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4 David Hering's *David Foster Wallace: Fiction and Form* begins with an original thesis: all of Wallace's fiction oscillates between monologism and dialogism in a process revolving around "the continual risk of a master discourse engendered by the degree of Wallace's authorial presence" (7). The thesis shakes one of the fundamental anchors of Wallace criticism, i.e. the reading of Wallace as a "new Dostoevsky" whose fiction provides a dialogic context for the staging of opposite abstract ideas. Also, it introduces the main focus of this monograph, namely the formal analysis of Wallace's fiction, one that does not do without content, intentionality, nor non-fiction.

5 Chapter 1, "Vocality," addresses Wallace's concerns with authorship. The main – astute and agile – thesis is that Wallace's fiction moves back and forth between its author's will to exert his authorial presence and his awareness of the implications of literary theory, i.e. between authorial intentionalism and the Barthesian "Death of the Author;" a conflict also thematically enacted in "the motif of the ghostly 'apparition'" (16). This conflict, Hering continues, gives birth to a "fiction populated with multiple and competing indiscernible voices which originate from powerful absent and often ghostly figures" (17) through which Wallace manages to construct a new type of authorial figure that he brands "the revenant author:"

> the revenant author [is not] a direct 'revival' of the pre-Barthesian author figure, but rather a 'ghostly' return of the dead author, one aware of his existential contingency upon readerly presence and interpretation and committed to a dialogic engagement with those readers (18).

6 While keeping to this framework, the chapter investigates different models of authorial anxiety within Wallace's fiction. The first of the two main models Hering uses is Harold

Bloom's *apophrades*, "whereby 'the mighty dead return, but they return in our colours, and speaking in our voices'" (18). Wallace's formal choices had never been investigated under this model, which is most persuasively argued with regards to the short-story collection *Girl With Curious Hair*, which is defined, at large, as a direct "dramatization of the anxiety of influence" (25). In this engaging analysis Hering points out that specific stories inside the collection are direct imitations and parodies of Bret Easton Ellis, Robert Coover, William Gass, Philip Roth and John Barth. A comparative reading would be extremely interesting. The second model is "Mikhail Bakhtin's concept of dialogism and polyphony" (18), which Hering argues is a better compass then the Derrida-Wittgenstein nexus to understand Wallace's formal evolution. His Bakhtinian reading of Wallace's fiction differs from all previous analyses. *Infinite Jest*, for example, is defined as not purely dialogic and as maintaining an authorial voice, therefore confirming that Wallace's fiction oscillates between monologism and dialogism, and that "Wallace's revenant author accepts 'the birth of the reader' but refuses to submit to its own effacement, instead proposing an author-reader relationship that is explicitly dialogic" (38).

7 Chapter 2, "Spatiality," first addresses how and why Wallace created a Midwestern literary persona. It classifies Wallace among the authors who wrote "with one eye to the academy and the other on New York" (50), such as Nabokov, Gaddis, Bellow, Pynchon and DeLillo. It traces Wallace's desire to be always both in and out, among the geniuses and among "us civilians." His Midwestern persona was a tool to this end, one in "stereotypical concordance with the valorization of 'single-entendre principles'" (48), another task Wallace held dear. Secondly, spatiality is investigated with regards to the nature of institutional and non-institutional spaces inside Wallace's fiction. This concern drives the AA and NA sections of *Infinite Jest* and, for Hering, increasingly widens throughout Wallace's career, as "the sense of institutional encroachment and the toxic nature of the outside world permeates the narratives of *Brief Interviews* and has progressed exponentially by the publication of *Oblivion*" (70). Wallace's fiction, then, plays out a "progressive effacement of non-institutional space" while showing an increasing "ambivalence about institutional structures" (70). On this last point, Hering again challenges mainstream narratives of Wallace criticism. Kelly and McGurl especially have read Wallace's institutional spaces as harbors of safety, shelters. Hering partially acknowledges their theses, but concludes instead that Wallace's institution is "a highly ambiguous space," and that, as "Wallace's later fiction demonstrates, the rapacious nature of the institution leads not only to a figurative and cultural geographical colonizing, but also a generation of the area outside itself as toxic and predatory" (78).

8 Chapter 3, "Visuality," deals with Wallace's concern with self-reflexivity and metatextuality. Proof from the Harry Ransom Center's Wallace archives come into play (the second half of this monograph is constructed on Hering's findings at the archives); here's one example. A section of *Infinite Jest* was initially entitled *Las Meninas*, explicitly referring to Velazquez's famous painting where the painter paints himself painting *las meninas* (the ladies in waiting), on a meta-move that has lead to incessant critical interrogation (most famously by Michel Foucault). Hering takes Dällenbach's model of analysis of the painting, a "three-part structure of *mise-en-abyme*," and uses it to construct "a theory of reflection in Wallace's fiction" (84) which *necessitates* a *fourth part*:

> Wallace develops a fourth trope, a motif of *refraction* that is often in deliberate conflict with the preceding three. [...] If the previous three motifs reflect text, author, and character, the fourth attempts to refractively pass through the

> 'reflective' surface and dialogically communicate with whoever pass through or outside that surface (87).

9 Hering hasn't merely adopted Dällenbach's model. He *adapted* it, evolved it. The rest of the chapter is concerned with demonstrating the theory through close-readings. It ends with a section on *Oblivion* read through the trope of refraction and archival evidence. Hering comes to deeply interesting conclusions: "Wallace's authorial presence undergoes a fundamental shift in *Oblivion*, a transition that is connected inextricably to his own developing public persona" (117). Skip Atwater, in "The Suffering Channel," is an obvious stand-in for Wallace's non-fictional persona and represents Wallace's attempt to begin "to align his *public* persona with the subjects of his fiction" (117). This attempt presented "Wallace with an unprecedented [formal] challenge" (121) that was only partially solved in *Oblivion* and never solved with *The Pale King*. For Hering, Wallace's late fiction is the history of its author's confrontation with, and loss against, this formal challenge.

10 Chapter 4, "Finality," deals precisely with Wallace's failure to make *The Pale King* – "a narrative within which all of Wallace's prior formal concerns accumulate but are also in conflict" (127) – cohere. Its compositional history is read through extensive use of archival evidence and theorized as moving through three stages. The first stage takes place in the 1997-1999 period, when Wallace starts writing a novel entitled *Sir John Feelgood* where the protagonist is named Drinion and the central theme is pornography. Its motifs and thematic preoccupations end up "form[ing] the bases of significant elements of *Brief Interviews with Hideous Men* [1999]" (128), and *Sir John Feelgood* abandons pornography to take on what was merely a peripheral focus – taxes and the IRS – as its new central element. It changes its title to *The Pale King* and becomes – probably – the first novel ever to start off about pornography and end up about taxes. The second stage runs through 1999 and 2005. It ends in writerly "disaster," so to say. *Oblivion* is published because Wallace cannot make the novel cohere. It is an emergency publication, trying to make sense of years of steady but unfulfilling work. "Much of *Oblivion* essentially was *The Pale King*" (132), i.e. its best parts, and the novel is left bereft. At this point, in Hering's story, Wallace 1) feels that the novel "is spiraling out of control and coherency" (135) and 2) has spent the last years trying "to mine his established non-fiction persona for the purposes of his fiction" (133). So "Wallace decides to incorporate the figure of a non-fiction narrator" (133); he writes "himself," "David Wallace," into the novel. This is the last compositional period, which ends with Wallace's suicide. Here are written the "Author Here" section, Fogle's monologues, and Rand and Drinion's dialogue, the most substantial sections of the text we read today. At first, Wallace's idea seems to work, his "positioning of a fictional iteration of his persona [...] has the effect of creating an oppositional motif in *The Pale King* in which the narrative juxtaposes and dramatizes chaotic and controlled data: the text, effectively, begins to formally model itself around the manner of its own composition" (136-137). To be clear as day – Hering here is outstanding –, "David Wallace" is *not* a fictional stand-in for the real-life Wallace. *It is a stand-in for his non-fictional persona*. The "David Wallace" of *The Pale King* comes from "Philo IL," as does the author of the 1990 essay of "Derivative Sport in Tornado Alley." Real-life Wallace was born in Ithaca, lived in Bloomington-Normal, and Claremont (and was older than the fictional stand-in). But why would Wallace want to do that? The answer to this question is, it seems to me, the climax of the monograph, and its complexity is impossible to summarize. It requires the full nuanced and intricate argument Hering sets down plus the attentive read his argument deserves. So get your

hands on this book. It is mandatory reading for Wallace scholars. Chapters 1 and 2 provide indispensable corrections in Wallace criticism. Chapters 3 and 4 provide new models of analysis and fresh archival evidence. To close, I'll anticipate that the answer begins with the previously mentioned attempt, on Wallace's part, "to align his *public* persona with the subjects of his fiction" (117), and that, quoting:

11 What *can* be established is that Wallace's interest in ghostliness and dialogism continued into his final work at the level of both scenario and narration but becomes paralysed by both the amalgamation of his fiction and non-fiction registers and the incoherency of the novel's materials (147).