Hidden Gems
Unexpectedly Poetic Lines Easily Overlooked (?) in *Infinite Jest*'s Voluminous Flow

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Abstract   Although readers are more likely to dwell upon particularly funny, surprising, or disturbing moments in David Foster Wallace's *Infinite Jest*, the novel contains many instances of breathtaking poeticism. A close reading of a few such lines, hidden gems that could easily be overlooked in the voluminous flow of the novel, demonstrates the array of linguistic variables that Wallace skilfully manipulated to create iconic reminders that moments of beauty and pleasure can be found in the most mundane, ridiculous, and/or depressing of contexts.

I read *Infinite Jest* when it first came out twenty-five years ago, and have read it several times since then, and it has never disappointed, though it has certainly taken on new layers of meaning as the world has changed around us. Wallace's caricature of a celebrity with no political experience being elected president proved prophetic with respect to the Trump presidency, but what seemed over-the-top and farcical at the time now seems gentle and benign in retrospect. Re-reading the novel mid-pandemic, I feel more nostalgia than I would ever have predicted for a seamy world full of drug addicts, terrorists, and overly competitive teenaged athletes, in which masks are mentioned frequently, but are never worn to prevent the spread of infection, a world in which characters frequently gather unmasked in large groups (in 12-step meetings, in the halfway house, in the locker room, in the stands of tennis matches), without fear of infection. One cannot help but wonder what Wallace would have made of the events we have witnessed in the last few years, including the packing of the US Supreme Court with right-wing ideologues, 'ordinary' citizens storming the capital building armed with zip ties, looking for legislators to torture and/or kill, State governors outlawing public health measures recommended by the CDC to slow the spread of infection, the Black Lives Matter protests, the #MeToo movement, and on and on. How could he have written something more outlandish, more nightmarish than these realities – and if he had found a way, could we bear to read it? In some respect, this makes *Infinite Jest* less scary and more comforting: we can think fondly "remember when *this* is what we were afraid of?"

Wallace would be amused, I imagine, to see us using this novel for escapism, but also gratified that we can find comfort in it. Beyond the plot, we can also find joy in the writing: each time I dip into the novel, I stumble across instances of great lines I had forgotten (or never consciously registered, being caught up in the flow), moments of breathtaking poeticism and linguistic cleverness. I share a few of these here, in case you also skimmed right by these the first time or two you read the novel. In subjecting these to very close reading, I hope to demonstrate again Wallace's extraordinary facility with language, but also that his deployment of this went beyond mere playfulness. In each case, when I have stopped to dwell on a newly discovered 'hidden gem', I have been able to see how it connects to the larger themes of the novel, and sometimes directly corresponds to other, more prominently placed lines, creating a complex interweaving of ideas that makes the novel become ever more satisfying the more deeply you dive into it.

Although readers are probably more likely to dwell upon particularly funny, unexpected, or disturbing moments in *Infinite Jest*, all of which are available in great abundance, I have demonstrated elsewhere (Shapiro 2019) that Wallace congruently manipulated varia-

bles on multiple levels of language (phonetic, phonological, morphological, syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic) to create extraordinary phrases and sentences, and that these work not only to slow down the reader as Hayes-Brady (2016, 140) has argued, but to underline and bring readers' attention to important themes. There may have been many instances when Wallace was not conscious of all the linguistic variables that he was deploying, when he just liked the sound or weight of a phrase without consciously analyzing why it 'worked', though there are passages that cannot just be the product of a good ear for language. It is easy for such complex linguistic patterning to escape the notice of even a careful and trained reader. Letzler singles out the repeated entries in James O. Incandenza's filmography (endnote 24 of the novel, 985-93) that read merely "Untitled. Unfinished. UNRELEASED" as "cruft", i.e. "junk text, simultaneously too excessive and too vacuous to be worth anyone's attention" (2012, 308), adding that they "do not represent pointlessness – they are pointless" (314). However, I have shown previously that this refrain is artfully and strategically constructed and deployed, not just to create some cohesive linguistic patterning, but to allow for a fractal splintering of interpretations (Shapiro 2020).

Of course, different readers respond to different elements of the novel, and may remain unaware (on a conscious level, at least) of these displays of linguistic virtuosity, much the same way that a musically naïve listener might nonetheless appreciate a Beethoven symphony without being able to analyze its structure. But it is this level of linguistic sophistication and complexity that makes me return time and again to Wallace's work, despite my discomfort with aspects of his worldview (and indeed with the author's own life). I am frequently dismayed by the centering of white male experience, frequently grossed out by graphic descriptions, appalled by the author's real-life admitted stalking and abuse of Mary Karr, deeply saddened by his struggles with depression and eventual suicide, but when I allow myself to sink into Wallace's sentences, the sheer pleasure I get from the words and sounds outweighs my other emotional responses. Wallace's writing does what all great literature does: it allows us to find the right distance from the 'real' world in order to see it better, to consider how it could be different, to find solace in the reminder that we are capable of such acts of imagination; that our everyday taken-for-granted language can be reworked in such fresh and surprising ways offers hope that the humdrum and routine can at any moment become uplifting and transcendent.

Take, to start with, a passing observation by Hal Incandenza, out walking the streets alone and upset:

A Brockton man in a Land's End parka took a fall too burlesque to have been unstaged. (949)

It is easy to skim over this line, as just a moment of slapstick comedic relief, just another detail in a chaotic kaleidoscopic description of activity on a busy public street – until you read it out loud, which I encourage you to do. First of all, you might notice the meter, which is satisfyingly singsong. It starts with a couple of strongly iambic feet (ă Bróck/ tŏn mán), loses any regular sense of rhythm for a moment (ĭn ă Lánd's/ Énd/ párk ă/), then comes roaring back with three anapests in a row (tŏŏk ă fall/ tŏŏ bŭr lésque/ tŏ hăve béen) and finishes up with another strong iamb (ŭn stáged). It *could* just be epiphenomenal, the English tendency to drift into iambic meter, broken up by some lexical choices that interrupt the natural flow. Except that when you think about it, does it not exactly mirror the action that is being described? Normal, basic guy (iambic) stumbles and flails (loss of rhythm), Hal thinks about it (sting of anapests) and comes to an important realization (final iamb).

Then you might notice quite a bit more phonological patterning, the alliteration and consonance of *Brockton*, *burlesque*, and *been*, the additional consonance (slightly camouflaged by the different spellings) of the non-initial /k/ sounds in *Brockton*, *parka*, *burlesque*, then the yet more pervasive consonance of the (again, non-initial) nasal /n/, which is patterned even more deliberately, with five tightly clustered in the initial subject noun phrase, then after ten /n/-less syllables, we get two more tightly clustered together in the final two words. There is a near rhyme of *man* and *land*. The visual repeat of *took*, *too*, *to* is likely mere coincidence, but maybe not, given that these come at the start of each anapestic foot. One can go too far down this road – it begins to feel like looking for alphanumeric codes in the Bible to solve *Da Vinci code*-type riddles. The English language only has so many sounds that some patterning is unavoidable. But then you think about how much Wallace loved to play with language, and you cannot help but wonder.

Going beyond phonology, all three articles in the sentence are indefinite (the unstressed *a* each time, no definite *the*, *this*, *that*, *his*). Wallace thus sketches a specific, concrete visualization, but simultaneously evokes an infinity of alternate realities: the man is "a Brockton man", but could have been any man (and really, how could Hal know where the man lives?); he is in "a Land's End parka", but he could have been wearing anything), and he took "a fall", though he could have taken anything, done anything. Why does it matter that he is from Brockton, and that his parka is from Land's End, if indeed Hal is correct in these identifications? What does it tell us that Hal would notice and/or infer these unspoken signals of identity? Does a reader who understands what Brockton and Land's End index in the social semiotics of the Boston area in the 1990s read this sentence differently than one for whom these are meaningless signifiers? My guess is no, because these are white middle-class default specifica-

tions for Wallace's imagined white middle-class default kind of readers. The guy is intended to be a basic guy – and if you do not know the basicness of Brockton and Land's End, you would still have to default to a basic interpretation. (In fact, Brockton has a much higher percentage of Black residents than Boston does, but as Hal always uncomfortably registers ethnic differences, we may infer that this particular man is white.) So why not just call him 'a man', full stop? Why not give him other 'default' descriptions (which, in Hal's view, might include, e.g. average height, a tense or worried expression, less than perfect posture, or a myriad of other potential descriptors)?

Likewise, Hal might have registered in his thoughts that the man *fell*, *fell down*, *fell over*, or *tripped* or *stumbled* or *came crashing down*, but instead he "took a fall", an agentive construction that underlines Hal's belief that it *could not* "have been unstaged". The implied double negative (as opposed to just saying that it was certainly 'staged') adds additional emphasis, cementing the certainty in Hal's mind that this man deliberately chose his actions. At the same time, 'taking a fall' evokes the more shameful meanings from boxing, when a fight is thrown for money, or in law enforcement, when a 'fall guy' is punished for a crime in the place of others.

Thus, this 'simple' sentence actually gets to the heart of some deep concerns, not just the question of seeing past theatrical artifice to reality, but also the issue of agency and assuming responsibility for one's actions. It focuses Hal, and by extension the reader, on how we all, constantly, are making the choice to act (or not to act), and whether we are willing to take the responsibility (or blame) associated with having made such choices. Perhaps the dude really just stumbled and flailed, even if a bit dramatically – but Hal sees intention there because he needs to, because this allows him to contemplate doing the same: he realizes just a few pages later that if he fakes a fall, he will not have to play in the upcoming tennis competition, or indeed ever again. He imagines a few different scenarios, in which he could

> fall so carefully badly, I'd take out all the ankle's ligaments and never play again. Never have to, never get to. I could be the faultless victim of a freak accident and be knocked from the game while still on the ascendant. Becoming the object of compassionate sorrow rather than disappointed sorrow. (954-5)

This chunk of text itself deserves some close reading, as Hal keep restating and reframing the idea, as if he cannot stop thinking about it. The fragments "never have to, never get to" echo the original formulation "never play again", but the contrast between the flip sides of the coin of obligation and opportunity is brought into stark relief by the absence of subject and object. It is exactly when Hal flips that coin that the perspective shifts, from Hal's point of view (taking de-

liberate action to free himself from the crushing pressure) to the assumed point of view of others (feeling sorry for him).

While sentences with multiple layers of linguistic patterning are a joy unto themselves, they take on even more significance when juxtaposed with other lines scattered elsewhere. We take Hal's threat to self-harm more seriously if the line about the Brockton man is still ringing in our heads. The louder a line resonates, the longer it echoes in our minds, the more likely we are to see connections with other moments in the text. Hal gets more than his fair share of these lines, but only in his thoughts, never in his reported speech, which is appropriate since one of the main plot points we try to figure out throughout the text, introduced in the very first section of the novel, is the disconnect between his enormous intellect and his communication skills, the mystery of how and why he has become completely unable to speak, and whether he will be able to recover from this catastrophic mutism. The less Hal is able to speak for himself, the more Wallace gives us access to his thoughts, and the greater the contrast between his inarticulateness and the poeticism of his thoughts, the more we invest in these questions.

When we do see Hal (in flashback) talking to his classmates, friends, or siblings, he is occasionally long-winded and/or erudite, often clever and funny – often to the point where he no longer seems like a realistic adolescent – but never poetic. Take, for instance, this snippet of a phone conversation with his older brother Orin, which like many of Hal's conversations gives only direct dialogue, never dipping into the minds of the interlocutors:

> Don't feel bad. There's no guarantee anybody would have told you even if you'd popped in for, say, the memorial service. I for one wasn't exactly a jabberjaw at the time. I seemed to have been evincing shock and trauma throughout the whole funeral period. What I mostly recall is a great deal of quiet talk about my psychic well-being. It got so I kind of enjoyed popping in and out of rooms just to enjoy the quiet conversations stopping in mid-clause. (251-2)

It is, therefore, all the more arresting when we find elaborate linguistic patterning in his thoughts, as Wallace shows us when Hal most clearly tries to remember his father:

> The tall thin quiet man, Himself, with his razor-burn and bent glasses and chinos too short, whose neck was slender and shoulders sloped, who slumped in candied east-window sunlight with his tailbone supported by windowsills, meekly stirring a glass of something with his finger while the Moms stood there telling him she's long since abandoned any reasonable hope that he could hear what she was telling him – this silent figure, of whom I still

remember mostly endless legs and the smell of Noxema shave-cream, seems, still, impossible to reconcile with the sensibility of something like *Accomplice!* (951)

This single sentence is notable simply due to its length; it is ninety-six words, the first sixty-seven of which turn out to be one long appositive phrase. This is nowhere near a record for Wallace, and the sort of thing he is famous for, the sort of sentence Wallace himself described as "a kind of hostility to the reader [...] syntactically not incorrect but kind of a bitch to read" (McCaffery 2012, 25), but we do not find sentences like that on every page. Simply comparing it to other passages quoted here shows that he varied his syntax quite dramatically, both in the sense of 'widely' and in the sense of 'for dramatic effect'. The paragraph that this sentence begins in fact continues with a series of more normal-sized, easier to process sentences, finishing with a gut-punching pair of short independent clauses connected by a colon: "I accepted it: I could not remember" (951), sputtering out as Hal's memory has done.

The long sentence begins matter-of-factly, with a string of short adjectives that could come in any order, as if we are being hit with just a concise and objective list of descriptors. Then we get to the appositive phrase within the appositive phrase: "Himself", the pronoun used as a proper noun, which was defamiliarizing the first time we encountered it, as if Hal's earthly father has been given the status of a heavenly Father (which stands in stark contrast to the oddly-plural-yet-informal moniker for "the Moms"), but by this point in the novel this should already have become familiar to us. Each of the adjectives must be stressed (which slows us down, even in the absence of commas separating the adjectives), and of course the noun head of the noun phrase "man" must also likewise be stressed, and each syllable of the appositive "Himself", too – resulting in a string of slower stressed syllables that is quite unlikely to occur in normal discourse (six stressed syllables with only the unstressed second syllable of "quiet" interrupting them). After this, the sentence then spins off into a dizzying array of prepositional phrases with conjoined objects and relative clauses themselves containing internal modifiers, while simultaneously breaking the punishing pounding of the stressed syllables, as if the sentence is spinning out of control, as if Hal's thoughts are doing so. (Though, of course, even when Hal's thoughts are out of control, he has been well-trained enough by his grammarian mother to use the formal case-marked relative pronoun *whom*.) The syntactic explosion is mirrored phonologically, again, in the strategic deployment of sibilance. Notably, there are no occurrences of *s/z/sh* in the initial list, with its impression of controlled description ("the tall thin quiet man") – this does contain softer interdental fricatives, but none that hiss. After this, however, we never get more than a brief respite

from sibilance, as if Hal has lost control and is just spitting out slices, slashes of details. It is as if we can hear his thoughts churning.

There are three *sl-* onsets, in particular, that come in rapid succession: *slender*, *sloped*, and *slumped*. Although linguists disagree about the role phonaesthemes play in spoken language (and how this fits with morphological theories, as Winter et al. 2017 discuss), there can be no doubt that word-initial *sl-* is associated with more than a random sampling of negative connotations, mostly having to do with unpleasant moistness (*slime*, *slop*, *sluice*, *slush*, *sludge*), but also clumsiness, lack of care (as in *slouch*, *slump*, *slip*), and some more abstract sense of being pejorative (as in *sly*, *slander*) (Mattielo 2013, 203-4 provides a review of these dating back to studies beginning in the 1930s). It is not a *morpheme* with an independent meaning, yet it certainly activates associations with these other words in our minds and may thus still evoke a negative, unpleasant feeling. Wallace cannot have chosen three of these in rapid succession because they sounded *pretty* together.

On the semantic level, the descriptions are insistently redundant, featuring no fewer than four twinned lexemes: *quiet* as well as *silent*, *thin* and also *slender*, both *sloped* and *slumped*, and not just the visual cue of *razor-burn* but the *smell of Noxema shave-cream*. There is even a triplet to reinforce, especially, the man's height: he is *tall*, his *chinos too short*, and he has *endless legs*. Hal "still" remembers what "still" seems impossible to him. One might imagine a creative writing instructor attempting to steer a new writer away from this kind of repetition, particularly within a single sentence. But it is clear that what Wallace is doing here is intentionally underlining not the description of Incandenza Senior (which, had it been important, would likely have taken place long before nearing the thousandth page of the novel), but how Hal experiences the world, becoming obsessed with particular details and replaying them in an endless loop in his head.

We are supposedly experiencing Hal's memories, but he does not share all the sensory details with us; what is missing from this paragraph is as important as what is included. All we 'see' of Incandenza is "razor-burn" and "glasses" (incidentals, not a description of his actual face). We know he is wearing chinos, but we do not know what he is wearing on his upper body. This is all the more striking as the sentence follows an extremely detailed portrait of the remembered living room, full of shapes and colours, all remembered in almost excruciating detail. The sunlight coming through the window is "candied", which describes a process of making something sweet (and preserving it), but the Dante reference to "abandoned… hope" makes it perfectly clear that this is not a sweet or happy memory for Hal, and presumably yellowish, but it lends the only colour to the scene.

Notably, although we are told that the Moms is speaking, we do not hear it for ourselves – the dialogue is interpreted for us, not rep-

resented directly. In effect, Hal presents his memories as a blurry, silent, black-and-white film, one in which Hal (like the reader) is a viewer, not a participant; he does not remember interacting, nor do his parents show any awareness of his presence. While Avril was still trying to communicate with her husband (all the while averring that she had lost hope of succeeding), Hal had already given up entirely. James (in his son's eyes, at least) shares Hal's lack of agency: the only action attributed to him, stirring his drink with his finger, is done "meekly" and in a socially unacceptable way. He appears to have little control over his own body: his shoulders are sloped, as if permanently or independent of his will (as opposed to him more actively *shrugging* or *hunching* over or choosing a posture), and his tailbone is likewise 'supported' by the windowsills (as opposed to him deciding to *perch* or *pose*). He does not speak, lending some credibility to Avril's doubt about his ability to hear and understand her. Hal not only appears to share his mother's misgivings, not recalling any details of his father reacting to her speech in any way, but takes it one step further, specifying in the sentence that follows this one that "[i]t was impossible to imagine Himself conceiving of sodomy and razors, no matter how theoretically" (951), not recognizing this as Hal's own personal failure of imagination projected onto his father and readers both. (It is particularly ironic that he cannot imagine his father imagining razors, as he has just told us about his father's razor-burn and his smell of shaving cream.) Notably, the sibilance that persisted through the first long sentence continues well into this following sentence as well, until we reach the final murmured disclaimer.

Although much of the poetic language in *Infinite Jest* comes from Hal's thoughts (which ties in to him being a language prodigy, and a pretty clear proxy for the author), it is not entirely absent elsewhere, though many of the poetic moments that do not belong to Hal are more prominently placed and therefore harder to miss in an initial reading, such as the final line of the section in which Lucien Antitoi is brutally tortured to death:

> As he finally sheds his body's suit, Lucien finds his gut and throat again and newly whole, clean and unimpeded, and is free, catapulted home over fans and the Convexity's glass palisades at desperate speeds, soaring north, sounding a bell-clear and nearly maternal alarmed call-to-arms in all the world's well-known tongues. (488-9)

If this line has done its job properly, it may still be able to prompt connections in the reader's mind, though separated from the lines we have just looked at by hundreds of pages and therefore likely days if not weeks of reading time. Both the Brockton man and Lucien are portrayed as agents, although we may suspect that the former is merely experiencing an accident and we know that the latter

did not choose to be sadistically tortured. Both Hal and Lucien see their bodies as a prison (and perhaps Hal's father as well, given his eventual suicide). Notably, the freedom that Lucien finds in being released from the constraints of his body is the ability to communicate freely (precisely the ability we see Hal lose at the start of the novel, and one that James also struggles with, both with his family in Hal's memory and in his film-making career).

The ending line of any novel is a particularly privileged position, intended to keep echoing in reader's minds after we finish reading the novel. This is perhaps even more notable in an open, postmodern novel that no longer carries the burden of expectation that it will neatly tie off loose ends, providing the reader with a sense of closure. Much, of course, has already been written about Wallace's first novel, *The Broom of the System*, ending mid-sentence. Hayes-Brady (2016, 2) points out that it "ends by cutting off the very word 'word', reflexively invoking the absence of linguistic closure that has been problematized throughout the narrative". *Infinite Jest* is not quite that open, although readers are left to wonder whether life is looking up for Don Gately or not:

> And when he came back to, he was flat on his back on the beach in the freezing sand, and it was raining out of a low sky, and the tide was way out. (981)

Although I can hardly claim the ending sentence as a 'hidden gem', I suspect may readers do not consciously stop to think about some of the nice linguistic patterning it contains, and how these may push us toward a more hopeful reading of the line. In a 1996 interview with the *Boston Phoenix*, Wallace said the ending of the novel "is supposed to stop and then kind of hum and project" (Donahue 2012, 72) In a live 2004 radio interview, a caller asked Wallace about this final line, describing it as a "moment of redemption" to which Wallace responded "I like it as a last sentence, so obviously, I'm going to agree with you" (Goldfarb 2012, 144).

Freezing sand may sound unpleasant, but since Gately has been burning up with fever (and in memory, burning up from drugs), in this context it is more refreshing than not. He is been flat on his back in the hospital, so being flat on his back on a beach is a much more pleasant prospect. "Raining out of a low sky" is almost redundant, given that it can hardly rain out of something that *is not* the sky. "Low" is, of course, both ambiguous and vague. Low as in 'sad'? As in 'underhanded' and 'unworthy'? Or low physically, close to the ground, so that Gately feels like he can almost reach out and touch it (and therefore a rather optimistic way of looking at the situation)? Note that it is not *soaking* or *drenching* him (it is reported impersonally, removed from his experience), not *storming*, or *pouring*, or *pelt-*

ing down. Compared to how he has been, lying feverishly in his own filth, the idea of lying on cold sand while being washed by the rain, seems cleansing: Gately emerges from his ordeals not just unscathed, but practically purified.

Tides come and go in a cycle, and he is lucky that the tide is "way out" (which, of course, evokes not just distance, but a possible escape, and even an echo of the hippie phrase for something groovy). He may be feeling unpleasantly cold and wet, but he is safe, at no risk of drowning, Bobby C is not going to hurt him, and life will go on. The rising diphthongs in *sky*, *tide*, *out* and the lip rounding in the many /w/ glides and back vowels support a reading in which this line evokes both surprise and wonder. The string of simple conjunctions ("and… and… and") is also pretty notable from an author who included "multiple conjunctions at the start of independent clauses" in a list of his own stylistic quirks that he did not want the copy editor of *Infinite Jest* to edit out (see Harry Ransom Center's David Foster Wallace collection, container 20.5). There is no contradictory *but*, no disjunctive *or*, no *so* in sight, here, adding to the hopeful reading that things will just keep going on, that everything will be okay.

There is a 'hidden gem' of a line that forms a direct point of comparison for this ending sentence, that readers may have skimmed right past more than five hundred pages previously, about halfway through the novel:

> And his dreams late that night, after the Braintree/Bob Death Commitment, seem to set him under a sort of sea, at terrific depths, the water all around him silent and dim and the same temperature he is. (449)

In both the dream sequence and the (we presume) real memory that ends the novel, Gately is portrayed as entirely non-agentive; he does not even contemplate taking any sort of action, content to observe the world around him. This could be read as passivity to the point of impotence, or as the Alcoholics Anonymous serenity prayer deems it, "the serenity to accept the things I cannot change", and he does seem by the end of the novel to have achieved a transition from the former to the latter, developing the also-prayed-for "wisdom to know the difference". The alliterative sibilance of this sentence had to be worked for – Gately is not just "under water", he "seems" to be "set" under a "sort" of "sea" – but it is not sustained through successive syllables, alternating with non-sibilant onsets, creating a more lulling ebb and flow. The water is "silent", and this is reinforced by the frequent bilabial nasal stop codas, which muffle the effect of the sibilance. The nasal codas come mostly in rhymed pairs: *dream(s)/seem*, *him/dim*, *commitment/silent*. (The final spelled /t/ of this last pair is not normally pronounced in most US dialects, so these syllables actually end

in nasalized vowels followed by a glottal stop, and the rhyming syllables are not stressed, so the effect is pretty subtle.) The conjunction *and* (which would normally be pronounced just as a syllabic nasal) forms identity rhymes with each of its repetitions, adding again to the soothing ebb-and-flow effect.

"Dim" lighting may be romantic in restaurants, but it can also be scary, if you cannot see what dangers lurk. "Terrific" has this same ambiguity: it is wonderful, marvellous, *and/or* terrifying. Gately is being gently sucked under the water, encouraged to give up, to drown, to die. This is quite different from the rain that falls on him as if to wake him up at the end of the novel. Importantly, both of these are framed as scenes that Gately is remembering, memories he has been dredging up to work through his past as part of his road to recovery. It is painful (both for Don and the reader) to relive such scene, but it is also reassuring that he can face these low moments in his life with, now, enough distance to understand them and learn from them.

Could Wallace really have hoped that readers would make a connection between these moments that are so many hundreds of pages apart, with so much else that has happened in between? Boswell (2012, 368) notes that "Wallace's longer work achieves its effect through accumulation and collage", and much has already been written of the very intricate structuring of the novel, which Wallace has said was based on a fractal known as the Sierpinski Gasket (Hering 2017, 63). Michael Pietsch, Wallace's longtime editor, has described the structure of *Infinite Jest* and the structure apparently intended for *The Pale King* as "large portions of apparently unconnected fragments presented to the reader before a main story line begins to make sense" (Pietsch 2011, viii), and many have quoted Wallace's famous line that the reader "is going to have to put in her share of the linguistic work" (McCaffery 2012, 35). Perhaps most revealingly, Wallace wrote to Pietsch, "I think I'd presumed in some of this stuff that it was OK to make a reader read the book twice" (Max 2012, 199). Someone reading the novel for the second time (who remembers puzzling over that final line) is more likely to look closely at this line, and to see both the similarities and the differences, and to feel rewarded by having found this connection. Perhaps they will also stop to admire the language that Wallace so carefully controlled.

Language continues to change, as Wallace clearly knew, and it is sad that we will not get to see how Wallace's language use would have adapted (or not) to the changes he would have perceived taking place around him. Would he have whole-heartedly and unironically adopted new usages, or would he have eschewed them and the new identities and stances associated with them? Would he have put them in the mouths of characters, to mark them as young, or used them with a touch of ironic distance in his narration, unable to resist the siren call of a cool phrase?

Wallace acknowledged to McCaffery (2012) that he "rip[ped] off poetry a lot" (39), that he was motivated by a "desire to make something pretty. And for me, a lot of prettiness in written art has to do with sound and tempo" (38), but his fascination with language went far beyond the phonetic and phonological. Little poetic snippets of prose that also present evidence of syntactic and semantic patterning pop out of the text as we read (and especially as we reread), not just to draw attention to or underline important themes (though they certainly also serve this function); they provide us with iconic reminders that moments of beauty and pleasure can be found in the most mundane, ridiculous, grotesque, and/or depressing of contexts. This is a reminder well worth rereading for.

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