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### **‘The man who knows his limitations has none’: the homoeroticism in *Infinite Jest***

#### Abstract:

David Foster Wallace’s magnum opus, *Infinite Jest*, is 1079 pages long. The narrative is arguably endless. Thus, the complete omission of a positively enforced queer culture is troubling and presumably intentional.

In this paper, I interrogate the lack of LGBTIQ characters in *Infinite Jest* through multiple angles. Initially, I examine the overall ‘queerness’ of Wallace’s rhetoric versus the lack of queer community in his diegeses. With the aid of feminist philosopher Luce Irigaray’s contentions on male and female constructions of language, I postulate that Wallace’s rhetoric is in fact not inherently ‘queer’, but profoundly masculine – therefore, grounded in privilege. This argument is extended by the claim that – as a result of its masculine discourse – *Infinite Jest* creates a specifically homoerotic landscape rather than an overarching queer one.

I navigate this homoeroticism primarily through a critique of the tropes of homoerotic literature in conjunction with the narrative of Hal Incandenza – the ‘protagonist’ of *Infinite Jest*, who finds himself the anomaly in the privileged, homophobic, and racist environment of Enfield Tennis Academy. I suggest that Hal’s character development is in fact an allegory of the homosexual rite of passage – ‘coming out’. Given this, I further argue that having *Infinite Jest* grounded in homoeroticism justifies the negative portrayal of a more ‘flamboyant’ queer culture found in Wallace’s prose, largely through an investigation of the troubling depiction of the transgender community.

#### Biographical note:

Matilda Douglas-Henry is a Melbourne-based literary nonfiction writer and aspiring Wallace scholar. Having recently completed her Honours year at RMIT, she is primarily interested in exploring queer theory and the concepts of memory and forgetting, both through academic and creative frameworks.

#### Keywords:

Homoeroticism – *Infinite Jest* – queerness – patriarchy

David Foster Wallace's magnum opus, *Infinite Jest* (1996), is 1079 pages long. The vastness of its landscape is endless, bizarre and otherworldly. The reader is transported from halfway houses to tennis academies – thrust deep into the minds of clairvoyants and tattoo enthusiasts, and encounters unlikely literary forms such as Curriculum Vitae and high school essays. We are presented with a world where numerical years no longer exist. Instead, it's:

- (1) Year of the Whopper
- (2) Year of the Tucks Medicated Pad
- (3) Year of the Trial-Size Dove Bar
- (4) Year of the Perdue Wonderchicken
- (5) Year of the Whisper-Quiet Maytag Dishmaster
- (6) Year of the Yushityu 2007 Mimetic-Resolution-Cartridge-View Motherboard-Easy-To Install Upgrade For Infernatron/InterLace TP Systems For Home, Office, Or Mobile (*sic*)
- (7) Year of Dairy Products from the American Heartland
- (8) Year of the Depend Adult Undergarment
- (9) Year of Glad (Wallace, 1996: 223).

In this world, anything is possible. Thus, the complete omission of a positively enforced queer culture is troubling, and presumably intentional. The lack of LGBTQIA characters in *Infinite Jest* must be interrogated. Rather than a 'skeleton of satire... fleshed out with several domestically scaled narratives and masses of hyperrealistic quotidian detail' – as Jay McInerney's New York Times review discerns (1996) – this novel is marvellously immersive and powerful, yet *fails* to acknowledge an empowering queer community that would presumably function in this far-off dystopic society. Alternative sexualities certainly exist, yet they exclusively serve a blasphemous purpose. Homosexual sex is largely portrayed on non-consensual terms. If Wallace didn't think it necessary to include a healthy queer community in *Infinite Jest*, why am I treating it as such a major problem? After all, there are many books that exclude all minorities completely. Why, then, is it disappointing in Wallace's case? Why am I discussing this at length at all?

Language lies at the crux of the dilemma - as it often does, when discussing Wallace's writing. As Jack Klempay states in 'The Definitively Non-Standard English of David Foster Wallace' (2001), 'Wallace's English is *not* Standard: it is unique among the myriad other dialects spoken around the globe'. The lack of queer culture in *Infinite Jest*, then, manifests as a cruel deception. The queerness of Wallace's rhetoric implies an understanding of queerness in general – imagine my frustration, then, when all queer characters in *Infinite Jest* are vulgar, or fade into the background of the textual diegesis. With the aid of feminist philosopher Luce Irigaray's contentions on male and female constructions of language, however, it becomes clear that Wallace's rhetoric is in fact *not* inherently 'queer'. Instead, it is profoundly masculine – therefore grounded in a place of privilege, where the majority is prioritised.

The analytical journey does not end here. Does it ever end with Wallace? A more comprehensive analysis of Wallace's masculine rhetoric gleans greater insight into the lack of LGBTQIA characters in *Infinite Jest*. Hal Incandenza – the 'protagonist' of the novel – is a gifted and complex student at Enfield Tennis Academy (ETA). He is the anomaly in a world surrounded by privileged, homophobic and racist peers. Hal's character development serves as an allegory of the homosexual rite of passage – coming out. Rather than portray this explicitly, Wallace's rhetoric keeps this at bay. Instead, ETA exists as a typical homoerotic environment, with the two-dimensional 'boyishness' of the students ironically enforcing it. Yet this homoeroticism extends beyond Enfield as well. *Infinite Jest* depicts a complex homoerotic landscape, with Hal's homo-subtextual narrative seemingly justifying the negative portrayal of a more 'flamboyant' queer culture. A troubling depiction of the transgender community is unfortunately rife in *Infinite Jest* – particularly noticeable in the cryptic interactions between Hugh Steeply and Rémy Marathe.

When considering the lack of explicitly queer characters in *Infinite Jest*, it is difficult not to acknowledge the wry irony of the fact. David Foster Wallace was heralded as a master of the trade who successfully encompassed – in the most wonderfully odd way possible – every facet of the human condition. In a Times Literary Supplement Article, Paul Quinn (2015) describes Wallace as possessing an 'outreaching, comic, world-absorbing imagination and 'maximalist' style'. There are many examples in *Infinite Jest* that are conducive to these qualities. Page 54 sees a sweeping, stream of consciousness ramble that lasts for almost three pages, with punctuation barely existent. Here, we are presented with a tennis-related scene, which may be a fleeting moment of a mundane reality (yet Wallace would never portray it as such):

Eschaton takes eight to twelve people to play, w/ 400 tennis balls so dead and bald they can't even be used for service drills anymore, plus an open expanse equal to the area of four contiguous tennis courts, plus a head for data-retrieval and coldly logical cognition, along with at least 40 megabytes of available RAM and wide array of tennis paraphernalia. The vade-mecumish rulebook that Pemulis in Y.P.W. got Hal Incandenza to write - with appendices and sample c:\Pink2\Mathpak\EndStat-path Decision-tree diagrams and an offset of the most accessible essay Pemulis could find on applied game theory - is about as long and interesting as J. Bunyan's stupefying Pilgrim's Progress from This World to That Which Is To Come, and a pretty tough nut to compress into anything lively (although every year a dozen more E.T.A. kids memorise the thing at such a fanatical depth that they sometimes report reciting mumbled passages under light dental or cosmetic anaesthesia, years later) (Wallace, 1996: 322).

Evidently, the above description could not be more fitting. It's a fascinating approach to writing a novel – the relatively clichéd bildungsroman that Hal embarks upon is twisted, contorted and developed into something profoundly original. Yet we must consider if this is really the case. Is Wallace's rhetoric as 'queer' as we have accepted it to be, or is it more conventional than we assume? Rather than his rhetoric transforming a cliché narrative, is it in fact the other way round – the prose

deceptively concealing *Infinite Jest*'s true identity as just another coming of age story? In his essay "'An Anguish Become Thing': Narrative as Performance in *Infinite Jest*", Frank Louis Cioffi (2000: 165) contends that the protagonists 'compel[s] a 'traditional' narrative interest, their individual stories mimicking or vaguely resembling recognisable, archetypal situations, such as bildungsroman, metamorphosis, or quest'. Cioffi's contention proves correct by the recruitment of Luce Irigaray – a philosopher whose theories on feminism and language radically shifted our approach to rethinking engrained ideas. One of Irigaray's most interesting contributions to philosophical thought is her masculine/feminine sentence structure formula. In her essay *The Question of the Other* (1985), she infers that a masculine sentence structure prioritises 'subject-object relations' and the feminine, 'subject-subject relations'. Irigaray (1985: 16) observes that 'When asked to give a sentence using the preposition 'with' or the adverb 'together'... women will respond with statements such as: 'I'll go out with him tonight', or 'we'll always live together.' Male subjects instead respond: 'I came with my motorcycle'; ... or 'Me and my guitar are good together'.

Irigaray and Wallace may seem like a farfetched scholarly pairing – especially since Wallace's sentences seem to have very little definitive structure at all – but it offers insight into the 'unconventional conventions' that lie dormant in *Infinite Jest*. Consider one of Wallace's most infamous linguistic tropes: *and but so*. In the article "The 'And But So'" (2008), Will Hansen notes that 'Most writers don't have any sort of grammatical or syntactical trademark, simply because their goal is writing transparent prose', yet Wallace uses 'and but so' 'in dialogue, in internal monologue or ventriloquised thought, and in narrative exposition' – 'it's kind of his trademark' (Hansen, 2008). Wallace's 'and but so' is a key example of Irigaray's gendered sentence theory. In fact, it surpasses it – Wallace is known for creating phrases that have no subject at all, the 'and but so' being one of the best-known examples. The opening sentence of *Infinite Jest* – 'I am seated in an office, surrounded by heads and bodies' (Wallace, 1996: 3) – also validates Irigaray's theory, commencing the ensuing patriarchal discourse of the novel.

This unexpected reveal generates two new strands of knowledge. Firstly – with the use of Irigaray's sentence structure theory – it is exposed that Wallace's rhetoric is grounded in masculinity. Therefore, we can deduce that it is also grounded in privilege – thus shedding more light on Wallace's adherence to portraying a positive queer community, while furthering the claim that Wallace's prose is more conventional than it appears. This contention also commences the unravelling of a crucial theme in *Infinite Jest* – one that is not necessarily explicit in the text itself, but a subtle one that is of great importance to this essay: *disguise*. Disguise manifests in many forms, both within the narratives of the novel and the more obscure meta-narratives outside of it. In this case, Wallace is using his seemingly eccentric, odd, and unique rhetoric to mask simple and well-worn narrative tropes – Hal's bildungsroman serving as a prominent example. In fact, American writer Bret Easton Ellis took to his twitter to describe Wallace as 'the most tedious, overrated, tortured, pretentious writer of my generation', citing *Infinite Jest* as 'needy' and 'so conservative' (Ellis, 2012). Considering Ellis's status as a social media provocateur,

his comments may seem redundant. However, he is not wrong in exploiting the novel as much more conventional than we have interpreted it to be – ever since its publication in 1996.

The concept of disguise is subverted when considering the *content* of *Infinite Jest*. As we know, the novel covers a lot of territory – from *Les Assassins des Fauteuils Rollents* (wheelchair assassins) seeking to destroy James O. Incandenza’s film (also titled *Infinite Jest*) to substance abusers, and a particularly memorable moment with some giant hamsters. There are arguably, however, two key settings within the text – the substance abuse recovery centre Ennett House, and ETA, the tennis academy that Hal Incandenza attends. For the purpose of this paper I am identifying Hal as the protagonist of *Infinite Jest*. Hal’s narrative – albeit masked by Wallace’s ‘unique’ prose – is a relatively conventional one. He fits in well with the rest of his peers – some of them being Michael Pemulis, Jim Troeltsch, and James Struck. Collectively, they engage in playful banter - most of which is misogynistic, homophobic, and racist:

Michael Pemulis seated cross-legged on the cooler’s bench just off Kornspan’s left hip, doing facial isometrics, trying to eavesdrop on Lyle and Rader, wincing whenever Kornspan and Freer roar at each other.

‘Three more! Get it up there!’

‘It raped your sister! It killed your fucking mother man!’

‘*Do it!*’ (Wallace, 1996: 198-199).

Hal cooperates in the hyper-masculine talk, but he’s not quite like everyone else. He “worries secretly that he looks half-feminine” (Wallace, 1996: 101). He is hyper-intelligent – a genius, while also battling with an extensive drug dependency. Hal’s drug use is exclusively described as something underground and secret. Here, Wallace is disguising an alternative individual in his textual diegesis - not quite belonging with the ‘real boys’, he is pushed underground, *literally*, to explore his differences:

Here’s Hal Incandenza, age seventeen, with his little brass one-hitter, getting covertly high in the Enfield Tennis Academy’s underground Pump Room and exhaling palely into an industrial exhaust fan. It’s the sad little interval after afternoon matches and conditioning but before the Academy’s communal supper. Hal is by himself down here and nobody knows where he is or what he’s doing (Wallace, 1996: 49).

The underground tunnels of ETA structurally symbolise Hal’s ‘secret life’. His drug use, too, serves as an allegory for the true subtext of Hal’s bildungsroman – repressed homosexuality. As a hyper-masculine, heteronormative environment, ETA is, quite ironically, an archetypal example of a homoerotic landscape. It’s important here to specify what I mean by homoerotic. I am using it as an overarching term to refer more explicitly to homoerotic subtext - a well-worn trope in literature, film and television, and the arts. In his essay ‘Homoerotic Bonding as Escape from Heterosexual Responsibility in Pynchon’s *Slow Learner*’, Mark D. Hawthorne (2000: 512), states that ‘While his [Pynchon’s] protagonists consistently avoid – and are indeed not openly temped by – genital homosexuality, they bond in tightly structured, *homoerotic unions*’. This description applies to ETA in *Infinite Jest* in quite literal

terms, as an all-boy's sports academy driven by routine. Considering Wallace's inherent patriarchal rhetoric, it is a fitting way for him to interact with homosexuality – particularly in this context, as Pynchon and Wallace are often said to have a very similar approach to tackling the encyclopedic novel form.

In the introduction to 'Invisibility, homophobia and heterosexism: Lesbians, gays and the media', Steiner et al. (1993: 1) posit that 'homosexuals are now heterosexualised... the problem in this instance is pushing homosexuals' distinct sexual, cultural, and political practices to the background, so as to foreground their normalcy'. This is certainly the case with Hal's narrative arc – rather than embrace his differences, Wallace pushes him away; forcing him to lurk in the underbelly of the society to which he thinks he belongs. Hal's life outside of tennis and study is portrayed as clandestine, almost shameful – perpetuating his subtextual narrative as a boy who cannot be part of the heteronormative confines of the world he lives in. In footnote 67, Hal is said to secretly go to a tavern fittingly called *The Unexamined Life* – 'Hal is the only ETA who seems truly interested' (Wallace, 1996: 997). There is another particularly profound example early on in the book. It is a dream sequence – described as 'your first nightmare away from home' (Wallace, 1996: 62):

The dream is that you awaken from a deep sleep, wake up suddenly damp and panicked and are overwhelmed with the sudden feeling that there is a distillation of total evil in this dark strange subdorm room with you... None of the other little boys in the room are awake; the bunk above yours sags dead, motionless; no one moves; no one else in the room feels the presence of something radically evil; none thrash or sit damply up; no one else cries out: whatever it is is not evil *for them* (Wallace, 1996: 62).

As is the case with *Infinite Jest* in its entirety, there is a lot of intentional ambiguity in this dream sequence. This could be easily justified, as many subconscious states *are* ambiguous. When considering Hal's homo-subtextual narrative, however, it provides profound commentary on his true identity – an identity that Wallace seems intent on concealing. The dream suggests a lingering fear of an intrusive, authoritative presence – in this context, it could be interpreted as sexual abuse. Hal being the only target too – 'whatever it is is not evil *for them*' – emphasises his status as an outsider. This dream offers a possible explanation for Hal's disguised homosexual identity. Its ambiguity builds a potential rape narrative into his already multi-layered arc.

Hal's narrative extends beyond these potent and hypersexual instances, yet its homoerotic subtext never subsides. Wallace situates Hal in a turbulent narrative that blocks his ability to effectively feel - the catalyst of which is most likely the DMZ mould he ate as a child. Hal's struggle with emotion is masked by his fluency in language, as well as his athletic and academic excellence. Wallace's desire to disguise Hal's true identity is pervasive. The character is a metaphor for Wallace's own creation of *Infinite Jest* – Hal is a dexterous linguist who hides his homosexuality behind his fluent rhetoric.

Ultimately, Hal embarks on a circular narrative. His journey ends where the book begins, a year after the novel's conclusion – 'I am seated in an office, surrounded by heads and bodies. My posture is consciously congruent to the shape of my hard

chair... I cannot make myself understood, now' (Wallace, 1996: 3-10). With the deterioration of his most prized skill – communication, Hal's demise is presumably a tragic one. But in fact, Hal's fate offers multiple interpretations into his homoerotic bildungsroman – as Noah Raizman (1999: 1) states in 'Call it Something I Ate: language-games, addiction, and dialogic possibility in David Foster Wallace's *Infinite Jest*', 'the source of Hal's impairment is one of the key questions the book leaves open'. The circular nature of Hal's journey initially implies a dissatisfying result – that his identity remains suppressed, with the structure of his arc symbolising his own character development. Yet there are small glimmers of hope within the few pages of *Infinite Jest* that suggest otherwise. Although Hal cannot communicate, he expresses that he is no longer 'a machine. I feel and believe' (Wallace, 1996: 12). This ironically implies that disconnecting from language has provoked a renewed ability to feel, and be himself. Considering Wallace's language is to blame for Hal's suppressed identity, it is truly fitting that now, without it, he can be himself again. The conclusion of Hal's story is also – uncharacteristically for the protagonist – written in first person, placing further emphasis on contentment with his identity. What's more, the chapter is titled YEAR OF GLAD – perhaps quite literally referring to Hal's newfound sexual comfortability. It's a pleasant surprise – renewing hope in Hal's lack of self-expression, suggesting that beyond the world of *Infinite Jest*, clarity and confidence may be sought.

*Infinite Jest* offers a troubling contrast in its portrayal of a queer community. Explicit LGBTQIA individuals certainly exist in this world, and in some instances are discussed at length. However, they are never depicted in a positive light. The only character who does not suffer in this way is Hal, whose homoerotic narrative is implicit – kept dormant in a highly masculine landscape. In *Infinite Jest*, the word 'homosexual' is employed nine times. Its usage never denotes a sensitive awareness – instead, it perpetuates taboos that the community has attempted to dismiss for decades.

It is almost as if Wallace had a profound lack of faith in the progression of queer rights. In his depiction of the future, intolerance is still rife – in some cases, worse than it is now. There is one particularly telling example approximately one-tenth into this epic tome of a novel, especially when considering the two arguments of this paper. The extract – seven pages long, beginning on 129 – offers a perfectly *imperfect* collision of both a comment on Wallace's use of language and queer characters. We are drawn into one of the most immersive, disturbing segments of *Infinite Jest* – two characters, identified as Poor Tony and the narrator, 'yrs truly', go on a drug-binge adventure throughout Boston, which results in a run-in with some eccentric drug dealers and bizarre and gruesome deaths. It's perhaps where Wallace's rhetoric reaches its most inaccessible point. Sentences go for paragraphs, sole capital letters are used in lieu of words, and the words themselves are often misspelled.

This is the first time in the novel that the LGBTQIA community is mentioned in explicit terms, and they are not mentioned many times after that. Yrs truly describes Poor Tony (or PT) with vulgar, derogatory language – 'PT is a fucking dicksucking fag queer and a proven cheater and wed' fucked up his map and Cheese and Lolasisisters' map in a beef and didn't crew with fags since aprox the autumn period',

Yrs truly says (Wallace, 1996: 133). Evidently the rhetoric is hard to understand, but the prominent message is made clear – the queer community is disgusting. I am not accusing Wallace of being complicit in these views, and a homophobe as a result. Rather, it is troubling for such an esteemed and clever writer to merely *engage* with these kinds of ideas when there are no powerful ‘unconventional’ characters to refute them.

What remains most fascinating in the ‘yrs truly/Poor Tony’ extract, however, is the relationship between the content of the segment and the rhetoric itself. There is a complete and objective demise in language. As we have established, Wallace’s rhetoric has been superficially ‘queer’ thus far – but it reaches new heights of unreadability here. It is not simply difficult – it is a dwindling standard, an incoherent ramble. The fact that Wallace’s language – arguably his most precious tool – crumbles when homosexuality is explicitly discussed is very telling. It suggests that Wallace is so oblivious to his privilege as a white, male writer – so oblivious, in fact, that he has a subconscious, ‘knee-jerk’ reaction to condemn minorities, and the LGBTQIA community in particular. While no accusations are being made, Adam Kelly (2012: 267) makes an interesting observation in his essay “Development Through Dialogue: David Foster Wallace and the Novel Of Ideas” – that ‘the fictional worlds in which Wallace’s characters exist have themselves been constructed through the author’s close engagement with abstract ideas – logical, political, historical – that are made concrete in linguistic registers and plot dynamics of his novels’. If Kelly is correct, Wallace’s own opinion may be more integrated into the text than we initially presumed. Kelly’s specific mentioning of ‘political’ and ‘historical’ ideas is also profound. Arguably, the fight for LGBTQIA rights has been one of the most prominent political struggles in modern history – thus, Wallace’s abolishment of the community (at least in an empowering sense) is proving to be even more intentional, and perhaps more personal, than we thought.

The conclusion of Poor Tony’s narrative is inevitably gruesome. He kills a character called C, ultimately retrieving ‘what was left of his feather stole out of Cs’ mouth’ (Wallace, 1996: 135). Unfortunately this is not the end of Wallace’s patronising attack on trans identities. Insensitivity towards the trans community is rife in *Infinite Jest*. It appears in many of the novel’s endless worlds – oft fleeting, yet sometimes manifesting with great clarity and certainty. I want to establish here that I am using the term ‘trans’ not pertaining to post-op transgender individuals exclusively – instead, it refers to all individuals who identify (to any extent) as the gender they were *not* born with.

Steeply and Marathe’s interactions are one of the most obvious examples. Here, the theme of disguise manifests again, perhaps in its most obvious incarnation. Cross-dressing is reduced to an insincere form of disguise. It is trivialised and chastised – in this world, it is certainly not a valid and justified expression of identity. Steeply and Marathe meet ‘above the desert’ to discuss the status of the Entertainment – their code word for James O. Incandenza’s hypnotic film, *Infinite Jest* (Wallace, 1996: 89). Their conversation surpasses that issue – as Kelly notes (2012: 274), their ‘dialogue... is drawn from the discourse of political philosophy’, ambitiously claiming that ‘the debate can be understood as playing out in terms of Isaiah Berlin’s famous 1958

lecture Two Concepts of Liberty'. Kelly's emphasis on the political weight of their conversation is not wrong – it is further enhanced by their respective physical states. Marathe is 'alone and blanket-lapped in his customised *fauteuil de rollent*... amusing himself with his shadow'. Conversely, Steeply emerges, 'falling twice and cursing in U.S.A. English... [his] skirt... pulled obscenely up and his hosiery full of runs and stubs of thorns' (Wallace, 1996: 88). Wallace continues to gleefully reduce two minorities to degrading slapstick comedy – particularly Steeply, who 'appeared huge and bloated as a woman, not merely unattractive but inducing something like sexual despair', smoking 'Belgian cigarettes of a... habitually female type' (Wallace, 1996: 90-91). It is a tragic attempt at assimilating some less 'conventional' characters into the diegesis. Clearly a writer consigned to the patriarchy, Wallace's constructions of Steeply and Marathe characterise the inherent flaw in *Infinite Jest*. To borrow Kelly's phrase, it *appears* to be a novel of ideas – new and interesting ones at that, crafting comprehensive characters that subvert perpetuated stigmas on minorities. Rather, it's quite the opposite. Wallace displays a profound inability to be an ally – so much so, that the *real* trans community is not portrayed. We are instead given Steeply – a character who manipulates, rather than embraces, trans qualities, ultimately distorting them into a crude and patriarchal context. Wallace provides us with a justification:

The received wisdom among Québécois anti-O.N.A.N. cells was that there was something latent and sadistic in the Bureau des Services sans Specificité's assignments of fictional personae for field-operatives - casting men as women, women as longshoremen or Orthodox rabbinicals, heterosexual men as homosexual men, Caucasians as Negroes or caricaturesque Haitians and Dominicans, healthy males as degenerative-never-disease sufferers, healthy women operatives as hydrocephalic boys or epileptic public-relations executives, non deformed U.S.O.U.S. personnel made not only to pretend but sometimes to actually suffer actual deformity, all for the realism of their field-personae (Wallace, 1996: 419).

Initially, this seems promising. Wallace acknowledges the 'sadistic' nature of the operation. However, he then goes on to suggest that Steeply in fact finds a sense of intrinsic masculine fulfillment in his disguise – 'the more grotesque or unconvincing he seemed likely to be as a disguised persona the more nourished and actualised his deep parts felt' (Wallace, 1996: 420) – continuing the engrained patriarchal discourse in which the novel is situated.

The blurb on my well-worn edition of *Infinite Jest* describes the book as exploring 'essential questions about what entertainment is and why it has come to dominate our lives, about how our desire for entertainment affects our need to connect with other people, and about what the pleasures we choose say about who we are' (1996). Most of these sentiments are true. In particular, the novel's comment on our addiction to entertainment is profound – a contention that, contrary to tradition in this paper, is a logical prediction of the nearby future. If Wallace's book seemingly captures the essence of humanity on many platforms, the lack of empowering LGBTQIA characters creates a tragic and surely intentional absence.

I could be wrong. After all, Wallace was famous for being a writer of irony and parody. He exclusively used the collective personal pronoun ‘she’ in all of his nonfiction - a bold and equalitarian move. But I’m not convinced. Kelly (2012: 281) describes Wallace’s ‘dealing with ideas through dialogue’ as ‘account[ing] for more than his untimely originality as a novelist. It also suggests his wider importance for our twenty-first-century world, a world that now, more than ever, requires some fresh thinking’. I couldn’t agree with Kelly’s sentiment more – our society is in dire need of new and innovative thinkers. This is *exactly* why Wallace isn’t the right man for the job. We need thinkers who aren’t white, straight men. We need *female* thinkers, *queer* thinkers, *progressive* thinkers. Thinkers who will *rethink* the patriarchal society we live in – not perpetuate it.

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