initially, with the addict's sponsor so that the addict is held accountable by the older, wiser mentor who experienced the same struggle with the self. Basically, the sponsor can see through any bullshit that the new member may try to employ as a way to deflect or neglect difficult, uncomfortable moments in working through the steps.

striking resemblance in the way they are structured” (*emphasis added* Holstein and Gubrium 179). Members, like Gately, who are new to recovery, learn to talk about their addiction from the frequently shared stories of their sponsors and older members, just as these older members in turn learned to share from their predecessors. As older members pass down AA’s recovery rituals and personal histories, they are effectively rebuilding a structure with which to replace the addictive rituals that are/were engrained in the addict’s way of being. The White Flag Group that Gately attends cultivates the trust of each member—thereby creating the necessary condition for empathy—by being “disgustingly humble, kind...nonjudgmental...sanguine tolerant, attentive, truthful...the only people who end up able to hang for serious time in AA are the ones who willingly try *to be* these things” (*my emphasis* 357). These genuine interactions are not a simulacrum of good behavior; they demand a practiced life-style. Gately observes such authenticity is not forced by The White Flag Group because “[i]t isn’t like the Group makes them do it...It’s all optional; do it or die” (357). Because the postmodern culture struggles with authenticity, the recovering addict needs a group, like AA, that respects and cultivates it, making the group imperative to the individual addict’s struggle.

Gately regularly attends Boston AA meetings, but he goes further in his endeavor to maintain sobriety by living and working at the Ennet House, a place where, “people are crying and making noise and getting less unhappy” (591). Ennet House serves as a halfway house and a home where authentic emotional expression is understood and embraced. Gately wants to counsel his fellow tenant and addict—Geoffrey Day—and imagines that if Day ever hits rock bottom, Gately will be able to reach out to Day and offer him the same kindness and support that Gately received from his AA sponsor. Gately imagines telling Day the same

clichés that the AA members quoted to him: “Ask For Help and like Turn It Over, the loss and pain, to Keep Coming, show up, pray, Ask For Help” (273). The AA slogans are ephemerally simple because once the recovering addict tries to live by the slogan’s imperative the real work begins, hence they repeat the phrases again and again almost like a prayer to keep recovery at the forefront of their minds and actions. According to Marshall Boswell, the banality of AA maxims “is the source of their truth. And to accept them without irony, without intellectual disdain, is to take the first gesture toward genuine openness” (143). This genuine openness becomes possible because the language used in AA’s traditions, slogans, and rituals “bring[s] members into one another’s presence, providing a bridge between the loneliness of alcoholism and the community of A.A. recovery” (Denzin 271). What Gately hopes to do with Day is founded in AA’s ability to bridge the divide between people but also between the individual and her inner self. Gately hopes to perform the AA ritual of sharing with Day so that they can confront their solipsism together by identifying with one another’s experience. In doing so, they would dispel their insularity by being present with one another’s story, struggle, and pain and by admitting the unmanageability of their addiction. Acknowledging addiction’s recalcitrance and the suffering it causes allows the recovering addicts to communally remember the negative consequences of addiction without feeling judge or blamed. The unmanageability of addiction is *the* common denominator that enables the members of AA to identify and empathize with one another. AA reminds the addict that she is not alone, not unique in her suffering, and offers a community in which to reorient herself. Gately understands that, as he situates himself in a narrative about his addiction and recovery, he takes ownership of his life story, and when he shares his story, his healing process becomes grounded in a community

that shares his intention and habits and that facilitate recovery.

Believing Even When We Don't – An Example of a Double Bind within

Metamodernism: Don Gately and Higher Power Issues

Committing to the culture of AA requires that the recovering addict adopt the community's values, rituals, and vocabulary. Holstein and Gubrium notes that "[t]he most salient and significant resource was the *language* of treatment and recovery that he found permeating—and constituting—the AA environment, forming a discourse of considerable local reckoning (*emphasis added* 177). For the addict, language and meaning are made subject to the language-user and the language-user's need. Meaning within the AA community is not understood as being definitive, empirical—as meaning was considered to be by Enlightenment philosophers—nor is meaning relative, slippery, or deferred—as is asserted by deconstructionists/poststructuralists. Instead, meaning is chosen or created by the community engaging with it⁶². One example of this within both AA and *Infinite Jest* is the addict's conception of her Higher Power (HP). Members of AA are encouraged to submit to their HP, but the definition of one's HP is left to the individual. For some, the HP is God; for others, the HP is Allah; and for others, the HP is something/someone that the addict submits their power over to: "Some newcomers' Higher Power is like Nature, the sky, the stars, the cold-penny tang of the autumn air, who know" (539). Gately struggles with the definition of his Higher Power even though he knows "that you turn your Diseased will over to the direction and love of 'God as you understand Him.' It's supposed to be one of AA's major selling points that you get to choose your own God. You get to make up your own understanding of God or a Higher Power or Whom-/Whatever" (443). As the examples

⁶² Wallace was highly influenced by Wittgenstein's philosophy on language.

indicate, AA's conception of a Higher Power is both definitive and relative: it is definitive in that every member of AA agrees to submit to their Higher Power and it is relative in that everyone determines for herself who/what their HP is. AA members relate to their HP in the same way even if their HP differs in name/gender/religion/personification, etc. This paradox is referred to by Clare Hayes-Brady as the "Both/And" theme. She finds that this is an essential scheme throughout Wallace's works because the "Both/And" system allows for "the process for deconstruction to find new sources of meaning" so that the outcome is not "deleterious but cumulative, allowing for the layering of plural and frequently contrary elements of meaning, rather a palimpsest than a supplantation like deconstruction in general, it is fundamentally resistant to closure" (26). Wallace's application of the "Both/And" paradigm throughout his literature parallels the AA culture's willingness to embrace multiple conceptions of a single premise—like each member's determination of her HP—thus allowing for the individual's understanding/belief within the community's larger framework. Inclusion is more important than homogenization.

Throughout *Infinite Jest*, Gately struggles with his "narrative map" and defining his HP, but he moves through the steps nevertheless. The narrator observes that Gately didn't have any God- or J.C.-background, and the knee-stuff seemed like the limpest kind of dickless pap, and he felt like a true hypocrite just going through the knee-motions that he went through faithfully every A.M. and P.M., without fail, motivated by a desire to get loaded so horrible that he often found himself humbly praying for his head to just finally explode already and get it over with. Pat [his sponsor] had said it didn't matter at this point what he thought or believed or even said. All that mattered was what he *did*. (*original emphasis* 466)

Such a double-bind is common in metamodernism literature and theory. Vermeulen and van den Akker describe the metamodern aesthetic as one that “moves for the sake of moving, attempts in spite of its inevitable failure; it seeks forever for a truth that it never expects to find” (5). Although this may seem futile, it is a similar gesture to each moment that the addict decides to trust in her ability to change her behaviors and attachments and turns her power over to her HP. When this self-denying behavior is practiced daily, it can ultimately lead to sobriety. Holstein and Gubrium note that within AA, “The ‘alcoholic ego’ must be renounced as the recovering alcoholic surrenders to a ‘spiritual’ way of life. In other words, the AA philosophy, culture, and vocabulary offer what Pollner and Stein call ‘narrative maps’ for navigating and recounting the experiential and psychological terrain of alcoholism” (178). Metamodernism’s “movement for the sake of moving” is seen here in Gately’s adherence to his AA sponsor’s instructions to work the program and get down on his knees and pray even if he does not believe in praying or God.⁶³ For addicts like Gately, sobriety does not come through an intellectual endeavor of analysis or even professional psycho-emotional treatment, but through choosing to change one’s thinking and habits and doing this consistently. Gately’s habitual drug use is replaced with the practices and aphorisms of AA. Likewise, certain postmodern theories, which are no longer of service, are exchanged for metamodernism’s reconstruction of language and authenticity, truth and selfhood.

⁶³ Gately’s sponsor goes on to chide him: “He told Gately to just imagine for a second that he’s holding a box of Betty Crocker Cake Mix, which represented Boston AA. [...] Gene M. said 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” (467).

Finding Agency through Stories: Wielding Word to Tell Our Personal History

The sharing of one's story and listening to the stories of other recovering addicts is imperative to the recovery process. This is accentuated in *Infinite Jest*, throughout Gately's narrative, and also in addiction recovery research. The act of verbally structuring and vocalizing one's history is defined by Maté as recreating, which is the fifth and final step in his recovery method. As the addict reattributes the reasons she once chose to use substances/compulsive behaviors,⁶⁴ she recreates her life now, in the present moment, by sharing her story of recovery; speaking about her personal history repeatedly; replacing the old, unhealthy narrative of the addict with a new narrative of recovery/sobriety. Nicoline Timmer notes that many psychologists stress the importance of situating the self in a narrative⁶⁵ and asserts, "the way we talk about ourselves, and structure our sense of self by constructing life stories, is most important: it is how we try to make *sense* of who we are"⁶⁶ (*emphasis original* 27). The narrative that the recovering addict shares is not that of the reflexive narcissism that postmodern literature proliferates—what Wallace described as "toxic, paralyzing, raped-by-psychic-Bedouin self-consciousness"—but an intimate personal search for Real World meaning and purpose (Lipsky 19). For the addict, making sense of the self is painful and challenging because she must face the pain that caused her to seek solace in her

⁶⁴ Maté states that reattribution "helps you put the addictive drive into perspective...so there is no real need that the addictive urge will satisfy. It is only a thought, an attitude, a belief, a feeling arising from an automatic brain mechanism. You can observe it consciously, with attention. And you can let it go" (379).

⁶⁵ Timmer cites the following for self-narrative psychology/sociology works: Theodore R. Sarbin, *Narrative Psychology: The Storied Nature of Human Conduct* (New York: Praeger, 1986); Csaba Pléh, "Narrativity in Text Construction and Self Construction," *Neohelicon* 30, no. 1 (2003); and James A. Holstein and Jaber F. Gubrium, *The Self We Live By: Narrative Identity in a Postmodern World* (New York: Oxford UP, 2000).

⁶⁶ Timmer furthers her observation of where psychology and literature could further influence one another: "I feel that analyzing the presentation of the self in recent fiction can contribute significantly to the development of a more up-to-date version of the story of self. If we allow for the view that fiction is a way of 'experimenting with knowledge structures', in the words of Pléh, then it may be very informative to take a closer look at how the self is conceptualized in present day fiction, to see how we *can* think of our 'selves.' Contemporary literature has had, therefore, not enough impact, yet, on the development of narrative psychological model of the self, in my opinion" (27-28).

addiction, yet in doing so, she must (re)create the meaning of her behavior and life so that she may again situate herself in the world from which she has largely been segregated from.⁶⁷ The language she uses and story she tells about herself must be (re)appropriated on her own terms; the story she tells provides her with agency. Timmer defends the power of (self)narrative after post-structuralism and asserts that the emphasis should on “how we still *do* try to make sense of ourselves, *even when* fractured and mediated” (*original emphasis* 42). Wallace (re)creates space for renewed trust in narrative–storytelling–by boldly and frankly articulating his intention to compose literature that could “affect somebody, make somebody feel a certain way, allow them to enter into relationships with ideas and with characters” that readdresses the ways “in which you have *to learn to be a human being*” (*my emphasis* “Looking for Garde” 18). For a subject matter of this import, irony and cynicism are of limited use, so Wallace counters the now familiar, expected ironic gestures with intensely emotional, vulnerable moments⁶⁸. He certainly uses irony but he does not depend on it as a *modus operandi*. Hayes-Brady find that unlike the typical postmodern use of irony, Wallace’s ironic technique “tends to be revelatory rather than obfuscatory, aimed at investigating concepts of authenticity and sincerity by way of ironic conventions” (52). It is with ironic revelation and sincere commitment to the narrative and the reader that Wallace develops his younger protagonist, Hal Incandenza, from a cynical, pot- and pill-addicted athlete to a drug-induced paraplegic who seeks to tell his story but physically cannot.

It is at the novel’s chronological end, which is the first chapter of the novel, that

⁶⁷ Maté observes that individuals are more susceptible to addiction if they are “people who have suffered dislocation, whose place in the normal human communal context has been disrupted. [...] The drug addict is today’s scapegoat” (279).

⁶⁸ Here, I am mainly referring to the initially humorous NA meeting that Hal visits. Upon closer analysis of this scene, the humor should dissipate once a studied reader observes the very-real and dynamic integration-work being done by the NA members. Pia Mellody describes this work as being very painful yet necessary in the work of recovery.

Wallace begins to explore the breakdown of language and communication. During Hal Incandenza's interview with administrative officials at the University of Arizona, the deans confront him about the discrepancies between his stellar grades and subpar test scores, between the verbose essay and muted social demeanor. When they demand an explanation, Hal tries to respond with intellect and feeling: "I am telling them, calling into the darkness of the red cave that opens out before closed eyes. 'I am not just a boy who plays tennis. I have an intricate history. Experiences and feelings. I'm complex. [...] I'm not a machine. I feel and believe'" (11-12). When he opens his eyes after telling the administrators about himself—which he does not do with other people throughout the rest of the novel—Hal realizes that something is very wrong. Before he collapses to the floor in some kind of seizure,⁶⁹ he tries to speak again, "'Please don't worry...I can explain'" (12). Ironically, it is the moment that Hal most needs to communicate that he can no longer speak coherently. Marshall Boswell compares Hal's verbal impairment to postmodernism's distrust of language and finds that "Hal, a linguistic genius who can recite from photographic memory complete pages of the OED, is postmodernism's paralyzed prodigy" (149). Wallace presents an extreme scenario of what happens when communication is impeded even as the language-user is cognizant of what she wants to say. Hal is a lexical genius⁷⁰, but throughout the novel, he does not use his talent—his ability to copiously absorb and understand words—for its ultimate purpose: communication, contribution, connection. He grew up shying away from intimate

⁶⁹ Many Wallace scholars and enthusiasts assert that this sudden physical collapse is caused by the drug "DMZ," which Hal and his classmates supposedly took sometime before this interview. Hal's classmate, Pemulis, describes DMZ as the "'The Great White Shark of organosynthesized hallucinogens. 'The gargantuan feral infant of -' [...] 'The Yale U. of the Ivy League of Acid'" (211). The fact that Hal collapses in the Dean's office and subsequently transforms into a teenage infant—gurgling and speechless, unable to hold himself up—is one of many reasons—but perhaps the most obvious reason—why scholars conclude that Hal took the drug.

⁷⁰ "'I consume libraries. I wear out spines and ROM-drives. [...] My instincts concerning syntax and mechanics are better than your own'" (12).

relationships; instead, he matured embracing secrecy. Such situational irony is stylistically similar to the prevalent postmodern technique; however, Wallace employs irony to find out “what irony is hiding...he employs cynicism—here figure as self-reflective irony—to recover a learned form of heartfelt naïveté, his work’s ultimate mode and what the work ‘really means,’ a mode that Wallace equates with the ‘really human’” (Boswell 17). As Hal loses the ability to communicate with those around him, Wallace structures the novel so that Hal’s voice, his interiority,⁷¹ is still presented to the reader. Hal continues to communicate even though he is not doing so within the narrative reality of the novel, and although characters within the novel no longer understand him, the reader does. Hal spends most of the novel avoiding his personal and familial history; he evades intimacy. Intimacy requires the individual to be vulnerable, but if the individual allows himself to be vulnerable in an unhealthy or harmful environment, she can feel exposed, even threatened. Hal defends himself against vulnerability on and off the tennis court, at and away from home, with others and himself. It is only after he loses his ability to speak, to express himself, that he realizes the importance of telling his story. The novel ends with Hal being rushed to the hospital. At the time, he acknowledges: “It will start in the E.R...or in the green-tiled room...or, given this special M.D.-supplied ambulance, maybe on the ride itself” that someone is going to asking him “So yo then man what’s *your* story” (*original emphasis* 17). It is no coincidence that Hal’s sudden epiphany regarding sharing one’s self and story occurs after he meets Don Gately. Although this encounter is glossed over in chapter one as it simultaneously acts—as foreshadowing and flashback: “I think of John N. R. Wayne, who would have won this year’s

⁷¹ Interiority here is used in the very sense of the dictionary definition: “The quality or state of being interior or inward. Inner character or nature” (*OED*). Nowhere else in the novel does Hal’s emotional- and psychological-self present itself so transparently.

What-a-Burger, standing watch in a mask as Donald Gately and I dig up my father's head" – it nudges the reader to imagine the encounter. With re-readings of *Infinite Jest*, some readers may feel a longing for the un-narrated events of this scene, which Wallace does not provide us. Perhaps it is by meeting Gately that Hal begins to consider opening up. Unfortunately for Hal, the university officials he tries to open himself up to do not truly care about him; the deans are invested in Hal as a potential monetary and advertising benefit for the Arizona university. Once Hal realizes that he is not speaking coherently, he has time to ponder on what will happen in the next few minutes and hours; he intuitively knows the medical staff will ask him about his story, but the difference will be that the medical professionals are in a better place to hear his whole story without rejecting him. The medical professionals are invested in his well-being and health as a human being, not as a potential athletic or intellectual investment. Hal's non-narrated ER visit could potentially mirror Gately's hospital visit⁷²; after all, in both cases, Gately and Hal are physically debilitated and cannot speak. Gately lays in the hospital bed in agony from the pain⁷³ and listens to other people tell him their stories, their confessions. Considering that Hal cannot speak upon being rushed to the hospital, it is not unlikely that he will share a similar experience of listening to other people's stories and in the process, hopefully, learn to tell his own story.

“How odd I can have all this inside me and to you it's just words”: The Words and Literature of DFW

Though Wallace recognizes that “postmodern irony and cynicism's become an end in

⁷² Gately is shot outside the Ennet House.

⁷³ Gately's hospital scene is of significant importance to the novel; it is here that he declines pain medication so as to continue his path towards sobriety. As he comes in and out of consciousness due to the pain, he has a revelation that “it wasn't just the matter of riding out the cravings for a Substance: everything unendurable was in the head, was the head not Abiding in the Present but hopping the wall and doing a recon and then returning with unendurable news you then somehow believe” (870).

itself...[f]ew artists dare to try to talk about ways of working toward redeeming what's wrong, because they'll look sentimental and naïve," he takes it upon himself to dare to redeem what he sees as being wrong with literature's postmodern affectation, and he does so without being overly sentimental or naïve ("An Expanded Interview" 48-9). Wallace negotiates the thin line between sentiment or naivety and emotional engagement—the willingness to be sincere.⁷⁴ Recovering from addiction and redeeming certain detrimental postmodernism attributes⁷⁵ requires awareness, effort, and humility. Wallace seeks to redeem his art through sincerity, humor, and human decency. This kind of vulnerability takes courage in the postmodern age.⁷⁶ Yet, redemption—whether it be for "good" art or for the addict—requires strength and transformation. Wallace employs sincerity to challenge and supersede postmodernism's irony and disillusionment. He cultivates authenticity via candor; he exemplifies austere conditions: addiction, despair, a certain American lostness. Wallace's transition into a new literary sincerity is born out of postmodern literature and modern critical

⁷⁴ Wallace allowed himself to be vulnerable to literary and critical theory refutations and critics because he promoted the idea that literature that could again explore the human experiences and emotions without being thought of maudlin. He often wrote about returning to the mode of Dostoevsky: "FMD [Fyodor Mikhailovich Dostoyevsky] creatures are alive...not because they're just skillfully drawn types or facets of human beings but because, acting within plausible and morally compelling plots, they dramatize the profoundest parts of all humans, the parts most conflicted, most serious—the ones with the most at stake" ("Joseph Frank's Dostoevsky" 265). Wallace lists the profoundest parts of Dostoevsky's literature: "Dostoevsky wrote fiction about the stuff that's really important...about identity, moral value, death, will, sexual vs. spiritual love, greed, freedom, obsession, reason, faith, suicide. And he did it without ever reducing g his characters to mouthpieces or his books to tracts. His concern was always what it is to be a human being—that is, how to be an actual person, someone whose life is informed by values and principles, instead of just an especially shrewd kind of self-preserving animal" (265).

⁷⁵ i.e. detachment from reality/the social world, language's endless deferral of meaning, suspicion of narrative structures, etc.

⁷⁶ Wallace explains why vulnerability takes courage after postmodernism's reign: "The next real literary 'rebels' in this country might well emerge as some weird bunch of 'anti-rebels,' born oglers who dare to back away from ironic watching, who have the childish gall actually to endorse single-entendre values. Who treat old untrendy human troubles and emotions in U.S. life with reverence and conviction. Who eschew self-consciousness and fatigue. These anti-rebels would be outdated, of course, before they even started. Too sincere. Clearly repressed. Backward, quaint, naïve, anachronistic. Maybe that'll be the point, why they'll be the next real rebels. Real rebels, as far as I can see, risk things. Risk disapproval. [...] The new rebels might be the ones willing to risk the yawn, the rolled eyes, the cool smile, the nudged ribs, the parody of gifted ironists, the 'How banal'" ("E unibus pluram" 192-3).

theories' emphasis on cynicism and detachment. By creating the dysfunctional Incandenza family, once-addicted Gately, Lyle the guru, detoxing Poor Tony, sadistic Lenz, Wallace provides the reader with intimate encounters with flawed, hurting, lonely human beings who struggle with addiction, but in doing so compassionately without an 'us and them' mindset, he provides little room for detached theories and cynical repotes. Kathleen Fitzpatrick notes *Infinite Jest* maintains the reader's trust and commitment because of "its willingness to treat some of the most painful aspects of contemporary life—loneliness, isolation, depression, addiction—with respect and concern" (191). Much as the addict needs to overcome her deep-seated belief that the drug is the only relief from suffering, so too should writers and artists confront postmodernism's negativity and dominance and, as Wallace encourages, shift into another way of thinking about the self, dependency, community, social-responsibility, art, and how to (re)create meaning. As younger generations rise up and forge new paths in art, academia, and society, Wallace's oeuvre stands as a call and challenge to confront ourselves, incite our courage, permit ourselves to be vulnerable, and discover ways that sincere, committed engagement in these fields will create dynamic, much needed change.

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Curriculum Vitae

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M.A. in English literature, University of Texas at Tyler

B.A. in English Literature, *cum laude*, University of Texas at Tyler, minors in History and Classical Studies, foreign language: Latin

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RESEARCH INTERESTS

Post-WWII American literature David Foster Wallace

World literature/ Post-colonial literature

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HONORS/AWARDS/SCHOLARSHIPS

Darrell Bourque Award March 2012

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Sam R. Greer Presidential Scholarship 2009-2010

Classical, Medieval, and Renaissance Studies Scholarship 2008-2009

Sigma Tau Delta: President of Epsilon Omega Chapter 2008-2010

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TA for HUMA 3300 (UT Dallas, Fall 2013)

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HIGHER-ED STUDENT SERVICES & RETENTION

Education Coordinator (Baylor College of Medicine 2015–present)

Academic Advisor (Lone Star College 2015)

Academic Enhancement Workshop at Lamar University (October 2014)

Academic Advisor (Lamar University 2014-2015)

Academic Advisor (Tyler Junior College 2012-2013)

Graduate Assistant for Student Learning Community Office of Academic Support
(University of Texas at Tyler 2011-2012)

PUBLICATIONS

Books Edited

Normal 2016: Selected Works from the Third Annual David Foster Wallace Conference. Ed. Carissa Kampmeier, Ashlie M. Kontos, Brian Monday, and Emily Brutton. Gibson: Lit Fest Press, 2017. Forthcoming.

Normal 2015: Selected Works from the Second Annual David Foster Wallace Conference. Ed. Carissa Kampmeier, Ashlie M. Kontos, Brian Monday, and Emily Brutton. Gibson: Lit Fest Press, 2016.

Normal 2014: Selected Works from the First Annual David Foster Wallace Conference. Ed. Jane L. Carman, Emily Brutton, Carissa Kampmeier, and Ashlie Kontos. Gibson: Lit Fest Press, 2015.

Articles

“‘It take great personal courage to let yourself appear weak’: DFW on Shame, Addiction, and Healing.” *Normal 2014: Selected Works from the First Annual David Foster Wallace Conference.* Ed. Jane L. Carman, Emily Burtton, Carissa Kampmeier, and Ashlie Kontos. Gibson: Lit Fest Press, 2015. Print.

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Interviews

“The Anti-Rebel.” An interview with Dylan Hollingsworth. *Notes on Metamodernism.* 24 Apr. 2013. Web.

CONFERENCES and PANELS CHAIRED

“‘Our attachments are our temples’: Addiction Recovery, and the Metamodernist Movement.” Fourth Annual David Foster Wallace Conference, Normal, IL, Jun. 2017.

“‘Our attachments are our temples’: Addiction Recovery, and the Metamodernist Movement.” Western Social Science Association 59th Annual Conference, San Francisco, CA, Apr. 2017.

“‘Kick ‘em when they’re up/Kick ‘em when they’re down’: David Foster Wallace and others on the News in 21st Century America.” Third Annual David Foster Wallace Conference, Normal, IL, July 2016.

- Chaired David Foster Wallace Archives and Teaching Panel. First Annual David Foster Wallace Conference, Normal, IL July 2016.

“Modern American Lostness, or how to be and not be alone.” The American Literature Association Symposium “Fontiers and Borders in American Literature,” San Antonio, TX, Feb. 2016.

- Chaired Chicana Feminism Panel

“Modern American Lostness, or how to be and not be alone.” Second Annual David Foster Wallace Conference, Normal, IL, May 2015.

“The Power of Narrative: Overcoming Shame, a response to Timothy Bewes.” South Central Modern Language Association: Forces of Nature: The Elements and Aesthetic Production,” Austin, TX, October, 2014.

“‘It Takes Great Personal Courage to Let Yourself Appear Weak’: DFW on Shame, Addiction, and Healing.” Popular/American Culture Association in the South Conference, New Orleans, LA, October, 2014.

“I Just Want to Believe: Modern Myths and the Double-Blind of Meta-modernism.” 2014 Rice English Graduate Symposium, Houston, TX, 2014.

*“‘It Takes Great Personal Courage to Let Yourself Appear Weak’: DFW on Shame, Addiction, and Healing.” First Annual David Foster Wallace Conference, Normal, IL, May 2014.

- Chaired David Foster Wallace Scholarship Panel.

“I Just Want to Believe: Modern Myths and the Double-Blind of Meta-modernism.” Southwest Commission on Religious Studies: Art, Literature, and Religion Conference, Irving, TX, March 2014.

“Dispossession of Language and Sense: Interrogation of Women in Titus Andronicus and King Lear.” Sam Houston State University’s First International Conference on Medieval and Renaissance Thought, Huntsville, TX, April 2013.

“I Just Want to Believe: Modern Myths and the Double-Blind of Meta-modernism.” University of Texas at Dallas’s RAW: Research, Art, Writing—An Interdisciplinary Graduate Student Symposium, Richardson, TX, March 2013.

“To Love and to Cherish from This Day Forward: Sublime Love in the Poesy of Milton and Donne.” Louisiana Consortium of Medieval and Renaissance Scholars, New Orleans, LA, October, 2012.

“Nomina Nuda Tememus: Jonathan Safran Foer, Finding Meaning within Empty Names, or (re)Construction of Deconstruction.” Popular/American Culture Association in the South Conference, Nashville, TN, September 2012.

“Nomina Nuda Tememus: Jonathan Safran Foer, Finding Meaning within Empty Names, or (re)Construction of Deconstruction.” Louisiana Conference on Language, Literature, and Culture, Lafayette, LA, March 2012.

“Nomina Nuda Temeus: Jonathan Safran Foer, Finding Meaning within Empty Names, or (re)Construction of Deconstruction.” University of Texas at Dallas’s RAW: Research, Art, Writing -- An Interdisciplinary Graduate Student Symposium, Richardson, TX, March 2012.

“Nomina Nuda Temeus: Jonathan Safran Foer, Finding Meaning within Empty Names, or (re)Construction of Deconstruction.” Louisiana State University’s 22nd Annual Graduate

Mardi Gras Conference Major Minors: New and Neglected Issues in Literary Studies, Baton Rouge, LA, February 2012.

“Sanity through Verse: The Hope in the Letters and Writings of Wilfred Owen.” Sigma Tau Delta Xi Alpha Graduate and Undergraduate Student Conference on Literature, Rhetoric, and Composition, Chattanooga, TN, April 2011.

“Sanity through Verse: The Hope in the Letters and Writings of Wilfred Owen.” The Center for Classical, Medieval, and Renaissance Studies Conference, Tyler, Texas, April 2010.

“Punctuation for Silence.” The Center for Classical, Medieval, and Renaissance Studies Conference, Tyler, Texas, April 2010.

“The Whoreson.” Arkansas Undergraduate/Graduate Conference on Literature, Rhetoric, and Composition, Henderson State University, Henderson, Arkansas, November 2009.

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