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"A Cage or Really a Door?"

A Psychoanalytic Study of the Trickster-Father in David Foster Wallace's *Infinite Jest*

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ABSTRACT:

Tämän tutkimuksen kohteena on David Foster Wallacen *Infinite Jest* (1996) -romaanin isähahmo, James Incandenza. Incandenzassa on merkittävää se, että hän luo elokuvan nimeltä 'Infinite Jest', jonka huhutaan olevan niin viihdyttävä, että se ajaa katsojansa toistamaan elokuvan aina kuolemaansa asti. Kyseisen elokuvan kautta tunnistan Incandenzan trickster-hahmoksi. Tricksterit ovat tunnettuja kansantaruista, joissa ne edustavat kaaosta, kontrolloimatonta luovuutta, anarkistisuutta, ja uhkaavat kontrollia kaikissa sen ilmenemismuodoissa. Incandenza kuvataan romaanissa myös isähahmona, joka kytkeytyy psykoanalyyttiseen teoriaan, jossa isän katsotaan edustavan psyykettä ja kulttuuria kontrolloivaa tahoa. Tutkimuksen tavoitteena on tarkastella, miten romaani kuvaa Incandenzan kautta käsitettä, jota nimitän trickster-isäksi. Tarkastelen trickster-isää kahdella tasolla, jotka nivoutuvat toisiinsa: (1) Mikä tekee Incandenzasta trickster-isän? (2) Miten trickster-isän vaikutukset näkyvät romaanin muiden hahmojen patologisessa käyttäytymisessä?

Teoreettinen viitekehys koostuu trickster-teoriasta ja Lacanilaisesta psykoanalyysistä. Käytän tässä tutkimuksessa etenkin Helena Bassil-Morozowin teoriaa, jonka mukaan nyky-yhteiskunta ei pysty pitämään tricksteriä asioissa, mikä tekee siitä yhden aikamme määrittelevistä ilmiöistä. Psykoanalyyttinen teoriani keskittyy Slavoj Žižekin tulkintoihin isä-käsitteestä. Teoreettisen viitekehyksen ytimen muodostaa väittämäni, että trickster-hahmo on rinnastettavissa Žižekiläiseen superegoon, jonka hän määrittelee käskyksi rikkoa isän asettamaa lakia. Tricksterin ja superegon yhdistävä tekijä on juuri tämä kulttuurin rajojen rikkominen, mutta tutkimuksessani osoitan sen myös erilaisten psyykkisten oireilujen taustavaikuttajaksi.

Analyysini osoittaa, että trickster-isällä viitataan psyykkiseen ilmiöön, jossa superegon käsky rikkoa isän asettama laki on omaksunut olennaisia trickster-piirteitä: merkittävin näistä on tuhoisa luovuus, joka synnyttää tappavan viihdyttävän elokuvan. Trickster-isän vaikutukset romaanin muihin hahmoihin näen vangitsevina, sillä romaani kuvaa useiden hahmojen kohtalot peruuttamattomina umpikujina.

KEYWORDS: Psychoanalysis, Trickster, Contemporary American Literature, David Foster Wallace, *Infinite Jest*

1 *INFINITE JEST*, THE TRICKSTER, AND PSYCHOANALYSIS

I focus in this study on James Incandenza, the elusive father character in David Foster Wallace's novel *Infinite Jest* (1996), whom I see as symbolizing the trickster. The trickster, a common archetype in folklore and myth, is defined as a figure with a penchant for breaking cultural boundaries, rules, and taboos; he [*sic*][1] represents the anarchistic, the creative, and the irrational (see, for instance, Mäntymäki 2015; Hyde 2010; Lock 2002; Hynes 1997; Radin 1972). I see Incandenza as the trickster because his ambiguous creative powers threaten the social stability of Wallace's fictional America. Most notably, Incandenza creates a film, titled 'Infinite Jest', which is so compelling and entertaining that anyone who watches it only wants to repeat the viewing *ad infinitum*, ultimately dying of thirst or rendered insane. Incandenza's film rises out of culture already obsessed with pathological behavior where professional sports, addiction, and even recovery from addiction are shown as sharing the same structure as the film. What deepens the character's ambiguity is that he has committed suicide four years before the novel's narrative present, and in the latter parts of the novel he appears as a ghost to haunt characters around him. I see Incandenza portrayed as the trickster because his ambiguity effectively problematizes the boundaries of culture and transgression, rationality and mad creativity, and even life and death.

The trickster's social implications have been brought up by Helena Bassil-Morozow in her highly original work titled *The Trickster and the System: Identity and Agency in Contemporary Society* (2015), in which she analyzes how we are tied to different systems by evoking the mythical figure of the *trickster*. Using the mythical figure as her guide, Bassil-Morozow (2015: 5, 7–8) pits two concepts against one another: on the one hand, we have the trickster, whose main purpose is to challenge the constraints laid upon him by society; on the other, we have the system that can ultimately mean any form of control from a "big and influential […] political ideology" to a "self-oppressive mind that stifles its own creative instincts". But the trickster-system dichotomy is not black and white. Bassil-Morozow (2015: 71) observes that in contemporary societies,

[1] Following Helen Bassil-Morozow (2015), I use the pronoun 'he' as a genderless substitution to refer to the trickster, which helps me evade cumbersome sentences.

"the trickster is framed in such a way that the system does not prevent it from expressing itself." The system is, in other words, not equipped to keep the trickster completely in check. Bassil-Morozow (2015: 82) insists that when the system can no longer structure our social existence, all kinds of tricksters escape to taunt us with their chaotic presence. Bassil-Morozow's perceptive analysis blurs the line between the trickster and the system, making it possible to identify the trickster's overpowering effects as a form of imprisonment. I intend to use this analytic paradigm as a blueprint to analyze how James Incandenza is depicted as a trickster in *Infinite Jest*.

The focus of my study being a father character, Slavoj Žižek's development of the psychoanalytic concept of the *Father* forms the theoretical framework of this study, making my approach to the trickster a Lacanian[2] one. Stemming from the Oedipus complex theorized by Sigmund Freud, the Father is seen in Lacanian psychoanalytic theory as a figure who connotes oppression, prohibition, authority, and normalization; his function is to separate the child from a symbiotic relationship with the mother and then introduce the child into the social world (Homer: 2004: 53). Žižek (2006: 80) complicates this view of the Father by claiming that the concept also has a dark underside, which he calls the superego, an obscene agency that bombards us with relentless, insatiable commands to "Enjoy!", to transgress the boarders maintained by the prohibitive Father. The term *enjoyment*[3] is something very specific in Lacanian psychoanalysis: while pleasure is controlled by the Father, enjoyment is an excess of pleasure that in fact brings more pain than pleasure (Lacan 1992: 228; Žižek 2006: 79), as when we fall in love, which can be agonizing but also makes us feel more present and more alive (Dean 2006: 4). What follows from the superego's command to enjoy is that it renders enjoyment a duty, something we *must* experience, instead of something we *may* experience (Žižek 2008 [2001]: 124), thus rendering enjoyment a duty we can never fully satisfy. The Father is, therefore, not merely an oppressor and normalizer, but has an obscene double who commands us to go beyond those boundaries in order to

[2] Jacques Lacan (1901–1981), the father of Lacanian psychoanalysis, was a French psychoanalyst who reformulated Sigmund Freud's theories in a controversial and highly challenging way. Slavoj Žižek (1949–) is a well-known popularizer, commentator, and developer of Lacan's complex ideas.
[3] Following Žižek and Dean (2006), I use the Anglicized term 'enjoyment' instead of the original French *jouissance*.

experience the unendurable yet fascinating pain of enjoyment. This creates a theoretical paradox where the figure who stands for prohibition also stands for transgressing this prohibition, and I argue that the trickster is an important figure in how this dynamic is represented in *Infinite Jest*.

I see a strong link between Bassil-Morozow's trickster theory and Žižek's interpretation of the two Fathers. In his book *The Ticklish Subject: The Absent Centre of Political Economy* (1999), Žižek argues that in contemporary Western cultures the power of the prohibitive Father is in demise, which can be detected as a distrust in, for instance, Religion and Tradition as forces that define our social coexistence. Thus, the concept of the Father corresponds with Bassil-Morozow's use of *the system*, both standing for the structuring and normalizing effects of Culture. Furthermore, Žižek and Bassil-Morozow share the idea that this structure is weakened in contemporary society. While Bassil-Morozow (2015: 70, 82) sees our weakening trust in the system as freeing the trickster to dominate our cultural landscape, Žižek (1999: 451) sees the disintegration of the prohibitive Father as giving rise to a fierce, intensified superego. I see the trickster and the superego as functioning as if on the same level, stemming from the collapse of the system/prohibitive Father. The two theorists also share the view that the human psyche needs protection from this overpowering agency, be it the trickster (Bassil-Morozow 2015: 86) or the superego (Žižek 1999: 440), making it necessary to find alternative ways for creating structure and fending off the all-consuming powers of the forces that threaten us. In this thesis, I use these overlapping theories in order to analyze how James Incandenza functions as a trickster and how his effects are portrayed in the other characters of *Infinite Jest*.

What my study of James Incandenza, *Infinite Jest's* father character, aims to show is that he is portrayed a superego figure whose psychic agency imprisons its subjects according to the irrational, chaotic, and anti-structural logic of a trickster, thus rendering him what I call the *trickster-father*. Moreover, the various forms of pathological behavior depicted in the novel, including obsessively ambitious tennis training, drug addiction, and even recovery from addiction, are all seen as stemming from this imprisoning agency, as reactions to his impossible command to *enjoy*, a command that

functions according to the trickster's operational mode. The study is conducted on two interlocking levels: Firstly, I look at how Incandenza's portrayal evokes the concepts of the trickster and the Father, followed by an analysis of how this portrayal produces what I have termed the trickster-father. Secondly, I analyze how the effects of the trickster-father are reflected in the depiction of the pathological behaviors of the novel's other characters. The conclusion I reach in the analysis is that the trickster-father is an force behind imprisonment, which I see as the most prominent motif in *Infinite Jest*.

1.1 Material

Infinite Jest (hereafter referred to as *IJ* followed by the page number) is David Foster Wallace's[4] second novel, which has become notorious for its length (a massive 1079 pages) and unconventional use of endnotes as a narrative device. The novel's setting is a futuristic America that has merged with Canada and Mexico to create The Organization of North American Nations (ONAN). The calendric years in ONAN have been subsidized by annually varying companies, with most of the novel's events occurring during the "Year of The Depend Adult Undergarment." Though Wallace's ONAN has elements to it that are close to dystopian science fiction, it is essentially an embellished view of America in the mid-90s. The novel takes place in a fictional area in Boston called Enfield and has two central settings: Enfield Tennis Academy, a school for promising tennis players, and Ennet House, a halfway facility for recovering addicts. These two institutions form the background for the themes of the novel, which include those of finding ones way through a cultural landscape that has been pathologized by addiction and ambition.

[4] David Foster Wallace was born in 1962 in Ithaca, New York but spent most of his childhood in Champaign, Illinois. He was born to a pair of academics, his mother being a grammarian and his farther a philosophy professor. Wallace would inherit both of his parents' academic interests by majoring in both English and philosophy at Amherst College. As an undergraduate at Amherst he was diagnosed with depression, a condition he would struggle with all his life. He committed suicide in 2008 after trying to quit the antidepressant he had been on for most of his life. (For further information on the author, see Max 2012)

James Incandenza, the trickster-father, is the founder of Enfield Tennis Academy and an experimental filmmaker. He commits suicide four years before the novel's narrative present. I begin chapter 4 by presenting how Incandenza fails to perform the function of the prohibitive Father in a scene with his eldest son Orin. What further deepens the failure of the Father's authority is a scene in which Incandenza uses disguise as a way to communicate with his son Hal, whom he cannot hear speak. Despite disguise subtly connecting the living Incandenza to the trickster, it is after his suicide that the effects of the trickster-father take hold. Incandenza commits suicide while he is making the lethal film called 'Infinite Jest', which is rumored to be so compelling that anyone who starts watching it is caught in a repetitive loop. It is through this film that I find the link to trickster theory most prominent: the film is the product of mad creativity so powerful that the character ends up killing himself. I see Incandenza's film as standing for the trickster's penchant for crossing boundaries and transgressing norms, with its effects being catastrophic for whomever watches it. On the other hand, Incandenza's film is also recognized as being reflected in the different forms of pathologies in which the novel's characters find themselves trapped. Furthermore, in explaining how this character operates as the trickster-father, I use psychoanalysis to analyze these trickster motifs and attributes that are manifested in the character, where Incandenza's trickster-like presence can be seen as issuing a command to enjoy, to transgress the boundaries that help to keep pleasure within capacities our minds can manage.

Furthermore, I recognize the trickster-father as a presence looming behind the pathological behaviors of the novel's other characters. I recognize three different forms of pathological behavior, which also form the subsections of my analysis. Firstly, I discuss the phenomenon I call *obeying the trickster-father's command*, which manifests itself in the novel as obsessive ambition. Ambition is most fully depicted through the students at Enfield Tennis Academy (ETA) most notably, Hal Incandenza, the youngest son of the late James Incandenza. Hal is a 17-year-old precocious student at the tennis academy, where he is the second-best player in his age group. He also has a startling grasp of the Oxford English Dictionary and language usage. Linguistic mastery is indeed presented as the way Hal relates to the world around him. Though Hal is initially shown in the novel as a promising young man, we find that he feels empty, merely a

shell trying to please other people with his achievements. The effects of Hal's feelings are depicted through his gradually losing control of his facial expressions, which the novel presents as a symbol for the self. Another ETA student I analyze is Ortho Stice, a minor character, and relevant in one crucial passage where Hal finds him leaning with his face against a window in the hallway at the tennis academy. After a while, it turns out that Stice's face is frozen stuck to the window, but they cannot remove it even by force, connoting the pathological underside of obsessive ambition. The tennis students define themselves through this idealized construction, this unattainable "best self," and I see this yearning for fame as stemming from the trickster-father's command to enjoy, to pursue one's potential to the fullest, even to the disturbing extreme as the examples of Hal and Ortho show.

Secondly, I analyze attempts at *evading the trickster-father's command*. In this subsection, the novel's representation of addiction recovery is recognized as a possibility for liberation, a way to find a substitute for the system that would ease the pressure of the trickster-father's command. Most crucially, I analyze Don Gately, an oral narcotics addict, who has been sober for over a year and attends AA meetings and works as a live-in staffer at Ennet House, where his role is to help the new residents in the difficult steps toward full recovery. As I show below, Gately's ability to remain sober leans on inventing a vague Higher Power to whose power one submits, the help of other addicts, and a commitment to banal cliché's. I see the Blind Faith needed for sobriety to work as presenting an alternative system with the potential to liberate from the trickster-father's commands. Moreover, Hal is addicted to smoking marijuana, and has developed a propensity for using the drug alone and in secret. The narrative portrays the final days of Hal as a drug user followed by his early attempts at staying sober, which are a continuation of his need to be perfect, and identifying with the idealized version of himself. Hal's first group meeting turns out to be an Inner Infant meeting instead of relating to addiction. What the passage shows is that Hal is so attached to maintaining the appearance of a successful young man that he cannot make the leap of faith the novel shows as the only way to remain sober, and the only way potentially to fend off the trickster-father's effects.

Finally, I analyze the novel's depiction of *enclosure inside the trickster-father's loop*, which stems from an inability to communicate, mainly through speech. Gately is shot and hospitalized in the middle of the novel and when the narrative returns to him, the reader finds him in the hospital bed, unable to speak because he is intubated. He suffers horrible pain because the bullet he was shot with was contaminated. During these pages, and though unable to speak, Gately struggles to remain sober by refusing the painkillers he is offered to relieve the unbearable pain. This part of the novel concentrates mostly on Gately's flowing thoughts, and has a nightmarish tone to it. One of these nightmarish visitations is Incandenza, who appears as the wraith, communicating, eerily, as if through Gately's mind. I argue that these sections show Gately facing the trickster-father trying to tempt him into consuming drugs again. Furthermore, I find Hal in a similar state in the first scene of the novel (though chronologically the final one), in which he confronts an admission board at the University of Arizona. What the reader finds out during this scene is that Hal is unable to communicate to the board. I see this scene as showing Hal's complete inclusion in his self as his final way to conform with the trickster-father's command. The novel thus begins and ends with a character unable to speak and at the complete mercy of the trickster-father, thus making imprisonment its most prominent motif.

1.2 Previous Criticism

Overall, the psychoanalytic implications of James Incandenza have been largely overlooked, which seems odd for a novel that features, as is already implied by the title's nod to *Hamlet*, a dead father coming back to haunt his literal and figurative offspring, themselves a group of characters crippled by addiction and pathological behavior. Mary K. Holland (2014: 84–85) draws attention to Incandenza's failure to successfully instill the power of the father, and that a kind of "patricidal liberation" takes place in the form of his suicide. Though her seeing Incandenza as failing at instilling the father's prohibition is a very valuable observation for my study, it becomes clear in the pages that follow that the prospect of "patricidal liberation" is far from

accounting for the effects of his failures. The trickster-father is, as I have already pointed out and elaborate on below, an agency of imprisonment, not liberation.

Psychoanalytic implications not focusing on Incandenza have, nonetheless, garnered some previous attention, mostly focusing on the novel's depiction of a culture in a state of infantile passivity. Marshall Boswell (2003: 131) has claimed that the novel parodies Lacanian theory in that all its characters are depicted as infants, as children needing instant satisfaction. Holland (2014: 63) observes that the characters of *Infinite Jest* struggle with the infantalizing effects of a culture whose "members [...] desire pleasure [...] over all else." In her study, the form of control is characterized as a "narcissistic loop," which the characters try to brave in different ways, though ultimately finding themselves back in the loop (Holland 2014: 77). Holland's interpretation is, therefore, rather pessimistic and bleak for she does not see the novel as portraying any substantial way out of the loop she finds controlling its characters. Though I do not focus on the theme of narcissism, I share Holland's pessimistic interpretation of the novel because it corresponds with my argument that the trickster-father stands for imprisonment. Though, rather than concentrating on the characters in the loop, I will consider Incandenza as an agency sustaining the loop itself.

I also wish to mention two additional studies that influenced the formation of this thesis. Firstly, James M. Mellard's (2010) article "Unimaginable Acts Imagined. Fathers, Family Myth, and the Postmodern Crisis of Paternal Authority in Toni Morrison's *Love*" has shown me how Žižek's conceptualization of the concept of the Father can be used to analyze social and psychological phenomena as portrayed through rich and complex father characters. Secondly, Robin Mookerjee's book *Transgressive Fiction. The New Satiric Tradition* (2013) introduced me to how the trickster figure can be seen as functioning in contemporary literature, whom he sees as an agent serving the satiric and anarchic purposes of the tradition he calls "transgressive fiction," a literary approach that highlights filth, violence, drugs, psychosis, and various deviant behavior in order to satirize contemporary culture. Though *Infinite Jest* can very well be called a work of transgressive fiction, my use of the trickster in this thesis does not address its satiric or anarchistic potentials because the focus is on the psychological effects of the

overpowering trickster-father. On the other hand, analyzing different manifestations of the trickster in works of transgressive fiction could be a fruitful topic for further studies.

Before moving on to presenting my theoretical framework, some overt limitations of this study need to be briefly mentioned. Firstly, the present study is exclusively concerned with male characters, which is why the gender aspect of the Oedipus complex is overlooked. Secondly, the mother of psychoanalytic theory will be overshadowed by that of the father. Though this study could benefit from a thorough consideration of the novel's depiction of maternity, it has been left out in order to fully concentrate on the depiction of the father.

2 THE TRICKSTER, THE SYSTEM, AND RAGNARÖK

This chapter is devoted to the trickster. I begin by presenting an outline of this mythic figure by investigating different definitions. I particularly focus on the trickster as a deceiver, a boundary-crosser, and a metaphor for change. Then I discuss the trickster's role within what Bassil-Morozow (2015) calls *the system*. I conclude this chapter by examining common motifs in trickster stories, which include being trapped, creativity and creationism, shapeshifting, and the trickster's ultimate dissolution. The following pages will show that the trickster is not a mere oddity prevalent in ancient stories, but a psychological presence whose influence should not be overlooked when analyzing cultural phenomena.

2.1 Defining the Trickster

As a mythic figure, the trickster can be found in all corners of the world. We can catch him in ancient Greece to China and Japan, from West Africa, and among North American Indians and African-Americans (Radin 1972: xxiii; Hyde 2010: 9). In contemporary culture, one finds the trickster for instance in the outrageously comic film portrayals of Jim Carey in *Mask* (1994) and *Dumb and Dumber* (1994) or Sacha Baron Cohen in *Borat* (2006) and *Bruno* (2009), in the anarchistic performances of Pussy Riot, and the subversive behavior of Lisbeth Salander in Stieg Larsson's Millennium Trilogy (see Bassil-Morozow 2012, 2015; Mäntymäki 2015). The trickster being so widespread and popular denotes that he stands for something so universal it seems to transcend the limits of time and place. As I will clarify in this chapter, the trickster stands for freedom, change, and a disrespect for authority, rules, taboos, and structures. Even though these qualities figure universally in the trickster, he should not be taken as a figure solely outside of time and place. Radin (1972: xxiv) points out that to fully understand the trickster, we need to place him in the specific cultural and social context in which he emerges. This is an important claim since, despite his rebellious antics, the trickster is not an arbitrary entity but plays with the taboos and social constraints of the dominant culture.

Defining the trickster is a problematic task because what encapsulates him is ambiguity: he always seems to slip away the moment we think we have exhausted all his possible implications. William J. Hynes (1997: 33) emphasizes this argument by claiming that the trickster resists definition because "to define (de-finis) is to draw borders around phenomena, and tricksters seem amazingly resistant to such capture." Furthermore, Hynes (1997: 34) maintains that "the trickster appears on the edge or just beyond existing borders, classifications, and categories." The trickster, therefore, resists being reduced to a concept, while Hynes acknowledges that the trickster is nonetheless there, an eerie presence in our attempts to make sense of him. The trickster's ambiguity is emphasized also by Radin (1972: xxiii), who writes that the figure is

> at one and the same time creator and destroyer, giver and negator, he who dupes others and who is always duped himself. […] At all times he is constrained to behave as he does from impulses over which he has no control. He knows neither good nor evil yet he is responsible for both.

The trickster is, thus, an oxymoronic figure, which is evident in Radin's use of oppositions. In a similar vein, Claude Levi-Strauss (1963: 224) suggests that the trickster is an anomaly that inhabits the extremes of binary opposites. But how is one to approach something that so readily defies conceptualization? One conceivable way is to observe what happens in trickster narratives and sketch a picture based on his actions rather than a preexisting essence.

Firstly, the trickster cycle of the North American Winnebago tribe begins with the figure posing as a tribal chief, and arranging a feast before going on the warpath. The trickster-as-chief suddenly disappears from the feast and is found having intercourse with a woman. These actions break strict social rules of the Winnebago tribe. Firstly, the chief should always be the last one to leave a feast he gives. Secondly, the men of the tribe are never to have sexual intercourse before leaving for war. Thirdly, the Winnebago tribal chief himself is never to join his tribe in war. (Radin 1972: 4–5, 54.) This passage is a typical example of how the trickster can mock authority. By pretending to be a tribal chief he defames what is socially expected from a tribe's leader.

Secondly, and in a grander scale, we have Loki, a trickster in Norse folklore. Loki schemes in order to kill Baldr, a god whose life is protected by an oath exacted by his mother. Disguised as a woman, Loki questions Baldr's mother concerning the oath, and finds out that there is a mistletoe that was not included in the oath. He eventually kills Baldr with a dart made from the mistletoe. As a result of his deed, Loki is captured and tied under a poisonous snake, whose burning venom drips on his face. After being bound for torture, what follows is the prophesied apocalypse, also known as *Ragnarök*, on the course of which all the gods will die. (Bassil-Morozow 2012: 25; Hyde 2010: 101–102). As a contrast to the obscene defamations of the Winnebago trickster, Loki attacks the holiest of Norse gods, though he himself suffers from it. By keeping these examples in mind, I move on to inspect different attempts at defining the trickster's irreverent doings in more detail.

The obvious yet crucial characteristic the trickster possesses is a penchant for deception: as his name implies, the trickster performs tricks. We can see this in the Winnebago trickster who poses as a tribal chief, but the trickster's deceptions are not limited to his posing as something he is not. The trickster is ready to deceive everyone and anyone whom he encounters with tricks that "derive from [his] being simply an unconscious numbskull, or, at other times, from being a malicious spoiler" (Hynes 1997: 35). To put it another way, the trickster's mischiefs do not have to be premeditated, meaning that he can stumble into situations and act irrationally without underlying intentions. On the other hand, he can also have a more conscious mindset, as with Loki and Hermes who both use deception cleverly to defy the higher gods that keep them constrained (for a detailed analysis of Hermes, see Hyde 2010). Moreover, these mischiefs can build up so much energy that even the trickster himself cannot control their force, making him possibly a "trickster-tricked," which is the case with Loki being bound and the looming Ragnarök (Hynes 1997: 35; see also Radin 1972: xxiii). The trickster's deceptions can result in falling upon his own head, which is what happens with Incandenza's lethally entertaining film: he creates something so deeply tuned into the human psyche that he cannot take it himself either. It can also be argued that by threatening to destroy Wallace's fictional society, the film functions in setting in motion a Ragnarök-like apocalypse.

Deception and trickery are linked to a further characteristic used to define this figure: he is a boundary-crosser. Hynes (1997: 34) maintains that for the trickster

> [n]o borders are sacrosanct, be they religious, cultural, linguistic, epistemological, or metaphysical. Breaking down division lines, the trickster characteristically moves swiftly and impulsively back and forth across all borders with virtual impunity.

The Winnebago trickster crosses boundaries of social acceptability by acting in a way that is out of the question for a tribal chief, but he crosses boundaries even more outrageous when, later in the cycle, he transforms into a woman and *marries* the son of a tribal chief (Radin 1972: 22–23). The trickster can, therefore, move freely from being a figure of patriarchal authority to being the wife of one; here he undermines the boundaries created by gender roles and the sanctity of marriage. According to Robin Mookerjee (2013: 11–12), the trickster is, indeed, someone who defies socially sanctioned narratives in favor of unsanctioned ones, where borders of decency are undermined. Loki killing Baldr is an extreme example of how detrimental tricksters are to figures of authority. The trickster does not fight for what is held acceptable, normal, or even within the boundaries of the physically possible. He is, instead, detrimental to the very institutions that keep these boundaries in place and give them their social sanction.

In her analysis of the social implications of the trickster, Helena Bassil-Morozow (2015: 7–8) defines the trickster as a metaphor for "the psycho-anthropological idea of change, an impulse that challenges the existing order of things, a progressive force that is a-structural and anti-structural in its nature." We can, in other words, catch glimpses of the figure in instances of *change*, when something new is brought into our world, when preexisting boundaries are lifted and present to us the chance to reorganize the world around us. As Bassil-Morozow (2015: 15) elaborates, the trickster disrespects the *structuring* power of the dominant culture's institutions and rules. In *Infinite Jest*, Wallace depicts characters yearning for change, wanting to live their lives without the pains of addiction and the passivizing standards of the culture they live in. But it is Incandenza who is the trickster in the novel. He creates, in a perfect trickster manner, a

film that functions as a symbol for the addicted culture itself. This highlights the trickster's destructive potential: one can never be sure what happens when the trickster attacks social structures.

To sum up the discussion thus far, the trickster is detrimental to the sacred and the official, which is already reflected by his elusive and definition-defying nature. Furthermore, the trickster has a penchant for deception, which he often uses to attack all kinds of different boundaries upheld by the dominant socio-cultural rules, taboos, and institutions. This brings us to the next topic, which deals with the trickster's functioning in relation to his sworn enemy: *the system*.

2.2 From the System to Ragnarök

To elaborate the trickster's role in society, Bassil-Morozow evokes the notion of *the system*. The system indicates a "rule-making, power-containing, controlling construct of any size" that opposes free, uninhibited creative expression that comes from the individual's part (Bassil-Morozow 2015: 8). The system is the conglomeration of sacrosanct borders to which the trickster is so detrimental, that is, language, religion, and culture (see Hynes 1997: 34). The system stifles the individual, it keeps on producing new forms of power that, in turn create new crevices for the trickster to wreak havoc. In other words, despite the trickster's irrationality, he usually emerges in concrete social situations where an aspect of the system has become too constrictive. For instance, though Incandenza's creation of the film 'Infinite Jest' seems like an accident that makes him commit suicide, it is a perfect materialization of the underlying desires of the novel's characters. The trickster is, in other words, always tied to the system around him. As Bassil-Morozow (2015: 31) states, "[a] healthy system has an in-built trickster as a necessary chaotic element, [...] ensuring the system's renewal within a controlled framework." The system needs the trickster to cast away old structures and to regenerate new ones. It is tempting to have complete faith in the trickster's progressive powers, but we need structure and constancy in our lives because our minds are not equipped to survive an unframed trickster: we would otherwise

experience the world as pure mayhem and uncontrolled change (Bassil-Morozow 2015: 88). This is precisely the problem I find represented in *Infinite Jest*, in which the trickster has become overpowering.

In contemporary society, the relationship between the trickster and the system has become problematic, and there is no guarantee of symmetry and harmony between the two. As "the local, narrow and stabilising character of culture gradually begins to change," argues Bassil-Morozow (2015: 71), the system is no longer capable of completely framing the trickster. There is, therefore, a crack in the system that enables the ambiguous figure to seep into the culture's structuring fabric without much resistance. What, then, are the consequences of the system's failure to keep the trickster in check? Bassil-Morozow (2015: 82–83) maintains that once "the stabilising influence of the social milieu [is] no longer available, human beings start to look for alternative forms of self-identification – and for alternative and effective ways of stabilising the [...] trickster," who relentlessly taunts us by presenting the possibility for an endless array of "unrealised opportunities and unlived lives and lifestyles." The trickster proves to be a major challenge for the human psyche when the system cannot frame it. As a result, different forms of therapy and the self-help genre thrive: the human psyche needs a system to protect itself from the trickster's overpowering, fragmenting effects, in whatever form possible (Bassil-Morozow 2015: 85, 92). The trickster's overpowering effects disorientate and cause anxiety, and we need whatever substitutes for the system we can come up with to keep them at a safe distance.

As a concluding remark of his study, Radin (1972: 168) states that every generation is bound to give new interpretations of the trickster. According to Bassil-Morozow's ideas outlined above, the early 21st century is characterized by increasingly free, unframed outpourings of the trickster, which disturb and complicate our lives. She even calls this trickster-system relationship Ragnarök, the apocalyptic state where there are no gods to trust or show us the way (Bassil-Morozow 2015: 82). As I show, Wallace depicts a society where the trickster has become overwhelming, and Incandenza's lethal film is a powerful symbol for its detrimental effects. This is evident in that practically all characters in *Infinite Jest* resort to some form of pathological behavior, whether it be the

obsessive ambition of tennis students, a harrowing addiction, or even being on a recovery program for addiction. All these behaviors are attempts to keep the trickster's all-consuming powers at bay, and Incandenza's ambiguous actions represent the roots of this outcome.

2.3 Common Motifs in Trickster Narratives

At some point in trickster narratives he tends to be trapped by some type of dominant force. It is common to find the trickster trapped in the beginning of the narrative, though this is not always the case (Bassil-Morozow 2015: 13; c.f. 2012: 24). Bassil-Morozow (2015: 13) argues that being trapped "is an allegory of control and order." Imprisonment is, thus, a way to portray the system's hold on the trickster. There are different ways in which being trapped is played out: mythological and folkloric tricksters tend to be restrained by someone with god-like powers to prevent apocalypse, as is the case with Loki, while the literary, non-mythological trickster is imprisoned on a more social level (Bassil-Morozow 2012: 25–26). However, the trickster's ambiguity is present in this motif in that it is not a solely negative thing that the trickster is imprisoned, for imprisonment also stands for the proper balance between the trickster and the system that frames him (Bassil-Morozow 2015: 13). In *Infinite Jest*, we find addiction and ambition depicted as forms of imprisonment, which problematizes the trickster-system division. Furthermore, the novel also brings up the importance of structures as a necessary way to frame one's life, to avoid the all-consuming power of the unframed trickster. But the novel is never clear when these attempts at structuring is a part of the cage itself, be it AA or rigorous tennis training. Imprisonment, I argue, is the novel's central motif.

Linked to the trickster's inherent ability to cross boundaries is his gift of creativity. Bassil-Morozow (2012: 28) suggests that when the imprisoned trickster comes into contact with reality (that is, with reality structured by the system), an explosion of "mad creativity" ensues. The trickster's creativity is not something planned but wild and random; it is an essential part of his playfulness (Bassil-Morozow 2015: 20).

Addressing the same issue, William J. Hynes (1997: 42) describes the trickster as a *bricoleur*, that is, as someone who mixes up all kinds of different materials at hand "in order to form a creative solution." The trickster's creativity consists of the ability to separate, but also to connect material that do not belong together. These modes of creativity are pronounced in my claim that James Incandenza is the trickster: his experimental filmmaking is a fitting example of a trickster's creativity, most notably including the lethal 'Infinite Jest'.

Another recurring motif is that the trickster can transform his appearance in several cunning ways: he is a shapeshifter and often in disguise. The figure is characterized by his ability to transform physical appearance by changing clothes or even by reorganizing the malleable and fluid bodily matter he consists of (Hynes 1997: 36–37; Bassil-Morozow 2015: 19). Apart from bodily transformations, the trickster can readily adopt an identity that is not his own (Bassil-Morozow 2015: 19). But what does this element of transformation imply? Discussing bodily transformations as a literary motif, Mookerjee (2013: 6) argues that it problematizes the separation between base human impulses and what is socially demanded of us, thus striving to close the gap between the individual and the social by revealing the "primal and nakedly physical." On a more general level, Bassil-Morozow (2015: 19) states that shapeshifting metaphorically depicts human identity and its relation to the forces that control it. It is, thus, the system that molds the primal physical matter into its socially acceptable form, and the trickster relentlessly resists being molded by traditions, customs, or, institutions, as we have already seen. In a crucial scene in *Infinite Jest*, Incandenza wears a mask in order to talk to his estranged son Hal, which implies that Incandenza resorts to trickster-like actions in an attempt to connect with him.

We have now reached the last point of Bassil-Morozow's outline for trickster stories: the trickster's dissolution. The trickster being such a wild and chaotic character, it is necessary for him to die in the end because such chaos cannot be left roaming the world uncontrolled (Bassil-Morozow 2012: 38). Bassil-Morozow (2015: 23–24) stresses that "[a]fter the creative, chaotic unconscious energy has been woken up for the purpose of disrupting the stale (personal or social) order, it must go back to its dark wellspring,"

and that the trickster's dissolution ultimately signifies the victory of the system to frame the chaotic energy it releases. The idea of the trickster's dissolution is problematized in Wallace's novel. Already its title, *Infinite Jest*, seems to denote a resistance to dissolving: the painful merriness the novel's characters face is relentless, and the consequences are horrific if the trickster does not retreat to its secret dwelling place outside the system's boundaries. The trickster's effects are not diluted even after trickster-Incandenza dies, but are heightened by it: it is only after his death that the lethal film starts circulating ONAN. Wallace's fictional universe is, essentially, a depiction of a trickster-infested Ragnarök where there are no gods offering guidance, only the trickster with its troubling and ambiguous presence.

3 THE TWO FATHERS AND THE TRICKSTER

With focus on Lacanian theory, especially the works of cultural critic Slavoj Žižek, in this chapter I discuss overlaps between psychoanalysis and trickster theory. The crux of the above discussion is how Bassil-Morozow (2015: 71) problematizes the trickster-system distinction by maintaining that in contemporary societies the system no longer frames the trickster in an effective way, making a whole variety of trickster experiences taunting us with their chaotic and disorienting presence. Due to this weakening distrust of "the system" to frame the trickster, people need to resort more and more to alternative sources for guidance and help at keeping the overpowering trickster at bay, In *Infinite Jest*, obsessive tennis training, addiction, and the process of addiction recovery and maintaining sobriety are all reactions to trickster's overpowering grip. As I make clear in the following pages, the need to tame the overpowering trickster resonates strongly with Žižek's investigations of psychic phenomena taunted by unnamable forces stemming from the superego. I begin this chapter by analyzing the trickster-system dichotomy with the basic Lacanian concepts of the Imaginary, the Symbolic, and the Real, and enjoyment. I then move on to track Žižek's separation of the two Fathers, namely, the prohibitive of law and the superego, law's obscene underside. I then present Žižek's (1999: 451) analysis of the "disintegration of paternal authority," which implies a psychological condition much like Bassil-Morozow's trickster-infested Ragnarök, only in this case it is the superego whose force is intensified. I conclude this chapter by discussing the concept of the death drive, which gives more insight into how the trickster-father's effects functions in what I recognize as the depiction of Ragnarök in *Infinite Jest*.

3.1 The Imaginary, the Symbolic, the Real, and Enjoyment

One is usually introduced to psychoanalytic theory through the three orders that structure the psyche, and first one of these is called the Imaginary. The Imaginary is characterized as the state when the child is in a dyadic, symbiotic, even somehow incestuous relationship with the Mother (Lacan 1997 [1981]: 96). It is defined by

wholeness, similarity, and autonomy and the deception related to surface appearances; the imaginary is what enables us to conceive of ourselves as entities separate from each other, giving us our sense of self through what is called the mirror stage (Evans 1996: 84). Occurring during early childhood, the mirror stage denotes the time in a child's development when she recognizes her own image in the mirror. The moment of seeing one's reflection establishes the ego in that the child identifies with the image and is convinced that she essentially is that reflection. Thus, the ego is strictly speaking not the product of recognition but of *misrecognition*. (Lacan 2006 [1966]: 75–81.) What this entails is that the ego is the site of "radical alienation" because one can never fully identify with the specular image that gives rise to the ego, the allure of its potential is always more appealing than what it really is (Homer 2005: 25). The ego is not a fixed entity but an accumulation of impressions and images; its most vital task is to give us the illusion of mastery, of being the one who controls our choices and actions. Despite these emphases on illusion and delusion, the ego is a vital part of our psyche as it creates the space for our sense of self. I use the concept of the Imaginary to approach the effects of obsessive ambition in *Infinite Jest*. As I show in the next chapter, what connects the novel's depiction of ambition to the Lacanian Imaginary is that Hal's and Orin's attachment to an idealization of the ego is portrayed through the motif of mirror images. Furthermore, the concept has its implications in relation to the superego and, therefore, the trickster-father. I elaborate on this connection below.

The Symbolic order is characterized by language, which deepens our sense of alienation. It is defined as that which is entered when a child starts to speak, thus becoming chained to language; and it is language, with its rules, structures and signs, that constitutes the Symbolic order and enables the exchange of meaning in society (Kurki 2004: 30; Fink 1995: 25). Žižek (1999: 377) explains that the Symbolic order, is "the anonymous circuitry which mediates any intersubjective communication and induces an irreducible 'alienation' as the price for entering its circuit." Psychoanalytic theory sees the root of this alienation in language, as portrayed by the expressions 'mother tongue' and 'native language'; one is born into a world with its own rules and predating structures of meaning (Fink 1995: 7; Dean 2006: 5). Being a work of fiction, language plays a crucial role in *Infinite Jest*. Language is relevant for the present study

since the characters of the novel use language as a way to define and pinpoint the psychological effects of the trickster-father. The use of language is depicted in the novel as insufficient yet inescapable, an alienating prison but simultaneously the only medium one can use to navigate through Ragnarök, the apocalyptic cultural landscape without gods to trust. In *Infinite Jest*, the most striking example of language use is in the way it functions in Alcoholics Anonymous, in which the repetition of clichéd slogans plays a crucial role in keeping addiction at bay.

Beside its linguistic foundation, the Symbolic order includes what is referred to as *law*. This implies that the regulations created by language are extended into the rituals, customs, and public institutions that structure our experience of the world (Dean 2006: 136). In this sense, law corresponds in an overt manner with the concept of the system, the trickster's sworn enemy. The purpose of both the system and the law is to maintain structures and give borders and cancel out elements that do not belong within its frame. What needs to be stressed at is that law is not complete, it "cannot be understood as a finite totality" because it "changes, adapts, unfolds, and expands in ways that cannot be fully systematized. Any such systematization will produce a remainder" that cannot be included in the Symbolic order (Dean 2006: 136). This remainder is what creates the root for law's inherent instability. The trickster stands for that which exists outside the system, or at least is detrimental to it, while in psychoanalytic theory the remainder that always eludes the structures of language and law is called the Real.

The Real is a highly problematic concept to define because it cannot, by definition, be expressed linguistically. Žižek (2008 [1989]: 190) defines the Real as

> simultaneously both the hard, impenetrable kernel resisting symbolization and a pure chimerical entity which has in itself no ontological consistency. [...] something that persists only as failed, missed, in a shadow, and dissolves itself as soon as we try to grasp it in its positive nature.

We cannot talk about the Real because it exists independent of language and law. This resistance to definition is shared by the trickster, whom, as discussed above, cannot be defined due to his inherent hostility towards the borders of conceptualization. This

entails that the Real, like the trickster, is always something the Symbolic order cannot normalize or integrate into its body of rules. Žižek (2008 [1989]: 191) continues that the Real both precedes the Symbolic order but is also the outcome of its inability to integrate the Real into its network of signs and rules. The Real is, in other words, simultaneously that which exists outside the Symbolic but also the remainder of what cannot be Symbolized. One of the ways in which the Real effects our lives is through the concept of enjoyment, which, as I show below, is one of the trickster-father's defining characteristics.

In psychoanalytic theory, enjoyment stems from the lost Imaginary symbiosis with the Mother. The infant exists as oneness with the Mother, and cannot tell the two apart: "her breast, her body, are the infants own," and this unified state is bliss (Dean 2006: 4). Lacan (2006 [1966]: 696) himself states that enjoyment "is prohibited to whoever speaks," which makes the Symbolic order of language that which prohibits enjoyment. The impossibility of enjoyment is created by the Oedipus complex, during which incestuous impulses directed at the Mother are rejected, which, in turn, guarantees the spot in the Symbolic order as a speaking being (Lacan 1997 [1981]: 96; Evans 1996: 94; Dean 2006: 4–5). Nonetheless, as Evans (1996: 94) continues, the ultimate function of the Symbolic order is to "sustain the [...] illusion that enjoyment would be attainable if it were not forbidden [by law]. The very prohibition creates the desire to transgress it, [making enjoyment] fundamentally transgressive." Enjoyment is, therefore, impossible because it stems from the Real: it is assumed to be possible only in the pre-symbolic stage, beyond the child's introduction into the Symbolic order of language and law. But what is enjoyment? Can it be defined if it is Real in the sense that it resists Symbolization? One way to explain this concept is to contrast it to its Symbolic double, namely, pleasure.

It is crucial to make the theoretical distinction between pleasure and enjoyment, which have specific meanings in Lacanian theory, as I briefly mentioned in the opening chapter. This distinction further clarifies the relationship between the Symbolic and the Real from a socio-cultural point of view. Pleasure is delimited and controlled by law, which keeps it at a level that can be dealt with by the human psyche (Lacan 2004

[1973]: 31; Evans 1996: 150). We sense pleasure when we, for instance, eat tasty food or go for a stroll in the woods. Pleasure is very different from enjoyment, which has a very specific meaning in psychoanalysis. Enjoyment, Žižek (2006: 79) stresses, is not about pleasure but a "violent intrusion that brings more pain than pleasure." Lacan (1992: 228) defines enjoyment as the suffering that is imposed upon us from beyond pleasure, the main function of which it is to keep us separated from enjoyment. It is an excessive, agonizing sense of pleasure that ultimately makes our lives worth living (Dean 2006: 4); although Kurki (2004: 85) encapsulates the concept as not fun to experience. There emerges a pattern in this opposition between pleasure and enjoyment: pleasure is Symbolic, regulated by law, while enjoyment corresponds with the unnamable Real. In *Infinite Jest*, enjoyment persists as the driving force behind ambition and addiction. I see the idea that enjoyment is painful and pleasurable at the same time as creating the psychic motivation for the pathological behaviors depicted in the novel's characters. This helps to conceptualize behavior that might seem detrimental but actually produces so much excessive pleasure that the novel's characters cannot stop doing it.

To conclude this subsection, I argue that the trickster-system dichotomy corresponds to the psychoanalytic concepts of the Real and the Symbolic. On the one hand, the Symbolic order is precisely the conglomeration of rules and institutions that define the system, they create different ways to control our access to enjoyment. What Lacanian theory highlights more than Bassil-Morozow in her trickster theory is the linguistic basis of the Symbolic order. On the other hand, the Real's resistance to symbolization comes very close to the trickster's a-structurality. The trickster can be defined, like the Real, as the "chimerical entity", to refer to Žižek's (2008 [1989]: 190) formulation, that resists definition and normalization, always slipping through our fingers the moment we think we have him in our grip. Psychoanalytically speaking, the trickster's objective is to expose the Symbolic order to instances of the Real: the Winnebago trickster defames the tribe's war and marriage rituals, thus poking holes into the Symbolic. Loki's murdering Baldr threatens to erase the whole Symbolic order maintained by the gods, making Ragnarök a violent outburst of the Real. By keeping these conceptualizations and connections in mind, I now move on to Žižek's interpretation of the two Fathers,

which complicates the Symbolic-Real opposition and gives me the tools needed to analyze Ragnarök from a psychoanalytic perspective. The crucial question to be answered in the next section is how to situate the trickster in relation to the Lacanian notion of enjoyment.

3.2 The Two Fathers and Ragnarök

In Žižek's theory, the basis for the two Fathers can be found in Freud's *Totem and Taboo* (1913), in which he delves deep into the mythic past to speculate on the origins of culture and humanity. Conversely to the Oedipal narrative, in the myth of the primordial father, it is the act of killing the father that gives rise to the prohibitions, only from beyond the grave (Žižek 1999: 379). In this narrative, Freud focuses on Darwin's study of a pre-societal community, which he calls the 'primal horde', where the father is a jealous, violent figure who appropriates all the women of the tribe and expels his maturing sons, whom he sees as his rivals. What follows is that the expelled sons unite and plan to slay their father, thus putting an end to his cruel tyranny and freeing the women whom he has come to possess. But after they have committed the planned murder, the brothers start feeling guilty for what they did. This guilt functions as the impulse to reinstate the dead father's prohibitions: they, in a way, "undid their deed" by commanding that one is not to kill one's father. Nor did they enjoy the women they fought to liberate, but refrained from them. In short, the sons' guilt erected the Oedipal prohibitions of parricide and incest. (Freud 1966 [1913]: 915–917.)

The first father that emerges from this narrative is the dead one, the Symbolic prohibition erected by the guilt-ridden sons in their father's name. This is why, in Lacanian theory, one refers to the Name of the Father, in which the 'name' connotes the Symbolic status of the father, while in French the homonymous 'non' (Nom/Non du Père) connotes prohibition: it is simultaneously the Name/No of the Father (Fink 1995: 57, 147; Kurki 2004: 86). In other words, the Name of the Father guarantees a neutrality in relation to law and thus forms the structural basis in creating our Symbolically structured existence (Žižek 2008 [1992]: 178; Fink 1995: 55). Žižek (2008 [1992]:

216n18; see also 1999: 377–378) clarifies that the Father[5] is "the 'repressive' agency of prohibition." The idea that the Symbolic and the Real can never meet renders the Father's function to instill the authority of the Symbolic order, which is to say, to prohibit access to enjoyment (Žižek 1999: 388). The Symbolic Father is, therefore, that which represses. He is the agency that maintains the constricting and constructing effects of the law/system that keep us in check. On the other hand, Žižek's use of quotation marks indicates that the repressiveness of the Father might not be as simple as it seems.

What is crucial to the concept of the Father as it is portrayed in Freud's myth, is that his authority is elevated at the wake of the primordial father. This underlies the inherent impossibility of enjoyment: the Father's symbolic authority is elevated at the moment the sons free themselves from the primordial father's tyrannical rule (Žižek 1999: 379; Evans 1996: 132–133). This indicates that eliminating the obstacle that prohibits enjoyment, namely the violent primordial father, leads to a subsequent reassertion of the same prohibitions, even in a stricter form. Thus, the murdered father "became stronger than the living [one] had been" (Freud 1966 [1913]: 917). This insight is important for the present study in that it shows parricide, or in *Infinite Jest* Incandenza's suicide, as not something to be read straightforwardly as an event that liberates a set of characters from the control of a tyrannical authority figure. In chapter 4, I use this interpretation of the dead father as the basis to analyze the psychological effects Incandenza's suicide has on the other characters in the novel. Furthermore, I argue in the next chapter that Incandenza's suicide signifies the psychic backdrop from which the trickster-father emerges.

This brings us, then, to the second father to be found in the mythic narrative paraphrased above, the primordial father before his death, which is connected to the Lacanian interpretation of the concept known as the superego. As opposed to the Symbolic Father, the primordial father is to be located on the side of the Real and enjoyment (Žižek 2006: 80); the superego is the violent, ferocious father who possessed

[5] To minimize cumbersome sentences, I henceforth refer to the Symbolic, prohibitive function of the Name of the Father with the capitalized word 'Father'.

all the women of the primal horde, thus excluding the sons from his monopoly of enjoyment. Hence, it is enjoyment that defines the superego. Lacan (1998: 3) himself defines the superego as follows: "Nothing forces anyone to enjoy except the superego. The superego is the imperative of jouissance [enjoyment] – Enjoy!" Žižek (2008 [1991]: 9) defines the superego as the call to enjoy: "enjoyment itself, which we experience as transgression, is in its innermost status something imposed, ordered – when we enjoy, we never do it 'spontaneously', we always follow a certain injunction." Dean (2006: 30) emphasizes that the Lacanian interpretation of the superego is counterintuitive because it sees the superego as a command to enjoy "against the prohibitions of symbolic norms." Žižek (1999: 319) elaborates that the superego manipulates what has to be given up in order to enter the Symbolic order, thus indicating the pre-symbolic possibility of enjoyment, which is prohibited by law. The superego's injunction to enjoy thus urges us to transgress the prohibitions of the Father and the Symbolic order. Finally, what encapsulates the superego is its insatiability: the superego addresses us "with impossible demands and then mocks [our] botched attempts to meet them," making us guiltier the more we conform to its demands (Žižek 2006: 80). It is this insatiability that forever chains us to the superego, whose obscene injunctions we can never satisfy.

What, then, are the effects of the superego's injunction to enjoy? How can its effects be detected in our lives? Žižek (1999: 450; 2008 [1992]: 216n18) insists that when enjoyment becomes our duty, our ability to experience enjoyment is hindered more effectively than a strict prohibition that nonetheless maintains the space for transgressing it. Dean (2006: 32) summarizes the psychological consequences of enjoyment becoming a duty in an illustrative and perceptive way:

> When enjoyment is a duty, we want to escape from it, so the order to enjoy actually hinders our enjoyment. We might think here of the way the pressure to enjoy ourselves while on vacation can be exhausting. By the time we return home, we are relieved to back at work so we are no longer compelled to keep having fun. [...] Once we are in the situation where we are expected to have a good conversation, where we feel that it is our duty to be smart or interesting, we find ourselves at a loss for words.

The sense we have that something that is supposed to be fun is rendered painful and disturbing by the superego. Our ability to experience enjoyment is challenged because we can never fully satisfy the superego's obscene injunction, or in other words, we can never enjoy enough.

There is, thus, a clear contrast between the prohibition of the Symbolic Father and the superego's injunction to enjoy, which is effectively illustrated by Žižek (1999: 320) with an ironic, banal example of a father telling his child that she is to come and visit her grandmother. In this scene, the Symbolic Father confronts his child with a clear command: "You are coming to visit your grandmother whether you like it or not!"; on the other hand, the superego commands his child as follows: "You do know how much grandma loves you, but you should only come along if you really want to" (Žižek 1999: 320). What we have is a clear command juxtaposed with a choice that speaks directly to our innermost feelings. The catch is that the choice of the latter example is an illusory one, Žižek (1999: 320) insists, because the child knows that she has to go visit her grandma, but the superego command includes that the child has to *enjoy* the visit, she has to have fun visiting her grandmother. As my analysis shows, Incandenza is depicted as a father who imposes the command to enjoy to the characters of the novel. As I show in the next chapter, some of the disturbing pathologies suffered by the novel's characters can be read back to Incandenza functioning as the figure who brought them about. The main challenge the characters in *Infinite Jest* face is, fundamentally, to find ways to negotiate the superego's fierce injunction.

I conjecture that the trickster-father is essentially the superego, whose actions reflect those attributable to the trickster. The superego and the trickster are close to one another in that they emerge from the Real, from that which by definition cannot be expressed linguistically. Moreover, both the trickster and the superego are highly detrimental to the Symbolic system, the other one unraveling systemic control, while the other encourages transgression, that is, behavior that can be found in trickster narratives. In this study, Incandenza is identified as a trickster because he resorts to, for instance, disguise and mad creativity in order to achieve his mischief. Moreover, what accentuates Incandenza as the trickster is that he is not even aware of his deeds, making

the underlying motivations of his actions even more ambiguous. What the term trickster-father indicates is that a trickster-like agency has merged with the notion of superego, issuing superego commands to enjoy with the chaotic, a-structural wildness of a trickster. This is, essentially the cultural condition I find depicted in Wallace's novel.

What is to be further emphasized about the superego's insatiable injunction is that it is essentially inseparable from law, and that this inseparability transforms the notion of law's repressiveness. Žižek (2005: 54) elaborates that the superego emerges from the gaps and failures inherent in Symbolic itself: "Superego is the obscene 'nightly' law that necessarily redoubles and accompanies" the Symbolic order and law. What the law being split into the Symbolic and superego sides entails is that

> [i]n contrast to the [...] notion of a Law checking, canalizing, alienating, oppressing, 'Oedipianizing' some previous 'flux of desire', Law is here conceived as an agency of 'disalienation' and 'liberation': it opens our access to desire by enabling us to disengage ourselves from the rule of the Other's whim. (Žižek 2008 [1991]: 265)

In this passage, Žižek reveals that law, the Symbolic authority of the Father, can in fact be liberating: it frees us from the uncontrollable whim of the Other, which is to say, from the superego. To explain Žižek, Dean (2006: 145) evokes *Totem and Taboo* and points out that once the sons kill "the [primordial] father, they are no longer subject to his violent, obscene, monopoly of enjoyment." Law is, in other words, not solely an agency that keeps us in check, but it also helps to keep the superego from completely consuming us. Law's potential to free us from the superego's impossible demands reverses the notion that our inner moral sensibilities are more reliable than external "repressive" law (Žižek 2008 [1991]: 240–241; Dean 2006: 148). Nonetheless, this duality creates a cycle in which the Symbolic law needs the superego in order to keep reproducing and reformulating itself, which in turn transforms the superego, and so on (Dean 2006: 159). It is an endless loop.

Thus far I have delved into the opposition between the Symbolic and the Real as it is presented in Lacanian psychoanalytic theory. I introduced the concept of enjoyment, which exists in the Real and needs to be controlled by Symbolic means because the human psyche is not equipped to deal with it. The duality of the Symbolic and the Real was also found to correspond with the two fathers, the Symbolic Father who enforces law, and the superego who commands to transgress that law, and derive enjoyment from it. These two entities were found to be linked, in that the more we obey the superego's command, the more ways law will produce to regulate them. I also pointed out that law can potentially liberate us from the superego's irrational and impossible demands. But Žižek takes the duality of these concepts to a direction that comes close to Bassil-Morozow's (2015) interpretation of the present state of things as a trickster-infested Ragnarök, during which all the gods have been dethroned, leaving the trickster's chaotic presence controlling the cultural landscape (see chapter 2 above). The psychoanalytic Ragnarök concentrates on the effects of what Žižek (1999: 451) calls "the disintegration of paternal authority," which leads to a transformation of how our lives are structured by the Symbolic on the one hand, and how we relate to the superego command to enjoy on the other. I will now move on to present Žižek's interpretation of Ragnarök.

The "disintegration of paternal authority" refers to the idea that the Symbolic order, and everything it stands for, its rules, regulations, and role as an intersubjective mediator, has become compromised and lost its structuring effect. As Žižek (1999: 388) states, it is "the father of the uncompromising 'No!', who is effectively in retreat," which creates new possible ways for the relationship between the Symbolic and the Real of enjoyment to structure our lives. I see this claim that the prohibitive Father is no longer in effect as Žižek's way to conceptualize the end of grand narratives from a psychoanalytic point of view. In other words, our lives are no longer defined by entities such as Tradition or Nature (Žižek 1999: 440), meaning that the unquestionable power of institutions such as, say, Religion or the State no longer impose their structures upon us as effectively as before. The consequence of this collapse is that the Father's Symbolic authority gives rise to an increasingly ferocious superego, leaving us to the mercy of the sadistic and obscene "superego injunction to enjoy" (Žižek 1999: 451). In another context, Žižek (2008 [1992]: 181) goes so far as stating that "[t]he allegedly archaic figure of the

‘primordial father’ is actually a thoroughly modern entity, a result of the decline of the [Symbolic Father]”. Our social condition is, in other words, characterized by an intensification of the superego’s injunction, making the primordial father an emblem of our times. And, as my study aims to show, the trickster-father I find depicted in *Infinite Jest* is a development of the superego’s intensification.

What the waning of the Father’s Symbolic authority entails is that we need to find substitutes for law (Žižek 1999: 417–418), or, to put it differently, we need to find alternative ways for keeping the overpowering pressure of the superego from completely crushing us under its command to enjoy. Sarah Kay (2003: 140) elaborates Žižek’s argument by stating that once the Father’s prohibition is no longer in effect, our only option is “to turn to gurus, do-it-yourself books, agony aunts, professional shoppers, quangos and a plethora of other miniaturized substitutes.” This resonates with Bassil-Morozow’s (2015: 82, 86) view of Ragnarök, the state where there are no gods to trust and no tradition to rely on, where the “individual drowns in the sea of fragmenting trickster experiences [...], relying mostly on himself [*sic*] to structure these tasks and experiences.” In *Infinite Jest*, the trickster-father’s effects can be detected in its portrayal of the addiction recovery process. As I show in chapter 4, the novel depicts this process through Don Gately, who resorts to AA and the addiction recovery community as a substitute for the structuring effects of law. Hence, Gately’s sobriety functions as a way to silence the trickster-father’s command to step outside the borders the recovery process creates and enjoy drugs again.

Finally, the waning of the Symbolic Father reintroduces the Imaginary order into the forefront of our psychic lives. As I explained in the beginning of this chapter, the Imaginary stands for the creation of the ego as a misrecognized specular image. What the waning of the Father’s Symbolic authority entails is that the superego’s commands are increasingly located in the Imaginary order, in the ideal ego we can never fully reach; this phenomenon is called the “superegoization of the imaginary ideal” (Žižek 1999: 451). This idea ultimately stems from the relationship between the three Lacanian orders: when the Symbolic order weakens and loses its effect, the Imaginary and the Real overlap (Žižek 1999: 459), and the primary manifestation of this is that the

superego emerges as a figure who imposes the Imaginary ideal. Kay (2003: 140) explains that "[i]nstead of having a symbolic function that provides us with a point of identification in the symbolic[...], we proliferate symbolic authorities that are jumped-up versions of our ideal ego, and hence a sign of narcissistic regression." In relation to trickster theory, Bassil-Morozow (2015: 82–83) has a similar idea in mind when she states that the trickster is pulling the strings in the fluidization of identity, presenting us with a chaotic array of lifestyle choices and unexplored experiences. Žižek (1999: 451) concludes "that this [...] self-enclosure leaves [us] to the (not so) tender mercies of the superego injunction to enjoy," and the same can be said about the trickster-father. I see Incandenza the trickster-father as standing for this overlap between the superego and the Imaginary ideal. As I show in the next chapter, Hal and Ortho have are so committed to their ideal egos, the unattainable specular images of themselves as successful, popular, and great tennis players, leads to horrific consequences.

3.4 Desire and the Death Drive

I have now reached my elaboration of how the Symbolic-Real opposition works in the concepts of desire and the death drive. In order to shed light to how enjoyment functions in this context, I refer to the drive's oppositional pair: desire. Desire is produced by the Symbolic law that prohibits enjoyment; it is always aimed at acquiring substitutes for the maternal object one loses after entering the Symbolic order, though nothing can never fill its place, nothing is ever "it" (Žižek 1999: 351). Desire is, in other words, produced by prohibition and sustained by an endless, exhausting search for recovering the loss this prohibition introduces. Here the object of enjoyment is unattainable (Žižek 1999: 351). Desire is, therefore, kept in motion by this never-ending search. The drive stands for the opposite of desire, in which enjoyment is not derived through the illusory promise of an unattainable object, but through the continuous failures of arriving at this object: drive is another name for the notion that we can never fully rid ourselves of enjoyment (Žižek 1999: 351–352, 354). Kay (2003: 106) states that desire is Symbolic because it is regulated by law, and conversely the drive is the closest the human psyche gets to the Real. Here we find the two concepts again

represented as if opposites, though they are nonetheless linked, which is the case with the Father and the superego as well. I now turn to a closer examination of the concept known as the death drive.

The death drive pushes the logic of the drive to its extreme. Žižek (2009: 62) emphasizes that the concept of the death drive is not to be taken as a

> thrust toward destruction or self-obliteration: the [...] death drive has nothing whatsoever to do with the craving for self-annihilation, for the return to the inorganic absence of any life-tension; it is, on the contrary, the very opposite of dying—a name for the "undead" eternal life itself, for the horrible fate of being caught in the endless repetitive cycle of wandering around in guilt and pain.

This dense passage turns the Freudian death drive on its head. The death drive is no longer the instinctual yearning to an inanimate state, the *Thanatos* as Freud (2001) envisioned in his essay "Beyond the Pleasure Principle." Žižek defines the death drive as not a destructive will to return to an inanimate state, but as an excess of life, a concept with disturbing implications of being caught in repeating the same actions and behaviors, over and over again. Žižek (1999: 355) continues that "the death drive is not the mark of human finitude, but its very opposite, the name for 'eternal (spectral) life', the index of a dimension in human existence that persists for ever, beyond physical death [...]." This "eternal life" is, essentially, the idea I discussed above our inability to fully rid ourselves of enjoyment: we are condemned to it; and as the death drive produces enjoyment, it is linked to the superego, whose commands help to sustain this excess of enjoyment through our repetitive failures of living up to them (Žižek 1999: 354, 481). As I show in the next chapter, *Infinite Jest* evokes the death drive in that it portrays not the anxiety of its characters' approaching deaths but the very idea that the trickster-father fills their lives with so much enjoyment that it seems infinite, the eternal life of the death drive.

I deploy the death drive because *Infinite Jest* is filled with pathological repetitions. The clearest instance of the logic of the death drive is to be found in 'Infinite Jest', Incandenza's film that is so entertaining that anyone who watches it is bound to repeat

the viewing, until death. The novel presents the death drive as more prominent than desire, which is already clear in how the lethal film functions: even the film cannot give the novel's characters the lost object in that they need to repeat the viewing. But this similar structure of repeating is found in other forms as well: ambitious tennis training at ETA is depicted as obsessively repetitive; the addiction recovery program featured in the novel relies on a series of repeated rituals from attending AA meetings to chores, mantras and linguistic clichés that are meant to redeem from the addiction. What Incandenza's revelatory film is ultimately testament to is that its structure is ubiquitous in Wallace's fictional universe; all activities function according to the same repetitive logic. Even the novel's name can be seen as implying the horrifying eternity of being caught in a cycle of repetition, of deriving an infinite amount of enjoyment. What I try to find out in the next chapter is how the novel presents its characters as stuck in a loop maintained by the trickster-father's commands. As I argue in the next chapter, the death drive is placed at the center of how I see Ragnarök depicted in *Infinite Jest*: this terrifying eternity is a crucial manifestation of the trickster-father's prison.

4 THE TRICKSTER-FATHER IN *INFINITE JEST*

I have now shown how Bassil-Morozow's trickster theory and Žižek's development of Lacanian ideas explain a similar social condition: the psychological consequences of the socio-cultural system's failure to frame and shape our experience of the world. Bassil-Morozow (2015: 82) insists that the collapse of systemic structures frees the trickster to roam the world uninhibitedly, affecting our lives in more complex ways than ever before. Žižek (1999: 451) approaches this issue by building upon the theoretical implications of the failure of the Symbolic Father as the enforcer of law, which intensifies its obscene counterpart, namely, the superego who commands us to enjoy and transgress the law. Žižek and Bassil-Morozow seem to share the idea about the consequences of the system's demise: it leads to a need to find alternative ways to frame our lives, to give structure that keeps, respectively, the trickster and the superego from completely overpowering our experience of the world. In other words, both theorists see our lives at the mercy of uncontrollable, ambiguous forces that threaten to consume us. The objective of this chapter is to use psychoanalytic theory to analyze the ways in which Incandenza suggests the merging together of the trickster and the superego into the agency I call the trickster-father. Furthermore, I also look at how the trickster-father features as a force that looms behind the pathological behavior and psychological ill depicted in the characters of the novel, most crucially in Hal Incandenza and Don Gately.

4.1 Incandenza as the Trickster-Father

In this section I focus on how Incandenza symbolizes what I call the trickster-father. What its name implies is that the trickster merges with the role of the superego as it is used in psychoanalytic theory. As I elaborate in the following pages, the trickster-father emerges when the Father's Symbolic authority becomes compromised. The trickster-father is, therefore, a superego figure who issues the command to enjoy and encourages transgression, but does so according to the logic of a trickster. Differently put, the trickster-father is a trickster who has crept on the underside of law itself, occupying the

position of the superego as the obscene underbelly upon which law is built. I begin this section by looking at how the failure of the Father's authority is depicted in the character of James Incandenza.

4.1.1 The Disintegration of Symbolic Authority

Incandenza signifies the Father's Symbolic authority in a passage in which he confronts his eldest son, Orin, after having found out that he has been watching a pornographic film (*IJ* 955–956). Incandenza regulates Orin's behavior, which implies the Symbolic Father as marking the limits of transgression. Narrated in the first-person by Hal, it takes place at the time his father was the headmaster at ETA, several years before the novel's narrative present. It is set in the headmaster's office, where Incandenza sits behind his desk, connoting respectability, authority, and power. After Hal's brother confesses watching the film, their father reacts in the following way:

> he wasn't going to forbid them to watch the thing if they really wanted to. But just please keep it discreet [...] nobody younger, and nobody whose parents might hear about it, and for God's sake don't let your mother get wind. But that Orin was old enough to make his own entertainment-decisions, and if he decided he wanted to watch the thing....And so on. (*IJ* 955)

What connects Incandenza to the Symbolic Father is his giving boundaries to Orin, giving him the limits within which his act is socially acceptable, even if it is not totally agreeable. Whatever concerns Orin might have had as to the consequences of his transgression are neutralized by the authority of the Father. In this scene, Incandenza can be said to represent the Symbolic Father to the extent that he instills law by delimiting his son's transgression, but also by acting as the Father who liberates from the superego's pressure to enjoy.

What introduces the failure of the Father in this scene is that Incandenza continues toward a more personal direction, ultimately leaving him ridiculed by Orin. Incandenza's earnestness is foreshadowed when he is described as offering Orin a

lemon soda and rubbing his eyes in a "sad and ruminative" way (*IJ* 955), indicating that he does not want to make Orin feel uncomfortable and that he puts though into what he wants to say. The confrontation continues:

> But Himself said that if Orin wanted his personal, fatherly as opposed to headmasterly, take on it, then he [...] would rather Orin didn't watch a hardporn film yet. He said this with such reticent earnestness there was no way Orin couldn't ask him how come. Himself [...] finally said he was afraid of the film giving Orin the wrong idea about having sex (*IJ* 995–996).

Incandenza explains that he does not like what his son has done because it might affect his views on what sex is, and implores that Orin waits until he truly loves someone before he even thinks about these matters (*IJ* 996). Hal reveals the failure of Incandenza's speech by reminiscing that Orin found his father's earnestness moving only because he thought that he was not yet sexually active (*IJ* 996). Orin's sneer at Incandenza's earnestness implies the lack of effect the Father's prohibition has: The Father's 'No' does not sink in, it is a failed attempt at instilling prohibition. What ultimately remains of the Father's Symbolic status is the comically exaggerated image of him sitting behind an authoritative desk, nothing more.

Incandenza stands for the Father's waning authority in a passage where he confronts Hal as a masked 'professional conversationalist', a scene in which Incandenza is deprived of a medium inherent to the Father, namely, language. This scene is tied to the one analyzed above with Orin, in that Incandenza is again sitting authoritatively behind a desk, offering his younger son some lemon soda, as he did with his eldest son. What draws attention to the role of language in this conversation is that it is narrated only through dialog: there is no outside voice commenting on the exchange between the two characters. This also heightens the sense of claustrophobia that this passage evinces. After introducing himself, the disguised Incandenza asks whether his son knows the meaning for the word 'implore', to which Hal answers the word's OED entry in verbatim, which is marveled at by Incandenza, who is in awe of his son's lexical talents (*IJ* 28). Once Hal notices that the "conversationalist's" "whole face is running" and

"nose pointing at [his] lap", he realizes he is talking to his father (*IJ* 30). An agitated Hal then questions his father's delusional belief that he never speaks, though to no avail:

> '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 talking, Dad? It speaks. It [...] defines implore and converses 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?*' (*IJ* 31, italics in original)

These lines end this whole section. Incandenza's desperate attempts to communicate with his son are responded to with mere silence. As Holland (2014: 84) notes, Incandenza's inability to communicate with Hal denotes his inability to instill the Father's law. What heightens the desperateness of Incandenza's attempt to do so is his request for Hal to define 'implore': the scene presents the Father imploring to his son, praying for a connection through which he can instill Symbolic authority. But no matter how effectively Hal can define the word, the Father's imploration remains a failure that ends in silence that further separates him from his son.

The final way Incandenza stands for the disintegration of the Father is, quite obviously, his suicide. The implications of Incandenza's death resonate strongly with Žižek's interpretation of Freud's *Totem and Taboo* (1966 [1913]). As I conclude above, the point of this mythic narrative is to show enjoyment as not only prohibited but impossible: the primordial father's killing does not create uninhibited access to enjoyment, but needs to be regulated by the murderous sons (see p. 29 above). Therefore, this myth presents a moment when the primordial father's violent authority is suspended, but also eventually substituted by the regulations created by the sons. To apply this matrix to *Infinite Jest*, I argue that Incandenza's death symbolizes not the death of the obscene, primordial father, but the disintegration of the Father itself. Incandenza's death stands for the failure of the Father's power to structure the world around us, to give it fixed meaning and stable borders. To follow the logic of Žižek's (2008 [1992]: 181; 1999: 451) idea that the intensification of the superego is an

outcome of the Father's disintegration, Incandenza's death signifies this very transformation: the disintegration of law resuscitates the cruel primordial father, that is, the obscene, insatiable superego who commands us to enjoy. I argue that this obscene command to enjoy is at work already in the scenes with Orin and Hal, who process their father's attempts to connect as commands to enjoy.

Incandenza suggests the failure of the Father's Symbolic authority in that he is unable to speak with his son nor is he able to instill law: these failures eventually culminate in his death and intensify the superego. Incandenza represents the superego in the passages analyzed above since both Orin and Hal are affected by their respective talks with their father, which is detectable in the pathologies manifested in both characters. For Orin, a sex addict, the conversation with Incandenza concerning the porn film introduces enjoyment in a compulsive form: Incandenza's attempt to prohibit the porn film, fearing it gives his son the wrong idea about sex and love, is processed by Orin as a command to enjoy. As the superego can never be fully satisfied, it leaves Orin always wanting more, caught in a recursive loop of enjoyment he cannot escape. To put it briefly, Hal is tied to the superego's effects through his inability to speak in the chronological end of the narrative, in which we find him unable to address members of a university admissions board. Does this mean that Incandenza's failure to communicate with his son creates a command to enjoy language, to withdraw between words themselves? Or is Hal's silence his way to evade the superego's insatiable command, a fear of failure taken so extreme the most viable option is to refrain from speech? I return to the implications of Hal and his inability to speak below.

From the point of view of Bassil-Morozow's trickster theory, Incandenza's failures represent the system's ability to instill power to frame the trickster. Incandenza's failures denote the psychic background for the novel's events: the system is no longer effective, its function as the regulator of the trickster's chaotic a-structurality has become compromised. On the one hand, according to psychoanalytic theory, the diminishing of Symbolic regulation leads to an ever-stronger power for the superego to taunt its subjects, which we saw in the case of Orin's sex addiction and Hal's relationship with language. On the other hand, as I discuss above, in Bassil-Morozow's

(2015: 82–83) trickster theory, the system's failure leads to all kinds of tricksters being released to haunt the social order. This creates a link between the superego's command to enjoy and the awakening of an overpowering trickster, a link I find depicted in Incandenza's suicide. In other words, if Incandenza's death signifies the disintegration of the Father and the intensification of the superego, as I argue above, his suicide also generates the trickster-father. But what makes the character a trickster? What are the actions this character performs that merits this term? I will now move on to analyzing the emergence of the trickster-father by referring to the common motifs and characteristics in trickster stories I discussed above.

4.1.2 "His Last Resort: Entertainment" – The Emergence of the Trickster-Father

Incandenza is wearing a mask in the scene with Hal, thus using disguise to forward his ambiguous agenda. Disguise is a common way for the trickster to accomplish his deceptions and tricks, which I show above in the case of Loki, who disguises himself as a woman in order to approach Baldr's mother to find out his weakness and set in motion Ragnarök, the death of all the gods. Another form of disguise I discuss above is the Winnebago trickster posing as a tribal chief, violating the tribe's sacred war rituals. Firstly, Incandenza suggests the trickster through this same kind of false posing. His being masked is the only way he can maintain a connection with his son, to communicate with him. But the disguise is a failure, and the conversation with Hal ends in silence as I show above. What this implies is that the trickster emerges when the Father's Symbolic authority fails: Incandenza's resorting to disguise brings the law's underside to the forefront: it can be seen as depicting the Father's attempt at instilling law at the wake of his Symbolic authority. Then, instead of being able to connect with his son, the Father emerges as an obscene figure with a poorly fitting mask that cannot hear his son speak. This passage shows that the motif of disguise portrays the failure of Symbolic authority and foreshadows the subsequent emergence of the trickster-father.

What solidifies Incandenza's transformation into the trickster-father is his mad creativity. Incandenza's filmic career culminates in his creation of 'Infinite Jest', the

ambiguous, lethally entertaining film that gives the novel its title. With the film, he uncovers the very matter that should be kept repressed and blocked by the Symbolic Father. With the film, Incandenza has created a portal that transforms through law's prohibition and into the realm of enjoyment, and the little the reader finds out about it indicates that the film portrays the unity with the Mother that must be rejected in order to be able to exist in the Symbolic order that is structured by law and prohibition (see pp. 24–26 above): we learn that the lead actress of 'Infinite Jest', Joelle Van Dyne, "wore an incredible white gown of some sort of flowing material and leaned in over the camera in the crib and apologized"; she continues that she was ordered to repeat "at least twenty minutes of permutations of 'I'm sorry' " (*IJ* 939). This image can be read as the Mother apologizing for having to let the baby become separated and torn by the Father into the Symbolic order. What strengthens the film's connection to psychoanalytic theory is that to shoot the film, Incandenza modifies his camera's lens to make the image seem as if through a baby's eyes:

> The camera was fitted with a lens with something Jim called I think an auto-wobble [...] The crib-lens's mount projected out way farther than a conventional lens, but it wasn't nearly as big around as a catadioptric lens. It looked more like an eye-stalk or a night-vision scope than a lens. Long and skinny and projecting, with this light wobble. [...] Plus I think a milky blur. Neonatal Nystagmus. [...] I don't think there's much doubt the lens was supposed to reproduce an infantile visual field. That's what you could feel was driving the scene. (*IJ* 939–940)

Thus, 'Infinite Jest' condenses the underlying implications of the addiction-riddled culture: the characters of ONAN are depicted as if ready to cast away their lives in favor of Incandenza's film, where the very the characters' deepest desires are answered by a film that causes total paralysis.

The film 'Infinite Jest' is, then, an example of the trickster's creativity par excellence. Incandenza has tinkered with different possibilities at portraying reality throughout his career, and stumbles upon something he becomes obsessed with. Joelle Van Dyne, the apologizing mother character in the film, recounts Incandenza's attitude as follows: "He talked about making something quote too perfect. But as a *joke*. [...] When he talked about this thing as quote perfect entertainment, terminally compelling — it was always

ironic — he was having a sly little jab at me" (*IJ* 940). The film is Incandenza's trick, his joke. Moreover, I find a strong similarity between Incandenza and the trickster since he is oblivious about what he has created himself, and commits suicide while working on the film. What implies the accidental effectiveness of the film is that Incandenza commits suicide right after completing it, thus becoming what Hynes (1997: 35) calls a trickster-tricked. Incandenza is depicted as having created something that stems from the very core of ONAN's collective consciousness. The film is an object that can undo systemic/Symbolic structures, even if it is through a cycle of repeated viewings. Incandenza's film, his ultimate trick, turns out to be so powerful he cannot survive it himself.

Toward the end of the novel, the film is revealed as Incandenza's final hope for a connection with Hal, which further emphasizes my claim that the trickster-father emerges as if from the ashes of the Father's authority:

> [Incandenza's goal was] [t]o concoct something the gifted boy [Hal] couldn't simply master and move on from to a new plateau. Something the boy would love enough to induce him to open his mouth and come out — even if it was only to ask for more. Games hadn't done it, professionals hadn't done it, impersonation of professionals hadn't done it. His last resort: entertainment. (*IJ* 838–839)

After the Father's prohibition has failed and language can no longer be used to restore it, as portrayed in the scene with Hal and the disguised Incandenza, all the father can do is resort to entertainment. The use of the word 'concoction' brings to mind Hynes's (1997: 42) description of the trickster as a creative *bricoleur* who mixes a variety of sources in name of his mad and dangerous creativity. It is worth emphasizing that Incandenza's medium is film and not literature, further distancing language from the trickster-father's repertoire. The lethal film is, in the end, so entertaining for the very reason that it *shows* what existence was like before entrance into the Symbolic order – it gives visual access to the prohibited object of enjoyment. This indicates that entertainment is the only way for the Father to issue power, but, as was already implied in Incandenza's using disguise, the power he issues is not that of the Father but of the superego. Incandenza's declaration of wanting to *entertain* is the trickster-father's

version of the superego command to *enjoy*. This gives another possible meaning for the repeated apologies Joelle is reported as performing in the film: it is also the Father apologizing for his inability to instill law, to successfully manage pleasure and keep the potentially all-consuming powers of the superego at a safe distance. Incandenza's lethally compelling trickster-film should not, however, be seen as *giving* the prohibited object of enjoyment: what needs to be stressed is the repetition involved in it.

The repetition included in the trickster-father's film, both as its content and as the implied viewers' compulsion to watch the film on loop, connects the trickster-father to the psychoanalytic concept of the death drive. What needs to be stressed about the film is that it produces enjoyment only through repetition. In this respect, 'Infinite Jest' shares the structure of the death drive: As Žižek (1999: 354, 360) explains, the death drive is the enjoyment produced by the repetitive circling around the unattainable lost object of desire, of repeatedly missing this object. Therefore, the film does not give free access to the prohibited enjoyment, but stages the very impossibility of attaining it; and the film does it so compellingly that the viewing is repeated until death. On the other hand, I see the name of film, 'Infinite Jest', as a further extension of the death drive: the film connotes the endless, painful search for a way to reach beyond law's prohibition under an intensified superego who renders this search a duty, something imposed upon the novel's characters. The enjoyment produced by the novel's characters for repeatedly missing the goal of their desire, be it sobriety or success at tennis, corresponds with the " 'undead' eternal life itself" that Žižek (2009: 62) uses to describe the death drive. What we find reflected in the novel's characters, though especially in Hal and Gately, is not a repetition striving towards death, but a state of being caught in the death drive's loop of eternally repeating the same, of an excess of life extending beyond boundaries the characters' psyches can manage. The characters' struggle is ultimately depicted as more terrifying than the film because there seems to be no end to this loop, no way to step out of it. I will return to the two characters' connections to the death drive in the final subsection of this study.

The film is, then, a symbol for the culture defined by its addictions and compulsion to repeat in that it shares the psychological pattern lying behind the pathologies depicted in

the novel. To put it differently, while none of the main characters in the novel see the lethal film, their lives are already structured according to the film's logic: repeat, enjoy, repeat again. Incandenza's film raises the question of whether it is feasible to direct one's attention elsewhere from the passivizing enjoyment the film produces if the similar structure can be found in the pathological behavior that define the novel's characters. This is, crucially, how the trickster-father turns the motif of imprisonment upside down: the trickster-father's command to enjoy is so powerful it locks Hal and Gately in a loop they cannot escape. The trickster-father is, therefore, not imprisoned but the very agency of imprisonment. Hence, while Bassil-Morozow (2015: 7–8) sees the trickster as a metaphor for change, for the progressive potential of this chaotic agency, I argue that the trickster-father in *Infinite Jest* is a metaphor for the cage of pathological repetitions performed under his insatiable command to enjoy; the trickster-father is the agency that feeds the death drive and keeps its prison-like loop in motion. This is how the emergence of the trickster-father forms the psychological background of *Infinite Jest*. As I show in the next section, the trickster-father's presence is detectable in the repetitions that structure the obsessive ambitions of the young students at Enfield Tennis Academy, as well as the novel's depiction of drug addiction and the process of quitting them. I will now present my analysis of the trickster-father's effects on Hal Incandenza, Ortho Stice, and Don Gately, all of whom are taunted trickster-father's imprisoning command to enjoy.

4.2 The Psychic Effects of the Trickster-Father

In this section, I inspect the characters Hal Incandenza and Don Gately in order to analyze the effects of the trickster-father's injunction to enjoy. Gately, a recovering oral narcotics addict, struggles to remain sober by attending AA meetings and working as a staffer at the Ennet House recovery facility. I argue that Gately's means of maintaining sobriety imply an attempt to evade the overpowering effects of the trickster-father, where AA's central tenets function as substitutes for the law of the Father that has lost its structuring effect. I, however, begin with Hal Incandenza whom I argue is portrayed as striving to live up to the trickster-father's command to enjoy. His ambition as a

promising tennis player and linguistic genius is taken to an extreme: his natural talent to master everything he does cannot ultimately be separated from the trickster-father's injunction to enjoy, as I show in the following subsection. In relation to Hal, I also analyze one scene featuring the character Ortho Stice, one of the younger tennis players at ETA, who shows the horrific consequences of the pressure of the trickster-father's command to enjoy. Furthermore, the focus in the following subsection is the way in which Hal and Ortho signify the trickster-father's role as "superegoizing" the Imaginary ideal. I approach these phenomena as being generated by the trickster-father, meaning that these forms of behavior define the trickster-father as the figure behind Ragnarök, the godless state where no fixed meaning applies.

4.2.1 Obeying the Trickster-Father

What defines the young tennis players' lives in *Infinite Jest* is ambition, but a self-conscious ambition that has come to define their existence. The problem is formed out of the competitive culture in which the students' energies are channeled into being the best, but that actually *making it* can prove detrimental. One of Enfield Tennis Academy's prorectors encapsulates the predicament as follows:

> [if you] attain the goal and realize the shocking realization that attaining the goal does not complete or redeem you, does not make everything for your life "OK" as you are, in the culture, educated to assume it will do this, the goal. And then you face this fact that what you had thought would have meaning does not have the meaning when you get it, and you are impaled by shock. (*IJ* 680)

The challenge with ambition the novel presents is, thus, dealing with the goal when it is attained, of having the wherewithal to face the fact that striving to reach the goal is not the same as reaching it. This corresponds with Žižek's (1999: 351) theorization of desire, which connotes this type of striving for a goal that is never it. Moreover, I see the trickster-father's injunction to enjoy as the force behind this obsessive striving for fame and success. The basis for this claim is the idea of the superegoization of the ideal ego, which means that the unattainable, idealized version of the self is one of the

superego's guises. As I point out in the previous chapter, Žižek (1999: 451) sees the effects of this in that the superego's injunction to enjoy is in contemporary societies channeled through Imaginary ideals of wealth, prosperity, beauty, and authenticity. In the case of tennis and *Infinite Jest*, the promise of athletic fame and success form the core of this ideal. Furthermore, this section aims to show that when this ideal is sustained by the trickster-father's insatiable command to enjoy, the novel's characters are forced to confront corners of their psyche that give us nightmarish glimpses into how the ideal ego threatens to consume them.

The complications concerning this goal-oriented behavior, as well as the pathology involved in the process of attaining it, is portrayed in the novel through James Incandenza's youngest son, Hal, who is portrayed as being an athletically and linguistically gifted 17-year-old:

> Hal Incandenza for a long time identified himself as a lexical prodigy who [...] had made his mother proud, plus a really good tennis player. Hal Incandenza is now being encouraged to identify himself as a late-blooming prodigy and possible genius at tennis who is on the verge of making every authority-figure in his world and beyond very proud indeed. (*IJ* 155)

The narrator recounts how Hal's sudden rise to the rank of second-best player at ETA, makes it necessary for identifying himself as someone who will impress people, who will be liked and respected for his achievements. This seems like a chance for Hal to live up to the tennis school's ubiquitous ideal ego: the successful, talented, and perfect tennis genius. The staff at ETA are, however, aware of the risks involved: "Hal's head, closely monitored by [the] Staff, is judged still level and focused and unswollen/-bludgeoned by the sudden éclat and rise in general expectations. When asked how he's doing with it all, Hal says Fine and thank you for asking" (*IJ* 155). Hal's road to stardom seems to be without problems or threats; he seems mentally stable and gives no reason for concern. It is as if he has been able to come to terms with his ideal ego, and to manage the pressure of its unattainability. But as the novel gradually shows, beneath this surface Hal himself feels a gnawing emptiness.

Though Hal seems perfect in every way, the narrator dives deep into the character's consciousness to reveal that

> Hal himself hasn't had a bona fide intensity-of-interior-life-type emotion since he was tiny; he finds terms like joie and value to be like so many variables in rarified equations, and he can manipulate them well enough to satisfy everyone but himself that he's in there, inside his own hull, as a human being [...] (*IJ* 694.)

Hal, in fact, feels as if his self, his true 'me', is trapped, caged somewhere inside all the surfaces he manipulates to be accepted and liked by the Staff and his family. What makes Hal's situation a harrowing dead end is that he is uncannily self-aware of his situation, of the trickster-father that imprisons him. He, in a way, recognizes the debilitating power of the trickster-father in stating that he can "satisfy everyone but himself" (*IJ* 694), suggesting that it is he, the 'me' under the façade, that inexplicably wants to be more than it already is, more than it can be. What also ties the passage to the trickster-father is the use of the term "himself": while it might mean Hal, it can also denote Incandenza, whose nickname in the novel is, ironically, 'Himself'. Thus, the trickster-father's command to enjoy is embedded in the very core of Hal's sense of self: the emptiness he feels stems from the insatiability of the trickster-father's injunction to follow the ideal ego beyond law's boundaries, beyond the borders of attainability. Hal may seem perfect, but he feels trapped within the ideal ego imposed by the trickster-father, which is the root for his sense of emptiness and anxiety.

Moreover, Incandenza's motivations behind the film 'Infinite Jest' can be seen as linked to Hal's need to strive for perfection. Besides being a questionable, even dangerous attempt to communicate with Hal, Incandenza's film can also be seen as a challenge because he created the film as something Hal could not be able to master the moment he is exposed to it:

> [It was Incandenza's goal 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. (*IJ* 839)

In another scene, the trickster-father appears to Gately as a wraith[6] and explains that when Incandenza was "alive in the world of animate men, [he] had seen his own personal youngest offspring, a son, the one most like him, the one most marvelous and frightening to him, becoming a figurant, toward the end" (*IJ* 837). Incandenza seems to want to present Hal with different challenges as a way to 'bring him out of himself', of preventing Hal's fading away, as if gradually transforming into a figurant, which denotes the extras in the periphery of a play or film. Incandenza's film is an attempt to save, to introduce borders and challenge his son, but the entertainment his film produces is far from helpful: as I argue above, due to the disintegration of the Father's ability to instill law, he can only issue the command to enjoy, which is what the film articulates.

In Hal's case, the trickster-father's command to pursue the ideals of success and perfection is portrayed in his gradually losing control over his facial expressions. While watching an extracurricular match of a game called Eschaton[7] early in the narrative, Hal must "feel at his own face to see whether he is wincing" (*IJ* 342). This need to feel whether he is wincing is a transitional moment for Hal: he has become alienated from himself by committing to the trickster-father's command. Hal's disintegration continues in a scene where ETA's janitor informs him that "[y]our face is a hilarity-face. It's working hilariously. At first it merely looked *a*-mused. Now it is open-ly *cach*-inated. You are almost doubled over. You can barely get your words out. You're all but slapping your knee." (*IJ* 875) And even after Hal tries to force a serious expression on his face, the janitor replies "Somewheres now between amused and cach-inated. Mirth-ful, perhaps" (*IJ* 875–876). Close to the end of the novel's narrative, though a year before the chronologically final scene that opens the novel, Hal is described as being completely disconnected from reality: "His face today had assumed various expressions ranging from distended hilarity to scrunched grimace, expressions that seemed unconnected to anything that was going on" (*IJ* 966).

[6] The implications of Incandenza's appearance as 'the wraith' will be returned to below.
[7] A complex war strategy game that uses lobbed tennis balls as metaphorical missiles. Played only by the youngest students at ETA, which is why Hal does not participate in it.

Hal's loss of control of his expressions is linked in the novel to imagery that I see as evoking the Lacanian mirror stage. After the janitor is gone, Hal tries to see his expression in a window, but the sun is already coming up which makes him look "sketchy and faint... tentative and ghostly against all that blazing white" (*IJ* 876). This inability to finally see himself in the window's reflection plays with the themes of alienation that the mirror stage introduces through misrecognizing with the specular image (see Lacan 2006 [1966]: 75–81). But for Hal, there is no image to identify. It is as if Hal's commitment to the trickster-father's command to follow the ideal ego has consumed him: despite his sense of emptiness, he has followed the trickster-father's command to derive enjoyment by wearing the mask of his ideal self. Therefore, I claim that Hal's inability to see his reflection signifies that his ideal ego has slid to the other side of the mirror, meaning that for Hal cannot make out his reflection because he has been consumed by this specular ideal itself: Hal has attained the unattainable, and his fate in the novel depicts its harrowing consequences. Hal has obeyed the trickster-father's command so fully that his "true self" has become buried under the idealized masks he can no longer control.

At this point it needs to be pointed out that the trickster-father is not only the force that urges these characters to follow their *desire*: the trickster functions, rather, in the guise of the death drive, of the circulation around the goal that produces enjoyment and an excess in life (see Žižek 1999: 358). Hal embodies this paradox in that, as I show above, he has become his own ideal ego, he has subjectivized the unattainable, but he still circles around a truer self that has disappeared behind all the masks he has learned to manipulate. The next and final stage of Hal's falling into the trickster-father's loop, in the vortex of the superegoization of the Imaginary ideal, is portrayed in the scene that opens the novel, in which Hal is completely unable to reach out of himself: he is at the undivided mercy of the trickster-father. I return to this passage in the final section of this chapter, where the role of the death drive is ever more pronounced.

The dead end of pathologically goal-oriented ambition is also symbolized by the face in a terrifying passage where Hal finds Ortho Stice, the best of the younger tennis players at ETA, sitting on a chair with his face frozen stuck on a window after having fallen

asleep against it with a sweaty forehead. The passage, which occurs while Hal loses control of his expressions, starts as merely comic, with lines that foreshadow what is to come: "His forehead had not once left the cold glass" (*IJ* 867). Stice then reveals what has happened: "It's stuck is what it is. [...] Forgot the forehead was sweated up. Whammo. Kertwanged my own self. [...] I tried to pull her off her about 0230, and there was this fucking…*sound*." (*IJ* 868–869). Ortho is stuck and cannot pull himself out. He himself articulates the point of the passage by saying that he stuck his "own self." This scene is another depiction of the outcome of obeying the trickster-father's command to follow one's Imaginary ideal. What Ortho's face getting stuck signifies is that he has become so obsessed with his ideal ego that he is, literally, stuck in it: the pressure of the trickster-father renders the reflective surface of the mirror into a trap Ortho falls into. The novel thus presents the mirror's reflective surface as a trap, as a symbol for the imprisoning effects the trickster-father lays upon the characters' sense of self. As I show above, Hal cannot identify with his "true self" because he has effectively become what the trickster-father commands, which makes him unable to see his reflection in the window. In Hal's case, the outcome is withdrawal into the confines of the alienating masks, but this scene with Ortho shows that a strong devotion to the Imaginary ideal leads to horrific violence where the trickster-father's urge to strive for perfection is strongly present.

The scene with Ortho continues in a violent direction, which suggests that the novel's characters are doomed to obey the trickster-father's command. The passage is genuinely disturbing:

> There was a horrible sound. The skin of his forehead distended as we yanked his head back. It stretched and distended until a sort of shelf of stretched forehead-flesh half a meter long extended from his head to the window. The sound was like some sort of elastic from hell. The dermis of Stice's forehead was still stuck fast, but the abundant and loose flesh of Stice's bulldog face had risen and gathered to stretch and connect his head to the window. (*IJ* 871)

Later on, we find out that Ortho "looks like a piece of cheese pizza where somebody tore the cheese off" (*IJ* 909). What do these unusual and campy descriptions tell about the self? The passage shows the impossibility of living without the idealized masks that

have come to define these characters' existence. They cannot escape the ideals that have come to dominate their lives: they are imprisoned by them. The trickster-father is the force at the core of how Hal and Orin relate to ambition and the process of striving for success. What strengthens my claim that the trickster-father is the agency behind this horrific, otherworldly event is that Incandenza is present as a ghost. Stice, before the attempt to pull him loose, asks Hal whether he believes in "[l]ittle kid shit. Telekiniption. Ghosts. Parabnormal shit." (*IJ* 870) Stice's terror here is underlined by the use of erroneous language. It is a reminder of the failure of language that the trickster-father symbolizes. The dialogue continues: " 'Somebody did come by before,' he said. 'There was somebody standing back there about maybe an hour back. But he just stood there. Then he went away. Or…it.' A full-body shiver" (*IJ* 870). The presence is horrific and sends a shiver through Stice's body as he narrates the happening. Hal responds in a way that helps to prove my point, as paranormality evokes memories of his father: "Himself allegedly used to see his father's ghost on stairways sometimes, [...] and claimed I wasn't speaking sometimes when I was sitting right there speaking to him. [...] So belief-wise I don't know what to think" (*IJ* 870). Incandenza's presence is, in other words, felt by both characters. He is a silent presence, looming over the moment of Ortho's violently losing his sense of self.

But Ragnarök is not depicted only as obeying the trickster-father's command. Thus, in the next subsection I analyze how the novel represents the attempts at keeping the trickster-father's all-consuming powers at bay. The attempts to evade the trickster-father's effects are most crucially portrayed through Don Gately's and Hal Incandenza's attempts at maintaining sobriety after quitting the use of drugs. I briefly noted that Hal's metaphorical loss of self occurs after he is forced to quit marijuana, which implies that addiction recovery might be the ultimate challenge for Hal. This connects also with Incandenza's film being something Hal cannot master: what proves most challenging to Hal is the very opposite of the addictive and repetitive structure of Incandenza's terminally entertaining film. This emphasizes the ambiguity of the character: what he creates does not correspond to his motives.

4.2.2 Evading the Overpowering Command to Enjoy

The novel presents Don Gately's struggle with drug addiction as a way to fend off the trickster-father's detrimental effects, which is a stark contrast to Hal's downward spiral analyzed above. As Boswell (2003: 148) notes, Gately "must begin his spiritual journey at postmodernism's zero point, where even modernism's secular sacred has been exhausted." In contrast to Gately, Boswell (2003: 149) calls Hal "postmodernism's paralyzed prodigy", who thinks he has learned how to manipulate his emotions but finds himself trapped behind this self-consciousness. From the theoretical point of view of this study, I see Hal's paralysis stemming from the trickster-father's command to enjoy, to follow the ideal ego to its darkest corners as I show above. On the other hand, I see Boswell's articulation as corresponding with Gately's journey through Ragnarök, which is the 'zero point' where all that is potentially sacred has been exhausted. Gately navigates through Ragnarök as an addict-in-recovery where the trickster-father's temptation is framed and controlled by AA meetings and Blind Faith in the application of cliché's and the undivided help of fellow addicts. The contrast between Gately and Hal becomes most pronounced once Hal tries to enter an addiction recovery group. I nonetheless begin this chapter by analyzing Gately's struggles to remain sober.

Gately feels the presence of the trickster-father as the looming urge to consume drugs, the temptation to *enjoy*. In relation to Gately's struggles to remain sober, the narrator relates the following:

> your personal will is the web your Disease sits and spins in, still. The will you call your own ceased to be yours as of who knows how many Substance-drenched years ago. It's now shot through with the spidered fibrosis of your Disease [...] You have to Starve The Spider: you have to surrender your will. (*IJ* 357)

As trickster-father is an emblem for the injunction to enjoy, for the call to cross the border and take the drug, he is the Spider that Gately needs to starve in order to remain sober. The trickster-father is the cruel force inside Gately's mind that keeps open the possibility for him to consume drugs again, to reenter the cage of enjoyment. Gately's conscious will, that is, his reason, is in fact in the service of the trickster-father, always

ready to push Gately back into a comfortable high. This is how *Infinite Jest* presents the trickster-father's hold as having become overpowering. As the law of the Father/the System fails to be in effect as maintaining coherence and structure for Gately and the other addicts of the novel, they need to find other substitutes for it, alternative ways for evading the trickster-father's all-consuming powers.

For Gately, the most vital element in Alcoholics Anonymous is the turning to a Higher Power, some type of god to whose power one submits. In AA, "[y]ou get to make up your own understanding of God or a Higher Power or Whom-/Whatever" (*IJ* 443). The point of this God is that it needs to be there, what it effectively *is* is of no importance. To heighten the arbitrariness of this belief in a vague God, Gately is

> suggested he keep his shoes and keys under the bed to help him remember to get on his knees. [...] He didn't have any God or J.C.-background, and the knee-stuff seemed like the limpest kind of dickless pap, and he felt like a true hypocrite just going through the knee-motions that he went through faithfully every A.M. and P.M., without fail, motivated by a desire to get loaded so horrible that he found himself humbly praying for his head to just finally explode already and get it over with. (*IJ* 466)

Moreover, what is noteworthy in this need for a Higher Power is that one does not have to know why one believes in it: uncertainty is a principal element in relying on this god. Gately "hits the knees in the A.M. and asks for Help and then hits the knees again at bedtime and says Thank You, whether he believes he's talking to Anything/-body or not, and he somehow gets through the day clean" (*IJ* 443). The miracle of this vaguely constructed Higher Power is that it works: no matter what Gately *really* thinks about going through the motions, these routines keep the trickster-father at bay, even if one painful, drug-hungry moment at a time.

In addition to submitting to the rule of some Higher Power, one needs Blind Faith in the older addicts and in clichéd slogans, which are the cornerstones of recovery from addiction and maintaining sobriety. These include, for instance, the following slogans: "Ask For Help and like Turn It Over, the loss and pain, to Keep Coming, show up, pray, Ask For Help", "One Day At a Time!", "Fake It Till You Make It" (*IJ* 273, 369). What

makes these tags relevant is that it is incredibly easy to merely sneer at them, but "that the clichéd directives are a lot more deep and hard to actually *do*. To try and live by instead of just say" (*IJ* 273). For the addicts in the novel, Gately among them, having faith in these banal, irritatingly superficial sentences is paramount, it is thorough a series of repetition without conscious thinking that enables sobriety. If too much conscious thought is put into these slogans, one is again following the voice of the trickster-father, who urges one to cross the boundaries, to transgress the Blind Faith in these cliché's that miraculously keeps the trickster-father's commands at a manageable distance. In relation to cliché's and the vague Higher Power, what needs to be stressed is that the moment one follows one's will, one is conforming to the trickster-father's command.

Addiction recovery is, then, depicted in *Infinite Jest* as a feasible way to fend off the trickster-father's overpowering effects. Bassil-Morozow (2015: 82) shows that the system's failure frees the trickster to taunt us, making us compelled to find alternative ways to structure his chaotic presence. Žižek (1999: 451) sketches a similar phenomenon by claiming that the law waning of law and the Father's authority intensifies the superego injunction to enjoy, making us strive to find ways to ease the superego by finding new forms of submission. But is AA simply a new form of submission or can it be viewed as something else? If addiction is life at the complete mercy of the trickster-father, I argue that recovery, as it is portrayed in *Infinite Jest*, is about establishing the law of the Father that can potentially free from the uncontrolled whims of the superego. As I point out in chapter 3, Dean (2006: 146) maintains that "subjection to and liberation through the law are the same thing." What is the crucial aspect in the novel's depiction of AA is that it emphasizes the Blind Faith needed for the law of the Father to function. It is this faith in the law, faith in its liberating powers that needs to be restored; and one cannot turn to reason and will because they are infested with the trickster-father's detrimental presence. *Infinite Jest* can thus be said to portray Žižek's (2008 [1991]: 240–241; see also Dean 2006: 148) Lacanian reversal of the repressive law and liberating will: it is the novel's characters' *will* that conforms to the trickster-father's command.

What is noteworthy about Gately's addiction recovery is how it relates to the death drive. While AA is itself a loop, it is not sustained by transgressing border but establishing new ones. In other words, the death drive is emptied out of its enjoyment-producing nature: the repetitions that Gately engages in have a structure similar to the death drive. However, instead of the disturbing excess of life that is sustained by the trickster-father's command to enjoy, AA's repetitions generate the ability to cherish the banality of life, of in fact finding the sense of having achieved something in living according to the simple slogans mentioned above. As the analysis with Hal shows, the trickster-father is an agency behind an urging to follow the Imaginary ideal beyond the final stage possible for the human psyche. What we see, then, in AA is a death drive that has managed to use the repetitious structure to transgress the command to enjoy. This makes the important point that the Gately and the other recovering addicts depicted in the novel seem to reject the trickster-father's command to enjoy, they say "No!" to this obscene call. What is ironic is that it seems to work even under dictums such as "Fake it till you make it!" (*IJ* 369). The repetitive structure that defines the death drive is transformed in this collective attempt to navigate through Ragnarök.

In contrast to Gately and AA, Hal Incandenza tries to escape the dead end of the trickster-father's command by language and learning, or like he himself puts it: by "delivering the goods" (*IJ* 253). The roots of this are to be found in the way Hal is depicted as processing his father's suicide, and especially the trauma of finding him dead. Hal recounts this to Orin in a very detached, ironic way: "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." (*IJ* 251–252). Hal is then forced to attend grief- and trauma therapy, to which Hal relates as a challenge solvable by reading books, which does not work at first, giving rise to the fear that he might "flunk grief-therapy" (*IJ* 253–254). Hal's need to perform and master thus extends even to his way of dealing with grief. Before long, he realizes that he has to think like a *grief-therapist*, and not like a "*student* of grief" (*IJ* 254). In the following sessions, Hal uses what he has read in order to perform a successful grieving process, stating that he "finally delivered the goods and my traumatic grief was professionally pronounced uncovered and countenanced and processed [...]" (*IJ* 257). Hal uses his talent to *learn*

how to be cured. The superficiality of this learning is a part of Hal's need to master everything, it is on the same level as his commitment to his ideal ego. This is also the case in a scene in which Hal is introduced to the sacrifices needed in order to be able to recover from addiction, which is to say, from the trickster-father's command to enjoy.

Hal's first time in an addiction support group shows him the challenges included in any attempt to frame the trickster-father's imprisoning authority. He enters Ennet House and asks for a schedule for meetings within the area (*IJ* 787). When he arrives at the meeting, he recognizes that one of the men is "pretty clearly the leader of the Meeting, possibly a high-ranking official of Narcotics Anonymous, whom Hal could casually approach about tracts and texts to buy and study, afterward" (*IJ* 800). To study and read his way through addiction is Hal's strategy, which resonates with his process to master grief: Hal can therefore be seen as being afraid of "flunking" addiction, of failing to succumb to its effects. What makes the meeting uncomfortable for Hal is that he eventually realizes that participants are holding teddy bears in their lap and *not* talking about their addictions: he realizes he has come to an Inner Infant meeting where adults holding teddy bears have gathered together in search for ways to cope with unhappy, loveless childhoods (*IJ* 800, 804). It is the first time Hal has ever "seen projectile-weeping" (*IJ* 806), which suggest the sentimentality that the occasion provokes. Hal's reaction to these crying adults is to scroll "through an alphabetical list of the faraway places he'd rather be right now" (*IJ* 806), which indicates not only that he does not want to be at the meeting, but also that he withdraws into language, within the alphabetically organized list of words that signify escape. I show in the final section of this chapter how Hal's withdrawal within the alphabetized list foreshadows his complete enclosure within the trickster-father's loop.

What the meeting and the final image ultimately reveals for Hal is how difficult it is to make the leap of faith required to keep the trickster-father's effects away, no matter whether the trickster-father manifests itself as addiction or a loveless childhood. The scene at the meeting ends with one of the participants "down on all fours on a Dacronyl rug, crawling, hampered because one arm was holding his bear to his chest, so he sort of

dipped and rose as he crawled on three limbs [...] his face unspeakable" (*IJ* 808). This image connects quite literally to an earlier one in which Hal is described as musing that

> [w]hat passes for hip cynical transcendence of sentiment is really some kind of fear of being really human, since to be really human (at least as he conceptualizes it) is probably to be unavoidably sentimental and naïve and goo-prone and generally pathetic, is to be in some basic interior way forever infantile, some sort of not-quite-right-looking infant dragging itself anaclitically around the map, with big wet eyes, and froggy-soft skin, huge skull, gooey drool. (*IJ* 695)

Hal's theory of what being a human is like seems to be eerily played out in front of his eyes in the Inner Infant meeting. It is as if the horror Hal faces in the meeting is that of seeing his view of humanity realized and made concrete. The Inner Infant meeting confirms for Hal that human existence really might be sentimental, pathetic, and naïve. On the other hand, what makes this scene uncomfortable for Hal is that he cannot identify with this sense of humanity. As I show in the previous section, the way he solves the deadlock is by following the trickster-father's authority, staying true to the ideal ego's mask that lures with its destructive fascination. The participants of the Inner Infant meeting, like Gately with his struggle to remain sober, seem to refrain from covering up this hidden "truth" about humanity: they accept humanity as banal and sentimental, and by embracing this "truth" they are presented the possibility to evade the trickster-father's cruel authority.

In stark contrast to Don Gately's relationship to language as characterized by Blind Faith in the AA system, Hal's obsession with mastery and performance seep into his attempts at coming to terms with his father's death. In Hal's attempt to brave the loop ends up in a failure because he submits to the trickster-father's command to enjoy, which in his case is extended to linguistic matter itself. In contrast to Gately, Hal masters language but has no faith in it, while the point of Gately's relationship to language is that he has Blind Faith in its potential to redeem.

4.2.3 Enclosure in the Trickster-Father's Loop

My analysis of how the trickster-father's imprisoning effects are portrayed in *Infinite Jest* can be separated into two categories, with Hal and Gately as their representatives. I argue above that Hal follows the trickster-father's command by becoming the ideal ego. This paradox of Hal identifying with the unattainable ideal leads to a gradual disintegration of his sense of self, which is depicted in the novel as Hal losing control over his facial expressions. On the other hand, Gately and the AA community was found out to represent an attempt to evade the trickster-father's effects by elevating an alternative way to frame the trickster-father's overpowering presence, which I see as elevating a substitute for the collapsed Symbolic Father. I also point out the way the novel depicts this as impossible for Hal, who cannot turn away from his ideal ego and face his true self in all its banality. My analysis shows thus far that the trickster-father imprisons through his command to stay true to the ideal ego, but also that this obscene authority creates a "zero point" (Boswell 2003: 148) from which Gately can reconfigure his relationship to the world around him. This twofold distinction, and the contrast between Hal and Gately, seems to signify the predicament and ponder on a solution. But the trickster-father is detrimental to structures such as this on of condition and cure. This view stems from Levi-Strauss' (1963: 224) observation that the trickster is a mediator between oppositional pairs. This is why the trickster-father does not leave its characters into a state of choosing between two options that oppose each other. *Infinite Jest* is not an optimistic novel, and the focus of this final subsection is to analyze Hal and Gately while they are enclosed in what I call the trickster-father's loop.

I see the trickster-father as a figure who imposes the need to resort to repetitive behavior: the trickster-father is the agency that sustains the imprisoning loop the novel's characters fall into. The lethal film's star, Joelle Van Dyne, ponders whether the lethal film Incandenza created was a "cage or really a door?" (*IJ* 230). Boswell (2003: 137) wittily points out that the film is, essentially, "a door to another cage." In other words, the novel depicts a loop where escape from imprisonment leads into another prison. A similar conceptualization of the loop is to be found in the astute analysis by Mary K. Holland (2014), who argues that the novel presents addiction and addiction recovery as

a cycle that is maintained by a culture defined by narcissism; she goes so far in her analysis as claiming that "even earnest attempts to escape only lead back to new manifestations of the solipsistic loop" (Holland 2014: 77). Hal's relation to his ideal ego is decidedly narcissistic, but the concept that defines the trickster-father is not narcissism but the obscene command to enjoy: the trickster-father urges the novel's characters to cross boundaries that limit them, be it in the form of an ambitious striving for perfection or the use of drugs after sobriety. Nonetheless, Boswell's and Holland's insistence that attempts to escape the loop only lead into new forms of the loop is an important feature of the trickster-father as well. What my analysis shows is that the trickster-father's loop is defined by the death drive, which Žižek (1999: 354–355) defines as the impossibility of ever getting completely rid of the pain of enjoyment, of a horrific excess of life that poses immortality and not death as the ultimate nightmare. The trickster-father presents itself as the agent of this terrifying immortality.

Gately's heroic success at maintaining sobriety is thwarted when he is shot in the right shoulder while heroically defending the most obnoxious of all the residents at Ennet House. What follows is that Gately wakes up lying on a hospital bed, in terrible pain. We learn that he suffers from toxemia due to an unclean bullet (*IJ* 815). Gately's situation is summarized by the following blunt sentences: "Shot with a professionally modified .44 item. He's post-trauma, in terrible pain, and everyone heard the guy say it: it was going to get worse, the pain" (*IJ* 888). The situation is unimaginably painful for Gately already because of the complications of the gunshot wound. But what makes these final pages of the novel so devastating is that Gately is continually offered oral narcotics to relieve this pain, but his ability to reject drugs by simply saying '*No*' or '*I'm an addict*', have become compromised because he is intubated: "[t]he tube was probably why he could only mew and grunt" (*IJ* 858). These pages recounting Gately's time tucked in the hospital bed are, in other words, a heartbreaking depiction of an addict trying to resist the urge to take the drug, to succumb to the nightmarish figures he confronts. For instance, a doctor appears beside him and offers the painkiller Talwin for his pain, which used to be "Gately's #2 trusted standard when he was Out There [using drugs], which 120 mg. on an empty gut was like floating in oil the exact temperature as your body" (*IJ* 888). The mere "memory of consuming Talwin makes parts of his body

Gately didn't know could drool drool" (*IJ* 888). Being deprived of language thus makes rejecting the drug a near-impossible task. It heightens the vital importance of simple declarations such as the ones I mentioned above. Furthermore, what these pages show is that Gately's inability to speak is depicted as the root of his imprisonment, and therefore stemming from the obscene agency of the trickster-father.

Gately's state, his inability to convince the haunting figures that offer him drugs, is described by evoking imprisonment and entrapment, effects that I see as imposed upon him by the trickster-father. Gately himself ponders how maybe his addiction tries to alarm him to "be scared a medically necessary squirt would pull all his old triggers again, put him back in the cage" (*IJ* 888). Moreover, Gately ponders how

> [t]his is the only time he's ever been struck dumb [...] and he doesn't like it a bit, the being struck dumb. It's like some combination of invisibility and being buried alive, in terms of the feeling. It's like being strangled somewhere deeper inside you than your neck. (*IJ* 833)

Unable to speak, he is given a notebook to *write* down things he wants to say; the narrator describes him as "inscribing an enormous vowel in the notebook with incredible care" (*IJ* 886), this vowel, an 'A' that stands for 'Addict,' is another way to try to keep clear of drugs. Later on, the promise of writing is frustrated since "[w]ithout a pencil and notebook he couldn't even seem to get across a request for a notebook and pencil; it was like he was trapped inside his huge chattering head" (*IJ* 922). Gately's inability to signify that he is an addict creates a horrific prison. Fearing the cage of addiction he might fall back into, he lies on the hospital bed and is confronted by fever-infused, dreamy figures who try to administer him oral narcotics in some form or other.

The most notable figure he confronts while lying in the hospital bed is Incandenza, the trickster-father himself, who appears as transformed into an entity referred to as the *wraith*. He is described as pirouetting himself inside Gately's mind:

> into Gately's personal mind, in Gately's own brain-voice but with roaring and unwilled force, comes the term PIROUETTE, in caps, which term Gately knows for a fact he doesn't have any idea what it means and no reason to be thinking it

> with roaring force, so the sensation is not only creepy but somehow violating, a sort of lexical rape. (*IJ* 832)

Here he is presented as an ambiguous presence, as something that cannot be confronted directly because he communicates, as it were, through Gately, but simultaneously to him. He even enunciates words through Gately that he does not know the meaning to. Incandenza thus introduces an alternative way for Gately to communicate, though this mode of conversing does not help him with the matter at hand, which is to remain sober. It actually intensifies his sense of imprisonment because he can now converse with someone though he cannot reach out: it is all happening within the confines of his mind. After the wraith's appearance, Gately himself starts pondering what it implies to him as a person addicted to oral narcotics. He mentally observes that the wraith

> could be a sort of epyphanyish visitation from Gately's personally confused understanding of God, A Higher Power or something, maybe sort of like the legendary Pulsing Blue Light that AA founder Bill W. historically saw during his last detox, that turned out to be God telling him how to stay sober via starting AA and Carrying The Message. (*IJ* 833)

Gately sees the wraith as possibly a message from God that would miraculously strengthen his ability to stay sober. The wraith replies: "Don't we both wish, young sir" (*IJ* 833). Gately then muses the opposite: "the wraith might represent the Sergeant at Arms, the Disease, exploiting the loose security of Gately's fever-addled mind, getting ready to fuck with his motives and persuade him to accept Demerol [his drug of choice while still using] just once" (*IJ* 833). Gately then acknowledges the possibility that the wraith is an agent that encourages him to go on and accept the drugs offered to him. I see the wraith as a disguise for the trickster-father, to whom no boundaries apply, not even those of life and death. The trickster-father is the roaring force behind the nightmarish visions that Gately encounters; he is the psychological motivation behind the repetitive loop of tempting doses. Gately finally entertains the possibility that the wraith, meaning a ghost, might be "a message from a Higher Power about sobriety and death?" (*IJ* 833). I see the trickster-father's appearance as the wraith as not testament to death but its opposite: the wraith being a dead person signifies that the trickster-father is a representative not of death but of the death drive.

Gately's sensations are recounted as connecting pain with a repetitive loop, which evokes the concept of the death drive. As Gately lies in bed, he isolates each second in order to survive the pain of the gunshot wound: "Second. Second. He tried to Abide. No single second was past enduring" (*IJ* 890). The flowing of seconds that reproduce the near-unbearable pain makes him focus on how the pain is only a repetition of these painful seconds. The imagery of passing seconds is used in another scene to describe the sense of withdrawal he is forced to undergo in a jail cell:

> Withdrawing. Any one second: he remembered: the thought of feeling like he'd be feeling this second for 60 more of these seconds — he couldn't deal. He could not fucking deal. He had to build a wall around each second just to take it. The whole first two weeks of it are telescoped in his memory down into like one second — less; the space between two heartbeats. A breath and a second, the pause and gather between each cramp. An endless Now stretching its gull-wings out on either side of his heartbeat. And he'd never before or since felt so excruciatingly alive. (*IJ* 859–860)

It is as if Gately's pain suggests not only the pain of the gunshot wound but also the pain of enjoyment the excessive pleasure in pain that is prohibited and maintained by law. The trickster-father's intrusion, his "lexical rape," creates the space in which Gately is forced to repeat each individual, overwhelming second, one at a time. This overwhelming pain Gately is forced to divide into individual repeated seconds resonates strongly with the death drive as being an excess of enjoyment derived through repetition. But a further observation by the narrator makes the crucial addition included in the Žižekian interpretation of the death drive: "He could do the dextral pain the same way: Abiding. No one single instant of it was unendurable. Here was a second right here: he endured it. What was undealable-with was the thought of all the instants all lined up and stretching ahead, glittering" (*IJ* 860). The enjoyment-filled seconds are fine, but the true horror lies in is that these seconds extend into infinity, never ending and keeping Gately unable to divide them into isolated moments of overwhelming pain. In this respect, Gately's state in the hospital is an expression of the horror related to the death drive: the truly disturbing part is the pain stretching into eternity.

The sentence that ends the novel introduces the trickster-father's loop on another level, which solidifies the novel's portrayal of him as a prison. The final nightmare of the hospitalized Gately delineates the events of a catastrophic drug binge during which one of his friends is murdered and Gately is injected, against his will, with a potent variant of heroin (*IJ* 979–981). After the drug takes effect, Gately loses consciousness "[a]nd 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" (*IJ* 981). Gately finds himself on the beach, which is the location of his first dream at the hospital, in which he dreams of a time when "his mother had put them in a little beach house" (*IJ* 809), which suggests the trickster-father's loop: not only is Gately not presented with redemption from the struggle to keep enjoyment/pain within manageable margins, the whole final section of the novel seems to start over. Despite being a metaphorical "way out", it is also simultaneously a falling back in: the door is a door to another cage. This is the ultimate prison in which Gately has fallen, he is, as it were, forced to live and relive the painful excess of pleasure over and over again. He will be taunted by the trickster-father's guises in a recursive succession that suggests an extreme representation of the disturbing immortality of the death drive.

Hal also ends up being caught in the trickster-father's loop, though in his case the loop can be seen as a continuation of obeying the trickster-father's command to enjoy. There is something deeply disturbing about Hal in the novel's opening scene, which turns out to be the chronologically last one in the novel. Hal sits in front of an admissions board at the university of Arizona, and he has been told "not [to] attempt what would feel to me like a pleasant expression or smile" (*IJ* 3). This connects the novel's opening scene with my argument that Hal becoming his ideal ego has led to a disintegration of his sense of self: he is ordered to remain neutral. The severity of Hal's state is reveled when he starts to speak: "My application's not bought. [...] I am not just a boy who plays tennis. I have an intricate history. Experiences and feelings. I'm complex. [...] I'm not a machine. […] I am not just a creātus, manufactured, conditioned, bred for a function" (*IJ* 11–12). Hal is trying to convince the admissions officers that there is more to him than his achievements, that he is a real human being behind the mask of talent and success, that is, his ideal ego. This reminds of Hal's theorizations of the "true" self

buried under masks, the true self whose embodiment that he confronts at the Inner Infant meeting when one of the participants crawls sobbing on the floor.

Hal's dead end is ultimately the same as Gately's: the loss of speech and the ability to communicate. After speaking, the admissions board is horrified at Hal, they offer him help, express terror (*IJ* 12). He is ultimately carried into the bathroom while the board members describe his speech as

> "Undescribable."
> "Like an animal."
> "*Sub*animalistic noises and sounds."
> "Nor let's not forget the *gestures*."
> [...]
> "What were you possibly *about*, trying to enroll this —" (*IJ* 14)

Hal is unable to communicate. He has become completely enclosed within his own consciousness, only eliciting horror from the people around him. This is the final stage of Hal's commitment to his ideal ego: despite his attempt to convince people that he is something more than the impossible ideal he has become, he cannot reach out and converse. What complicates this is that Hal is unable to communicate, but, as the first-person narrative implies and emphasizes, he is imprisoned within language: he keeps pointing out solecisms the other characters make, and even states that "[t]here are, by the O.E.D. *VI*'s count, nineteen nonarchaic synonyms for *unresponsive*, of which nine are Latinate and four Saxonic" (*IJ* 6, 17). This is the issue I promised to return to in the beginning of this chapter, where I discuss Hal's relation to language and Incandenza's inability to hear him speak: Hal's inability to communicate with the university staff reflects Incandenza's inability to hear his son speak. It may be argued that Hal has become what his father claimed him to be. In other words, his enclosure within words can be seen as his final step in conforming to the trickster-father's injunction.

The death drive is applicable also to what happens to Hal: his enclosure inside the loop gives words, the infinite expansion of language. Holland (2014: 78) states that "Hal is doomed to the solipsistic death of his pathological society." But a reading of Hal's fall into the loop of the trickster-father is to say that he is not dead but doomed to live

forever the way he is presented in the opening scene: unable to communicate, unable to reach out, doomed to remain enclosed within his ideal ego. The same Žižekian inversion of the death drive is, thus, the case with Hal as well. Only in Hal's case, the trickster-father's command to enjoy does not include pain-filled seconds that stretch into eternities, but letters that extend into words and sentences – even into the libraries the character claims to consume (*IJ* 12). Hal is, as Boswell (2003: 149) states with a nod to Tony Tanner, "trapped in a cage" one might call "the City of Words." What connects Hal's imprisonment within language to the death drive as signifying an excess of life, a painful eternity with no end, is the final sentence of the opening section. After he is dragged to the bathroom, an ambulance arrives to take him away, during which Hal envisions that once they get to the hospital, there "will be someone blue-collar and unlicensed [...] who will, looking down in the middle of some kind of bustled task, catch what he sees as my eye and ask So yo then man what's *your* story?" (*IJ*: 17). If Gately is depicted as being caught in the loop of eternally repeating the painful, enjoyment-filled seconds at the hospital, Hal is shown as being forced to tell his story, to recount the events that led him into the trickster-father's loop. Hal thus dissolves between the immortality of the letters, words, and structures that form the novel itself.

Finally, the novel itself begins and ends with the characters at the complete mercy of Incandenza the trickster-father, which problematizes the idea of the trickster's dissolution and creates the terms for the Ragnarök imposed by the trickster-father. As I show in chapter 2, Bassil-Morozow (2015: 23–24) holds that after the trickster has performed his tricks and changed the stale social situation he attacks, he is to return to his "dark wellspring", implying that the trickster is not completely gone but absorbed by the system's structures. But the trickster-father does not return to a "dark wellspring" in *Infinite Jest*, but persist as the horrific eternity of the command to enjoy that sustains the death drive. The Ragnarök imposed by the trickster-father is this terrifying infinite jest, the unimaginable eternity of Gately's and Hal's personal prisons of which the novel gives its readers a disturbing glimpse.

5 CONCLUSIONS

The aim of my study has been to analyze how James Incandenza, the father character of *Infinite Jest*, portrays the agency I call the trickster-father. I conducted my study on two interlocking levels: firstly, I examined the ways in which Incandenza can be called the trickster-father by resorting to crucial trickster motifs and characteristics, as well as the psychoanalytic concept of superego. The trickster-father was found to be an imprisoning presence characterized by trickster features, which the trickster-father uses to taunt the characters around him. Most central of these was found to be his creation of the film 'Infinite Jest', which was found to function as an articulation of the trickster-father's command to enjoy. Secondly, I analyzed the different pathological conditions depicted in the novel, which I categorized in the following thematic subsections: obeying the trickster-father's command, attempts at evading the trickster-father, and finally, the nightmarish state of being enclosed in the trickster-father's loop.

My study showed that the trickster-father is a relentless figure, making it problematic to find any kind of hope in challenging the ambiguous presence of this figure. The above pages delineate alternative ways in which the characters of the novel, most notably Hal and Gately, are imprisoned by the trickster-father. The trickster-father ultimately stands for an imprisoning superego command to enjoy that has acquired the operational mode of a trickster. I stated that the trickster-father is not a metaphor for change (Bassil-Morozow 2015: 7–8), but a metaphor for the cage created by the trickster-father's command, a cage I saw as sharing the logic of the Žižekian death drive. This has been identified as an outcome of the failure of the Father's Symbolic authority that is supposed to give life its borders, and potentially liberate from the trickster-father's obscene demands. My analysis shows that the novel portrays AA through Gately, as a potential way to fend off the trickster-father's overpowering presence. Though the promise of the novel's depiction of AA was questioned in the final subsection, in which I argue that the novel presents the speechless, enclosed-in-one's-mind types of stages as Ragnarök. The Ragnarök in *Infinite Jest* was not found to be merely the acts of conforming to and fending off the trickster father, but also total paralysis, complete imprisonment in what I call the trickster-father's loop.

As I already mentioned in the introduction, the foremost limitation of this study is that I do not take femininity into account. One could expand this study most obviously by considering the mother's role in the psychoanalytic triad of child-father-mother. In this study, the maternal piece of the Oedipal matrix has been taken as a symbol for the prohibited enjoyment, something that needs to remain cast out of society in order for it to maintain itself. Some of the conclusions of this study could very well be elaborated on if one focuses on the abject maternal body, which is the content of Incandenza's lethal film.

Finally, one possible way to expand on this study is to look more closely at the trickster-father and his implications. As our present political, social, and cultural contexts become more and more disorienting, we might very well locate the obscene and the transgressive on the side of authority itself. Slavoj Žižek's theories were used in this study because of this very insight that fills the pages of his works. On the other hand, I evoked Helena Bassil-Morozow's conceptualization of the trickster for the very reason that whatever form of authority one might face today, be it the state, a social institution, a political party, or one's own consciousness, one is bound to confront figures or impulses that function increasingly like the trickster. This also gives rise to a need to reevaluate the ways in which these novel forms of authority can be challenged. It is this change in how authority and power works during the Ragnarök we confront in our everyday lives that my analysis of the trickster-father is ultimately testament to.

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