“Have a Father Whose Own Father Lost What Was There”:
Filial Debt in *Infinite Jest*

HAYASHI Hikari[1]

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［所　　属 Institution］ [1]岐阜大学教育学部（Faculty of Education, Gifu University）

［要　　旨 Abstract］ This essay observes the father-son relationships in David Foster Wallace’s masterpiece *Infinite Jest*. The paper explores intergenerational voices within Wallace’s narratives, proxying his own voice as a novelist in the generation of “post-postmodernism.” In the novel, the main character Jim Incandenza’s highly postmodern films illustrate reflective endlessness and the abusive and neglective father figure that is repeated through a filial relationship between him and his three sons, focusing on the muteness of his youngest son Hal. Hal and Jim’s incommunicability with each other mirrors the disconnect in communication and understanding between the modern, postmodern, and post-postmodern generations. As post-postmodern writers do not, cannot, or must not, deny their filial debt from postmodern fathers, the same applies to fathers and sons.

1. Introduction

David Foster Wallace’s textual exploration has been analyzed by critics and by the writer himself regarding his problematic relationship with other postmodern writers. Marshall Boswell observes that Wallace self-consciously deplores “a generational clash” (92), where he situates himself among the young resistance: “The word ‘generation’ appears twenty-six times in ‘Fictional Futures [and the Conspicuously Young]’ and seventeen times in ‘E Unibus Pluram.’ In every case, Wallace is at pains to explain how *his* generation is uniquely different from that of his immediate predecessors” (92). The “predecessors” here are postmodern, highly experimental novelists: John Barth, Donald Barthelme, Thomas Pynchon, and others. The influences from these elder postmodern writers are mentioned in early studies of Wallace by Tom LeClair, including other writers of the “generation”: “[Richard] Powers, William Vollmann, and David Foster Wallace all admit within their novels their filial debt to ‘Pop’ Pynchon” (12).

Supporting this evaluation, Wallace’s description of his attitude to postmodernism is complexed as follow: “For me, the last few years of the postmodern era have seemed a bit like the way you feel when you’re in high school and your parents go on a trip, and you throw a party” (“An Interview” 150). With the simile of a party, he focuses rather on its remnant:

> But then, time passes, and the party gets louder and louder, and you run out of drugs, and nobody’s got any money for more drugs, and things get broken and spilled, and there’s a cigarette burn on the couch, and you’re the host and it’s your house too, and you gradually start wishing your parents would come back and restore some fucking order in your house. (150)

Here Wallace hopes for come-back of some “order,” something that postmodernists destroyed. The association follows a broken father-son relationship: “The postmodern founders’ patricidal work was great, but patricide produces orphans, and [. . .] writers [of] my age have been literary orphans throughout our formative years” (150). His use of the word “patricidal” connotes a kind of Oedipus complex where one desires to get over one’s father’s influence by killing him; but what is peculiar is that he, calling himself an “orphan,” admits to the “uneasiness” of his need for his father’s return (“of course we’re uneasy about that we wish they’d come back” [150]). This suggests that there may be a more complicated father-

son issue embedded in Wallace's comment, and also that this filial debt would be a key to read his texts. Obviously, one can notice that there is a certain obsession with father-son relationships observed in his magnum opus *Infinite Jest*: the central family, the Incandenzas, includes a mysterious father figure, Jim, and his three sons—Orin, Mario, and Hal. When these fictitious father-son relationships are compared with the author's parable-like explanation above, an observation of what it means to be a writer in succession after the postmodern fathers could be deduced. In other words, it illuminates the question of how the writer could, or could not, produce the generational difference that he was striving to achieve.

For the postmodern writers like Donald Barthelme, the father figure is symbolically dead. His novel, *Dead Father* (1975), announces in the first sentence that: "Dead, but still with us, still with us, but dead" (8). In Reiichi Miura's interpretation, this novel ironically expresses a parody (or joke) of the Oedipus complex—it no longer has any validity (225). According to Miura, Barthelme, after James Joyce's and Samuel Beckett's radically experimental works, has nothing other than reminding us of the fictionality of what was founded, i.e., what was supposed to have authenticity, like a father (276).

On the other hand, Wallace's father-and-son relationship rather takes the Oedipus complex more seriously (and sometimes overly). The sincerity in his writing is considered as the marking spot of the aforementioned generational difference between him and postmodern 1960-70s. In this line of thought, Adam Kelly's study (especially his article, "David Foster Wallace and the New Sincerity in American Fiction") generated a certain trend that situates Wallace in the context of New Sincerity, succeeding the irony-oriented postmodernism. Other scholars, such as Mark Sheridan and Mary K. Holland, support that Wallace seeks to differentiate himself from the old generation of writers (even if in vain). These arguments tend to emphasize the gap between the older and younger literary generations, and Wallace himself is not an exception in the statement above. However, such a claim invites a misunderstanding that the newer writers are completely separated from the elders. It is neither a correct nor an effective way to pursue the notion. Postmodernism, as a literary and philosophical movement, is not so simple to be denied indiscriminately. Even though there are several terms to denote the divergence of the literary generation after postmodernism—digimodernism, renewalism, to name a few,[1] none of those terms succeed in illustrating an entire idea of what comes after postmodernism. They only shed light on the facets of an abstruse entity. Rather, as Lee Konstantinou notes, studies about what succeeds postmodernism should focus on the uneasiness with the postmodern "inheritance" (3). Therefore, what is suggested is an approach that seeks continuity rather than discontinuity, or, in other words, the complicated "father-son" relationship between postmodernism and post-postmodernism.

Among those new terms signifying the cultural movement after postmodernism, "post-postmodernism" would be sufficient to encompass the generational continuity and differences. The rather tricky term "post-postmodernism" signifies an awkwardness that came with the wave. According to Jefferey T. Nealon, "the least mellifluous part of the word (the stammering 'post-post') is the thing that most strongly recommends it, insofar as the conception of post-postmodernism [. . .] is hardly an outright overcoming of postmodernism" because "post-postmodernism marks an intensification and mutation *within* postmodernism (which in its turn was of course a historical mutation and intensification of certain tendencies *within* modernism)" (ix: my italics). This implies that post-postmodernism is not a total thrashing of postmodernism but a variation of it. A certain continuity, rather than a severance, is highlighted.

With this background, this study focuses on the treatment of the "filial debt" in Wallace's writing, incorporating the description of the father and son characters in *Infinite Jest*, to propose a reading of persisting relationship between postmodernism and after. Regarding the father-son relationship in *Infinite Jest*, so far Robert Bell and William Dowling has mentioned the hauntedness of the father figure (Bell and Dowling 118) and Nicoline Timmer has argued the dysfunctional father at some length in her book (133-42). However, there has been no discussion of the connection between the father-son problems in *Infinite Jest* and Wallace's "debt" for the postmodern fathers. The allegorical reading of Wallace in terms of father and son seems effective to consider the interrelationship among the different generations in

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[1] David Rudrum and Nicholas Stavris's *Supplanting the Postmodern* organizes the putative terms after postmodernism.

American literary history. Why and how do sons hold continuity from their fathers? To answer this question, this study highlights the importance of the textual remains of fathers and sons in *Infinite Jest*, including film works written on the novel's text.

2. Jim, the Father

Jim's filmography is listed in "Note 24" at the end of the novel. It is an excerpt from an academic review that very meticulously frames it as if the films are reality. With specific information about the film and the camera, every entry describes the pragmatic details of Jim's works. For instance, *The Joke*, which was a projection of the figure of the audience onto the screen, is quite literally a joke that mocks the audience who expects cinematic beauty, revealing the silly stereotype of "Art" and the "Artistic-minded" bourgeois. This film bears a certain resemblance to postmodern metafiction, especially the artist's attitude of making a "joke" to the reader/viewer who believes in so-called novels. Such an attitude provokes a "sheer annoyance" (989) as the fictitious critics say in "Note 24," and this work is "the most hated" one of Jim's career as his son Hal reminisces later in the novel (397).

Another work of his reflects a more barren idea of the result of "meta" confrontation, involving the audience in it. *The Medusa v. The Odalisque* features two mythic figures, both of whom have the power to turn people who directly see their faces into stone or jewels. The film captures the audience watching their battle on stage, using a mirror and a shield, as a live drama. The live audience in the film indirectly watches their fatal eyes and faces reflected on the mirror or shield, and, thus, they turn to stones and jewels and fall from their seats one by one. On the other hand, the audience who watches these filmed sequences "never does get much of a decent full-frontal look at what it is about the combatants that supposedly has such a melodramatic effect on the rumble's live audience, and so the film's audience ends up feeling teased and vaguely cheated" (397). As noted here, the highly experimental "meta" story gives rise to discontent in the viewer's mind. What he/she finds at the end of the film is only apocalyptic barrenness after the extraordinary battle, filled with stoned bodies of people. In this way, Jim's work, like postmodern metafictions, turns the viewer into inept, inorganic matter, it seems to say.[2]

A few of his films' audiences, however, find a slight hint of human sensitivity in the cold-looking fronts. Joelle van Dyne, a student studying film theory, an actress in the film "Infinite Jest," as well as the ex-girlfriend of Orin (Jim's first son), observes "flashes of something" in what looks so inept that any human sensitivity could not exist in it: "The *M v. O*'s three quick cuts to the sides of the gorgeous combatants' faces, twisted past recognition with some kind of torment. [. . .] Three split-seconds, no more, of glimpses of facial pain" (741). The mythic figures' (Medusa and Odalisque's) humanly aching faces that Joelle catches are for a moment, so brief that she gets "the creepy feeling the man [Jim] had upped the film-speed in these few-frame human flashes, to thwart just such study. It was like he couldn't help putting human flashes in, but he wanted to get them in as quickly and unstudyably as possible, as if they compromised him somehow" (741). Here, Joelle rightly senses Jim's elusive emotion that is extremely limited to the smallest moment behind the ironic story and construction of this work. Like *The Joke*, this work on Medusa and Odalisque signifies the dilemma of postmodernism, which is sometimes accused of its cold perspective of mocking naïve people while holding a human aspect within itself. Joelle (and later Hal) narrowly perceives the resisting sensitivity within the cool experimental work itself, and yet that it is too fugitive to catch face-to-face. This impossibility to match up to another's face, like seeing into the mirror, is what Jim's postmodern works betray paradoxically: to confront one's face is sometimes full of pain, so that it is reduced to the least.

Commenting upon the literature of the postmodern era, John Barth once related in "Literature of Exhaustion" that the novels after modernist experiments had been left in a "labyrinth," where all the possibilities must be exhausted (75). With this sense of exhaustion, the barren battlefield with petrified humans is certainly one of its goals, resulting from the

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[2] Metafictional composition of Jim's works is related to *Infinite Jest*'s metafictionality itself—it is a fiction about making fiction, or rather, a son and his fiction-making father.

eccentric use of mirrors and reflections; for the latecomers (the viewer who watches his works after his death, like Joelle and Hal), the afterimage of literature of exhaustion haunts strongly even after the auteur died. Even though it is possible to see emotional motivation in postmodern works, it is too brief to be fully understood. With such a communicational discrepancy, Jim's postmodern works are so exhausted that the next generation gets annoyed, confused, or lost in its unfathomable quality. It is indeed a heavy debt—not a positive influence or parodiable mastery—because the latter generation can neither enjoy nor healthily digest it. For his sons, this atmospheric indebtedness permeated into their living experiences.

3. Jim's Sons

Jim is the father of three sons—Orin, Mario, and Hal[3]; though, as Nicoline Timmer points out, he is an "absent father" (136). She relates this to Christopher Lasch's argument in *The Culture of Narcissism*, which suggests that "the absence of the American father has become [. . .] a crucial feature of the American family" (Timmer 138; Lasch 208). Jim's disfunction as a father is, for instance, described by Orin as follows:

> Jim's internal life was to Orin a black hole, Orin said, his father's face any room's fifth wall. [. . .] Orin had no idea what his father thought or felt about anything. He thought Jim wore the opaque blank facial expression his mother in French sometimes jokingly called *Le Masque*. The man was so blankly and irretrievably hidden that Orin said he'd come to see him as like autistic, almost catatonic. [. . .] Orin's basic childhood memory of Jim had been of an expressionless stare from a great height. (737)

Jim's existence, especially his face, resembles his films, from his son's eyes: cold, inhuman, stony, and turning others into stone. The repeated mention of "face" and "facial expression" highlights the impossibility to read his inner feelings from this apparent feature. Jim's face, like Jim's works, is an unfathomable "mask" hiding any traces of emotion, thus seeming uncommunicable.

This communicational impossibility stands out, especially for his youngest son, Hal. Hal says, "Himself [=Jim], for two years before his death, had had this delusion of silence when I spoke: I believe I was speaking and he believed I was not speaking" (899). The words that Hal manifests do not reach Jim. The communication here was blocked. However, there is ambiguity as to whether it is Jim's deficiency to grasp or his son's to recount. Earlier in the novel, a conversation between Jim and young Hal—Jim disguises himself into a "professional conversationalist," consulting the boy—is depicted with a characteristic ". . ." that marks (or masks?) the son's words. Hal says to his father:

> 'I can't just sit here watching you think I'm mute while your fake nose points at the floor. And are you hearing me, Dad? It speaks. It accepts soda and defines *implore* and converse with you.'
>
> 'Praying for just one conversation, amateur or no, that does not end in terror? That does not end like all the others: you staring, me swallowing?'
>
> '. . .'
>
> 'Son?'
>
> '. . .'
>
> '*Son?*' (31)

The father cannot grasp his son's words, and they cannot "converse" even if they hope to. However, the reader cannot know whether the father is at fault (due to his alcoholic delusion) or if it is Hal's problem, whether the ". . ." shows Hal's

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[3] In the novel, it is suggested that Mario might not be a biological son of Jim, rather Avril and Charles Tavis's (though it is never distinctly identified). However, the fact that all of the three sons *believe* that Jim is their father is more important for their generational complex. Thus, this paper calls three of them as Jim's sons.

practical silence or Jim's delusion. The ellipsis ". . ." is used in Wallace's work effectively, as the critics notify.[4] Here, the text focuses only on the dialog, not including a narrator to mediate them, and the ". . ." represents the *unrepresentable* utterance on Hal's part. Furthermore, in this scene, Jim is in disguise, putting on the face "le masque" of a professional conversationist, as it were. The interpretation of Jim's real feelings from his face becomes more difficult due to its combination with the dialogical discrepancy. Jim's panicky reaction to Hal's ". . ." betrays that there is an irretrievable gap in the communication between the father and his sons.

Such incommunicability—even when the words and facial expressions are presented—is what motivates Jim to make the film "Infinite Jest," which eventually has the power to kill its viewer with its excessive attractiveness. Later in the novel, when Jim appears as a wraith to Don Gately—not to any of his sons—he tells Gately that he really wanted to create "a medium via which he and the muted son could simply *converse*" (838) because, from Jim's perspective, "[n]o horror on earth or elsewhere could equal watching your own offspring open his mouth and have nothing come out" (837). Jim's work is indeed an attempt to communicate with his son, although it is fated to fail. Jim the wraith elaborates further that he tried to

> [m]ake something so bloody compelling it would reverse thrust on a young self's fall into the womb of solipsism, anhedonia, death in life. A magically entertaining toy to dangle at the infant still somewhere alive in the boy, to make its eyes light and toothless mouth open unconsciously, to laugh. To bring him 'out of himself,' as they say. The womb could be used both ways. A way to say I AM SO VERY, VERY SORRY and have it *heard*. A life-long dream. (839)

This emotional, but insensible, motivation of the father/filmmaker is directly represented in the film itself, where a mother character says sorry to the camera's wobbling lens that imitates the view of an infant. Mary K. Holland gives an acute interpretation of this malfunctioning work regarding adults and infants: "the film does *not* function simply as a representation of the experience of infantile narcissism [. . .]: it offers, rather, the experience of being a knowing adult, already separated from the mother and suffering from that separation of longing and loss of self [. . .], and receiving the apology that could ease that suffering" (81). Jim, as an adult, attempts to stand in an infantile memory for Hal, who is now becoming an inept, solipsistic, and incomprehensive adult himself. Such an adult is exactly the one that his sons imagine in the figure of their father, Jim.

Jim and his son, Hal, are thus very similar to each other, especially in the characteristic of incommunicability even when they want to communicate: their conversational words or their exchange of facial expressions never reach each other. Only the filmography of the father remains for the sons to interpret (yet it is not sufficient).

As Jim finds himself in Hal, though incognito, the repeating characteristics over generations—father to son—demand a glance of the other "father" figures in *Infinite Jest*, especially Jim's own father.

4. Jim's Father

Infinite Jest offers a catalog of abusive fathers: the episode of the smiling father who violates his daughter wearing an actress's mask (371-74) is striking; Matt Pemulis's father comes to his bed at night; Don Gately's "organic father" broke his mother's jaw before he was born, and then her subsequently-involved live-in lover, a former M.P., hits her regularly when he is drunk; Joelle van Dyne has also a father ("the low-pH Daddy") who confesses that he is in love with his daughter and that confession destroys her life, etc. Those fathers often make their children addicts: it is said to be a "fact," in the novel, that "over 60% of all persons arrested for drug- and alcohol-related offenses report being sexually abused as children" (201). From the repeated description of these abusive fathers, the reader receives an image of the harmful father

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[4] Stephen J. Burn illustrates the importance of the ellipsis in Wallace's writing, comparing it with William Gaddis's employment of the same technique (*David Foster Wallace's* Infinite Jest, 30-31). On the silenced female characters' words (such as "Q." in the series of "Brief Interviews with Hideous Men"), see by Clare Hayes-Brady's argument (172-77).

and the irretrievable infection to his children. Among these examples of harmful inheritances, it dawns on the reader that Jim, so far discussed as Hal's father, also has a problematic father who influences young Jim. Focusing on Jim's father, this section will consider the father-son relationship from a wider perspective: it is not a problem only for Jim and Hal, a postmodern author and the following generation, but also for the generation before Jim, way before postmodernism.

Jim's father is the one who taught Jim tennis (as the sport is inherited by Jim's sons, Orin and Hal), and his teaching contains more profound ideas on life, mediated by talks about playing tennis. He tells Jim, "[y]ou are going to be a great tennis player. I was near-great. You will be truly great" (158) in one chapter, where only his first-person narration (to his son, Jim) is written. His expectation seems stifling for the son, but Jim's reaction is not manifested. Then, his lesson gradually slides into mental issues as to how to think oneself: "Son, you're a body, son. [. . .] son, it's just neural spasms, those thoughts in your mind are just the sound of your head revving, and head is still just body, Jim. Commit this to memory. Head is body. Jim, brace yourself against my shoulders here for this hard news, at ten: you're a machine a body an object" (159). Jim's father's severe materialistic admonition seems to deny his son's inner thoughts, calling him "a machine a body an object." It suggests that growing up with such a mantra, Jim turns out to be a "cold person" (from his sons' perspective) who would never outwardly manifest his inner thoughts and feelings. The section of Jim's father's one-sided talking suggests its influence on the formation of Jim's personality.

However, Jim's father's materialistic warning betrays the opposite sentimentality of emotional nostalgia, when he explicates that Jim is in a different generation from his own and his father's. His father (thus Jim's grandfather) has never acknowledged Jim's father's talent of playing tennis (and thus "never acknowledged I even existed as I was" [163]) and Jim's father having remembered that his father had "no face" (165). The "non-existent" self of Jim's father from his own father's eyes now turns to the relationships with his own son, that is, Jim and his generation:

> You see parents as kind or unkind or happy or miserable or drunk or sober or great or near-great or failed the way you see a table square or a Montclair lip-red. Kids today . . . you kids today somehow don't know how to *feel*, much less love, to say nothing of respect. We're just bodies to you. We're just bodies and shoulders and scarred knees and big bellies and empty wallets and flasks to you. I'm not saying something cliché like you take us for granted so much as I'm saying you cannot . . . imagine our absence. We're so present it's ceased to mean. We're environmental. Furniture of the world. [. . .] God I'm I'm so *sorry*. Jim. You don't deserve to see me like this. I'm so scared, Jim. I'm so scared of dying without ever being really *seen*. Can you understand? Are you enough of a big thin prematurely stooped young bespectacled man, even with your whole life still ahead of you, to understand? Can you see I was giving it all I had? That I was *in* there, out there in the head, listening, webbed with nerves? A self that touches all edges, I remember she said. I felt it in a way I fear you and your generation never could, son. (167-68)

While Jim's father says everything should be thought of as a body, material, or object, he also expresses the fear of being thought coldly as a mere body by his son's generation. There is a contradiction in his mind, and it makes him emotional to the extent that he apologizes. Peculiarly, this apology from the father is repeated in Jim's film "Infinite Jest" (as in the quotation from page 839), and the desire to be seen by his son, to be recognized that he "was *in* there," is similar to Jim's wish to be "*heard*" in the quotation from page 839. From these two examples, one can observe that this father figure desperately wants to "communicate" to bridge the gap between generations. Also, this complex desire to have one's existence acknowledged to be seen or heard, is inherited from grandfather to father to son, although this is never satisfied in any generation.

Moreover, this fatal separation between them can be compared to the gap between each representational "ism"s—modernism, postmodernism, and post-postmodernism. Jim, representative of postmodernism, would never be free from his father's, that is, modernism's influence, and his sons in the post-postmodern generation can never be disentangled from their father. This repeated problem between father and son foretells that Jim's sons, especially Hal, would repeat Jim's and his father's remoteness, becoming an uncomprehensive person who shuts down his communication. The sign

of such a shut-down is what the reader faces at the beginning of the novel, although the scene is chronologically the last—the scene where Hal becomes totally uncommunicable (3-17).

Then, for the remainder of the story, can the reader only face the last generation's deteriorating process? Or, as Jim created his own film works, can the sons represent their own existence apart from the father's? In other words, is *Infinite Jest* merely a repetition that Wallace created of senior postmodern writers' suicidal attempts? To answer these questions, this paper turns to Hal's and Mario's juvenile works that are passingly described in the novel, and often missed by critics. The next chapter will illustrate how the sons' works manage their indebtedness to the older generation, even if it seems too late or too retrospective.

5. Jim's Son's Works

The reader finds that some specimens of the sons' work—Hal's term papers, Mario's films—inserted as chapters or sections in the novel. However brief their works are, Wallace's *Infinite Jest* incorporates them as a script-text, as opposed to Jim's “Infinite Jest” that never surfaces on the page (because it kills the viewer and no one can describe the contents). Although the sons' works sometimes help the reader to capture the historical or political context of the story, it is rare to argue that these works are written, transcribed, and created *after* the father's death (and *before* the narrative present).

First, Hal's academic papers are noteworthy. In the beginning, the reader learns that his application essay to the University of Arizona includes the following titles: “Neoclassical Assumptions in Contemporary Prescriptive Grammar,” “The Implications of Post-Fourier Transformations for a Holographically Mimetic Cinema,” “The Emergence of Heroic Stasis in Broadcast Entertainment,” and “Montague Grammar and the Semantics of Physical Modality,” etc. That he is highly efficient at treating words is evident by the several mentions that he memorizes the entire *Oxford English Dictionary* from A to Z. The range of his topics suggests the influence of his parents' interests—his mother is a linguist and his father is a filmmaker.

One of Hal's term papers consists of a section in the novel (140-42), with the main topic summarized as: “how our North American idea of the hero changed from the B.S. 1970s era of ‘Hawaii Five-0’ to the B.S. 1980s era of ‘Hill Street Blues,’” mentioning two famous American TV-series. Hal compares the hero characters in these programs (Chief Steve McGarrett of ‘Hawaii Five-0’ and Captain Frank Furillo of ‘Hill Street Blues’). It is explained by Hal that Steve McGarrett, on the one hand, is a character of “modern heroism,” and that, on the other, Frank Furillo is a “‘*post*’-modern hero” [sic.] (141). Hal's definition of “postmodern hero” is “a hero whose virtues are suited to a more complex and corporate American era. I.e., a hero of *re*action” (141). The description of the “postmodern hero” reminds the reader of his dispassionate father, Jim. Hal elaborates further: “Frank Furillo retains his sanity, composure, and superior grooming in the face of a barrage of distracting, unheroic demands that would have left Chief Steve McGarrett slumped, unkempt, and chewing his knuckle in administrative confusion” (141). This paper is annotated to be written four years after Jim died, and here Hal searches for his father in the description of generational differences in pop culture. However, what attracts our eyes more is the part where Hal guesses “what comes next” for that postmodern hero: “What North American hero can hope to succeed the placid Frank? We await, I predict, the hero of *non*-action, the catatonic hero, the one beyond calm, divorced from all stimulus, carried here and there across sets by burly extras whose blood signs with retrograde amines” (142). Hal expects the future of the American hero as a non-active and catatonic hero who is gradually embedded in other people's lives. Given that “placid Frank” is the postmodern hero portrayed as close to Jim, this catatonic young hero should be compared with Hal. The first scene of this novel, where Hal cannot control his body and Jim's delusion that Hal is disappearing into the peripheral space of the frame supports the interpretation that the “post-post-modern hero” is Hal. In this way, his paper illustrates how he posits himself in relation to his father over the generational transition around postmodernism. Although he foretells his future to be stupefied, Hal does nothing to stop the advance. It seems that the debt to the father is too much to expect any power to thwart the influence. That the son posits himself among such resignations is significant: his purpose is not to deny or resist the indebtedness; rather, by subordinating themselves to the older generation, it passively shows the difference. It might seem contradictory, but such complicated self-reflexivity is

nuanced most in the word “post-postmodern.”

Another son’s work shows a peculiar commitment toward Jim’s work: Mario adapts Jim’s *The ONANtiad* into a puppet-show film. Jim’s original work is “a four-hour piece of tendentiously anticonfluential political parody long since dismissed as minor Incandenza by his late father’s archives” (380-81). Although “minor” for Jim’s oeuvre, Mario’s puppet-show version is a major source in the novel to learn how O.N.A.N. (Organization of North American Nations) has created, depicted by several sequences (380-86, 391-94, 398-407, 438-42), with detailed scripts and subtitles. These scenes also comment that watching this film becomes a popular annual event at the Enfield Tennis Academy, even though the original is “minor” and less liked, for the younger students to learn the history of their own country. Mario’s trick is to replace every political figure into a puppet, “all made by E.T.A.’s fourth- and fifth-grade crafts class, [. . .] of matchsticks and Popsicle-stick shards and pool-table felt with sequins for eyes and painted fingernail-parings for smiles/frowns, under their masks” (384). Remaking the father’s work, Mario makes the film’s plot accessible in a way Jim’s work could not. Although it is only the son’s imitation of (or a homage to) the father’s work, its dependence and submission make the original complicated works accessible to contemporary peers. Mario worked on this film after Jim’s death, so it cannot be an answer or a real conversation with the father. However, it does affect students in E.T.A., the audience who lives in the same era. Mario’s adaptation does not change anything in the plot but changes the direction that the work addresses.

Mario inherits the filming technique and interests from Jim, and Hal (and the eldest son Orin) the talent for tennis. There is a collaborative work of the brothers called *Tennis and Feral Prodigy*, written and filmed by Mario, and narrated by Hal, almost three years after their father died. The sons’ work is rarely featured in other critics’ readings, but it is important when we consider the indebtedness of the sons to their father because it is a putative answer that was possible only momentarily. The contents of the work are described as a narrated script—voiced by Hal, written by Mario—from pages 172 to 176. It begins with some introductive statements about life in the Tennis Academy and descriptions about being a tennis prodigy who aspires to be a professional player. The script consists of a list of directions, seemingly given by the senior students of E.T.A. to the newcomer, for instance:

> This is how to hold the stick.
>
> Learn to call the racket a stick. Everyone does, here. It’s a tradition: The Stick. Something so much an extension of you deserves a sobriquet.
>
> Please look. You’ll be shown exactly once how to hold it. This is how to hold it. Just like this. Forget all the near-Eastern-slice-backhand-grip bafflegab. Just say Hello is all. Just shake hands with the calfskin grip of the stick. This is how to hold it. The stick is your friend. You will become very close. (172-73)

The technical advice on holding a racket (“stick”) slides into a moral lesson on how to approach a thing. The narrator recommends seeing it as a friend, an intimate personage that needs even a nickname. This seems to be common with Jim’s father’s coaching, but the direction is rather reverse; while Jim’s father calls one’s body material, here Hal and Mario consider a tennis racket as an extension of the player, as a human friend. In *Tennis and the Feral Prodigy*, there are more sentences about human figures on the tennis court, the player him/herself, and their opponents.:

> Try to learn from everybody, especially those who fail. This is hard. Peers who fizzle or blow up or fall down, run away, disappear from the monthly rankings, drop off the circuit. [. . .] Nets and fences can be mirrors. And between the nets and fences, opponents are also mirrors. This is why the whole thing is scary. This is why all opponents are scary and weaker opponents are especially scary.
>
> See yourself in your opponents. They will bring you to understand the Game. To accept the fact that the Game is about managed fear. That its object is to send from yourself what you hope will not return.
>
> This is your body. They want you to know. You will have it with you always. (176)

The opponent player is also the extension ("mirror") of the player him/herself, and his/her body is always here to coordinate with themselves. Compared with Jim's father's words, "you are a body," a cruel announcement that what was human now is only a material object, Hal and Mario's "This is your body" takes back what was once abject into their own personal selves. The younger generation's advice is more humanly, emotional, and friendship-oriented.

Moreover, the comparison between the sons' words and Jim's father's words illuminates the *absence* of Jim's teaching. The literal lack of Jim's advice to his sons in the novel strengthens the image of the deficiency of intergenerational communication. The silence of the father is yet influential to the sons, though:

> Have a father whose own father lost what was there. Have a father who lived up to his own promise and then found thing after thing to meet and surpass the expectations of his promise in, and didn't seem just a whole hell of a lot happier or tighter wrapped than his own failed father, leaving you yourself in a kind of feral and flux-ridden state with respect to talent. (173)

The impact of Jim (who faces the impact of his own father) causes a certain uneasiness within the sons' minds: there are contradictory sentiments—whether they should cry for paternal love out loud or stay quiet and practice hard, whether they should resent and reject the inherited talent for tennis or enjoy it. This ambivalent attitude toward their father is the putative answer to their filial debt, which they could face only by absorbing the uncertain attention from the father. What Hal and Mario do is not deny or overthrow the influence but undertake the unsolved enigma of their father, the postmodern, which was inherited from his own father, the modern.

One more thing to say is that this collaborative work is not promised to be effective; it is merely an essay about a short film that Hal and Mario created almost two years ago from the narrative present. In the crucial "Year of Depend Adult Undergarment," the sons are not able to communicate from their hearts even between themselves, mainly because of Hal's addiction and withdrawal. As the novel proceeds, it becomes certain that Hal would be going the same way as Jim, and the worst moment is foreshadowed in the first scene. The entire novel thus prepares the contradictive recognition that the post-postmodern sons are different from, and same as, the postmodern fathers simultaneously. That is what the "filial debt" really means and such indebtedness is necessary for the wake of postmodernism because this debt is the only way to maintain the connection with the father, who has been long out of reach, the only way for the sons to survive.

6. Conclusion

This paper observes the manifestation of indebtedness in the father-son relationship that Wallace explores in *Infinite Jest* as a proxy of himself as a novelist in the generation after postmodernism. As Jim's highly postmodern films illustrate reflective endlessness, the abusive and negligent father figure is repeated through their filial relationship. Although they share similar personal characteristics, the son and his father never fully communicate with each other. This incommunicability is also inherited from fathers to sons, especially for Hal's genealogy. Hal and Mario's written specimens reveal the contradictory feelings toward their debt to the father: even though they desperately realize that they cannot kill their fathers properly, to have an irreducible influence of the self-killing father *within* them makes a subtle difference. Only a subtle one, through adapting and adopting one's own father, is a big difference from what their father did to his own father (i.e., their grandfather). Post-postmodern writer Wallace does not, cannot, or must not, deny their filial debt to postmodern fathers. The attitude to embrace the unresolvable incongruity is what makes the sons "post-postmodernists": it is not a complete independence from the earlier generation's suicidal desire, but a symptomatic retention of what seems harmful to themselves.

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