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THE AGE OF INTERVENTION: ADDICTION, CULTURE, AND NARRATIVE
DURING THE WAR ON DRUGS

DISSERTATION

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy in English in the College of Arts and Sciences at the University of
Kentucky.

By
Ashleigh Michelle Hardin

Lexington, Kentucky

Director: Dr. Alan Nadel, Professor of English

Lexington, Kentucky

2016

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ABSTRACT OF DISSERTATION

THE AGE OF INTERVENTION: ADDICTION, CULTURE, AND NARRATIVE DURING THE WAR ON DRUGS

While addiction narratives have been a feature of American culture at least since the early 19th century's temperance tales, the creation of the Johnson Intervention in the late 1960s and the corresponding advent of the War on Drugs waged by U.S. Presidents have wrought significant changes in the stories told about addiction and recovery. These changes reflect broader changes in conceptions of agency and the relationship of subject to culture in the postmodern era. In the way that it iterates the imperatives of the War on Drugs initiated by Richard Nixon, the rhetoric of successive U.S. Presidents provides a compelling heuristic for analyzing popular and literary texts as reflective of the changing shape of addiction and recovery narratives over the last half century. Johnson, by defining addiction, not intoxication, as a break with reality, argued that confronting addicts with narratives of the potential crises could convince them to seek treatment before they hit bottom. Johnson's version of "reality therapy" thus presented threatened or simulated crises, rather than real ones. Examining presidential rhetoric and popular culture representations of addiction—in horror movies, "very special episodes," and reality television—this dissertation identifies features of the postmodern Intervention and recovery narrative in fiction by William Peter Blatty, Stephen King, Jay McInerney, Tama Janowitz, David Foster Wallace, and Jess Walter. I demonstrate how the Intervention is key to understanding the cultural products of the War on Drugs and its continued salience in American culture.

KEYWORDS: Narrative, Addiction, Postmodernism, Presidential Rhetoric, War on
Drugs

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To the memory of Scott Rachford

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Chapter One: Introduction

Narratives of addiction and recovery have been a staple of American literature and culture since the early 19th century. According to Harry Gene Levine, these narratives were not merely representations of addiction, but foundational to the creation of an early disease concept of addiction, itself a product of “a transformation in social thought grounded in fundamental changes in social life—in the structure of society” (165-66). Levine argued that the novel, with its “exploration of the nuances of daily life and inner experiences” provided “one important place where the inner struggle of the drunkard was portrayed” (165), thus linking the disease concept of alcoholism to the rise of the novel as a dominant literary form. Scholars such as Thomas Gilmore, John W. Crowley, Robyn Warhol, Avital Ronell, Nicholas O. Warner, and Eoin Cannon have explored the special relationship between addiction and literature from the 19th century to the mid-20th, making valuable contributions to our understanding of addiction as a cultural narrative. However, recent changes in addiction treatment have created new narratives of addiction and recovery. These narratives have infiltrated American culture aided by the political rhetoric of the War on Drugs, a campaign that encouraged reassessment of how bystanders could participate to stop addiction.

The Johnson Intervention, a therapeutic concept developed in the late 1960s, presented simulated crises to coerce addicts into recovery. Rather than allowing addicts to reach a rock bottom, Episcopal preacher and addiction treatment pioneer Vernon Johnson argued for a confrontation early in the addict’s drinking or drugging career that would present him/her with the effects of his/her addiction on others and mandate

consequences if the addict did not enter treatment. This new approach to addiction shaped the narrative so common to American literature and culture and has had a series of significant impacts on cultural and literary narratives about addiction and recovery since 1970. The corresponding advent of the War on Drugs waged by U.S. Presidents has wrought significant changes in the stories told about addiction and recovery. These narratives reflect broader changes in conceptions of agency and the relationship of the subject to culture in the postmodern era. In the way that it iterates the imperatives of the War on Drugs initiated by Richard Nixon, the rhetoric of successive U.S. Presidents provides a compelling heuristic for analyzing popular and literary texts as reflective of the changing shape of addiction and recovery narratives over the last half century.

Chapter 1, “A Brief History of Addiction Treatment in the United States before 1970,” lays the foundation to explore the proliferation of addiction in late capitalist America as both an affliction and a body of metaphors. From the writings of Benjamin Rush through the early 20th century Twelve Step groups, the concept of addiction has been understood through its informing narratives, and attitudes toward alcoholism and addiction, therefore, depend on broad social structures more so than medical knowledge. Addiction treatment in the United States prior to 1970 reveals a medical concept of addiction followed the creation of addiction narratives. Vernon Johnson’s Intervention departs radically from earlier ideas about motivation and recovery. Defining addiction, not intoxication, as a break with reality, Johnson argued that confronting addicts with narratives of potential crises could convince them to seek treatment before they hit bottom. Johnson’s version of “reality therapy” thus presented threatened or simulated crises rather than real ones.

Intervention as a narrative trope is discussed in Chapter 2, “Heroes, Heroin, and Horror: Interventions and Exorcisms during Richard Nixon’s War on Drugs.” Nixon’s deft dovetailing of the War in Vietnam with his nascent War on Drugs allowed fears about the former to be retranslated into concerns about the latter. Thus, the dominance of gothic horror during this time is as much about fears of addicted veterans returning home as it is about guilt over atrocities committed in Vietnam. The Intervention gave the parents and wives of these veterans new agency, and the Nixon Administration stressed that the family’s surveillance of the addict was the first step to recovery. Ira Levin’s *Rosemary’s Baby* (1967), William Peter Blatty’s *The Exorcist* (1971), and Stephen King’s *The Shining* (1977) reinstitute a moral dimension in the disease concept of addiction by linking it with demonic possession. Though each novel represents addiction as possession in different ways, and offers varying degrees of hope for the addicted characters, they all promote as a solution that is simultaneously medical and spiritual, investing interventionists with medical, spiritual, and legal authority. The consolidation of authority serves to divorce addiction from its social context, to treat it as individual pathology rather than a condition influenced or caused by situational factors.

The more punitive and less treatment-focused approach of Ronald Reagan continues the trend of divorcing addiction from its context. In Chapter 3, “Nancy Reagan’s Star Wars: A Very Special Episode in the War on Drugs,” I argue that the Intervention becomes an ally of the forces of privatization and criminalization that drive Reagan’s War on Drugs. Nancy Reagan’s Just Say No campaign and the Very Special Episodes of television it produced show that the Reagans’ project of emphasizing prevention and education had a distorting effect on addiction narratives and on the public

perception of the true victims of the War on Drugs. The Just Say No episodes of *Diff'rent Strokes* and *Punky Brewster* depict addiction as resulting from experimentation caused by peer pressure and addressed by simply “saying no.” The struggle against addiction in these episodes is colorblind and apolitical. The campaign also privileged television as the best medium for the message and celebrities the best carriers of it. In the novels and stories of the Brat Pack writers, Just Say No’s obsession with youth and addiction is dramatized, even as writers trouble the campaign’s dependence on popular media to distribute its anti-drug message. The protagonists of Jay McInerney’s *Bright Lights, Big City* (1984), Bret Easton Ellis’s *Less Than Zero* (1985) and Tama Janowitz’s *Slaves of New York* (1986) inhabit a media-inundated culture that encourages rather than arrests addiction. Though McInerney offers a narrative of rebirth that ultimately coalesces with Reagan’s anti-drug message, Ellis and Janowitz develop deeper critiques of colorblindness and commercialism in the Reagan era.

In Chapter 4, “Irony and Recovery: *Infinite Jest* and Bill Clinton’s Postmodern War on Drugs,” the continuation of Reagan’s War on Drugs under the Democratic President Bill Clinton is examined as an instance of postmodern irony. Clinton’s Third Way politics and perceived insincerity were read by some as indications of his status as the “first postmodern president.” Trysh Travis cites Clinton as the “first recovery president,” capitalizing on a broader Recovery Movement with his use of recovery narratives during and after his campaign (1). Clinton said very little about drugs publicly and reduced the staff of the Office of National Drug Control Policy, but he also promoted himself as both a “tough on crime” Democrat and a child of alcoholism. While the Recovery Movement seemed to normalize addiction and offer the identity of the

recovered/recovering addict to greater numbers of people, the problem of addiction was still treated largely as a criminal justice issue. In David Foster Wallace's *Infinite Jest* (1996), an overly ironic, media- and image-obsessed society continually thwarts possibilities for social change. In the novel, addiction is a kind of ideology from which American culture has been unable to escape despite or because of its reliance on irony. Wallace's advocacy for a "new sincerity" contends with the issues of representation and mediation raised by postmodernity, and *Infinite Jest* suggests the Intervention's use of simulation may be less effective than the older methods of Alcoholics Anonymous.

Nonetheless, as a narrative trope, the Intervention achieved widespread popularity during the presidency of George W. Bush. In Chapter 5, "Breaking with Reality: Divine Interventions After 9/11" I examine the intersections of 9/11, terrorism, and addiction. Jess Walter's "novel of September 12," *The Zero* (2006), demonstrates how the linking of addiction and the attacks of 9/11 helped relieve Americans' anxieties and feelings of guilt. A spate of Intervention themed TV shows that appeared during this time, especially A&E's *Intervention* (2005-13, 2015-present) and *The Cleaner* (2008-09), reflect changes in U.S. foreign policy during the War on Terror. Decades of Intervention-influenced narratives about addiction shaped not only the way Candidate Bush styled himself as a recovering addict, but also the ways in which President Bush used the rhetoric of addiction to lend "divine" authority to the Bush Doctrine and the War in Iraq. Focused neither on rehabilitation nor interdiction, Bush's rhetoric equated recovery with Intervention as event, a move illustrated in his "Mission Accomplished" speech in May 2003. *The Cleaner* replicates Bush's rhetoric in its depiction of "extreme interventions,"

in which addicts are kidnapped and forced into treatment. This usage suggests a change in the way the Intervention itself is understood.

As a coda, Chapter 6 “Intervention in the Age of Obama: Race and Trajectories of Addiction in *Cast Away* and *Flight*” briefly examines the Intervention as it can be used to perpetuate the racial dichotomies of the War on Drugs. Robert Zemeckis’s 2012 film *Flight* appears to undo the whitewashing of alcoholism narratives through its protagonist, Whip Whittaker, played by Denzel Washington. However, contrasting the narrative of addiction in *Flight* to Zemeckis’s 2000 film *Cast Away*, I argue that the Intervention offered to Whip asks him to accept the identity of criminal before he can begin recovery. Divine recovery narratives, like that offered to *Cast Away*’s Chuck (Tom Hanks) and suggested by George W. Bush’s experience, are still reserved for white protagonists.

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Chapter Two: A Brief History of Addiction Treatment in the United States before 1970

“When the culture demands rigorous evaluation to prove the effectiveness of treatment, such demands usually reflect that the treatment industry is failing to meet those larger social utilities. This usually occurs when broad social forces redefine one’s ‘brother’ as ‘perpetrator’ and redefine ‘keeper’ as ‘warden.’ Prisons serve similar symbolic functions that have little to do with their actual capacity to punish, protect, or rehabilitate. Caretaking and punishment are venues through which the culture expiates its most powerful emotions. The acts of caring and punishing are more about ourselves than about the consequences of those acts on the addict” (White, *Slaying the Dragon*, 331).

If the history of narcotics is, as Nietzsche claimed, “the history of the so-called higher culture,” (86), the history of addiction *treatment* may well be the history of postmodern culture, and narratives of intervention and recovery may be symptomatic of changing notions of power and agency in the late 20th and early 21st century American culture. Because the discursive field of addiction studies is indebted to cultural and social forces, perhaps to an even greater extent than to the medical profession, we need first to review the history of addiction treatment in America. Doing so will draw into sharp relief the differences between earlier attitudes toward intervention and treatment and the contemporary moment.

Addiction, as we understand the term today, includes not only alcoholism and drug addiction, but also sex addiction and other compulsive behaviors.¹ However, this consolidation of various behaviors under the rubric “addiction” is relatively recent. Though at points in the nineteenth century some reformers and physicians compared alcoholism to addiction to other drugs, most of the twentieth century saw the two treated separately by both the medical field and the federal government. The history of addiction

¹ Medical discourse has replaced the term “addiction” with the term “dependence.” However, in mainstream discourse, addiction still has considerable purchase. Because my dissertation examines cultural representations, I will rely on the term “addiction.”

treatment nevertheless reveals a number of unifying themes. For this reason primarily, I've structured the chapter around approaches to the general problem of addiction, dealing with different substances separately when necessary, but generally striving to emphasize the parallels and the “growing together” of the two diseases.

Social Reform Movements: Compassion for the Drunkard

According to *Sobering Up*, Ian Tyrrell's important study of the American Temperance movement of the early 19th century, a “revolution in social attitudes” after the War of 1812 that made Americans begin to consider alcohol a social and personal ill (Tyrrell 4). Although most temperance reformers considered abstinence a matter of willpower, and there was no medically codified conception of alcoholism as a disease, the rhetoric of disease was invoked as early as the late 18th century to describe and explain problematic drinking. Benjamin Rush, the father of American psychiatry and a signer of the Declaration of Independence, was one of the earliest proponents of a medical disease concept of alcoholism. According to Tyrrell, “until Benjamin Rush produced his *Inquiry into the Effects of Ardent Spirits* in 1784, there was scarcely a ripple of medical dissent from the use and prescription of alcohol, and not until a broader community opposition to liquor emerged in the early nineteenth century did medical practice begin to undergo significant change” (Tyrrell 17). As a prolific and influential figure, Rush profoundly shaped the 19th century conception of alcoholism, and it is this early theory that began to consider alcohol problems as treatable, medical conditions worthy of scientific study. However, efforts to combat alcoholism manifested themselves most clearly in social reform movements rather than medical research. Following Tyrrell,

Harry Gene Levine argues the early disease concept was the result not of Rush's medical or scientific study, but "a transformation in social thought grounded in fundamental changes in social life—in the structure of society" (165-66). In his analysis of the American Temperance movement, laymen, physicians, reformed drunkards, and concerned family members disseminated a notion of pathological drunkenness through narratives shared at Temperance meetings and in print.² Thus, the earliest treatment approaches to addiction in America came through a series of social reform movements against "drunkenness" and "inebriety," with temperance organizations like the American Temperance Society (ATS) courting the medical profession to supplement their spiritual arguments against drinking with medical evidence (Tyrrell 89-90).

Temperance as a political and social issue was not always concerned with the treatment of the alcoholic. Some Temperance reformers preached abstinence for those who hadn't begun drinking and hoped the inebriate population would die off. Pessimistic about the chances of recovery for any alcoholic, the ATS abandoned attempts to reform or control the inebriate in favor of encouraging abstainers to remain sober (Tyrrell 54-55). Conversely, personal recovery organizations, such as the Washingtonians, both humanized the alcoholic and suggested that the pathway to recovery could come through association with reformed drunkards and the pursuit of sober entertainment. Tyrrell notes, "the Washingtonian movement was not socially homogeneous; it embraced lower-middle-class as well as lower-class people, employers as well as employees, ex-

² Though the drunkard population was predominately male, Temperance quickly became a women's issue, as domestic abuse and lack of financial support were often the outcomes of a husband's alcoholism. For an analysis of middle-class women in temperance, both as victims of and as drunkards themselves, see: Martin, Scott C. *Devil of the Domestic Sphere: Temperance, Gender, and Middle-class Ideology, 1800-1860*. DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2008.

alcoholics and men and women who were lifelong abstainers, the thoroughly respectable and the not-so respectable, evangelicals and those of a more secular disposition” (Tyrrell 160). Washingtonian meetings were known for the emotional and theatrical tales of former drunkards whose sharing of their experiences was an integral part of their reformation. Newcomers were encouraged to sign a pledge of total abstinence and share their experiences as well.

Although a variety of factors in the mid-19th century contributed to the dissolution of the Washingtonians and many similar organizations, the demise of these organizations reflected a shift in thinking about alcoholism recovery. Scandals like those involving noted Temperance speaker John Gough damaged the personal recovery movement’s credibility.³ Americans were skeptical about the claims of the allegedly reformed drunkard, and improvements in medicine following the Civil War fostered a greater faith in professional, rather than lay, approaches to problem drinking.⁴ Simultaneously, temperance reformers increasingly sought legal prohibition at the state and local levels (the so-called Maine Laws) as the solution. Thus, as early as the 1850s, addiction was emerging as a social problem with personal, medical, religious, and legal dimensions.

³ As Kobler explains, to their detriment, the Washingtonians continued to promote Gough even as he “suffered several spectacular relapses... A Washingtonian salvage squad would sober him up, repledge him and return him to the lecture platform. His most serious fall occurred in 1845 in New York City, where after a week’s disappearance, he was found semiconscious in a lower West Side brothel. Despite the skepticism of the press, the society chose to accept Gough’s version of events, according to which an acquaintance from his old bookbinding days—probably a secret agent of antitemperance forces, he surmised—hailed him as he was strolling along Broadway and invited him into a soft-drink parlor. The raspberry soda that Gough ordered tasted, in retrospect, strangely like gin, though the villain may have introduced some drug” (Kobler 68).

⁴ *Huck Finn*’s Pap exemplifies the unsentimental attitude toward the “reformed drunkard” that emerged in the wake of Temperance speaker scandals like John Gough’s.

Institutionalization for the Inebriate

Following the Civil War, Maine Laws were overturned and the effort to prohibit alcohol was stifled by moderates who found enforcing prohibition created more problems than it solved (Tyrrell 295). However, temperance agitation had produced a profound change in the way Americans viewed intoxication: it was no longer a fact of everyday life, but a hindrance to middle-class respectability (Tyrrell 317).⁵ Significantly, the 19th century conception of “inebriety” considered both alcohol and opiates dangerous substances. In the 1870s, inebriate homes and asylums emerged as viable treatment options for both alcoholics and addicts of other drugs. These institutions surfaced as part of the medical community’s, as well as political and community authorities’, growing disagreement with personal recovery and temperance movements “over the causes [of addiction], responsibilities, best courses of treatment, and requests for aid” (White 25). Though inebriate homes varied according to proprietors, regions, and other factors, for the most part they served middle and upper-income alcoholics and addicts who entered treatment voluntarily. Some of the inebriate homes were merely “drying out” places for wealthy addicts whose privacy was valued over their sobriety. The inebriate homes served to develop a “*well-articulated* disease concept of addiction and to operationalize this concept within a system of institutional care” (White 26, emphasis in original).⁶

⁵ My gloss of the social movement dimensions of temperance obscures the complexity and longevity of the movement, but necessarily so, as much temperance agitation dealt with the problem of treating the alcoholic minimally if at all. For a full explanation of the history of temperance as a social movement and its culmination in national Prohibition, see Ann-Marie E. Szymanski’s *Pathways to Prohibition: Radicals, Moderates, and Social Movement Outcomes*.

⁶ As White points out, it’s important to note that the disease concept employed by the early inebriate homes was a rediscovery. Addiction and alcoholism had been considered diseases of some kind by earlier temperance reformers and personal recovery movements.

Physicians in the new field of addiction medicine worked to professionalize the field, legitimize their patients, and form the core concepts on which the modern addiction treatment specialty was built. These early professionals first articulated concepts still used today to describe and diagnose addiction, such as tolerance, withdrawal, craving, and loss of control (White 31).

Within a relatively short timespan, however, the inebriate home system disappeared. Of the several reasons White notes several reasons for its demise, two major cultural/historical factors deserve closer analysis.⁷ First, the fin de siècle was marked by an increasing intolerance for addiction and addicts and a broader move to criminalize not only drug use (including alcohol), but also addiction itself. In the two decades before the national prohibition of alcohol, physicians were gradually stripped of their abilities to prescribe or dispense certain drugs and to treat addicts with maintenance doses or medicines including narcotics. The right to determine which drugs were dangerous or inappropriate for certain patients was placed in the hands of the Department of the Treasury. Some doctors resisted the new legislation and continued treating addicts or maintaining them with small doses (e.g. of morphine), but aggressive prosecution of these doctors by the federal government all but eliminated the practice. It is important to note that the federal government's intervention in addiction medicine was based not on science, but on the ruthlessly pragmatic idea that "if alcohol and other drugs were effectively prohibited, there would be no need for addiction treatment programs" (White 31). These measures merely transmuted addicts into criminals.

⁷ No centralized funding, planning, or regulation; failure of optimism about personal reformation/recriminalizing of addiction; lack of central therapeutic ideology; patient selectivity; nature/structure of isolation in asylum; conflict within the field; ethical abuses and problems of leadership succession (White 28-30).

The second major cultural shift that effected the end of the inebriate homes was the rise of psychiatry and psychoanalysis in the beginning of the 20th century, a change that has affected the interpretation of human behavior ever since.⁸ Rather than seeing addiction as a criminal behavior, psychiatry would claim that it was the “symptom of underlying emotional disturbance, and thus within [its] purview” (White 31). The psychoanalytic approach viewed addiction as “an alternative to emotional maturation” (White 96). Significantly, the goal of psychiatric treatment of addiction, particularly alcoholism, was not abstinence, but a return to “normal” consumption. Although the psychoanalytic approach remained en vogue until the second half of the 20th century, it was by no means applied evenly to all addicts. As White points out, the concurrent criminalization of drugs (including alcohol) and rise of psychiatry worked to separate addicts along class lines so that “the drunken affluent were seen as victims of a disease, while the drunken working class and poor were seen as exhibiting willful misconduct deserving of punishment” (34).

State Control and Interventions: Containing the Criminal

Psychiatry did, however, begin the cultural work of restoring viability to the disease concept by diagnosing other behaviors as diseases (White 99). Nonetheless, while American society increasingly accepted psychological interpretations of social problems, the American government criminalized addiction. The first two decades of the 20th century saw a number of national measures limiting or prohibiting the use of drugs and alcohol. The 1906 Pure Food and Drug Act required the labeling of patent medicines and

⁸ Musto also notes the importance of the rise of psychoanalysis for changing conceptions of addiction. See *The American Disease*, p. 83.

beverages that contained cocaine or opiates. In 1914, the Harrison Act further regulated these substances by stipulating that they could only be prescribed by a doctor in the course of treatment. Since addiction/alcoholism was not officially a disease (and had it been, maintenance doses would not have been considered “treatment”), doctors prescribing to “known addicts” faced prosecution, and between 1914 and 1938 more than 25,000 were indicted and 3,000 were sent to jail (White 114). In 1920, the states ratified the 18th Amendment, prohibiting the sale of alcohol. Simultaneously, a now-familiar collection of topoi and cultural narratives convinced Americans of the danger of drugs: “racial violence, addicted soldiers, children falling prey to drug peddlers, drug-emboldened criminal gangs, people switching to drugs after alcohol prohibition, and foreign enemies using drugs as a weapon against America” (White 114). The 1910s thus saw the rapid consolidation of federal and state power to limit or prohibit altogether the use of alcohol and narcotics for medical or recreational purposes.

Though the prohibition of drugs and alcohol occurred almost simultaneously, the tactics of the pro-prohibition forces differed. Temperance supporters had adopted some form of what Joseph Gusfield calls “coercive traditions” since the ATS had pushed in 1838 for the short-lived “15 gallon law,” which made it illegal to purchase spirits in quantities smaller than 15 gallons (52-3). During the mid-19th century, temperance reformers pushed for prohibition at the state and local level, and enjoyed success that the failure of Prohibition has retroactively obscured in popular history: “Between 1843 and 1893, 15 states had passed legislation prohibiting statewide sale of intoxicants. Only in three states, Iowa, Kansas, and Maine, was Prohibition still in force. Between 1906 and 1912 seven states passed Prohibition laws. By 1919, before the passage of the Eighteenth

Amendment, an additional 19 states had passed restrictive legislation, some through referenda” (Gusfield 100). Nonetheless, the final push for national prohibition was not, in Gusfield’s view, “the long-awaited outcropping of a slowly developing movement over 90 years of agitation,” but the effect of a relatively brief period of evangelical and Populist “enthusiasm” for the cause (107).⁹ Thus, though the 18th Amendment swept through the nation fairly rapidly, a large part of the population (especially in rural states/districts) was already living under state or local “dry” laws.

The United States federal government had entered into international drug policy in 1903 by attempting to coerce China into adopting more stringent controls against opium. However, as Musto points out, “on the eve of entering an international conference it had called to help China with its opium problem, [the U.S.] discovered it had no national opium restrictions. To save face, it quickly enacted one” (4). This hasty decision set the tone for further Congressional regulation of narcotics.¹⁰ Legislators described drug use as immoral and un-American, and by taking a stand on the international stage, the President and the State Department would feel “the pressure to live up to this standard of morality” (Musto 52). According to James H. Beal, the lawyer-pharmacist the federal government consulted, “the principal object of the law must be to prevent the creation of drug habits, rather than to reform those who are already enslaved, however desirable the latter might be” (qtd. in Musto 18). Numerous bills passed in the period between 1900 and 1920 reflect the spirit of an age in which the interdiction of substances,

⁹ Szymanski has more recently argued against this interpretation of the movement’s success. See *Pathways to Prohibition*.

¹⁰ While the term “narcotics” refers to a specific class of drugs in medical and pharmacological discourse, I’m employing it here to encompass opiates, cocaine, and barbiturates. Marijuana was, and seems to be again, a separate issue. However, the specific history of laws regulating and banning marijuana is not relevant to my project.

criminalization of addicts and doctors, and containment of the “disease” of addiction prevailed. Rehabilitation was not the concern of Department of Treasury, and their mass prosecution of doctors served to stigmatize the treatment of addiction. Furthermore, the international context of the issue led some narcotic control proponents to believe that in addition to agents of the Bureau of Internal Revenue, state police could be employed to enforce compliance (Musto 62).

A revolution in medical discourse bolstered this prohibitory attitude toward addiction. As the advent of psychology and psychoanalysis profoundly influenced conceptions of alcoholism and addiction, during the late 19th and early 20th centuries, “there was confidence that an addict was eminently curable” (Musto 78). Doctors and opportunistic entrepreneurs alike promoted “cures,” often available through mail order, to the desperate families of alcoholics and addicts. White notes “the lack of a defined treatment science, [and] the proliferation of many schools of competing thought and practice” that contributed to “a climate ripe for exploitation” (White 71). American lawmakers seized on the possibility of a “simple cure” to rationalize prohibition. According to Musto, “from the mid-nineteenth century until about 1920, physicians continued to tell one another that withdrawal and perhaps a few weeks of aftercare would lead to the cure of addiction in most cases” (Musto 77-8). Since the cure for addiction was relatively easy to effect, “the prohibition of narcotics for simple addiction maintenance or pleasure was no more cruel than the requirement for smallpox vaccination” (Musto 81). By the end of the 1920s, however, this optimism had waned, and in 1929 Congress funded the creation of the nation’s first federal narcotic institution

in Lexington, Kentucky.¹¹ Though the narcotic farm included a hospital, “the primary reason for federal aid to addiction was not to provide treatment,” but to house “the large numbers of jailed addicts who had crowded federal penitentiaries” (Musto 85). Thus, even when optimism about the possibility of curing addiction waned, the problem of addiction remained a criminal justice issue.

The legacy of the deluge of prohibitory legislation for the treatment of addiction is complex. Although historians now generally accept that the 18th Amendment reduced per capita consumption of alcohol and alcohol related deaths, popular culture, literature, and histories depict the 1920s as a “‘lost weekend’ during which bootleggers flourished and through which flowed an unchecked river of booze” (Kyvig xxv).¹² Modern conceptions of alcoholism privilege the motivation of the alcoholic as central both to maintaining and to quitting his/her addiction, for if we believe, however erroneously, that federal prohibition of alcohol actually exacerbated alcoholism, then limiting access to the substance would not sufficiently treat or cure the problem. The “lost weekend” revision of Prohibition, and its longevity, can be seen as both cause and consequence of the focus on the alcoholic’s motivations.

On the other hand, the legacy of early federal drug regulations has not been similarly tarnished, as the U.S. government increasingly regulates drugs one hundred years after the Harrison Act. Since the 1980s, interdiction of illegal drugs has been a

¹¹ *The Narcotics Farm: The Rise and Fall of America’s First Prison for Drug Addicts* by Campbell et al is a fascinating history of this unique institution. How Lexington shaped the disease model of addiction and courses for treatment falls outside the more general scope of this project.

¹² Kyvig notes “the findings of John Burnham and others that prohibition reduced alcohol intake by more than half” (xxv). He also demonstrates that “not only did Americans drink significantly less as a result of national prohibition, but also the effect of the law in depressing liquor usage apparently lingered for several decades after repeal” (24).

priority of every U.S. President who invoked the banner of the War on Drugs. However, when the 18th Amendment was repealed, a revolution was set in motion. Alcoholism was relocated in the person rather than the substance to rationalize repealing a law that recognized alcohol as inherently problematic (if not addictive). The laws would shift from restricting sales to monitoring and assessing behaviors. Though subsequent research into the treatment of alcoholism would eventually support also defining addiction, or chemical dependency, as an issue of demand rather than supply, the tension between these two poles has been an enduring feature of the War on Drugs.

Post-Repeal: The Modern Alcoholism Movement

The logic driving Prohibition was that alcohol itself was the problem and anyone was vulnerable to addiction if he/she imbibed. In order to rationalize Repeal, Americans had to accept that some individuals were inherently susceptible to addiction rather than that some substances were inherently addictive.¹³ Just as “teetotalism” had to be imbued with not only legal but social, cultural, and medical legitimacy, the national rationalization of the 21st Amendment, the Repeal of Prohibition, required a revolution in American cultural attitudes toward addiction. The alcoholic beverage industry funded medical research that would advocate for “a cultural redefinition of the source of the alcohol problem from one rooted in the drug itself to one rooted in the unique vulnerability of a small percentage of alcoholic drinkers” (White 179). Clergy, once deeply invested in temperance, looked to the medical establishment to help them treat the

¹³ However, the notion that some drugs were addictive remained in play and has changed over the years. For instance, medical science still generally agrees that cigarettes are inherently addictive. Scare tactics of the 1980s posited crack cocaine as immediately addictive.

alcoholics in their flocks. Recovered alcoholics, banding together to support each other, formed the enormously influential Alcoholics Anonymous.

The cultural products supporting Repeal and their contribution to the reemergence of the disease concept of alcoholism (and subsequently, the disease concept of chemical dependency) constitute a rich, understudied topic in the history of addiction. The post-Repeal research and advocacy that took place between 1935 and 1960 are generally understood together as part of a larger Modern Alcoholism Movement. While it falls outside the scope of this project to explore this topic fully, two events are significant: the rise of the mutual aid societies and E. M. Jellinek's articulation of the disease concept of alcoholism. Both significantly shaped the cultural understanding of addiction central to my concerns.

Mutual Aid Societies

Formed in 1935 by Bill Wilson and Robert Smith, Alcoholics Anonymous is a mutual aid organization dedicated to the recovery of alcoholics.¹⁴ The organization began with Wilson's observation that trying to help other alcoholics, and relating to them as a fellow sufferer, helped him maintain his sobriety. While on a business trip to Akron, OH, a newly sober Wilson was removed from his New York City support system, which consisted of his wife and fellow members of the Christian organization, the Oxford Group. Desperate to maintain his sobriety, Wilson asked Oxford Group members to refer

¹⁴ Alcoholics Anonymous had both its precursors (the Washingtonians, as discussed above) and its contemporaries (the Oxford group out of which AA began). My focus on AA should in no way suggest that it was or is the only mutual aid society devoted to addiction recovery. However, its influence, particularly as filtered through the Minnesota Model, is undeniable, and I would argue that no recovery-focused mutual aid society currently exists that defines itself *except* by its relation to AA, be it sympathetic or adversarial.

him to an Akron alcoholic he could talk to. This led him to Robert Smith. Over the next several months, Wilson and Smith were able to help each other stay sober and in conversations developed a “program” of recovery. Ernest Kurtz, AA’s unofficial historian, points out that Wilson and Smith focused on the alcoholic rather than *alcoholism*, pragmatically eschewing an understanding of the causes of alcoholism in favor of experiential insights into what methods “worked” (Kurtz 59). This emphasis on experience can be seen mostly clearly in the publication of the “Big Book,” the center of Wilson and Smith’s promotional efforts and still the guidebook of the organization. The first few chapters outline the “Twelve Steps” to recovery that Wilson introduces by claiming they worked for “us.”¹⁵ The bulk of the volume contains the personal recovery narratives of the organization’s early members.

The standard AA recovery narrative consists of three major components: the drinking life (or drunkologue), the epiphany of “hitting rock bottom,” and the recovery. While the first part of the narrative might provide a significant portion of the tale, the second two components are far more important to understanding the nature of AA’s brand of recovery. The rock bottom event is typically a crisis of some kind; the name suggests that it is the alcoholic’s “lowest point,” in a narrative sense, before beginning the rise to sobriety, and implicitly, a return to “higher points” in his/her life. According to Kurtz, Wilson and Smith recognized early on that “hitting bottom” was one of the most complex spiritual events in the alcoholism narrative, one that “became understood not as a loss of employment or family, not as ‘sleeping in the weeds,’ or even immediately as the felt inability to not drink, but as the sense of being ‘really licked’ and hopeless”

¹⁵ The organization itself is maintained through adherence to twelve corresponding traditions, emphasizing anonymity, self-sufficiency, and neutrality.

(Kurtz 60). Similarly, the epiphany that follows (or in some cases serves as the rock bottom event) finally illuminates the alcoholic's dire situation. Prior to this moment, he or she has been unable to see or understand the reasons for the crises his/her drinking has caused. This turning point in the alcoholic's narrative prepares him/her for taking the "First Step," to admit he or she is "powerless over alcohol, that [his/her] life has become unmanageable." Subsequent steps lead the alcoholic through the admission of powerlessness, the turning over of his/her life to a Higher Power, the inventory of past misdeeds, the reparations to those he/she has wronged, the maintenance of healthy attitudes, and service to AA and other alcoholics.

AA relies foundationally, however, not on its book or the steps, but on meetings. Wilson claimed whenever at least two alcoholics meet together to talk and offer support staying sober, an AA meeting can be formed. AA meetings are traditionally speaker or discussion meetings; both formats are based on the personal narratives of alcoholics. Listeners are encouraged (by sponsors and in AA literature) to identify with those parts of the narrative that resemble their own experiences. Through these activities, AA meetings work to build a narrative of shared experience that describes the progression of alcoholism and the road to recovery.

It is important to note three features of the AA recovery narrative. First, the rock bottom event denotes a point to which the alcoholic's actions have taken him/her where his/her choices are severely limited. From a narrative standpoint, the alcoholic can no longer continue in the direction he/she has been pursuing. Second, the moment of clarity that follows (or replaces) the rock bottom moment has the characteristics of a spontaneous insight. AA encouraged repeated storytelling in the hope that "the telling of

personal experience—*internal* personal experience—laid the foundation for saving identification” (Kurtz 61). However, there was no systematic way to explain why some alcoholics would identify with these stories and others would not. In this way, the epiphany is reminiscent of St. Paul’s experience on the road to Damascus—an intervention outside the control of human agency. Finally, recovery is an ongoing process that requires repetition of one’s narrative, vigilant self-awareness, participation in the AA community, and outreach to still-suffering alcoholics.¹⁶ After they have maintained their sobriety for a certain length of time, AA members are encouraged to sponsor newcomers and work through the Twelve Steps with them as a method of maintaining sobriety.

Despite requiring an admission of powerlessness, AA in fact charges its members with new agency. The recovery narrative of AA allows the alcoholic to reconstruct his/her identity. The events that force this reconstruction are highly individualized: each person will have his/her own drunkologue, rock bottom, and ongoing recovery story. Furthermore, the turning point of the narrative (the rock bottom/moment of clarity) obscures to the point of mystification the forces and factors that compel the alcoholic to change; fate, serendipity, chance, God: any of these might earn the credit for the epiphany. From that moment, the alcoholic engages in a series of actions to effect his/her recovery, ascribing his/her successes (when necessary) to any of the forenamed factors. Perhaps the most significant of these actions for the spread of AA’s influence is Step Twelve, “carrying the message of AA” to others.

Jellinek’s disease concept of alcoholism

In 1960, E. M. Jellinek published *The Disease Concept of Alcoholism*. This book,

¹⁶ It is also not uncommon for AA members to repeat the steps several times through their recovery, whether they relapse or not.

which would be foundational to the field of addiction studies, was the culmination of fifteen years of work with alcoholics. Jellinek credits a few specific groups for the spread of the disease conception in mainstream society in the post-Prohibition Era: the Yale Center of Alcohol Studies, several national research and education agencies, state government agencies, and Alcoholics Anonymous (Jellinek 9). He also dismisses the idea that a disease concept of alcoholism is new. Rather, during Prohibition “Americans were interested in the problems of bootlegging but not in the problem of alcoholism. This relatively long period of disinterest sufficed to relegate the efforts of the proponents of the illness conception to oblivion, but somehow the idea that ‘alcoholism’ is an illness was still hovering in order to be ‘rediscovered’” (Jellinek 7). Despite his dismissals, Jellinek facilitated the interdisciplinary movement that would legitimize the disease concept and, perhaps more importantly, firmly establish it as a credible area for medical specialization.

Importantly, Jellinek resolves inter- and intra-disciplinary conflict over the status of alcoholism as a disease by claiming, “*a disease is what the medical profession recognizes as such*” (Jellinek 12, italics in original). He further elaborates that even if the medical profession does not have a clear definition of what constitutes “disease,” “the medical profession has officially accepted alcoholism as an illness, and through this fact alone alcoholism becomes an illness, whether a part of the lay public likes it or not, and even if a minority of the medical profession is disinclined to accept the idea” (12). In articulating the disease conception, Jellinek is sensitive to both the authority claimed by the medical profession and the power of language to further consolidate that authority. His tautological insistence that diseases are whatever the medical profession defines as

diseases is reinforced by his admittedly vague definition of alcoholism: “*any use of alcoholic beverages that causes any damage to the individual or society or both*” (Jellinek 35, italics in original). Despite emerging consensus that alcoholism is defined by tolerance, craving, withdrawal, and loss of control—for the most part physiological phenomena—Jellinek’s conception of alcoholism is an inherently social one, one that relies on the subjective observations of family, coworkers, and multiple medical professionals to diagnose the alcoholic.

Funded as it was by parties with a vested interest in maintaining the social acceptability of drinking, the Modern Alcoholism Movement, of which Jellinek and AA were parts, differed with 19th century conceptions of addiction.¹⁷ According to White “[w]hile the rehabilitation of alcohol as a product and the image of the alcoholic were championed by this movement, other drugs and drug users were being increasingly stigmatized and criminalized. This split ensured that the treatment of alcoholism and the treatment of other addictions would constitute separate worlds between 1945 and 1975” (White 197). Though Jellinek focused specifically on alcoholism, he felt there were obvious parallels to narcotic addiction and criticized students of alcoholism who “bend far over backward in order to escape any possible tainting of alcoholism—which is related to a highly valued social custom—through contamination with anything suggesting the despised use of narcotics” (72). In rehabilitating the image of the alcoholic, however, the movement re-conceptualized alcohol problems as local and familiar, and promoted new forms of intervention and treatment rather than punishment.

¹⁷ White details the involvement of the alcoholic beverage industry in the research that fueled the Modern Alcoholism Movement. He notes, “Those fledgling post-repeal organizations concerned with alcohol problems that did not accept money from the alcohol beverage industry became extinct” (194).

Because alcoholics often experienced issues with other substances, these new interventions would increasingly be applied to the treatment of addiction, and from this milieu emerged the concept of “chemical dependency,” uniting addiction to drugs and alcohol once more.

Occupational Alcoholism Programs: The Birth of Chemical Dependency

The Modern Alcoholism Movement spread the disease concept of alcoholism and AA’s method of treatment throughout the 1940s and 50s. As White points out, the movement “changed a century-old definition of America’s alcohol problem and the entire language in which that problem was conceptualized,” shifting alcohol problems from religious/moral registers to secular ones, transforming the alcoholic from criminal to patient, and moving alcoholism from “Skid Row into our own neighborhoods and our own families ” (White 178). By re-conceptualizing alcohol problems, the movement also encouraged new forms of intervention into alcoholics’ lives.

One major arena for intervention was the workplace. Three conditions led to the rise of occupational alcoholism programs: 1) “growing concern about how repeal would affect industrial efficiency”; 2) “the growing presence in the American workplace of AA members who” practiced the Twelfth Step therein; and 3) “a lowering of employment standards during the Second World War, which forced employers to hire employees with histories of chronic alcoholism” (White 189). From the 1940s well into the 1960s, employers were considered the most likely candidates to intervene successfully in an alcoholic’s life. Rehabilitation programs established at all levels of industry and government destigmatized alcoholism, for by admitting his/her alcoholism and receiving

treatment, the alcoholic could hope to be rehabilitated and retained by his/her employer. The occupational interest in rehabilitating alcoholics in turn spurred the medical profession to find ways to diagnose and treat them sooner.

Encouraging these new forms of intervention required redefining the concept of “cure” (as far as addiction was concerned) and the relationship of patient motivation and understanding of addiction’s “causes” to patient success. In earlier, more optimistic times, alcoholics and addicts had been considered “cured” by some if their medical practitioners never heard from them again after leaving the asylum or taking the final dose of a nostrum, but when increasing federal aid was dedicated to fighting addiction, researchers began studying incidents of relapse and found them to be far more common than sustained sobriety (White 125). To incorporate relapse into the theory of addiction, doctors and AA rejected the idea of “cure,” and increasingly referred to recovery instead.

Patient motivation was long considered a factor of treatment success. According to Morgan’s *Drugs in America: A Social History, 1800-1980*, treatment “focused on the addict who cooperated in seeking cure...The treatment programs were thus elaborate and gave the patient the sense of being at their center” (Morgan 72). White notes that, before the spread of Occupational Alcoholism Programs, “nearly all of the professionally directed treatment programs explicitly noted the role that motivation played in alcoholism recovery. These programs emphasized that a motivation for sobriety was essential to recovery and sought to admit only those patients who could demonstrate such motivation” (White 206). Researchers at Willmar State Hospital began to challenge this notion in the 1950s, asserting “initial motivation for treatment had no relation to treatment outcome. In fact, the alcoholics who entered Willmar were often noted for their

defiance and resistance to treatment. Through a treatment program...however, many of these same drinkers achieved sustained sobriety” (Spicer 39).

Early proponents of the disease concept had also been preoccupied with etiology. Over the course of the 19th and early 20th centuries, they “developed a variety of explanations for addiction that tried to free the user from self-deprecation and to soften social criticism” (Morgan 67). Explanations often served to place the problem of addiction within the explainer’s purview. For instance, early psychiatrists posited that addiction was “a symptom of underlying emotional disturbance” (White 31). However, as White points out and Jellinek’s comments above demonstrate, the disease concept was particularly useful to addiction treatment specialists as a metaphor for addiction. Research during the mid-20th century increasingly focused on holistic treatment, rendering the search for causes irrelevant and even distracting.

The Minnesota Model

In the 1950s, as industry sought the help of the medical profession to treat this professional class of alcoholics, a consortium of treatment centers located in Minnesota were developing a system of treatment incorporating AA and psychiatric counseling. This “Minnesota Model” of treatment significantly shaped the American treatment industry.¹⁸ Some of the Model’s interventions further influenced cultural narratives of addiction as well. In addition to solidifying the disease concept of alcoholism, the philosophy of the Minnesota Model stipulated that alcoholism was “chronic and progressive; Barring [sic] intervention, the signs and symptoms of alcoholism self-accelerate” (White 209). This notion reinforced the AA narrative of declining towards a “rock bottom.” However, Dr.

¹⁸ White details some of the reasons why Minnesota in particular was primed to become the “Land of Ten Thousand Treatment Centers” (199, 209-211).

Nelson Bradley of Willmar State Hospital challenged accepted addiction medicine wisdom that an alcoholic must be motivated to receive treatment. Bradley discovered that “clients who were admitted under extreme duress and coercion did as well as those who presented themselves as ‘voluntary’” and “motivation for sobriety was something emerged out of the treatment experience, not something to be set as a precondition for admission” (White 206). Under the Minnesota Model, the primary vehicle for treatment was a counselor who, not unlike AA’s sponsors, was in recovery him or herself. In addition, the Minnesota Model maintained that insight into the cause (psychological, social, physiological, or environmental) of one’s alcoholism was unimportant to the alcoholic in his or her recovery (White 212). Finally, the Minnesota Model collapsed drug and alcohol problems into a single category, chemical dependency, and argued that addicts were vulnerable to “abuse of a wide spectrum of mood-altering drugs” (White 209). Perhaps more importantly, the Minnesota Model offered hope for treating this broad condition, “chemical dependency.”

If we conceive of addiction as having a narrative structure, the implications of the Minnesota Model for that narrative are significant. First, the Minnesota Model reinforces the structure of “decline, rock bottom/moment of clarity, recovery” that AA (and the inebriate homes and Washingtonians before them) described. Second, the Minnesota Model placed something far less mystical at the narrative’s crux than a Road-to-Damascus experience: a medical intervention. Enlightenment need not occur before recovery. An addict need not reach a “rock bottom.”¹⁹ Third, implicit in the reliance on

¹⁹ According to Kurtz, AA had developed techniques for “raising the bottom” of active alcoholics. However, in AA this consisted of “the stark portrayal of the early symptoms of alcoholism as these were understood by Alcoholics Anonymous, joined with a

“wounded healers” to deliver treatment to the addict is the idea that an addict may identify *enough* with the story of the counselor’s recovery and experience an epiphany through that secondary channel. In other words, the predictable trajectory of addiction was disrupted by the Minnesota Model. At the same time, the Minnesota Model argued that these features could be identified in the narratives not just of alcoholics, but of all addicts.

Practically, the philosophy of the Minnesota Model also influenced the kinds of alcoholics institutions sought. Hazelden, the preeminent treatment center of the Minnesota Model, was among the first created with the goal of treating “alcoholics of the professional class,” which implied “not so much social class distinctions as it did a desire to reach the alcoholic before he hit bottom on skid row, while he still had a family, a job, and some degree of social standing” (White 201). As these alcoholics entered treatment, studies increasingly found that the majority of alcoholics were of this “professional class.” Wellman, Maxwell, and O’Hallaren advised based on these findings that “the entire focus of the alcoholism effort would have to be redirected toward efforts to intervene in the progression of alcoholism at the earliest possible point. They believed this could be achieved through educational efforts aimed at early-stage alcoholics and their families, and at parallel educational efforts with physicians, clergy, social workers, and educators” (White 215).

dreadful stress on the inevitability of the ‘progression’ of these symptoms” (115). This is an attempt to place the moment of clarity or identification before an alcoholic hits bottom through identification with another alcoholic’s narrative. This can hardly be compared with coerced confinement in a hospital or even the simulated crises of the Johnson Intervention (described below).

Similarly, the 1960s and 70s saw drug use expand into new demographics. A half-century of law enforcement measures, “even with mandatory minimum penalties and the death threat” had not resolved the drug problem (Musto 235). Thus “government at all levels became more oriented to medical care for the opiate addict” (Morgan 165). “The early 1970s brought an explosion in treatment facilities” (Musto 253). White notes that John F. Kennedy made mental health services a national priority and that

after decades with no significant legislative action in support of addiction treatment, no less than 13 separate pieces of federal legislation passed between 1963 and 1974 addressed the need for treatment service for people who were addicted to alcohol and other drugs. By the early 1970s, more than 30 separate agencies and subagencies of the Federal Government were involved in some aspect of addiction treatment (263-5).

Though addiction was gradually decriminalized under presidents Johnson, Nixon, and Ford, the growth of the federal bureaucracy, occupational programs, and the Minnesota Model’s promotion of earlier interventions suggest treatment was still coercive.

Personal Interventions and Recovery

For more than a century, the medical profession and even some lay institutions viewed the addict’s family with ambivalence. The staffs of 19th century inebriate asylums often considered the wives of addicts to be nuisances who could hinder treatment (White 40). However, some mail order cures directed advertisements specifically at the families of addicts, sometimes claiming, “that the alcoholic could be cured without his voluntary cooperation and, in fact, without his knowledge” (White 67). After the advent of psychoanalysis, therapists often saw the family of the addict as a threat, and so sought only “the family’s agreement for noninterference” in treatment (White 104). The wife in

particular was considered “neurotic, sexually repressed, dependent, man-hating, domineering, mothering, guilty and masochistic, and/or hostile and nagging” (White 216). Developments in the 20th century worked to change the status of the addict’s family. It falls outside the scope of this project to give a complete history of the changes, but two important, interrelated developments, the concept of codependency and the Johnson Intervention, must be addressed. These two developments call into question the agency of the addict, the responsibility of those who observe him/her to put him/her on the path to recovery, and the relationship of addiction to reality.

Codependency was the term coined to explain the effect of alcoholism on family members. As White points out, addiction specialists had long considered the effects of addiction on children. Early concerns about the “nagging wives” of alcoholics evolved over time into accusations of “enabling” addicts to pursue their addiction. More sophisticated and less gendered conceptions of codependency labeled addiction a “family disease” (White 295). Although structurally and thematically similar to the Minnesota Model of chemical dependency, the idea of codependency completely untethered the concept of addiction from substances. In the 1970s and 80s, critics such as Stanton Peele would lament the pathologizing of human behavior under the rubric of addiction. Furthermore, though codependency was treated as a “disease,” it clearly implicated the family of the addict as perpetuating the family disease of addiction, and therefore required family members to participate in recovery.

The Johnson Intervention was one therapeutic technique by which family members could do so. In 1966, Vernon Johnson, an Episcopal priest and recovering alcoholic working in Minnesota, established the Johnson Institute to develop methods for

early intervention. Convinced that it was dangerous and unnecessary to allow alcoholics to reach a “rock bottom” or feel “motivated” to enter treatment, Johnson created what he called the “intervention,” a method by which friends and family members could coerce an alcoholic into entering treatment. In 1973, Johnson published *I'll Quit Tomorrow*, a guide for families of alcoholics to stage an intervention. While Johnson maintained the claim of Occupational Alcoholism Programs that employers were likely to be the most successful interventionists, he also assigned an important role to the families of alcoholics (particularly wives), a group whom the medical profession had treated ambivalently, at best. Their role gains its power from the fact that Johnson redefined addiction in a way that was more metaphorical and less scientific than his medical counterparts. Because he believed that alcoholism was a “break with reality,” he stressed that alcoholism and alcoholics must be treated with “reality therapy,” the intervention being the first attempt of loved ones to re-represent reality to the out of touch alcoholic. This does not mean, however, that Johnson’s mission or his claims were at odds with the Modern Alcoholism Movement. The unscientific basis of the Johnson Intervention was similar to the roots of the disease concept. As White points out, the emergence of the disease concept of alcoholism “was based more on its metaphorical utility as a slogan than its scientific validity. Its ascendance was more one of declaration than of scientific conclusion” (White 198). In other words, the development of the disease concept has followed a pattern of social/cultural/metaphorical coherence first with science coming along after to justify its claims.

Interventions in the War on Drugs

When President Nixon “declared” War on Drugs in June 1971, he mobilized a metaphor for understanding addiction that coalesced with the concept of intervention. While the federal government had previously written and enforced laws both nationally and internationally to fight drug smuggling and diversion, Nixon’s war specifically “attacked” addiction itself. In his address to Congress, Nixon emphasized the treatment and rehabilitation of addicts in his War on Drugs. For the federal bureaucracy surrounding research and treatment that Nixon finds “fragmented,” “piecemeal,” and “bureaucratically-dispersed,” he recommends a consolidation of power in a Special Action Office of Drug Abuse Prevention (SAODAP) to oversee all Federal programs involved in education, prevention, research, and rehabilitation. This consolidation corresponds to the narrative of addiction Nixon deployed when warning Congress of its threat to the nation: addiction is “all too often a one-way street beginning with ‘innocent’ experimentation and ending in death. Between these extremes is the degradation that addiction inflicts on those who believed that it could not happen to them” (Nixon). While Nixon compares the social ill of addiction to “cancerous growths” and weeds, the narrative of individual addiction is a linear progression (or, more precisely, decline) that must be arrested and reversed when possible or, preferably, prevented from even beginning.

Nixon’s war paradigm also served political purposes. He calls the heroin addiction of Vietnam War soldiers and veterans “by no means a major part of the American narcotics problem, [but] an especially disheartening aspect” of it (Nixon). However, Nixon did little to discourage popular perceptions, both in the media and in

Congress, of addiction as a major hindrance to fighting and winning the Vietnam War. In fact, a *New York Times* article published one year later cited Republican Representative Robert H. Steele as attributing Nixon's "step-up in its rate of troop withdrawal" to an epidemic of heroin addiction among soldiers ("Drugs Reported Tied to Vietnam Pullout" 6). As Nixon's narrative of addiction denied environmental causes, and as he called addiction itself an apolitical and non-ideological issue, he aligned the War on Drugs with the Vietnam War to make the latter's failure the result of a disease that affected individuals universally rather than an ideologically flawed foreign policy.

At approximately the same time, the use of war rhetoric to describe efforts to combat addiction reified concerns about agency and imperialism. Prior to the War on Drugs, drugs had been linked to Communism and anti-American sentiment, but just as a tool of the Communists, not a source of evil in and of themselves (Valentine 80). Nixon used terms like "public enemy Number One" to refer to addiction and created a "situation room" for journalists to be given information about drugs and look at graphic pictures (Musto and Korsmeyer 113, 116-117). Kuzmarov notes that even Nixon's critics deployed the war metaphor; by "equating drugs with the immoral quality of the war and exposing CIA support for regional drug lords, they helped to demonize drug use... while playing into the conservative agenda by raising fears about drugs and predominantly supporting the expansion of the war on drugs" (Kuzmarov 100). If one wasn't for the spread of "democracy" to Indo-China, one could still be against the spread of addiction from the same region and in doing so support military intervention. For conservatives and liberals, drugs and addiction became evils in themselves, evils that required immediate action.

Intervention was the active military strategy of the official Cold War policy of containing Communism. While the failure of the War in Vietnam undermined popular belief in the efficacy of military interventions (creating a malaise George H. W. Bush would term “Vietnam Syndrome” and declare conquered in 1991), Nixon’s deft dovetailing of Vietnam and addiction reaffirmed the necessity of a War on Drugs. In subsequent iterations of the War on Drugs (continued by Presidents Reagan/Bush I, Clinton, Bush II, and Obama), the terms of the intervention have shifted, but the emphasis on overturning the narrative of addiction and transforming it into a narrative of recovery has remained.

Emerging at this time of widespread uncertainty about America’s future as superpower and distrust of its government, the Johnson Intervention was both a uniquely appropriate and uniquely postmodern approach to treating addiction and a tool of the War on Drugs. Intervention enabled the non-addicted layperson to fight against the addiction of his/her loved ones; this narrative was writ large in the War on Drugs, as drugs are figured as a threat to the American way of life that requires external authorities to curb its spread. The Intervention resonates as a postmodern concept not simply because it also coincided with the emergence into the mainstream of American literary postmodernism, but because it also promotes an understanding of reality corresponds with the tenets of postmodernism, namely the ontological uncertainty of postmodernist fiction identified by Brian McHale and the ascendancy of the simulacrum over the real described by Jean Baudrillard.²⁰

²⁰ A recapitulation of the debate over how to describe and delimit postmodernism seems unnecessary for the purposes of this dissertation. However, I do want to note briefly the applicability of McHale and Baudrillard’s theories to the Intervention. McHale identifies

Because of the Intervention, the crisis of the narrative transformed from one of cure to one of diagnosis. That is, rather than requiring an addict to undergo a process of self-identification and recovery through retelling his/her story, the Intervention asks the addict merely to accept the diagnosis of his/her Interveners and enter treatment. White notes that “the coercive influences of family and friends” had persuaded addicts to seek treatment throughout history. However, the Intervention appeared during a time when coercion was being used at “at earlier stages in the development of alcohol- and drug-related problems.” Furthermore, the creation of the anti-drug bureaucracy meant there were more “coercive agents” than ever, and that the “primary goals of such coercion had shifted toward cultural and institutional gains and away from the more restricted focus on personal reformation” (White 277). The drive to coerce more addicts to enter treatment sooner meant that a diagnosis (an Intervention) could stand in place of a moment of spontaneous insight.

This change introduced a figure outside the addict, the interventionist, whose agency and relation to addiction raises interesting questions about the postmodern

ontological uncertainty as the “dominant” of postmodernist fiction, noting a shift from modernism in that postmodern texts concern themselves with questions of being rather than knowledge (9-10). This distinction can also be seen between the post-World War II Alcoholics Anonymous approach that required an addict to identify personally with the masternarrative and begin his/her own process of recovery and self-discovery and the Intervention. The Intervention, subverts the AA process by declaring that the moment of identification (a flash of self-knowledge) can occur out of sequence or is altogether unnecessary. The language Interveners are encouraged to use suggests there are multiple perspectives on reality (multiple worlds, to borrow from McHale) that the addict can be convinced to see him/herself a part of. The Intervention itself calls to mind Baudrillard’s description of the precession of the simulacrum in that Johnson advised Interveners to use both representations of the addict (e.g. recordings of his/her behavior) and stipulate consequences to create a “false bottom.” The false bottom is a simulacrum: purporting to stand in for a “real” rock bottom event, its purpose is to render the rock bottom event nonexistent, not real.

subject's relation to culture. If earlier recovery narratives emerged from self-identification with a masternarrative and retelling of one's story as a part of the process, what kinds of recovery narratives would the Intervention produce? Who would narrate them, and to whom would they be told? What would be the effect of proliferating these stories that privilege the struggle between multiple parties about how to define reality? Would Intervention narratives subvert or reinforce cultural narratives about addiction that have historically been racist, classist, and sexist?

The War on Drugs engages some cultural narratives about addiction and transforms others, depending on the political goals of the President who declares it. Whether reinforcing stereotypes about addicts or encouraging the public to see them as worth saving, the War on Drugs needs representations of addiction and recovery in narratives (literary, filmic, televisual—fiction and nonfiction) to speak for it. The cultural products of the War on Drugs I examine in this dissertation are not only barometers of the War's success/failure in shaping cultural narratives about addiction, but also symptomatic of larger changes in notions of agency and authority. It is important to consider the changes wrought by the creation of Occupational Alcoholism Programs and early intervention because efforts changed not only the image of the addict (making him/her, as White notes, less like the "Skid Row bum" and more like the white middle-class), but also the trajectory of addiction narratives. Though the advent of the Intervention provides one framework for examining these changes, the relationship of addiction to culture has long been a concern of authors as well as literary and cultural critics.

Addiction in Literary and Cultural Studies

When Nietzsche notes the relationship of high culture to the history of narcotics, he recognizes a connection between intoxication and creativity that some writers had alleged for decades. Beginning in the 1820s, with Thomas De Quincey's *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater*, stories of experimentation, intoxication, addiction, and recovery became viable topics for serious literature, from Samuel Taylor Coleridge's "Pains of Sleep" and "Kubla Khan" to Walt Whitman's *Franklin Evans* to T. S. Arthur's temperance novels (later turned into plays and films) to several of the canonical novels of American modernism. Despite the vast number of texts about addiction, literary and cultural criticism of addiction in texts (henceforth, addiction studies²¹) only emerged in the 1980s, following a profusion of historical and sociological analyses of American drinking culture and prohibition.²²

The canon of addiction studies has developed in several veins. Emerging at around the same time was a body of largely biographical criticism of alcoholic or

²¹ I realize this is an imprecise, if not to say, misleading term. However, rather than opting for inelegant constructions like "addiction in cultural studies" or "cultural addiction studies," I will assume that by virtue of its context (a literary and cultural studies dissertation) it will be understood that the term is not referring, for instance, to the study of medical approaches to addiction.

²² Susanna Barrows and Robin Room trace the study of alcohol in the social sciences to a wave of texts studying leisure and "off-the-job life" that emerged in response to E. P. Thompson's influential 1966 text *Making of the English Working Class*. Barrows and Room also suggest that temperance movement had left behind a massive archive that scholars were reluctant to exploit for a long time because the failure of Prohibition had tainted the movement. In literary studies, the turn away from issues of class and social life to psychology and culture (delineated extensively by Thomas Hill Schaub in *American Fiction in the Cold War*) must also be considered as a contributing factor to the rise of addiction studies.

addicted writers²³ and a more analytical strain that surveyed representations of drugs/alcohol in film, television, and literature.²⁴ Despite their different methodologies and theoretical paradigms, texts in these two traditions frequently conclude by arriving at hypotheses that link addiction to modernism, late capitalism, and consumer culture. This shared conclusion suggests that addiction was a dominant cultural narrative in both the periods under discussion in the texts and the contemporary moment during which the texts were published.

Biographical criticism of alcoholic or addicted writers was a necessary first step in the creation of addiction studies. In the second half of the 20th century, American scholars in a number of fields became increasingly interested in the drinking habits of writers and other artists.²⁵ Donald Goodwin's 1988 *Alcohol and the Writer* typifies this

²³ See for example, Matt G. Djos *Writing Under the Influence: Alcoholism and the Alcoholic Perception from Hemingway to Berryman*. New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2010. Print; Donald W. Goodwin *Alcohol and the Writer*. Kansas City: Andrews and McMeel, 1988. Print; and Donald Newlove *Those Drinking Days: Myself and Other Writers*. New York: Horizon Press, 1981. Print.

²⁴ See, for example, Markert, John. *Hooked in Film: Substance Abuse on the Big Screen*. Lanham: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 2013. Print; Boyd, Susan C. *Hooked: Drug War Films in Britain, Canada, and the United States*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008. Print; Shapiro, Harry. *Shooting Stars: Drugs, Hollywood and the Movies*. London: Serpent's Tail, 2003. Print; Reeves, Jimmie L and Richard Campbell. *Cracked Coverage: Television News, the Anti-Cocaine Crusade, and the Reagan Legacy*. Durham: Duke University Press, 1994. Print; *Images of Alcoholism*. Eds. Jim Cook and Mike Lewington. London: Educational Advisory Service, British Film Institute and the Alcohol Education Centre, the Maudsley Hospital, 1979. Print. Often, texts in this strain of criticism are interdisciplinary.

²⁵ There are several possible reasons for this interest. The expansion of addiction noted by critics like Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick and Stanton Peele to encompass all manner of human behaviors could have contributed to addiction's viability as an attractive critical lens. Significantly, by the early 1970s, most of the major modernist writers had died or passed into obscurity. One could argue that with the deaths of Robert Frost and Ernest Hemingway, American literature was in a state of interregnum, and while some critics turned their attention to what would come next, others attempted to isolate what it was that made the Modernists unique.

kind of interdisciplinary work. Goodwin begins his book with the hypothesis that, because American writers drink more heavily and have higher rates of alcoholism than the general population, they are “extraordinarily” more susceptible to the disease (Goodwin 1). In subsequent chapters, Goodwin explores both the biographies and the literary outputs of six American writers: Edgar Allan Poe, Ernest Hemingway, F. Scott Fitzgerald, Eugene O’Neil, John Steinbeck, and William Faulkner.²⁶ While Goodwin terms Poe the veritable founder of the “great alcoholic American writer” tradition (33), he is basically uninterested in the 19th century, as he finds that the “epidemic” of alcoholic writers is primarily an early 20th century phenomenon. In the second half of the century, he argues, drugs have replaced alcohol as the downfall of the artist, citing such examples as Jimi Hendrix and John Belushi. In the end, Goodwin offers several theories for why writers might be susceptible to alcoholism (including their flexible hours, need for creative stimulus, and external pressures to drink) and a few reasons why American writers in particular might be more likely to be alcoholics (e.g. the valorization of the “loner” type in American culture) (Goodwin 191-200). However, Goodwin does not come to any conclusions about why those we have labeled “Modernists” are more susceptible than their forebears. Goodwin’s analysis privileges individual biographical details over larger historical factors, and he does not convincingly articulate his methodology for the selection of these “representative” alcoholic writers.²⁷ However,

²⁶ Goodwin also includes chapters on Malcolm Lowry and Georges Simenon, though his reason for including non-Americans is for contrast more than investigation into the phenomenon of alcoholism in other cultures.

²⁷ Goodwin bases his selection on the observation that four of the six American winners of the Nobel Prize for literature were alcoholics and one was a heavy drinker (x). He does not consider that this may tell us more about the tastes of the Nobel Committee than American literature (or culture) broadly. Similarly, he dismisses the outlier, Pearl S.

some of his underlying assumptions—the presumed link between creativity and addiction, the increase in alcoholism during the period in which the American Modernists wrote—are shared by historians and literary critics.

For example, one of the earliest works of addiction studies in literary criticism also concerned the question of the preponderance of alcoholic writers among the American Modernists is Thomas Gilmore's *Equivocal Spirits: Alcoholism and Drinking in Twentieth-Century Literature* (1987), the first book length study on the role of alcoholism in 20th century American and British literature.²⁸ Unimpressed with earlier readings of the "Great Drunk Writers," Gilmore attempted to apply the paradigm of the disease concept of alcoholism (as outlined by Alcoholics Anonymous) to works by Fitzgerald, Hemingway, Faulkner, and O'Neil (among others) with the contention that an understanding of alcoholism will provide a new way to interpret the writers' work. Problematically, Gilmore treats addiction as an ahistorical concept, using diagnosis of the writer as a way to illuminate the text. For example, he prizes Fitzgerald's *The Beautiful and Damned* because it is his most "honest" work. When Fitzgerald is not "honest" about his drinking in his fiction, Gilmore faults the fiction for it. Gilmore's test of honesty

Buck, on the grounds that she "probably didn't deserve the prize" (x). Unsurprisingly, Goodwin was a medical doctor with an interest in literature, not a scholar of it. However, in addition to propagating the "Great American Drunk Writer" myth that exists to this day, Goodwin's work exemplifies the tendency to narrativize substance abuse, as Goodwin chooses the writers whose lives and work correspond to the AA drunkologue metanarrative and ignores those who do not neatly fit.

²⁸ There is a perhaps apocryphal story that the study of alcohol in literature began with a conference on Shakespeare in 1926 when scholar Emile Legouis begged forgiveness for addressing the subject (Warner 12). While the subject seems to be tackled more frequently (and perhaps more seriously) in American literary criticism, there have been some instances of the study of alcoholism/addiction in British and other national literatures. For example, see Kathleen McCormack, *George Eliot and Intoxication: Dangerous Drugs for the Condition of England*. New York: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2000. Print.

involves juxtaposing statements about Fitzgerald's drinking by sources like Sheliah Graham and Ernest Hemingway with the depiction of the protagonist's drinking in the story. Nonetheless, Gilmore's contribution is significant because he is the first scholar to transcend biographical criticism and suggest a relationship between the form of the literary texts and the form of the alcoholism narrative. Gilmore ends with a hypothesis, one he admits is "so broad, in fact, that it can probably never be fully demonstrated or refuted," that "to an important extent, the attitudes toward or treatments of drinking studied in this book are manifestations of literary modernism" (Gilmore 170). This tentative argument suggests a way for critics to shift to larger considerations of culture in addiction studies.

John W. Crowley takes up Gilmore's hypothesis in *The White Logic: Alcoholism and Gender in American Modernist Fiction* (1994). Crowley seeks to examine the effects of alcohol on the "Modern Temper" as they appear in the canonical literary texts of High Modernism, considering especially the historical context of gender and sexual anxieties. Crowley improves upon Gilmore's thesis by relying on contemporary understandings of alcoholism espoused by the writers under evaluation rather than a disease concept as outlined by AA in 1934 or E. M. Jellinek in 1960. As Crowley illustrates, conceptions of drinking during the first decades of the 20th century were hardly monolithic: while some drank in defiance of American "Puritanism" (Crowley 37), others imbibed as a form of "combat readiness" (88). Rejection of "bourgeois conventionality" and expansion of "personal and artistic experience" coexisted alongside the notion that alcoholism was the "inevitable response of the sensitive consciousness to the nightmarish human condition" of modernity (155). Regardless of the reason given for drinking, Crowley argues that

“within the emergent culture of conspicuous consumption, addiction would become, in effect, the sign of modernity itself. ‘Alcoholism’ and literary ‘modernism’ emerged together in a dialectical relationship that produced, in the drunk narrative, both a portrait of the modernist as an alcoholic and a portrait of the alcoholic as a modernist” (18). Importantly for Crowley, the alcoholic in modernist culture was always gendered male. Female alcoholics, like Hemingway’s Lady Bret Ashley, are “manly” women, or, in the case of Djuna Barnes’s characters, lesbians (Crowley 131). Barnes’s *Nightwood* also provides a critique of the masculinist vision of “modernist ethos of despair” (Crowley 44) through characters like Matthew O’Connor, a gay male alcoholic who attributes to himself conventionally “feminine” roles such as housewife and mother (Crowley 131). These gender reversals, as well as the parodies and appropriations practiced by John O’Hara’s *Appointment in Samarra* and Charles Jackson’s *The Lost Weekend*, worked to demystify the “White Logic” of alcoholism that was “inseparable from the modernist ideology of despair” (Crowley 41).

In his final chapter, Crowley notes that Charles Jackson’s *The Lost Weekend* began to close the book on these [High Modern] drunk narratives by exposing the literariness of their alcoholic despair” (155). While Gilmore argued that the Modernists had exhausted all possibilities for the high culture, literary “drunk narrative” (Gilmore 175), Crowley recognized it being reborn as the mass culture, best-selling “recovery narrative” (Crowley 155). In his study of intoxication in antebellum American literature, Nicholas O. Warner finds that the “argument with reality” is the central unifying theme that could explain intoxication’s enduring presence in American literature, from the antebellum period into the modern (Warner 220). However, in the postmodern period,

Warner suggests, “it is the nature of reality itself that has changed... the external world itself has assumed the hallucinatory qualities of a drug-induced dream” (Warner 222). Crowley’s and Warner’s conclusions suggest that, in the postmodern era, the terms of the argument with reality have changed. If intoxication allowed Modernists to flee a fragmented and alienating reality, addiction would allow for the creation of individual realities through the construction of recovery narratives.

Recovery narratives, those stories of alcoholism and addiction Robyn Warhol calls “euphoric” (99), have long been a focus of literary, sociological, and even medical addiction studies. Edmund O’Reilly’s *Sobering Tales: Narratives of Alcoholism and Recovery* proceeds from Crowley’s connection of alcoholism and modernism to look at the structure of recovery narratives in Alcoholics Anonymous and in American literature. More recently, Eoin Cannon’s *The Saloon and the Mission: Addiction, Conversion, and the Politics of Redemption in American Culture* argues that the alcoholism recovery narrative may be the most durable and important version of the “perennial trope of redemption in American culture” (xii). The recovery narrative increasingly emerging in the criticism is distinct from Modernist drunkologues: it is populist where the earlier version is elitist; mainstream as opposed to high culture; expressing a potentially empowering worldview instead of a bleak, alcoholic wasteland.

Because recovery narratives hold out this promise of individual and perhaps social change, recovery and addiction rhetoric have become increasingly important to feminist studies. Elayne Rapping’s 1996 study of self-help rhetoric and mutual aid societies, *The Culture of Recovery: Making Sense of the Self-Help Movement in Women’s Lives*, sharply criticizes the depoliticizing and decontextualizing tendencies of the

recovery movement. Rapping saw self-help meetings employing rhetoric similar to the politically radical consciousness raising activities of 1960s feminists, with the important exception that the self-help proponents “seemed to be saying, all these problems between women and men, between women and their bodies, were really problems of *addiction* to begin with, and we were foolish to think that mere ideas and organizations would change behavior rooted in an inherited ‘disease’” (Rapping 5). Following Rapping, both Melissa Pearl Friedling and Trysh Travis investigate representations of addiction and recovery in literature, film, and television with similar interest in the consequences for 21st century feminism. However, Friedling and Travis pay particular attention to the “essentially literary and discursive nature of the disease metaphor” (Travis 23) in ways that Rapping does not.

The reminder of addiction’s “literary and discursive nature” is important. Harry Gene Levine’s foundational article on the “discovery of addiction” links the form of the novel to the rise of the disease concept of addiction, arguing that the concept be understood “not as an independent medical or scientific discovery, but as part of a transformation in social thought grounded in fundamental changes in social life—in the structure of society” (165-66). Both literature (broadly defined) and discourse are cultural practices, so representations of addiction in culture must be studied with attention paid to how the culture and the concept interact. For this reason, narratives of addiction and recovery must be understood as not merely representative but constitutive of our concept of addiction.

The correlation between culture and addiction is one of longstanding interest for critics. Warner notes that attacks on writers of the romantic period frequently listed their

“intemperance” as a major failing, to such an extent that “intemperance and literature became virtually interchangeable terms” (20). Romantic literature was dangerous to readers because they could become addicted to it; just as its writers (allegedly) used substances to flee reality, moral reformers worried that readers would escape irretrievably into the world of Romantic fiction and poetry. Warner follows an influential analysis of addiction and *Madame Bovary* in Avital Ronell’s *Crack Wars: Literature, Addiction, Mania*. Ronell argues that literature has always been associated with addiction, and *Madame Bovary* and its eponymous heroine are the best examples. Addiction is a relation to being, and “drugs” describe “the structure that is philosophically and metaphysically at the basis of our culture” (Ronell 13). However, she maintains, “Obsessed and entranced, narcissistic, private, unable to achieve transference, the writer often resembles the addict. This is why every serious war on drugs comes from a community that is at some level of consciousness also hostile to the genuine writer, the figure of drifter/dissident, which it threatens to expel” (Ronell 106). This interpretation suggests that the addict-writer is external to the culture rather than a product of it.

Other scholars, however, continue to insist that addiction is the dominant metaphor of contemporary culture.²⁹ In 1975, Stanton Peele’s *Love and Addiction* argued that what American culture was calling “love” was structurally similar to what it was also calling “addiction.” While intending to critique codependency in monogamous

²⁹ See Janet Farrell Brodie and Marc Redfield, eds. *High Anxieties: Cultural Studies in Addiction*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002. Print; and Alexander, Anna and Mark S. Roberts, eds. *High Culture: Reflections on Addiction and Modernity*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2003. Print. These two wide-ranging edited collections on addiction in cultural studies provide examples of the myriad possibilities for examining addiction in culture. They also take as their starting points the assumption that there is a special relationship between addiction and culture that makes such an enterprise worthwhile.

relationships, Peele also unintentionally encouraged applying the addiction label to a variety of behaviors such as shopping, working, and exercising. Shortly after Peele, Jacques Derrida and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick also considered the role of addiction in culture. For both Sedgwick and Derrida, addiction is the inevitable product of the culture of late capitalism. In “The Rhetoric of Drugs,” Derrida emphasizes the dual nature of the word “drug,” that which is both poison and cure. The “War on Drugs” (in full swing in 1989, when Derrida participated in the interview) is not a war against this ambiguous entity per se, but a war against unnatural and foreign agents’ assault on the natural and perfect body. Of course the unnatural and natural, the perfect self-contained body and the threat of foreign agents are themselves historically constructed ideas. Drugs and addiction suppose “an instituted and an institutional definition: a history is required, and a culture, conventions, evaluations, norms, an entire network of intertwined discourses, a rhetoric” (Derrida 20). Similarly, in “Epidemics of the Will,” Sedgwick describes the “taxonomic frenzy of the early 1980s” that made it “a commonplace that, precisely, any substance, any behavior, even any affect may be pathologized as addictive” (Sedgwick 132). She too sees the rhetoric of addiction separating the natural from the unnatural, further locating the problem of addiction in “the *structure* of a will that is always somehow insufficiently free, a choice whose voluntariness is insufficiently pure” (132). For both Derrida and Sedgwick, the Reagan era War on Drugs had significantly changed the tone of drug rhetoric. By recriminalizing the pathologized body of the addict, the War on Drugs reinforced a moral dimension of addiction that medical discourse had been attempting to remove (or at least mitigate) for decades.

Both the body and the agency of the addict have been central concepts in cultural studies in addiction. Following Sedgwick, Timothy Melley coins the term “agency panic” to describe the “serious anxiety about autonomy and individuality” that he sees in the work of William S. Burroughs and in the “national tendency toward addiction-attribution” (39). Janet Farrell Brodie and Marc Redfield note that the general consensus among scholars who study addiction in contemporary culture seems to be that “one can only be a modern subject by running the risk of addiction” (15). The body of the addict, they note, like Donna Haraway’s cyborg, is “never substantially [embodied] enough to be able to police its own borders and be sure of its form” (15). Culture, they argue, becomes similarly “cyborgian,” ineluctably influenced as it is by addiction. Thus, an examination of the role of addiction narratives in late 20th century American culture needs to consider those external entities that police the boundaries of addiction and culture. Since the War on Drugs, narratives of addiction and recovery have interrogated these entities through the trope of the Intervention. These narratives focus on the body of the addict, making their central questions: who can intervene and what is the best way to do so? The Intervention asks us to believe in the power of a textual representation of an event to convince the addict to accept its version of reality.

In this context, I examine the cultural products of the War on Drugs since 1970, with special emphasis on those texts that privilege the Intervention. The canon of texts that deal with addiction post-1960s is huge, far too vast to deal with in a single dissertation. Moreover, when one considers texts that deal with addiction and intervention metaphorically rather than literally, as my project does, that number increases significantly. Fortunately, not all texts that deal with addiction consider the role

of the Intervention, and not all interventions are the same.³⁰ Because I am engaging directly with American Presidential rhetoric of the War on Drugs, I've chosen to look at texts that resonate with or respond to the War on Drugs as that era's President laid it out. My rationale for using presidential rhetoric in this way is pragmatic: though official declarations of war cannot be made by Presidents, Nixon (and Johnson before him with his War on Poverty) declared "war" as a means to consolidate a series of bureaucratic efforts into a coherent cultural narrative. The War on Drugs is rhetorical strategy as much as it is domestic or foreign policy, and at times it is more effective rhetorically than in practice. Declaring "War on Drugs" allows a president to assume powers he does not legally possess. Criminologist Mark S. Hamm, adapting political scientist Vincent Ostrom's theory of the "nationalization of democratic politics" to his analysis of corrections and the War on Drugs, illustrates how the public's perception of the President as a "universal problem solver," have allowed "drug warrior" Presidents to create and implement "an erroneous doctrine" about drug abuse, criminality, and treatment without a thoroughgoing critical theoretical or experiential basis (Hamm 79-80). Sean McCann notes that after the New Deal, there was an increasing tendency to view "politics and political action almost wholly in executive terms and, further, to see this executive branch itself as embodied in the intimate person of the president" (4). This "personal president" could speak for the people he represented and unify them under a coherent national

³⁰ Specifically, there is a strain of drug narratives that might best be called experimentation or liberation narratives that were especially popular in the 1950s and 60s among the counterculture. In such narratives, drugs and intoxication are a method of escaping bourgeois culture. Treatment of the addiction that might result from this escape is not the focus of experimentation narratives. Burroughs's *Naked Lunch*, a drug experimentation/liberation narrative that *does* grapple with addiction and treatment, does not ultimately conceive of addiction as a narrative that can be overturned.

identity. This unifying, McCann notes, is similar to the project of American literature, and finds that 20th century writers were particularly engaged with the “appeal of executive leadership” (153). While I am not looking at texts that specifically comment on the role of the executive, the texts under discussion suggest that how the President uses his symbolic powers to frame the War on Drugs is reflected not only in policy, but in cultural products as well.

Because the Intervention creates a mediated, social reality, the texts under discussion in this dissertation are often texts about textuality and media as much as they are about addiction and intervention. They are also drawn from popular and mass culture as well as from sources considered more traditionally “literary.” When considering addiction in postmodern texts, it is important to consider mass culture because it is most frequently accused of abetting addiction. Following Crowley, I argue that narratives of Intervention, treatment, and recovery are directly engaged with a variety of postmodernisms. The texts I’m examining in this dissertation each link addiction with culture by aligning it with another medium (television, literature, film, etc.) and then attempt to overturn the narrative of addiction through formal experimentation of some sort. The clearest example of this phenomenon is in Wallace’s *Infinite Jest*, the title of which refers to a film that is so engrossing viewers become addicted to watching it, giving up eating, sleeping, bathing, and communicating with the outside world to view it over and over. The novel attempts to depict portions of the film in narration, but because no person can survive prolonged exposure to it, no narrative perspective can do more than hint at images from it. More familiar forms of addiction (to drugs and alcohol) we see combatted with other kinds of narratives—the experiences of AA members and their

slogans. Simultaneously, the form of the novel itself, with its hundreds of digressive endnotes, repeatedly interrupts the plot and subplots and disrupts the narrative structure. Similar associations of text with addiction occur in other works considered here: the intoxicating scrapbook of *The Shining*, the narrator's fascination with tabloid magazines in *Bright Lights, Big City*, the inclusion of video game and internet "addicts" in shows like *Intervention*, to name just a few. While Wallace was famously uncomfortable with the literary legacy of postmodernism, *all* of these texts, I argue, engage in some way with the tenets and tropes of postmodernism in their responses to addiction.³¹ Following Derrida's reasoning in "Plato's Pharmacy," I want to suggest the possibility that because the War on Drugs, through its reliance on the concept of Intervention, is fundamentally a postmodern war, these texts about Intervention are implicated in the "addicted culture" the War on Drugs invokes at the same time they are responses to it. In other words, the War on Drugs, in its need for narratives of recovery, has created a culture of addiction.

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³¹ See, for example, Wallace's 1993 essay "E Unibus Pluram: Television and U.S. Fiction." Wallace's thoughts on postmodernism, especially in terms of irony and formal experimentation, will be discussed further in Chapter 4.

Chapter Three: Heroes, Heroin, and Horror: Interventions and Exorcisms during Richard Nixon's War on Drugs

“It is a myth that alcoholics have some spontaneous insight and then seek treatment. Victims of this disease do not submit to treatment out of spontaneous insight—typically, in our experience, they come to their recognition scenes through a buildup of crises that crash through their almost impenetrable defense systems. They are forced to seek help; and when they don't, they perish miserably.”

(Johnson, *I'll Quit Tomorrow* 1)

“Really the first line of defense against the narcotic problem is the family. The parents, the wives, are not taking a look at their children or at their husbands, at their sons or nephews, to see what they're doing. Now I have had parents... or I've had wives, for example, saying, 'Oh, if I'd only noticed the highs and lows that he had; if I'd only noticed the pills in his pocket.' The people, the parents, the wives are going to have to take a close look at their children and their husbands, because *the signs are there if they will only look at them...* The first line of defense is an aware parent who has some interest and will take a look, or an aware wife who may see her husband returning from Vietnam to take a close look at what he's doing, and to get him some help.”

Philadelphia District Attorney Arlen Specter
(qtd. in *Heroes and Heroin* 124, emphasis added)

From its inception in the 1970s, the War on Drugs has relied on a concept of addiction that lies outside medical discourse. This is nothing new: as I've illustrated in Chapter 1, a disease concept of addiction existed in American culture before the medical profession codified it. However, with the coincident emergence of the War on Drugs and the Johnson Intervention, new amalgamations of spiritual, legal, medical, and cultural authority and new questions about an addict's agency appeared in narratives that replaced a “rock bottom” with simulated crises. In this chapter, I suggest a cultural and a generic framework for interpreting a series of texts that respond to this paradigm shift. Placing the Intervention and Nixon's War on Drugs within their specific historic context, the Vietnam War, I argue for an interpretation of the era's horror texts as metaphorical

representations of addiction and Intervention, easing anxieties about the return of the addicted veteran and the failure of intervention abroad.

Nixon's War on Drugs must be distinguished from later, more well-known conceptions (i.e. the Reagan-Bush years) and from revisionist histories of drug prohibition that would label the earlier, more clandestine activities of the defunct Federal Bureau of Narcotics part of the "War on Drugs."³² Though he inaugurated the pernicious tradition of considering the social problem of addiction a "war," Richard Nixon's 1971 declaration of "War on Drugs" was in ways more progressive and humane than his successors'. Emphasizing treatment and rehabilitation, Nixon called for "severe punishments" for sellers and "more lenient and flexible sanctions... for the users," including methadone maintenance for heroin addicts (Nixon). While interdiction was formerly the domain of law enforcement and rehabilitation the domain of medical professionals, Nixon's War on Drugs worked to consolidate the drug problem under the federal government's jurisdiction. Despite Nixon's emphasis on treatment, "[i]t seems quite clear," David Musto argues, "that the emerging focus on non-law enforcement measures did not represent a redefinition of drug abuse as a purely public health problem. It appears to have been meant as part of an effort to place all narcotics control measures in the service of a generalized attack on crime and to move away from Great Society liberalism" (Musto 80). Addiction was a useful metaphor for the societal ills like crime

³² Douglas Valentine's *Strength of the Wolf: The Secret History of America's War on Drugs* is an interesting study of the FBN's mafia connections and criminal activities. However, with his emphasis on the actions of individual FBN agents and secret programs, Valentine's history is predominantly concerned with law enforcement. While enforcement is clearly a part of the War on Drugs as it has been defined since Nixon, it is only one aspect. What makes the War on Drugs, as declared by the Commander in Chief, distinct from earlier efforts to control drug abuse is the way in which Presidents are able to combine medical, legal, and cultural discourses.

and unemployment, and Nixon used both war rhetoric and disease rhetoric to convince citizens of the need for action. He uses some version of the word “attack” six times in his War on Drugs speech, and reminds his audience that interdiction is an important step in “root[ing] out the cancerous growth of narcotics addiction,” preventing narcotics from entering “into the lifeblood of this country” (Nixon). Interestingly, war rhetoric attends rehabilitation while disease metaphors are used primarily in describing the goals of supply reduction.

Thus, Nixon’s approach to combating addiction also required increased surveillance of addicts, veterans, and treatment facilities. Because success in combating addiction was vaguely defined, Nixon proposed eschewing “quotas and other bureaucratic indexes of accomplishment” in favor of judging treatment programs based on “the number of human beings who are brought out of the hell of addiction, and by the number of human beings who are dissuaded from entering that hell” (Nixon). Bringing addicts out of “the hell of addiction” had, as Nixon acknowledged, an incredibly low success rate. Preventing them from entering the hell of addiction would necessitate a variety of surveillance activities: urinalysis of deployed soldiers, aerial surveillance of fields in Indo-China, censorship of film and television, admonishing parents to “be aware.” Because laxity, not the militarism of Vietnam/the Cold War, led to crime and addiction, individual and institutional vigilance were required.

Nixon’s calls for increased surveillance of addicts, drugs, and treatment centers coincided with a widespread interest in the American public’s viewing of the Vietnam War through the medium of television. A persistent theme in critical discussions of the television news media’s depiction of the conflict is the paradox of the failure to make the

war “understandable” for the rest of the country despite the daily coverage provided by television news. In 1971, sociologist Maury Polner captured the fierce antipathy of the returning Vietnam soldier to the American media. One Vietnam veteran found himself becoming increasingly enraged at the “untruths” proliferating about the war in the mass media when he returned to the U.S. He sarcastically describes the television footage of the war dead, “then the station break—for an underarm deodorant or beer—and then back to death” (qtd. in Polner 68). Another veteran found himself both repelled by and attracted to the footage: “I try hard to avoid it but six o’clock every night, there I am staring as if hypnotized at the screen” (qtd. in Polner 107). Despite these statements, Polner and some of his subjects hold to the belief that Vietnam veterans “have been ignored... Unlike the returning servicemen of earlier wars, they have not been celebrated in film or song” (Polner xiv). In fact what Polner and the veterans decry is not the neglect or misrepresentation of the real veteran, but the failure to create a satisfactory fictionalized veteran. McClancy convincingly argues that none of the commonplace assumptions of coverage of the Vietnam War had basis in fact: “the news was *not* suffused with combat imagery, soldiers were *not* portrayed as rabid killers, and *not* all footage showed American servicemen engaged in horrific atrocities” (16). Rather, she suggests, the medium of television itself was what made the war appear both more dangerous and more mundane, and the soldiers less heroic, than what war films had conditioned viewers to expect. Kuzmarov similarly privileges the role of television in “bolstering popular anxieties about the addicted army and obfuscating the actual facts of the war” (46). McClancy also suggests that the viewers of the first televised war were

“haunted,” not because of the war itself or America’s defeat, but “because of the ways in which popular culture presented” it (iv).

In his 1975 study of Hollywood leading up and during the Vietnam War, Julian Smith notes, “in the minds of most Americans, Vietnam has produced little popular art” (3). He argues that while Hollywood (and other artists) seemed to “look away” from Vietnam, the War found other ways to emerge in popular culture “tunneling into our subconscious, a true phantom of Hollywood, surfacing in strange places, taking off its mask only briefly” (Smith 25). In “looking away,” American culture looked inward, using addiction as a metaphor for a malaise that appeared both external and internal to the suffering national body. The drug epidemic seemed to have been generated by the counterculture at home, but returning soldiers were also bringing it home, as if it were a contagious disease. After the war, the drug-addicted Vietnam veteran became an avatar and scapegoat for American feelings of culpability: monsters, whose will had been taken over by addiction, did the evil. The sensation of haunting McClancy locates in the television viewer of the Vietnam War, I argue, was at least as much (if not more) about fears of returning veterans as it was about the atrocities committed or the defeats suffered by the military; for while fictional representations of a triumphant American army or a moral and courageous soldier seemed to disappear during the Vietnam War, these narratives were replaced by metaphorical, fictional, and nonfictional representations of drug addiction.

By 1985, Brende and Parson could argue that the veteran was in fact “subtly, systematically, and completely” victimized by the media through its depiction of him as “depraved, immoral, drug-crazed, and psychopathic” (49). Kuzmarov argues that this

transfer of attention from the Vietnam War to Nixon's War on Drugs was part of Nixon's strategy. Nixon's support of the "myth of the addicted army" deflected attention from the failures of foreign policy abroad and opposition to the Vietnam War at home by placing the blame for defeat in the hands of heroin-crazed soldiers and strung-out hippie protesters (Kuzmarov 5-7). Kuzmarov makes a compelling case for how the War on Drugs has influenced foreign policy since Nixon, relying as it did on the emerging understanding of the disease concept of addiction. The rhetoric of disease provided Americans with a non-ideological enemy to unite against (Kuzmarov 35-36). In addition, politicians and the news media used demonizing language to incite public fears, terming the returning veterans "the living dead" (Kuzmarov 54) and drugs "evil" and "nefarious" (98). Thus, while Nixon's War on Drugs emphasized rehabilitation and was founded on the disease concept of addiction, medical discourse could not sufficiently explain or treat addiction, which apparently required the inclusion of metaphysical concepts like "evil." Furthermore, one important detail that Kuzmarov fails to note in otherwise convincing argument, is the fact that narratives of addiction themselves had to be changed to allow for the kinds of massive interventions Nixon was calling for. As the War on Drugs shaped (and replaced) the War in Vietnam, so Vietnam affected not only the War on Drugs, but also popular understandings of addiction as a disease.

This shift can be discerned in part through the cultural products that represented returning veterans as drug addicts. Kuzmarov identifies two texts that produced and proliferated the "myth of the addicted army": John Steinbeck IV's article in the *Washingtonian* magazine on "The Importance of Being Stoned in Vietnam" and the 1971 television premiere of a two-hour special (funded in part by the Department of Defense)

entitled *Heroes and Heroin*. Steinbeck's article exaggerated the extent of drug abuse in Vietnam and suggested that it, rather than external factors like, for instance, a popularly supported anti-American force in Vietnam, was responsible for military defeats (Kuzmarov 5). *Heroes and Heroin* also exaggerated military drug addiction, while treating addiction as more worthy of disdain than the atrocities committed against the Vietnamese, which were, of course, attributed to drug abuse anyway (Kuzmarov 47). Kuzmarov notes that by the end of the war, Hollywood and television focused solely "on the psychological torment of American GIs, often through their symbolic addiction to drugs, and on the cataclysmic domestic legacies of the war. This focus helped to enhance a mythic belief in America's victimization and bred a rising intolerance for drugs" (149). The trope of the drug-addicted Vietnam veteran was fully solidified in American popular culture in the 1980s, appearing in TV and movies regularly.

However, as several scholars of the period point out, during the Vietnam War, there were far fewer portrayals of the war (positive or negative) than would appear in the 1980s. The myth of the addicted army Kuzmarov traces in popular culture is predominantly (and most powerfully and enduringly) an aftereffect, a narrative for reshaping memories of the war and excusing American performance (individually and collectively) on the battlefield. To understand how changing notions of addiction and intervention manifested themselves during the Vietnam War/War on Drugs, I argue that we need to look to a genre that allowed the metaphorical demons, hauntings, and zombies to be spectacularly literalized: horror. Film scholar Robin Wood articulates clearly that the growth and increasing acceptance of horror as a serious genre is linked in the "national consciousness and the unconscious" to the Vietnam War (Wood 49). His

assessment was later echoed by novelist Stephen King, whose own hyper-prolific career was launched at the end of the Vietnam War, during a wave of horror texts both literary and filmic that achieved critical and/or commercial success: *Rosemary's Baby*, *The Exorcist*, *Texas Chainsaw Massacre*, *Carrie*, *The Amityville Horror*, *The Shining*, and *Halloween*.³³ Significantly, all of aforementioned texts saw the horror situated within the family home and most dealt with the will of an individual or individuals being corrupted or possessed by ghostly or demonic forces. In the context of the War on Drugs, the rhetoric of addiction overlapped with the rhetoric of the horror story. By analyzing these horror texts, therefore, we can better understand how the War on Drugs and the Intervention was shaping cultural understandings of addiction and recovery.

Horror and Addiction

The Intervention provides a context for Nixon's surveillance imperative and a paradigm for understanding the relationship between addiction and horror. As I discussed

³³ *Rosemary's Baby* (novel by Ira Levin published in 1967; film directed by Roman Polanski in 1968); *The Mephisto Waltz* (novel by Fred Mustard Steward published in 1969; film directed by Paul Wendkos in 1971); *The Exorcist* (novel by William Peter Blatty published in 1971; film directed by William Friedkin in 1973); *Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (film directed by Tobe Hooper in 1974); *Carrie* (novel by Stephen King published in 1974; film directed by Brian DePalma in 1976); *The Amityville Horror* (book by Jay Anson published in 1977; film directed by Stuart Rosenberg in 1979); *The Shining* (novel by Stephen King published in 1977; film directed by Stanley Kubrick in 1980); *Halloween* (film directed by John Carpenter in 1978). This is not an exhaustive list. Other critically or commercially successful horror novels during the time include: Thomas Tryon's *The Other* (1971) and *Harvest Home* (1973); Peter Van Greenaway's *The Medusa Touch* (1973); Peter Straub's *Julia* (1975), *If You Could See Me Now* (1977), and *Ghost Story* (1979); John Saul's *Suffer the Children* (1977) and *Punish the Sinners* (1978); Richard Matheson's *Hell House* (1971); Robert Bloch's *American Gothic* (1974); John Farris's *The Fury* (1976); Gary Brandner's *The Howling* (1977); Peter Benchley's *Jaws* (1974); William Goldman's *Magic* (1976); Stephen King's *'Salem's Lot* (1975) and *The Stand* (1978); Ira Levin's *The Stepford Wives* (1972); David Morrell's *Totem* (1979); Whitley Strieber's *The Wolfen* (1978).

in Chapter 1, the Intervention marked a distinct shift in thinking about the trajectory of addiction. Vernon Johnson redefined addiction as a break with reality, and insisted that alcoholics (and later, addicts) “by definition... [are] unable to recognize the fact” of their alcoholism (Johnson, *I’ll Quit Tomorrow*, 5). If the alcoholic is coerced into seeing a counselor, he/she cannot be questioned alone: “it is impossible to find out the subject’s behavior by questioning the subject” because alcoholics cannot and often will not answer truthfully about their own drinking habits (Johnson 21). Authority shifts to the alcoholic’s family and friends, the witnesses to the alcoholic’s behavior, whom the counselor can rely on for a true history of it (Johnson 22). The Intervention can be successful because Johnson is able to reconfigure the shape of the addiction narrative. Rather than progressing downward to a “rock bottom,” the alcoholic is, as Johnson argues, always already “surrounded by crises, no one of which is being used constructively” (4). Interventionists can deploy those crises by threatening the withdrawal of support (emotional and financial) long before the alcoholic has intersected with the events themselves (e.g. divorce, being fired from a job) in his/her alcoholic career.

The Intervention’s reliance on the witnesses could be used to depoliticize the issue of addiction by making the addicts themselves voiceless. Kuzmarov argues that veterans who protested the Vietnam War after returning home were discredited as junkies. Furthermore, research indicated that many of the soldiers who used heroin in Vietnam did not continue using when they returned, which suggested that their drug use had more to do with their high stress environment than with pathological addiction. Nonetheless, because potential addicts cannot be counted on to admit to their addiction, their witnesses are instructed to scrutinize their behavior and interpret mood swings or

problems adjusting to a routine as signs of addiction. A veteran falling prey to addiction could then, in part, be blamed on the lack of what Arlen Specter called “an aware parent” (he identifies both mothers and wives) who could serve as the nation’s “first line of defense against the narcotic problem” (qtd. in Westin and Shaffer 124).

Thus, these women formed an ambivalent relationship to the surveillance of the returning soldiers that had parallels to the ambivalent relationship of the public to the news coverage of the war itself. Encouraged to observe their husbands and sons closely, the aware wife/mother was always in danger of seeing something that could be a sign of addiction—yet the presence of an “epidemic” of addiction suggested that she had not watched (and perhaps could not watch) the addict closely enough. This tension between seeing and not seeing is reproduced again in theories of horror. In his study of the aesthetics of terror and horror tales, Terry Heller defines horror as “the fear of anticipating and witnessing harm befalling others for whom we have some sympathy” (Heller viii). The horror story, unlike, in Heller’s view, the more sophisticated terror story, uses devices such as narrative framing and suspense building to increase aesthetic distance, ensuring that the implied reader experiences fear while the real reader is comfortably removed from any danger. The War on Drugs, then, described by the Nixon Administration, can be read like a horror story: with sympathetic characters nervously watching loved ones for signs that they may be turning into monsters. The addiction narrative/horror story parallel is reinforced by rhetoric that linked addicts with zombies, pushers with vampires, addiction with demonic possession, and so forth.

It is not surprising, then, that many of the era’s most popular horror texts center on characters (quite often wives and mothers) watching the “evil” within their homes and

themselves. One could make the case that this is a trope as old as the work of Edgar Allan Poe.³⁴ At least, it could be argued, the twentieth century version of the trope can be traced to William March's 1954 novel *The Bad Seed*, which centers on an overwhelmed mother who begins to question her daughter's suspicious behavior in the wake of a classmate's death. Though that novel shares similarities with novels like *Rosemary's Baby*, *The Exorcist*, and *The Shining*, the differences are indicative of the ways in which horror was employed to exorcise fears of drug-addicted Vietnam veterans returning home. The later novels all at least make mention of addiction, often linking it to susceptibility to supernatural evil forces. These novels also displace the Vietnam War, by including characters who either can't seem to remember the war is going on (i.e. Rosemary Woodhouse) or who operate in a world where they are able to remain untouched by it. Equally important, however, are the differences in the ways in which evil is interpreted generically and thematically. While *The Bad Seed* declares the source of Rhoda Penmark's evil to be a hereditary predisposition to psychological problems (hence the title), the later novels find psychiatry and science to be insufficient to explain or treat the characters' terrifying afflictions. As a result, they also question the efficacy of different kinds of intervention. In the analysis of these novels that follows, I explain how horror

³⁴ In fact, Poe's engagement with what David Reynolds, in *Beneath the American Renaissance*, calls "dark temperance" is more like the novels I am discussing than March's more contemporary novel. Stories like "The Black Cat," the drink-crazed narrator of which punishes the loyal, but watchful titular pet, explicitly link alcoholism and evil. However, Poe's story reflects the fact that alcoholism, though it was gradually being destigmatized, still resonated in a predominantly moral register. To link alcoholism and evil was to suggest that alcoholism was one kind or manifestation of evil. The horror texts of the twentieth century cannot be so easily reduced. Addiction is understood, even within the fictional worlds of the texts, as a psychological or medical problem. Thus the linking of addiction with evil resurrects the moral register that ought to be banished by scientific discourse, suggesting that while addiction is a disease entity, it has a spiritual or moral component that cannot be countered by medicine or psychology.

during the Vietnam War was symptomatic of changing notions of addiction and agency, which were themselves deployed by the Nixon Administration and the War on Drugs in part to distract attention away from Vietnam. In other words, my reading of these texts suggests that the War on Drugs helped to revive belief in “interventions” that was shaken by the failure of intervention in Vietnam.

“This is really happening”: Failed Interventions in *Rosemary’s Baby*

Ira Levin’s novel *Rosemary’s Baby* is published early in the wave of horror I’m linking to the War on Drugs. Prior to this, horror fiction was mostly dominated by science fiction tropes and themes—the monsters are aliens, time travel and/or alternate presents/futures provoke horror, and mad scientists create fear in the fiction of Ray Bradbury, H. P. Lovecraft, and Philip K. Dick. Levin’s novel ushered in a renewed fascination with gothic themes, particularly people and places haunted and inhabited by evil spirits. Possession is an easy metaphor for addiction, and possession narratives could be used to express collective fears about individual and national guilt. However, possession narratives are not necessarily more concerned with human agency than other kinds of horror tales. In fact, in the stories discussed below, the membrane between willed and unwilled actions is quite secure. Rather, despite sometimes explicitly linking addiction and possession, these possession narratives are especially interesting because they raise questions about the observers and the possibility of intervention.

Published in 1967, before the tide of public sentiment had really turned against the War in Vietnam and before the declaration of War on Drugs, *Rosemary’s Baby* is also the only novel of the three I discuss in depth in this chapter to feature an explicit, diegetic

reference to Vietnam.³⁵ Rosemary and Guy Woodhouse concoct a fictional tale about Guy, an actor by trade, being drafted to join a theater company on “a four-month USO tour of Vietnam and the Far East” in order to get out of a recently signed lease and be able to move into the ill-fated Bramford (Levin 12). Guy shows himself willing to exploit not only the war, but the apparently patriotic emotions of his landlord by claiming that he’s the only one who can fill in for the injured star; without Guy the tour will be postponed, “which would be a damn shame, the way those kids over there were slugging away against the Commies” (12). However, neither Rosemary nor Guy seems overly concerned with Vietnam. Rosemary, who is revealed to be considerably less self-interested and opportunistic than Guy, thinks about the conflict from time to time. She sheds tears when the Pope comes to the United States and speaks against the war (77), but she also reveals that she has a shallow understanding of world events when she jokes about going to Zanzibar, only to be reminded that “Zanzibar is no more... It’s Tanzania” (75). Once her pregnancy becomes difficult and painful, she withdraws further into her own world. The narrator, however, alludes to Rosemary’s attempts to read the newspaper and “tr[y] to be interested in students burning draft cards” (141). Thus, for the novel, the war is the narrative’s own pharmakon, both a device to propel the plot and as a distraction from that plot, from time to time.

Drugs are also necessary to advance the plot: Rosemary must be drunk to be seduced, drugged to accomplish her rape, and sedated through the birth of the child. The novel, however, never allows drugs to exist as simply functional. Addiction is always present too, suggesting the horrific loss of control that may follow the use of drugs or

³⁵ William Peter Blatty’s 1971 novel *The Exorcist* (discussed below) does allude to Vietnam with an epigraph. None of the characters in the novel, however, discuss it.

alcohol. Early in the novel, Rosemary's older brother Brian, "who had a drink problem" is mentioned as the only one of her family members who supported her move to New York City (Levin 14-5). Later, Rosemary meets Terry, a recovering drug addict and resident of the Bramford, whose addiction has made her susceptible to the Casteverts' plot to inseminate an unsuspecting young woman with the offspring of Satan. The specter of drugs alone obviously does not constitute a deep engagement with the subject of addiction. However, these allusions to drugs invite the reader to see that drug addiction is used as an explanation of seemingly unexplainable evil, one that the novel will address by supplying supernatural rather than psychological or sociological explanations. This replacement, I am arguing, not only becomes ubiquitous in horror fiction of the time, but is the same rhetorical move that will be practiced by Nixon in his War on Drugs/Vietnam War conflation, which required (because Nixon wanted to dismantle Great Society programs and deny that the Vietnam War caused situational addiction) characterizing addiction in ways that fell outside of the sphere of medical discourse.³⁶

Rosemary's pregnancy ultimately functions as a kind of addiction too, if we consider the criteria for addiction that were taking shape in the late 1960s. As I noted in Chapter 1, after the repeal of Prohibition, the disease concept of alcoholism shifted the locus of addiction from the substance to the individual. In the 1960s, the Minnesota Model of addiction treatment further expanded the definition of addiction by arguing that "chemically dependent" people were susceptible to a variety of mind-altering substances.

³⁶ William Tryon's *The Other* (1971) also features a mother who, beset by the supernatural evil emanating from her telepathic and/or deeply disturbed son, finds solace in alcohol. As Niles continues to kill off members of his family, the survivors also drink, leading the rest of the town to gossip about them as alcoholics and blame their continued sorrows on that vice (Tryon 249).

Attempts to describe addiction resulted in the overarching claims that the addict could be identified as one who used drugs in a way that caused harm to himself/herself or others (Jellinek 35). In a more general sense, Rosemary's cravings and the "possession" of her body by a will other than her own aligns the pregnant body with the addicted body. Anticipating Johnson's definition of addiction as a break with reality, Rosemary's pregnancy also produces two levels of disconnection: the aforementioned withdrawal from the outside world and a more internal disconnection. As Karyn Valerius notes in her essay on Roman Polanski's 1968 film adaptation, Rosemary suffers from a kind of reverse paranoia. Instead of projecting fearful fantasies onto reality, Rosemary mistakes her real experiences and suspicions for fantasies and dismisses them (Valerius 123). For instance, she partially wakes during her rape and finds scratches and bruises on her body the following morning. She accepts Guy's explanation of the scratches and concludes that her memory of the rape was a nightmare (Levin 92-3). Though Rosemary isn't addicted to a substance, she lacks agency. As advances in addiction treatment expanded to allow more and more behaviors to be considered addictions, Rosemary might be read as a proto-codependent.

In terms of the narrative, however, the strongest argument that can be made for seeing Rosemary as an addict figure must come from the novel's overt connection of Rosemary with Terry. Rosemary first becomes interested in Terry because Terry reminds her of a movie star. The resemblance is close enough to cause Rosemary to watch Terry as closely as Rosemary later watches her actor husband, Guy. Terry eventually confides in Rosemary that she was using drugs and homeless when the Casteverts took her in and "completely rehabilitated" her (Levin 30). Terry, like Rosemary, has a black sheep

brother she mentions cryptically (“the less said about *him* the better” (Levin 31)) shortly before committing suicide by jumping out of the Castevets’ window.³⁷ In the wake of Terry’s suicide, Rosemary frets that she will never understand what compelled Terry to jump. The novel, of course, provides satisfaction for both Rosemary and the reader, by having Rosemary herself contemplate the same end after discovering the identity of her baby’s father. Before that, however, Rosemary finds herself replacing Terry by becoming friends with the Castevets. She eventually replaces Terry again by becoming the incubator for the spawn of Satan. Throughout the novel, however, Rosemary misunderstands her position in the conspiracy. She sees herself as only the victim, not also the unwilling accomplice of the plot, until the very end. As a result, her paranoia leads her to scrutinize Guy’s behavior, delve into the history of the Bramford, and try to create anagrams of Roman Castevet’s name in order to confirm her suspicions.

Rosemary’s behavior in this respect calls to mind the “aware wife” that the federal government would increasingly call upon to be its acolyte in the War on Drugs, but who was only recently being considered by addiction medicine to be more than a hindrance to treatment. Though Guy does not go away to war, he does go away for performances, and Rosemary doubles down on her surveillance of him, questioning “a disturbing presence of overlooked signals just beyond memory, signals of a shortcoming in his love for her... He was an actor; could anyone know when an actor was true and not

³⁷ Very little is said about Terry’s brother. However, he does make a brief return after Terry’s death. Rosemary tells police that he was in the Navy, and they find him “in a civilian hospital in Saigon” (Levin 61). Introducing a character that serves no function in the narrative except to be a thing about which the other characters prefer not to speak and then “finding” him in Vietnam suggests a kind of conscious “looking away.” This introduction also invites a comparison to Rosemary’s alcoholic brother Brian, and the four characters together constitute a matrix of the social, personal, and political ills I’m attempting to make connections among.

acting” (Levin 94). She begins to align his responses to her with his past performances, and he increases her suspicions by talking about a metaperformative role he is playing: that of “a crippled boy who *pretends* he’s adjusted to his crippled-ness” (Levin 96-7). His revelation that he can play roles within roles entrenches Rosemary’s epistemological uncertainty; nonetheless, all of her detective work leads her to the wrong conclusions. Despite her watchfulness, she was never asking the right questions.

It is significant that Rosemary seems to perform both the roles of addict and that of the observer. In the wake of the formation of Al-Anon, holistic approaches to treatment called addiction a “family disease,” and suggested that the spouse was linked to the addict in his/her disease. In “recovery” in Al-Anon, adherents rely on the same Twelve Steps as their substance-abusing counterparts. Vernon Johnson argues that the spouse of the alcoholic is as “sick as the drunk, except that the bodily damage is not there. With every drunk there is a dry sick who is a mirror image” (Johnson 33). Thus, figuring Rosemary as observer reifies her role as a codependent, a relationship addict, with the caveat that Rosemary’s sickness is rooted in her inability to interpret the signs of someone else’s addiction.

The novel concludes by aligning evil with addiction, and the interpretation of the observer with fallibility. As Rosemary gets closer to the truth, she increasingly considers calling her alcoholic brother, Brian. This might suggest that he could be the savior who intervenes, but Rosemary eventually decides against asking him for help. Rosemary’s brother appears again, however, not in person, but in the face of the titular infant, whose “tiny chin” is “a bit like Brian’s” (Levin 241). This comparison might be overlooked if one does not recognize that Rosemary, “an astute reader of her domestic scene” (Marcus

146), is practicing a form of physiognomy in order to justify her decision to mother the baby. Rosemary's predilection for a pseudoscience, the heyday of which is more than one hundred years past by the time of the novel, is not out of character. In fact, Rosemary's tastes become decidedly old-fashioned as the novel progresses: she chooses *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* to read while housebound, gushes to a friend "Nobody stops reading Dickens" (Levin 120, 158). Perhaps it is from Dickens, who used the principles of physiognomy in his descriptions of characters, that Rosemary acquires the reading "skills" she uses to see the good in the baby.³⁸ However, anyone who has never stopped reading Dickens (or practicing physiognomy) will also be aware that the shape of the chin was seen as an indication of the individual's strength of will, and that alcoholic characters could be identified by their weak (tiny) chins.

The comparison of Brian with the infant raises questions about the disease model of addiction and its supposed separation from spiritual/moral registers, questions that would be raised again in later possession stories. Stewart's 1969 *The Mephisto Waltz*, an early *Rosemary's Baby* imitation, locates addiction in the soul. After the body of Myles Clarkson, freelance writer, is taken over by the soul of Duncan Ely, Satan-worshipping concert pianist, "Myles," heretofore a heavy smoker, is able to cease smoking immediately. Paula, Myles's wife and the "Rosemary" of this novel, is unable to quit, and her addiction to cigarettes is reiterated throughout, as she smokes to celebrate a financial windfall, craves cigarettes after sex, succumbs to the urge for nicotine in the wake of her

³⁸ There are a number of studies of the use of physiognomy in Victorian literature. Boshear and Whitaker's chapter describes the sometimes-ambivalent relationship writers such as Dickens, Charlotte Bronte, and Ralph Waldo Emerson had to physiognomy. See Boshears, Rhonda, and Harry Whitaker. "Chapter 5 - Phrenology and Physiognomy in Victorian Literature." *Progress in Brain Research*. Ed. Stanley Finger and François Boller Anne Stiles. Vol. 205. Elsevier, 2013. 87–112. *ScienceDirect*. Web. 1 Feb. 2015.

daughter's death, and relapses again later despite a headache that turns out to be the harbinger of a brain aneurysm. Like Rosemary, Paula's dreams reveal real threats that Paula intermittently dismisses as fantasy. When Paula finally accepts that the Satanists' plot is real, she is accused of being high (by the police) and drunk (by others). No human form of outside assistance benefits Paula. Doctors conspire against her, law enforcement disbelieves her, and friends and family are easily manipulated by the charismatic Duncan/Myles. Paula, apparently influenced by *Time's* infamous 1966 "Is God Dead?" issue, concludes that Satan is real but God isn't, and so appeals to the only "higher" authority in which she can believe. With an understanding of the Satanist as a kind of "proto-hippie," Paula becomes a Satanist herself, usurping the body of Duncan's daughter-lover for purposes far less noble than Rosemary's rationale for keeping her baby.³⁹ There are no cures for diseases of the soul, and with no help for the afflicted, Paula joins to enable Myles's body because she cannot intervene to save his soul.

Similarly, the end of *Rosemary's Baby* fulfills the prophecy of the title: Rosemary chooses to own her baby and attempt to supply the "good influence to counteract [the coven's] bad one" (Levin 244). However, the novel has provided no reason to expect that Rosemary's intercessions will be successful. The narrative has evoked a sense of decline and downfall through the gothic setting of the "blackened" Bramford (Levin 35), the breakdown in communications and the inertia symbolized by the striking newspaper and transportation workers, and the delegitimizing of conventional figures of sacred and

³⁹ *The Mephisto Waltz* replaces the relatively selfless maternal drives of Rosemary Woodhouse with the late onset nymphomania that motivates Paula Clarkson. It's tempting to believe that incest between Duncan and his daughter Roxanne exists in the novel merely to up its salaciousness quotient, especially when Paula converts to Satanism, in part, because the sex is that good.

secular authority (i.e. the Pope and medical doctors). The world of *Rosemary's Baby* is entropic, but Rosemary's perception of herself has shifted from passive victim to an active agent of her (and the infant's) destiny. This shift in her perception creates the aesthetic distance that Heller argues is necessary to horror fiction; it makes it possible to view her as insane or unreliable. The reader is not asked to sympathize with her terrifying experience any longer; instead, we are distanced from her through the increasing use of dialogue and the decreasing use of free indirect discourse. This distance will be closed in later iterations of the demonic possession story, particularly in William Peter Blatty's 1971 novel, *The Exorcist*. Wives and mothers increasingly became the targets of messages of the War on Drugs, and their belief in the efficacy of intervention would have to be reinforced.

Raising the Bottom: *The Exorcist* as Interventionist

In reviews of both the novel and the film adaptation, *The Exorcist* is often considered the successor to *Rosemary's Baby*.⁴⁰ Though a myriad of literary and filmic horror texts were produced in the interlude, the similarities between these two are important. Both deal specifically with demonic forces and the very young victims of them. However, while *Rosemary's Baby* focuses on a hidden evil gestating within Rosemary (while remaining external to her in a metaphysical sense), *The Exorcist* makes the evil vividly and violently present, further underscoring the need for intervention. In

⁴⁰ In a *New York Times* book review entitled "Sons of 'Rosemary's Baby,'" Gerald Walker makes the connection explicit. Referring to new books by Tryon and Blatty, he quips, "Rosemary had a baby. She also hatched the occult novel's current incarnation. What possessed readers to make supernatural super-sellers of William Peter Blatty's 'The Exorcist' and Thomas Tryon's 'The Other'?' Timing, partly" (Walker 21).

my reading, *The Exorcist* is the most important text for understanding the cultural reverberations of Nixon's War on Drugs. Stridently anti-Great Society, the story depicts demonic possession as addiction: a disease that the medical community has been unable to define or treat adequately. Under the Nixon administration's clever handling of the nationwide increase in drug abuse, particularly among military personnel, questions of course of treatment were central to promoting the rehabilitation of addicts; questions of etiology that would encourage considering how social, economic, and environmental factors contributed to addiction were subordinated. *The Exorcist* furthers this agenda by conflating diagnosis with treatment and making understanding the causes of Regan's possession not only impossible but also irrelevant. Thus, for all the unresolved questions about why the devil chooses to enter young Regan MacNeil, the plot works to posit close observation by a mother and intervention by a third party as necessary to her recovery. The visceral reaction film audiences had to William Friedkin's 1973 film adaptation of the novel can also be read as an index of the success of the ideology of Intervention.

As in *Rosemary's Baby*, drugs and alcohol make an at first superficial appearance in the novel. The opening scene in the Middle East is set among the "poppied hills" of Iraq (Blatty 3). Back in the United States, actress Chris MacNeil is working on a film about student protests set in Washington D.C., a film directed by the legendary (for his drinking and his film work) Burke Dennings. Addiction is remote, like the far-off hills of a foreign land, or easily deniable, as Chris finds the countercultural insurrection of the film "dumb" and states that she doesn't believe Dennings has a drinking problem (Blatty 13-20). Drugs have functional roles to play in the narrative as well. When Chris's daughter Regan begins acting strangely, thrashing and mutilating herself, she's sedated

with increasing doses of Librium. Whenever Chris exhausts the resources of one therapeutic approach, the doctors, priests, and policemen ask if Regan might not be on drugs. Apparently, addiction resides in a liminal space between physiology and psychology, between spirituality and criminality. Drugs and addiction are one manifestation of evil in a world that the sympathetic Detective Kinderman describes as having “a massive nervous breakdown” (Blatty 159). Significantly, the novel gives no explanation for why Regan would be targeted by demonic entities. Other than playing with a Ouija board, which Chris states she also played with as a child, Regan seems to have no connection whatsoever to the occult. In an essay on Friedkin’s film adaptation, Michael Dempsey notes that both film and novel “laboriously discredit all other explanations for the girl’s condition” (Dempsey 61) making spontaneous, unprovoked demonic possession the only possible explanation. Rather than dissuade a reading of Regan’s possession as analogous to addiction, this lack of context for the affliction resonates with the developing denial of social and environmental factors influencing addiction.

The implied reader of *The Exorcist* also has few reasons to question the source of Regan’s change in behavior: Regan is clearly possessed by a demon. Despite the suggestions of Father Karras and Detective Kinderman that drugs can wreak all kinds of seemingly supernatural changes in a person, the reader is grounded in Chris’s perspective, and Blatty takes pains to prove that Chris is an especially attentive reader of people, if not texts. She’s described as “naturally inquisitive,” able to “juice” people for information, “wr[i]ng them out,” pin them down, make them “wriggle” (Blatty 39). Skeptical of doctors and not religious, Chris has apparently no bias for either a medical or

a spiritual explanation of Regan's malady. Her general skepticism and willingness to believe in Regan's possession by a demon are enough to convince the reader of a supernatural solution. The character for whom ambivalence about the cause is most crucial is Karras, whose faith is challenged by his mother's death. Karras's restoration of faith at the end affects no part of the reader's understanding of the possession, though Karras is only able to "cure" Regan when he invites the demon into his own body, a move that equates belief in the diagnosis with recovery. At stake here is the existence of God and the possibility that someone can intercede against evil forces. Blatty withholds positive evidence of a benevolent deity from readers; perhaps for this reason so many contemporary readers found the novel so troubling. (More of Karras's skepticism and the ramifications of Blatty's cosmology discussed below.) Because the reader never seriously entertains the possibility that drugs could have caused Regan's affliction, the allusions to drugs invite the reader to see addiction as analogous to possession.

Nowhere is this clearer than in the subplot involving Elvira, the daughter of Chris's housekeepers. Karl, the male half of the Swiss couple who live with the MacNeils, is introduced early on as mysterious and, to Chris's mind, unreadable. Burke Dennings has an unexplained hatred of him and accuses him of being a Nazi in hiding. When Dennings dies outside the MacNeil home, Detective Kinderman also finds Karl suspect. Believing he knows something more about Dennings's death than he is letting on, Kinderman has Karl followed and discovers that Karl does have a secret: his daughter, Elvira, is a heroin addict he is quietly supporting. Karl has let his wife believe that she is dead to spare her the pain of Elvira's continued decline. In this respect, Karl mirrors Chris, who hides her daughter's affliction from her estranged husband and works

to conceal Regan's condition from the police, who wish to question her about Dennings's death. However, like the medical and spiritual quest to cure Regan, Kinderman's quest to resolve Dennings's murder officially is technically futile. He discovers Dennings's murderer (Regan), but does not intend to press charges. Instead of arresting Karl or Elvira, he extends help. Elvira accepts his offer to enter treatment, and the novel ends with both Elvira and Regan in recovery. The parallels between these narratives reinforce a correlation between addiction and possession; they also juxtapose the behaviors of Chris and Karl, who approach their daughters' illnesses in very different ways. Chris is vigilant and tenacious. Karl is enabling and timid. Both, however, require the assistance of external authorities. The process of "diagnosing" Regan's possession dramatizes the tensions between medical and legal authorities in the War on Drugs. The exorcism (the cure that doesn't really cure Regan at all) shows the logic of the War on Drugs and the Intervention brought to their inevitable conclusions.

First, recall that the federal War on Drugs is justified by the apparent inability of medical knowledge to contain addiction alone. Nixon insisted that earlier efforts to stem drug abuse were "insufficient" because they did not combine and coordinate law enforcement (government) and rehabilitation (medicine). The novel too suggests that possession exceeds the limits of any single approach by offering a sustained critique of the medical establishment in the first half of the book, during which readers see doctors unable to diagnose Regan, unable to save Karras's mother, and during which readers find out that Chris has not trusted doctors since the death of her son, Jamie (Blatty 59). Doctors are "surprised" (Blatty 114) by Regan's responses and "unsatisfied" with their own hypotheses (127). Chris is continually frustrated by their inability to diagnose

Regan, and, at one point, Dr. Klein capitulates: “We use concepts like ‘consciousness’—‘mind’—‘personality,’ but we don’t really know yet what these things are” (Blatty 152). However, *The Exorcist* does not present a straightforward or unequivocal takedown of modern medicine. In fact, it allows some minor victories to the doctors and denies them to the priests. It’s important to point out that while doctors *initially* fail to diagnose Regan, their efforts at treating her do not. They are able to prescribe sedatives that calm the demon within Regan. They are also able to draw the demon out through hypnosis. Furthermore, it is a group of psychiatrists who eventually prescribe the “ironic” exorcism that Chris seeks for Regan. Chris remains skeptical of the suggestion, but the doctors have shown through their deductive process that there is nothing physically wrong with Regan. They even give her condition a name “*somnambuliform possession*” (Blatty 197) that contains the name of the condition she actually has. Medicine has done the work of the naming and defining the problem and suggesting the course of treatment, but it lacks the authority to carry it out and remains silent on the question of etiology.

The Church has only slightly more to say on the subject of etiology, and on almost every front, the spiritual treatment of Regan, including the actual exorcism, is less reliable and less efficacious. Karras notes with trepidation that priests often became possessed themselves, went mad, or even died during the performance of exorcisms (265, 273). Because he believes in paranormal phenomena like extrasensory perception and telekinesis, Karras constantly doubts the behaviors of Regan that would otherwise constitute proof of possession. Even seeing the words “help me” appear in Regan’s handwriting on her skin does not convince Karras that she is possessed (329). Karras’s conundrum in trying to diagnose Regan is this: Regan has read a book that contains

descriptions of the symptoms of demonic possession. Thus, while any behavior that conforms to these descriptions could be proof of her demonic possession, because it is contained in the text, it is simultaneously undermined by the hypothesis that her disorder is autosuggestive. Eventually, Karras, who is also trained as a psychiatrist, comes to the same conclusion as the other psychiatrists independent of their finding. Though at first he tells Chris that if she wants an “autosuggestive shock cure” she should call “Central Casting” and hire actors to perform the mock exorcism (249), once he discovers that Regan is speaking backwards, he thinks he might have enough evidence to convince the Church to allow an exorcism, but only because “suggestion could work for Regan... the counteracting suggestion for Regan, he believed, was the ritual of exorcism” (306). In other words, he’s assenting to the same ironic exorcism the psychiatrists prescribed, that Chris sought, that he initially refused to participate in, and he’s agreeing to do it for precisely the reasons the secular psychiatrists thought it would be effective. Significantly, what convinces Karras to pursue the ironic exorcism is not the medical evidence (which, again, suggested the same course of treatment) nor what he can see or hear directly, but his interpretation of a re-represented text: a transcribed voice recording of Regan’s voice played backwards. Karras, like Rosemary Woodhouse before him, plays with words in order to advance an interpretation of Regan’s condition that escapes the possibility of autosuggestion.

The juxtaposition of Karras and the medical doctors reflects two key themes of the War on Drugs. First, rather than negating the authority of the medical establishment, it imbues it with something more than medical authority—an authority at the same time spiritual and ironically spiritual. That is, the medical professionals end up prescribing

(and doing; recall that Karras is also a doctor) the spiritual treatment, but not because they believe in a spiritual affliction. Second, it places Regan's "disease" outside the bounds of any single field's understanding; she, like drug addicts of most eras, is being pursued and investigated by priests, doctors, *and* policemen. In the age of Intervention, however, confronting addiction cannot be accomplished without the assistance of culture. Thus, the actors, directors, aspiring screenwriters, and movie buffs who populate the narrative world prepare the reader for an Intervention that is grounded in spectacle and performance.

Karras's procedure coalesces with a central premise of the Johnson Intervention: that the representation of reality by others can reconnect the alcoholic with the reality his addiction necessarily severs him from. Johnson argued "Their greatest need is to be confronted by it [reality]. Sound movies or tapes of some of their drinking episodes will do it best... There they are on the silver screen or on tape, acting like that... The interveners are to act for the screen. 'This is reality! Reality *is not what you have been believing* it was!'" (Johnson 57). However, while Johnson argues that this form of "reality therapy" can be useful to the addict, he also acknowledges that the ones closest to the alcoholic, who have actually seen and heard his/her behavior without the distorting effects of "euphoric recall" or blackouts, are, as described above, as sick as the addicted. Thus, it's not the physiological symptoms of alcoholism (the blackouts and euphoric recall) that prevent the alcoholic from accepting reality. There's something else, inherent in Johnson's concept of addiction, that makes everyone touched by the disease cut off from reality. Karras is thus a victim of the disease because he is an observer of it.

It should be clear at this point that though Regan has been linked with addiction and drug usage throughout the novel, it is Karras who is positioned to be the character in need of an Intervention. Father Lankester Merrin, the experienced exorcist who assists Karras and whose function in the novel seems to be didactic explanations of the novel's moral, tells Karras "I think the demon's target is not the possessed; it is us...the observers" (Blatty 369). Merrin assumes that the purpose of possession is to show the observers that human beings are unworthy of God's love. Blatty suggests, however, that the fact of Satan's existence proves God's existence. In a manner similar to the autosuggestive/real possession dilemma Karras faces, the novel seems to propose that because Satan presupposes God, the proof of evil is also the proof of good (a view that, as I explain below, did not translate to many contemporary readers or viewers). Karras is partially convinced by Regan's levitation, but only experiences his "euphoric" restoration of faith when he becomes the afflicted. Drawing the demon into himself, he follows the path of the alcoholic Burke Dennings: out of the window to his death on the street, where passersby assume he must have been drunk (391). The narrative moves out of Karras's perspective so that we are downstairs with the members of the MacNeil household when this fatal act takes place.

The Exorcist thus links the addicted/afflicted with the witnesses in a way similar to the Johnson Intervention; it supports the surveillance necessary for the War on Drugs. In the Johnson Intervention, success is not measured by freedom from addiction, but acceptance of its reality. So too can *The Exorcist's* unique success, the cultural work it does, be understood by virtue of the novel's (and then the film's) ability to convince readers/viewers of *its* reality. Anecdotes about the reading experience suggested that *The*

Exorcist affected readers in the way that a good horror novel often does: it haunted them, made them want to sleep with the lights on, etc. By virtue of its medium, the film's effects on the audience were as spectacular as the film itself. Tales of audiences screaming, fainting, vomiting, and even dying during the film reproduced in the moviegoer the symptoms of possession.⁴¹ Subsequent fears that they were or could become possessed provoked some viewers to seek psychiatric help, resulting in the creation of a new entity, "cinematic neurosis," perhaps the only psychological disorder the origin of which can be traced to a specific text.⁴²

Cinematic neurosis is, in a sense, a fitting testament to *The Exorcist's* success in linking text and disease, a linkage that is crucial to the emerging understanding of addiction as break with reality. *The Exorcist* also instructs readers/viewers how to respond to the disease and pernicious text: be observers, not interpreters. In reviews of the film, critics noted the special effects and extreme violence, but ultimately derided it for its simplicity. In the words of one reviewer, the film did not please him because it did not allow the viewer to consider even for a moment that Regan might not be possessed. For mass audiences, however, this level of complexity seemed beside the point. One *New York Times* article on *The Exorcist* phenomenon claims "They Wait Hours—to Be Shocked" (Klemesrud 97). Commentary on the audiences notes the amount and kind of screaming and whether people vomited, fainted, or fled the theater. The intense visceral reactions to the film precluded any discussion among moviegoers as to the nature of

⁴¹ For example see Vincent Van Gelder, "'Exorcist' Casts Spell on Houses: Record Take Expected," *New York Times*, 24 January 1974.

⁴² See Bozzuto, James C. "Cinematic Neurosis Following 'The Exorcist.'" Report of Four Cases" *The Journal of Nervous and Mental Disease*. 161:1 (1975): 43-58.

Regan's affliction, just as the affliction itself undermines the doctors', Chris's, Karras's, and Kinderman's attempts to interpret it.

The Shining: Self-Help for the Addicted/Possessed

William Friedkin cut Blatty's significant subplot involving Elvira and her heroin addiction from the film entirely, but the investment of a moral quality in the disease entity remained. The apparent link between addiction and possession, between the War on Drugs and the War in Vietnam, appears in horror films that followed it. In 1974's *Deathdream* (also known as *Dead of Night*), a young soldier killed in Vietnam returns as a zombie; unlike the prototypical brains-seeking zombie, however, Andy's symptomatic behavior is his aloofness, irritability, and pseudo-narcolepsy—all behaviors aware parents were told to be on guard against. In 1977, George Romero's *Martin* humanized the monstrous vampire by making him an affable teenager who, compulsion to drink blood notwithstanding, seems plagued more by the generation gap than the evil his religious uncle insists dwells within him. In the 1980s, both horror and cultural representations of Vietnam would undergo radical transformations. In addition, President Ronald Reagan would re-declare the War on Drugs and redefine intervention to focus on preemptive strike. As a way to conclude my analysis of this era, though, I want to turn briefly to Stephen King's 1977 novel *The Shining*. Like the novels discussed above, *The Shining* is a gothic horror story set during the Vietnam War (though the text never mentions it), and it spends nearly half of its pages, like *The Exorcist*, suggesting that the vulnerable child at the center is perhaps at the mercy of demonic forces. However, rather than deal with addiction on a metaphorical level, by equating it to possession, *The*

Shining literalizes it and makes Jack Torrance's alcoholism the impetus for the Torrances' move into the Overlook Hotel, the force that drives the conflict between Jack and Wendy, the source of Jack's internal struggles, and finally, a semi-supernatural conductor for the evil emanating from the hotel. In other words, the novel is far more concerned with Jack's alcoholism than with the source of evil in the Overlook Hotel. *The Shining* firmly establishes a spiritual or moral dimension of addiction and reinforces the surveillance imperatives of the Intervention.

The shifting perspectives of King's novel allow the reader access to the thoughts of the witnesses and the addict. Beginning with the embittered Jack Torrance, the novel shifts to his wife, Wendy, and his son, Danny. Wendy is preoccupied with worry for Jack, who is a recently sober alcoholic, and Danny, who experiences strange fugue states. Danny worries too, mostly about his father, but also about the "signs" shown to him by Tony, an invisible entity that Wendy and Jack think of as Danny's imaginary friend, but who readers might construe in the tradition of Captain Howdy, the imaginary friend of Regan MacNeil. Unlike Regan, who receives text messages from her "friend" in lonely interaction with the Ouija board, Danny, who is five years old, can't read. The novel frequently presses on Danny's illiteracy to create both tension and narrative distance. He laments, "I wish I could read. Sometimes Tony shows me signs and I can hardly read any of them" (King 93). Danny experiences the same problem when he tries to "read" his father's mind in order to reassure himself that Jack hasn't started drinking again. Danny sees the word "DIVORCE" and, without knowing its definition or implications, fears it.⁴³

⁴³ It might be noted that what Danny sees are shapes, not words. The reader of *The Shining* reads a word, but the implied reader must consider it both a word and a series of shapes that emit affective meaning outside of language.

He sees the word “SUICIDE” and knows, somehow, that this is something even worse (King 32). At the Overlook, Danny pushes himself to learn to read while Jack pushes himself to complete an adaptation (for the stage) of a novella he had written. Both Danny and Jack consider these acts of interpretation essential to survival, and more specifically, to keeping Jack’s alcoholism at bay.

In the novel, addiction emerges as a disease entity dependent not on an individual’s continued ingestion of a substance, but on the personality and behavior of the addict as it is interpreted by others. Through Jack’s eyes, the reader sees the return of his alcoholism, even though the Overlook Hotel is devoid of any alcoholic beverages. The reader also sees this through Wendy’s eyes, as she worries about “the most frightening thing, vaporous and unmentioned, perhaps unmentionable... all of Jack’s drinking symptoms had come back, one by one... all but the drink itself” (King 213). Jack is what Alcoholics Anonymous calls a “dry drunk,” one who isn’t drinking but who isn’t in recovery either, a concept that further underscores how addiction becomes divorced from addictive substances. Wendy concedes “she had never been able to read him very well. Danny could, but Danny wasn’t talking” (King 213). This statement must strike the reader as strange, given that Wendy’s description of Jack’s behavior mirrors his own description and that she has identified these as drinking behaviors while Jack has increasingly voiced (to the reader) his craving for alcohol. She seems to be reading him as well as Danny could. Without the physical proof of Jack’s drinking, however, Wendy is hesitant to call his behavior alcoholic, and by not recognizing the superfluity of the substance in the disease model of addiction, Wendy is effectively blind to Jack’s consequent susceptibility to possession.

Like Terry in *Rosemary's Baby*, Jack is an easy target for demonic forces because of his addiction. To get him to do their evil bidding, the spirits in the hotel eventually supply Jack with spectral martinis, but his ingestion of them and subsequent “drunken” rage reinforce that addiction does not need a substance to fuel it. While we’re led to believe that *Jack* believes he’s drunk, his drinking also invites the evil spirits to take over his body. He seems also to be both drunk and possessed, and Danny’s understanding of Jack’s situation by the end, while it might be read as a metaphor for the dual personality of the addict, suggests that Jack has been taken over. “You’re not my daddy... You’re *it*, not my daddy. You’re the hotel” (King 482). Unlike in Levin’s novel, *The Shining* goes so far as to hypothesize why Jack’s alcoholism makes him susceptible to this invasion. Jack’s father was a violent alcoholic, suggesting both a genetic and psychological basis for addiction, and Jack himself, despite ceasing drinking after breaking Danny’s arm, has not sought any therapeutic treatment. When he gets the job at the Overlook, he begins rationalizing his drinking by suggesting that his former career, a teacher at a prestigious New England prep school, “stif[led] whatever creative urge he had,” making him unconsciously self-destructive (King 117). He acknowledges that he will “always” be an alcoholic, and claims that “it had nothing to do with willpower, or the morality of drinking, or the weakness or strength of his own character” (King 120). Even as he seems to espouse the tenets of the disease concept, Jack clearly uses his addiction to exonerate himself for the loss of his job, a drunk driving accident, and Danny’s broken arm.

In trying to understand Danny’s affliction (i.e. to create a psychological explanation of the supernatural events his son experiences at the hotel), Jack draws on Freud, claiming that the “subconscious never speaks to us in a literal language. Only in

symbols.” Thus, if Danny claims to have seen blood running down the walls, Jack thinks, he is trying to articulate the concept of death, but is unable to move beyond image to concept. Jack believes “to kids, the image is always more accessible than the concept, anyway. William Carlos Williams knew that, he was a pediatrician. When we grow up, concepts gradually get easier and we leave the images to the poets” (King 295-6). The Hotel may be full of negative energy that suggests certain symbols to Danny, who is “highly suggestible” (King 297), but it is Danny’s inability to distinguish between reality and trance that makes him susceptible to this energy. The reader knows Danny’s problem is not an infantile reliance on symbols, because, as I have noted, Danny’s visions are not metaphorical, but literal, not composed solely of images, but also of language. After a pedantic explanation of his hypothesis to a skeptical Wendy, Jack abruptly realizes that the Hotel’s negative energies are at work on him too, and, more importantly, “[i]t wasn’t Danny who was the weak link, it was him. He was the vulnerable one” (King 311). Jack has not understood the signs sent to him.

Like Danny, Jack eventually sees and interacts with the ghosts in the Hotel. Before allowing him to experience the decadence of the Hotel’s parties in real-time, the ghosts try to appeal to him with a scrapbook, a textual representation of the Hotel’s history, placed strategically in the basement where Jack performs his caretaker duties out of sight of Wendy. The scrapbook immediately becomes Jack’s fascination, and his consuming of that text replaces his previously productive work in adapting his novella. The scrapbook details the history of the Hotel, including in particular its mafia connections and the mid-century rehabilitation of it undertaken by Horace Derwent, the

Howard Hughes figure in King's novel.⁴⁴ In an essay on the novel and on Stanley Kubrick's 1980 film adaptation, Frederic Jameson rightly points out that the horror at the center of the Overlook Hotel is one of economic crimes covered over (123-24): Kubrick places the Overlook on an "Indian burial ground," murderous imperialism serving as shorthand for the byzantine history of rapacious capitalism King engineers. It should also be noted, however, that the history of the Overlook is also a history of addiction in America, the Hotel itself serving as the locus for organized crime, decadent Prohibition-era consumption, evil addicts (like King's arch-villain Howard Hughes), victim addicts (dead child movie stars), and drunken-perhaps-suicidal writers. Consuming this history of addiction becomes addictive, as Jack enacts his drinking behavior ("he wiped his lips with his hand and wished he had a drink" (King 177)), craves consumption of the scrapbook, and begins to feel guilty, "as if he'd been drinking secretly" (King 184).

As Jack's personality changes (or reverts to his alcoholic one), suspense is created along two themes in the novel: the horror of seeing versus the horror of not seeing, and the necessity for external verification/intervention. Characters reiterate the notion that not seeing (or not understanding) is more terrifying than the alternative. Wendy is shocked by the ghastly appearance of the possessed Jack, but "it was a hundred times worse not to be able to see him" (King 459). Earlier in the novel, both Jack and Danny are menaced by giant topiaries that only move when they are not being watched. Kubrick replaced the topiaries with the cinematically less silly hedge maze, but in the novel the topiaries are coherently terrifying: one can arrest their progress with one's gaze, but "the thing was,

⁴⁴ Howard Hughes is a go-to villain for King, with variations on the libertine, insane movie and technology tycoon appearing in a few other novels. In *Bag of Bones* (1998), the narrator simply describes a villain as "like Howard Hughes."

you couldn't watch all of them. Not all at once" (King 232). One can never watch *enough* to arrest the progress of the narrative's horror. When Jack does see things that puncture completely his disbelief in the supernatural, the lack of external verification allows him to dismiss it. The Torrances are reminded several times they'll be cut off from civilization when winter sets in, except for their radio and their snowmobile. Systematically, Jack destroys both. Danny, on the other hand, telepathically calls for Mr. Hallorann, the Hotel's chef who shares Danny's psychic abilities.

Hallorann's attempt to intervene is treated at length in the novel, with the story switching between his slow progress from Florida to Colorado to Jack's increasingly violent rampage inside the Overlook. Thwarted by turbulence, snowstorms, and the killer topiaries, Hallorann almost does not reach the Overlook to help. Once he arrives, however, he's not able to do anything to stop Jack. Jack attacks him, and he regains consciousness in time to find an injured Wendy, but not to prevent the final confrontation between Jack and Danny. Hallorann tells Wendy, "We got to get up there... We have to help him." Wendy, having accepted that Jack's alcoholism and the Hotel's evil spirits are working together, responds, "It's too late... Now he can only help himself" (King 483). She is likely referring to Danny, but the statement applies equally to Jack. Self-help is the thing that could have saved Jack, but, being too far gone now, the only one who can be saved is Danny. Danny has been enacting the principles of self-help all along. His doctors, noting that Danny's middle name was Anthony, had earlier suggested that Tony was a name Danny gave to his conscience. As in *The Exorcist*, the doctors are partially right. Tony is a future Danny, appearing to him in visions in an attempt to prevent the calamity.

Jack's downfall at the end is thus both voluntary and inevitable. The narrative denies him the option to save himself, so he chooses suicide to avoid murder-suicide. Jack regains control of himself long enough to prevent Danny's murder and allow the family to escape the Hotel. The ghosts attempt to regain control of Jack's body long enough to dump the boiler (which has been building pressure steadily throughout the novel) and try to prevent the furnace from bursting. The ghosts are also too late, and the Hotel explodes with Jack inside it, their coterminous fates further underscoring the link between Jack's addiction and the Hotel's possession by evil spirits.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I've argued that the reemergence of the horror genre, previously interpreted as exorcising feelings of guilt about Vietnam, can also be interpreted in the context of Nixon's War on Drugs, the campaign which directed public attention away from Vietnam while shaping attitudes about addiction treatment. Noting the ubiquity of comparisons of addiction to demonic possession, I've analyzed three popular texts from the era in depth. I'd like to highlight now a few themes that emerge in horror texts of the era vis-à-vis addiction and suggest how changes in cultural understandings of addiction might be inferred.

First, by making addiction adjacent to or interchangeable with demonic possession, all of these texts reinstitute a moral dimension in the disease concept. Whether addiction makes a character more susceptible to evil spirits or a possessed person is mistakenly believed to be on drugs, the implication is that there is something evil inherent in addiction. While the possessed may be, as in the case of Regan MacNeil,

entirely innocent of wrongdoing, and while the text may work to make clear the distinction between willed and unwilled actions, the possessed/addicted body is monstrous, and the possessed/addicted person is in danger of becoming a nonperson.⁴⁵ Vile, “putrid,” craving “disgusting” things, unrecognizable: these descriptors so remove the possessed/addicted character from the mainstream that only a complete purgation of the body and soul will restore him/her. The extremity of this view discourages compromises, such as harm reduction measures like methadone maintenance, in fighting addiction.

Horror during this era also viewed medical approaches to the problem with skepticism. Doctors and psychiatrists throughout the horror novels I’ve mentioned here are shown to be limited, inept, obstinate, and even cruelly unreceptive to the complaints of the witnesses. Undermining rational, secular authority is of course a common theme in the gothic. However, during the period under discussion, as I have shown, medical science is unintentionally or ironically correct in its diagnoses. With the exception of *Rosemary’s Baby*, doctors in horror texts are redeemed by their collusion with spiritual and legal authority. In *The Exorcist*, the medical course of treatment (the shock exorcism) is the same one the priests embark upon. The law, symbolized by Detective Kinderman, looks the other way long enough to allow the treatment to work, and at the end, priest and policeman (Father Dyer and Detective Kinderman) go off to the movies together. The

⁴⁵ In David Morrell’s *Totem* (1979), individuals stricken with the virus that causes them to become virtual zombie-werewolf hybrids are referred to as “it” in the narration. Even as the other characters continue to refer to the afflicted as he and she, the narrator maintains an insistence on “it” and does not distinguish between “its” except through context clues.

questioning of medical authority in these texts, therefore, is not meant to undermine that authority, but to consolidate it in a medical-legal-spiritual amalgam.

In these stories, as authority is consolidated, the supernatural also serves as a means to discredit sociological or environmental causes of evil. Levin's novel considers the systemic basis of evil by alluding to communications breakdowns, racial inequality, and civic unrest, but Rosemary's decision to attempt to "nurture" the evil out of her son suggests a commensurate unwillingness to acknowledge the supremacy of these socially and environmentally determined factors. *The Exorcist* and *The Shining* obscure these bases through strictly supernatural and psychological explanations. In Blatty's novel, epigraphs referring to the Holocaust, the atomic bomb, organized crime, and Vietnam suggest that a supernatural evil is at the root of all of these atrocities, and that they are best understood to be afflictions resulting from the loss of self-control, which Regan experiences as demonic possession. In eschewing Johnson's Great Society initiatives (including the War on Poverty), Nixon promoted an understanding of social ills as the results of individual agents, not systemic racism or economic inequality.

Intervention is another piece of this puzzle. With evil emanating from the supernatural, and authority consolidated into a medical-legal-spiritual entity, the gulf between the two is bridged by the witnesses. In each text, a woman—a wife and/or a mother—questions the skeptical, rational explanation of the authorities. In the case of the earlier novels, the witness insists through her continued surveillance of children/husbands on the necessity of an extraordinary intervention. Vernon Johnson's approach to addiction was unique because it challenged a dominant narrative—that addicts must proceed through the stages of addiction and reach a rock bottom before they can recover.

The Intervention replaced that rock bottom with the agency of the witnesses, emanating from their capacity to represent crises before they happen. While the interventions of these novels don't always succeed, we can discern the same movement, as female characters attempt to wrest back control of their own lives by insisting that the dominant reality of the diegesis is false. Rosemary Woodhouse, Chris MacNeil, and Wendy Torrance all deny rational explanations of supernatural behavior, and the reality they occupy is different from, or at least more complex than, what their detractors suggest.

The rhetorical power of the Intervention may give us a way to understand the prolific references to media and members of the media in the era's horror genre. Actors, authors, directors, reporters, musicians, and playwrights fill the pages of these novels. These characters serve multiple functional and symbolic purposes. Actors like Guy Woodhouse and Chris MacNeil and directors like Burke Dennings might gesture to the decadence of Hollywood. Writers, such as Jack Torrance and *The Mephisto Waltz's* Myles Clarkson, might be implicated in the long-standing myth (described in Chapter 1) of the "Great Drunk American Writer." In addition, however, these avatars of their mediums invite the reader to consider which versions of reality are most convincing. These questions would persist as the War on Drugs mutated under President Ronald Reagan. While Reagan's War on Drugs would shift emphasis from treatment to interdiction, from intervention to preemptive strike, the cultural products of his War on Drugs continued to consider the efficacy of the Intervention by questioning the reliability of media.

Chapter Four: Nancy Reagan's Star Wars: A Very Special Episode in the War on Drugs

Addiction recovery narratives are conversion narratives. Early temperance tales relied on the stories of Saints Augustine and Paul to structure recovery, at least in part because these stories were familiar to the audience. However, as demonstrated in Chapter 2, narratives of possession and exorcism gained cogency as metaphors for addiction and recovery during Nixon's War on Drugs. For a variety of reasons, the primacy of this narrative type waned during the 1980s and while a narrative of conversion through rebirth became more prominent. Two conversion narratives in particular encapsulate the changes from Nixon's rehabilitative War on Drugs to Reagan's punitive War on Drugs: the story of Nixon advisor Charles "Chuck" Colson and the adaptation of David Morrell's 1972 novel *First Blood* into the 1982 film of the same name. Though their stories begin during the Nixon era, both Chuck Colson and John Rambo are "born again" closer to the Reagan era, and the narratives structuring their rebirths will be useful in delineating the cultural narratives about addiction and recovery at work during Reagan's War on Drugs.

Colson's rebirth seemed, initially, to be of a piece with conventional conversion narratives. Colson was known for his ruthlessness. He compiled Nixon's infamous "Enemies List" and participated in the attempts to discredit Daniel Ellsberg, activities which would culminate in the Watergate scandal and lead to Colson's indictment for obstruction of justice. In 1973, while Colson was being investigated, he converted to evangelical Christianity. He began attending prayer meetings with Senator Harold

Hughes, an Iowa Democrat and recovering alcoholic who, like Joe Namath and Steve McQueen, occupied a place on Nixon's master list of political enemies.⁴⁶ Colson pled guilty to the charges against him but, after having served only seven months of his 1-3 year sentence, he left prison with a newfound interest in prison reform and ministry. He created the Prison Fellowship in 1976 with the stated purpose of reforming both the prisoners and the prison system itself. The arc of his conversion narrative seemed especially similar to Hughes's, as both became proponents of progressive reform in the areas (prison and alcoholism, respectively) where they had suffered most.

By 1978, however, Colson's narrative was shifting from conversion narrative to martyr narrative: from one in which an unenlightened man sees the truth and changes his ways to one in which a Godly man suffers for bearing witness to his faith. In the film *Born Again*, Colson (played by frequent Disney movie actor Dean Jones) is hardly an enthusiastic "hatchet man." Only half an hour passes before Colson breaks down and begs for God's help, and this half hour is in large part taken up with flash forwards to his time in prison. He's critical of Nixon's "paranoia" and the mentality of the administration, but there is very little criminal or even unethical activity on screen, virtually none from Colson. The only sense we have of Colson's real life reputation comes from the incredulous remarks of the journalists in the film, who question his conversion, their taunts making his martyrdom all the more apparent. The judge assigned to his case wants to make an example of him. The prison guards at his penitentiary torment him and give him pants too large for him to wear. His fellow prisoners also

⁴⁶ Skeptics denounced Colson's conversion as insincere. However, Hughes's commitment to Colson was so great that he not only offered to serve part of Colson's prison sentence, he later played himself in the film adaptation of Colson's memoir *Born Again*.

present a trial: one wants to kill Colson because he represents the corruption of the federal government, and others want to initiate him into prison life by engaging in bullying more typical of high school students. Despite these troubles, Colson maintains his evangelical Christianity, bringing a Bible study to the prison, even though one prisoner suggests that it's dangerous to pray openly there. The Bible study group prays for, and seems to effect, the parole of one member, and Colson follows him shortly thereafter, when he's released because of "family issues." Colson's faith is tested by his time in prison, and his release reads like a reward for his martyrdom. In this film, the moment of conversion (the rock bottom) is subordinated so that the focus is on his suffering for his faith, not suffering before his conversion.

The story of John Rambo, told in the 1982 film *First Blood*, is also similar to a martyr narrative. A long-suffering Vietnam War veteran, Rambo is persecuted by local sheriff Will Teasle for vagrancy. The interrogation tactics of the small town police force bring on a Vietnam flashback that causes Rambo to become violent and break free. The police pursue him with a helicopter and shoot at him; David-like, Rambo brings the helicopter down with a single stone. Though Rambo tries to explain himself to the police at this point, they'll have none of it, so he escapes to the woods. Fighting escalates between them, and the police have to call in assistance, including Rambo's former commanding officer, Colonel Sam Trautman. Trautman tries to convince the police to back off, but to no avail. The chaos culminates in a final standoff between Rambo and Teasle. Trautman, warning Rambo that he must surrender or die, prevents Rambo from killing Teasle. Rambo breaks down upon talking to Trautman, explaining how he has

been traumatized by both the war and the way he has been treated since returning. Teasle is taken away in an ambulance as Rambo turns himself in.

Rambo goes to prison (as we learn from the sequel), but even before he is sentenced, he has been as rehabilitated as he needs to be through his cathartic outpouring of emotion to Trautman. The Rambo of the film franchise is not here to be made less violent or less damaged; his violence becomes a weapon, a force the United States military can export to Vietnam, to Afghanistan, and to Burma. This was not the ending novelist David Morrell gave his John Rambo, a traumatized and irredeemable Vietnam veteran who brings the consequences of U.S. imperialism home and spreads fire and destruction, mortally wounding Teasle, until Trautman kills him. While the novel may have been about Vietnam, as Susan Faludi argues, the film version “and its sequels chronicled a domestic war. That was what put Rambo so squarely in the center of Reagan-era reconstructions of the war” (Faludi 368). Rambo was so thoroughly a product of the Reagan era that the President couldn’t resist invoking Rambo in 1985, when he reflected that after seeing *Rambo: First Blood Part II*, he now knew what to do when faced with a hostage crisis (“Reagan Gets Idea”).

Taken together, Colson and Rambo give us a sense of the viable narratives for recovery in the Reagan era. The exorcisms of the 1970s gave way to conversion narratives that were partly stories of rebirth and renewal and partly stories of suffering and martyrdom. The Vietnam vet was seen not so much needing rehabilitation, as victimized by Americans’ lack of patriotism. These new narratives attained coherence during the post-Nixon years in part because they were post Nixon. Musto and Korsmeyer note that Nixon’s resignation had a profound impact on national drug policy, as his

successors wanted to distance themselves from Nixon's initiatives (140). Reagan's more punitive and aggressive War on Drugs, though engaged for political purposes that were not unlike Nixon's, focused more on interdiction than rehabilitation. Reagan appealed not to a populace worried about its suffering sons and husbands, but to a martyred America that had suffered from the scourge of addiction.

First Strikes: The Reagans' War(s)

The defining features of the Reagan Era War on Drugs can be glimpsed in a few key episodes from its history. Reagan had run as a "law and order" candidate and promised to increase the federal government's role in fighting street crime, despite the fact that federal intervention in criminal justice was limited, especially outside of white-collar crime (Alexander 49). A month before the midterm elections of 1982, President Reagan took to the radio to announce changes to federal drug policy. Significantly, he asked Nancy Reagan to speak first about her travels in the Southern United States, where she witnessed the consequences of the "drug epidemic" on the American family. She lamented the families where "lying replaces trust, hate replaces love." Parents, ignorant of the reality of drug abuse, watched as "children with excellent grades, athletic promise, outgoing personalities... [become] shells of their former selves" (Reagan "Radio Address"). Immediately following this portrait of a nation's most helpless and innocent people, its children beleaguered by drug abuse, Reagan proposed an aggressive interdiction plan that, like that of his predecessors, Gerald Ford and Jimmy Carter, basically ignores the war on drugs that Nixon attempted to wage. Reagan offered his "bold, confident plan" to coordinate the efforts of "nine departments and thirty-three

agencies of government that have some responsibility in the drug area” to emphasize enforcement of drug laws (Reagan “Radio Address”). He suggested that the plan will “also focus on international cooperation, education, and prevention—which Nancy’s very interested in—detoxification and treatment and research” (Reagan “Radio Address”). In reality, while the Reagan War on Drugs would devote very few resources to the last three items, Nancy Reagan’s interest in prevention and education would result in one of the most successful advertising campaigns of the 20th century.

From its inception, Nancy Reagan’s “Just Say No” initiative was envisioned as a campaign that would infiltrate as many areas of popular culture as possible. During the Nixon Era, television executives and producers had been asked by Nixon to incorporate anti-drug themes into their popular dramas and sitcoms (Baum 32). Mrs. Reagan improved on this formula by appearing, as herself, on shows such as *Good Morning America* and *Diff’rent Strokes*, lending her voice to a *Flintstones Kids* Just Say No special, and even appearing in a 1986 rock music video, “Stop the Madness,” that features a variety of characters from the mid-1980s, from David Hasselhoff to LaToya Jackson to the Goodyear Blimp. Mrs. Reagan’s campaign was so thoroughly invested in spreading the message of “Just Say No” through popular culture that, in a Congressional Hearing, Chairman of the Senate Committee on Governmental Affairs William V. Roth, Jr. called Nancy Reagan’s anti-drug crusade, “a different kind of ‘Star War,’ a war waged by the stars” (2).

In truth, the Reagan Administration’s apparent philosophy regarding addiction bore resemblance to the Strategic Defense Initiative program, labeled Star Wars, in additional ways. Rejecting the diplomatic atmosphere of détente as a dangerous illusion

and its philosophical underpinning, mutually assured destruction, as insane, Reagan sought, even as a candidate for the Presidency, a civil defense system that would protect the United States from a first strike by the Soviet Union. This system would have to intercept Soviet intercontinental ballistic missiles in flight—the earlier in this flight the better. Reagan advisors and those officials Frances FitzGerald calls “space defense enthusiasts” concocted scenarios in which space and ground level lasers intercepted Russian ICBM in their “boost phase,” the initial phase of the missile’s flight. Intercepting a missile at any point in its flight is difficult; the boost phase offers a very brief period of time in which to act, but if the rocket can be intercepted here, the area originally targeted would be safe even from missile debris. As FitzGerald makes undeniably clear, the technology for such defenses did not exist in the 1980s, and despite the military build-up Reagan oversaw, the space-based boost-phase laser intercept Reagan envisioned still does not exist. Though too technologically complex for the scientists of the 1980s, Star Wars appealed to Reagan (and the American public) on a rhetorical level because of its breathtaking simplicity and its supposed moral superiority, that it is “better to save lives than to avenge them” (Reagan “Address to the Nation”). In reality, Star Wars proponents would settle for a defense that protected American missiles rather than American people. Freed from the confusion of international diplomacy, the U.S. could protect itself from the consequences of nuclear war while it stoked the fire of Cold War enmity. Thus, though population defense was impossible, military build-up proceeded. Similarly, though the War on Drugs did little to help the people suffering from addiction, an unprecedented expansion of the prison industrial system began.

Based on the cultural products of the campaign, it would appear the targets of Just Say No were middle and upper-middle class children, or rather, humans still in the “boost phase” of their lives. Targeting children was an effective appeal to pathos for the Reagans; it also served the purpose of reinforcing the often implicit assumption that adult users and addicts were beyond hope, and that interventions must occur earlier in the addict’s career. The campaign also asserted that peer pressure was one of the primary reasons children experimented with drugs, and Just Say No sought to use peer pressure (through the creation of Just Say No clubs and the use of child actors like Soleil Moon Frye as spokespeople) to encourage them to abstain.

Just Say No has been criticized by some for discouraging conversation about drugs and for oversimplifying the complex web of causes that lead to addiction. Some early critics assumed that the campaign was in large part devised to bolster the First Lady’s notoriously low approval ratings (Beasley 159). Even supporters had misgivings about Mrs. Reagan’s approach. In the same hearing mentioned above, Susan Kendall Newman, the special projects director of the Scott Newman Foundation, reminded those present that “there are, in reality, many psychosocial factors which contribute to the drug problem in this country” including “a breakdown in communications within all our social institutions and relationships” as well as “a growing and continued threat of nuclear annihilation which our children are very much aware of” (39).⁴⁷ Newman later more explicitly questioned Just Say No in an *LA Times* piece where she stated “You can’t just

⁴⁷ The Scott Newman Foundation was organized by Paul Newman and his family after the drug-related death of the actor’s son, Scott, to discourage drug abuse by the young through education and prevention.

tell kids who are curious about trying things... to just stop doing that. That natural curiosity has existed since Day 1. You can't say no without giving options" (Baker).

Nonetheless, discussion at the hearing centered not on the causes of the drug crisis, but rather on how best to use the media in responding to it. Importantly, several attendees of the hearing raised issues of representation and authenticity. Secretary of Health and Human Services Margaret Heckler cautioned that "when a drug prevention program is directed to the issue of drug abuse and the abuse is in any sense inaccurately portrayed, then the results of the program can be counterproductive" (5). However, if young viewers identified with the characters they saw depicted, in "Stop the Madness" for instance, a new "standard of conduct" could be created from the fictional model (9). Senator Roth pronounced himself not "of the right age to comment on" the music video but said it seemed "very well done. Persuasive to me if not to others" (9). Television actor Gerald McRaney (who once played a drug-addicted Vietnam veteran in an episode of *Hawaii Five-O*) weighed in as well, wondering if "the simple depiction of a thing can legitimize that thing" (29). If the goal of the Just Say No media campaign was to provide realistic representations of children saying no to drugs and alcohol, it had also to show drug and alcohol use among children. Newman's suggestion was to encourage all episodic television shows to "do one show a year on chemical dependency, awareness of the problem and possible solutions could be aired [sic]. The plotline could stress nonchemical coping skills and improve positive role models" (42). She further advised that the Scott Newman Foundation could make scriptwriters and advisors available for this endeavor.

As Stephan Kandall notes, the “federal prevention campaign rapidly decelerated to First Lady Nancy Reagan’s slogan, ‘Just Say No’” (236). The attractive simplicity of the campaign belied the fact that interdiction, President Reagan’s preferred method of waging the War on Drugs, was shown to be failing by 1986 (Kandall 236). For Mrs. Reagan’s campaign, questions of genre, narrative structure, realism, and authenticity weighed heavily, but success was not ultimately measured by a decrease in drug usage. According to Curtis Marez, corporations sought tie-ins with Just Say No because the “anti-drug message” was shown to have near universal appeal (Marez 27). It is a characteristic of the Reagan Era that commercial success and marketability bolsters Just Say No’s authority rather than undercuts it. This is not to say Nancy Reagan sought to create a lucrative advertising campaign rather than a persuasive educational one, but rather that for the Reagans there was no difference.

Despite Mrs. Reagan’s desire (whether it be earnest or political) to deal seriously with the topic, this era of television is often remembered for its saccharine family sitcoms with swift resolutions and melodramatic “very special” episodes, the latter a phenomenon that Newman seems to have picked up on years before the term would gain widespread recognition. Two of Just Say No’s television episodes allow us to sketch the generic and structural implications of mainstream narratives of addiction emerging from Reagan’s War on Drugs that inform much literature of the Reagan era.

The Birth of the Very Special Episode

Although no scholarly work on the Very Special Episode (VSE) currently exists, savvy television viewers and amateur critics alike recognize it as a 1980s phenomenon,

an episode of a situation comedy in which characters confront a dramatic problem and resolve it by the episode's end. The VSE is not to be confused with the earlier and contemporaneous *After School Special* and other modes of "edutainment" that proliferated as a number of critics and parents' advocacy groups lamented the lack of "quality" programming. Although the VSE may be a part of this movement, certain distinctions are worth pointing out. First, while *After School Specials* and their ilk were always dramatic, the VSE occurs in situation comedies; its "specialness" is derived from the fact that serious, dramatic, or overtly didactic fare occurs irregularly in the program. Second, the term "very special episode" was probably first used as a marketing device to denote a departure from the sitcoms of the 1970s that regularly dealt with controversial topics and social problems, often over the course of two or more episodes.

The audience for a VSE was also quite different than for the occasionally serious sitcoms of the 1970s. For instance, in 1972, the issue of abortion was taken up by the sitcom *Maude*. Over the course of two episodes, viewers saw the title character discover she was pregnant (at 47) and decide with her family to terminate the pregnancy. Later, multiple episodes across different seasons deal with her husband Walter's alcoholism. The content and the ages of the characters suggest adult audiences were the show's targets. However, Susan Horowitz notes that in the Reagan era, the sitcom lost popularity for adult audiences as hour-long dramas and nighttime soap operas attained primacy (106-109). Serious topics handled with humor for an adult audience, standard fare for 1970s audiences who watched *All in the Family* or *Good Times*, were largely absent from shows like *Family Ties*, *Who's the Boss?*, and *Full House*. When serious topics were broached in VSE, the episodes were promoted as "important for your family," and

parents were admonished to “watch with your children.” The generic difficulties of creating serious conflict appropriate for children in a half hour comedic format led to the tropes VSE are known for: afflicted “friends” and distant family members of the main characters who never appear again, exceedingly brief brushes with addiction and other disorders, overt moralizing, and public service disclaimers at the beginning, end, or both.

Nancy Reagan appeared in a 1983 episode of *Diff'rent Strokes*, perhaps the first advertised in *TV Guide* as “very special” and the genesis of the term itself. Titled “The Reporter,” the episode begins with Arnold (Gary Coleman) endeavoring to win his school’s newspaper story contest. He stays awake at night struggling to find an appropriately serious topic on which to write, and as a result he dozes off in class. A friend offers him drugs to help him stay awake. Arnold knows not to take the drugs, but he pretends to be interested so that he can meet the “pusher” in hopes of writing a story for the contest. Arnold meets the pusher (another student who seems to be about Arnold’s age) and grills him, declining at the end of the interview to buy any drugs. He then writes a story and turns it in, but, because his principal can’t believe there’s a “drug problem” at his school, Arnold is accused of making up lies. Arnold then takes his story to the city newspaper where it makes front-page headlines the next morning. This of course scandalizes the skeptical principal, but, luckily for Arnold, Nancy Reagan arrives at his door just after the newspaper does. The family is star-struck by Mrs. Reagan, who believes Arnold’s seemingly fantastic story about 3rd grade drug dealers because she’s seen it elsewhere. She accompanies Arnold to school and talks to the class about drugs. She coaxes them into admitting they’ve been offered drugs. Then, she answers questions, dispelling “myths” about some drugs (i.e. marijuana) being “okay” by telling a vaguely

harrowing story about a child named Charlie, whose experimentation with marijuana led to a full-blown addiction causing him to “brutally beat” his sister who wouldn’t steal to help him buy more drugs. After hearing this story, Arnold’s friend who offered him the drugs comes forward to say that he has experimented a few times with drugs, prompting several other students to admit the same. Nancy Reagan applauds their courage, and then advises these students to “talk to your parents, your teacher, whoever. But don’t end up like Charlie” (“The Reporter”). The principal is now prepared to contact parents “and the police” about the drug problem, and the students clamor to hug and shake hands with Mrs. Reagan as the credits roll. Though no one utters the phrase “Just Say No,” it is clear that the episode espouses the same ideology as the campaign: addiction is the inevitable result of drug use, and peer pressure is the reason young people begin experimenting.

The episode also subtly promotes an apolitical understanding of the drug problem (and perhaps social problems in general) by negating economic and social factors, the complex web Susan Kendall Newman would later allude to. The first indication that these factors will have no place in the discussion comes when Arnold tries to generate ideas for his article. Sitting at his typewriter amidst wads of rejected drafts, Arnold shares a few of his ideas with Mr. Drummond (his white adoptive father, played by Conrad Bain), who agrees that they’re terrible. The headlines Drummond reads are “Chalk: The Color Controversy Continues” and “Bed-wetting: A New Look at the Trickle-Down Theory” (“The Reporter”). The political puns would be obvious to the adult viewer, invoking both racial tension and President Reagan’s economic policy. Had Arnold’s second idea been pursued, we could read it as almost radical; Arnold, a grade-schooler, is precocious enough to compare Reaganomics to urination. However, Drummond’s assertion that the

ideas are terrible and his advice to “write about an important story that’s *true*” show that Arnold’s puns are without basis in political reality and refer only to the trivial troubles of childhood. His final story is “My School is Lousy with Drugs,” a title which is both more straightforward and syntactically more like what we would expect a child to come up with, slang and hyperbole replacing alliteration and allusion. Later, Arnold’s brown-nosing nemesis attempts to impress Nancy Reagan by obliquely linking being against drugs and being a Republican, only to be mildly rebuked by Mrs. Reagan, who states, “I have a hunch the Democrats are against drugs, too” (“The Reporter”). This incident does more than showcase Mrs. Reagan’s disarming bipartisanship; it also recasts the drug problem as one without a political dimension, making Republican intervention seem all the more benign.

Similarly, the causes of drug use and addiction are presented as inherently simple, so much so that a child can understand and write a newspaper article (for the general readership, not just his school) about them. Yet, it’s difficult to understand what Arnold actually wrote about in the article because there are many unanswered questions surrounding the drug-selling incident. Arnold’s pre-pubescent pusher gets his drugs from his older brother (a high school student), and sells them to make extra money, though whether the pusher, a white male child, apparently middle-class, needs this money or is merely a young acquisitive Reaganite is never explored. When Arnold is first offered the drugs, his friend Robbie pulls a crisp zipper bag from his pocket with a single pill, a convenient and quite unrealistic representation of the product. Why Robbie has this single pill on this day is also never pursued. Though he admits he has used drugs before, his behavior and demeanor are similar to the rest of the students: placid and respectful.

The horrors of drug addiction Nancy Reagan alludes to in the end are invisible at the school, despite the admission of a handful of Arnold's classmates that they have experimented with drugs. This unrealistic and contradictory depiction of the drug problem is in line with both President Reagan's War on Drugs and the format of the VSE. To explore any causes or consequences of drug use in the sitcom outside of a single episode would dramatically change the tenor, and perhaps the genre, of the whole series. Similarly, to depict any of the major characters dealing with a drug problem (for more than an episode) may engender sympathy for them, thus calling into question the stringent new policies of the Reagan administration, policies that would disproportionately affect black men and teenagers like Arnold and his older brother Willis (Todd Bridges).⁴⁸

Diff'rent Strokes, a long-running sitcom known both for its penchant for the VSE and its willingness to engage with issues of race and racism, renders Reagan's War on Drugs colorblind and apolitical, when it was neither.⁴⁹ In *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*, Michelle Alexander cogently argues that drug regulation in the United States has historically been a method of continuing the

⁴⁸ Though he played a much younger character, Gary Coleman was fifteen at the time of this episode. Todd Bridges was seventeen. Gerald Jones writes of the dynamic between the two on the show, "Coleman, an actor locked in chubby, prepubescent cuteness by health problems [...] stole the show. His big brother, more street, more 'black,' and threateningly normal-size, was shoved into the background" (224).

⁴⁹ See "Green Hair" (Season 4, Episode 20), about acid rain and the environment; "A Growing Problem" (Season 5, Episode 13), about underage drinking; "The Bicycle Man, Parts 1 and 2" (Season 5, Episodes 16-17), about child molestation; "Where There's Smoke" (Season 6, Episode 12), about smoking; "The Hitchhikers, Parts 1 and 2" (Season 6, Episodes 14-15), about sexual assault; "Cheers to Arnold" (Season 7, Episode 19), also about underage drinking; "A Special Friend" (Season 7, Episode 24), about epilepsy; and the series finale, "The Front Page" (Season 8, Episode 19), about steroid usage.

racial segregation instituted by slavery and Jim Crow. Under Reagan, “the War on Drugs went from being a political slogan to an actual war” as Reagan’s restructuring of the federal government’s role in state and local law enforcement provided police departments with “cash and military equipment” that necessitated more arrests and a more militaristic relationship between police and citizens (Alexander 74). Just Say No, through the medium of the VSE, obscures this basis.

When crack cocaine arrived on the scene, the War on Drugs was ramped up, and Just Say No and the VSE wandered even further from faithful depictions of the drug problem. The official “Just Say No” episode (1985, Season 2, Episode 8) of *Punky Brewster* illustrates how as the Reagan War on Drugs became increasingly militaristic, the VSE provided opportunities to disseminate the message of Just Say No while conveniently stripping away context for the drug problem. In this episode, Punky (like Arnold and Willis, a foundling under the care of a wealthy white widower) and her young friend Cherie encounter drugs in their own backyard, where they are approached by a clique of cool girls, six graders who wear similar outfits and finish each other’s sentences—an obvious manifestation of their capacity for peer pressure. Because they have an impressive tree house, Punky and Cherie, though quite a bit younger, are invited to join the “Chiclets” in their exclusive club. After they’ve been initiated into the Chiclets, the ringleader, Emily, offers them a box full of different drugs and tries to pressure them into experimenting. Punky, by saying “next time,” is able to refuse without completely alienating the club. In the meantime, she asks the advice of her teacher, who steers her in the direction of another club, the “Just Say No” club. When Punky and Cherie meet the Chiclets again, they are able to refuse the drugs (which are now reduced

to a single marijuana cigarette) and promote the “Just Say No” club instead. Emily is irritated, but one of the other Chiclets breaks away and joins Punky and Cherie. The final minutes of the episode feature Soleil Moon Frye out of character, leading a Just Say No parade and chanting “Just Say No” to a huge crowd of kids in green “Just Say No” t-shirts as voiceover describes the event.

In this episode, drugs again come from an older brother, but rather than sell them, the ringleader prefers to foist them on her somewhat reluctant friends, arguing that “everyone does it” and “it makes you feel happy and relaxed” (“Just Say No”). She also maintains that she does drugs “all the time” and describes her stash as “*just* some grass, a few uppers, and a little nose candy” (emphasis mine). Drugs in this episode are pervasive and incoherent; not even a desire to stay awake or make money drives the use or sale of this cocktail of illicit substances. The Chiclets are white and clearly middle or upper-middle class, and the desire to fit in is the only pressing issue they seem to face. The episode shows the success of the Just Say No campaign and President Reagan’s War on Drugs to reframe the national conversation about drug use and addiction. Peer pressure to experiment (represented by the aggressive pusher) has completely replaced the complex psychosocial factors cited by Susan Kendall Newman as the impetus for addiction. The continued popularity of the VSE format for both anti-drug and other social problems rearticulates the Reagan era emphasis on the individual. As Darryl Hamamoto explains it, “the salience of ‘socially relevant’ themes in the television situation comedies as seen in the 1970s gave way to the micropolitics of intimacy” (126). By divorcing the drug problem from social and environmental factors to ascribing it to individual aggression, the Reagans also succeeded in privatizing rehabilitation by making the only hope of

recovery (instead of incarceration) rest upon the earliest intervention of family and friends.

From this discussion of Just Say No and VSE, I wish to highlight a few themes of the War on Drugs. Subsequently, I'll discuss how literary texts responded to the proliferation of Mrs. Reagan's message across popular media. First, Just Say No stripped away context for addiction, making it largely a matter of peer pressure and insisting that "Just Say[ing] No" was an adequate response. Second, it made children the target of the campaign, underscoring the Reagan Administration's lack of interest in treatment and rehabilitation and, in terms of the structure of the addiction narrative, moving the crisis much closer to the beginning of the addict's career. Third, it privileged television as the medium to disseminate this message, suggesting that what children saw on TV was more influential than reality itself. Finally, it presented the War on Drugs as colorblind and apolitical. While Nancy Reagan appeared on television hugging African American children, the Reagan administration launched a campaign against crack. Alexander notes that "though explicitly racial political appeals remained rare, the calls for 'war' at a time when the media was saturated with images of black drug crime left little doubt about who the enemy was" (Alexander 105).

In the texts I discuss below, mainstream American literature also constructed a redeemable addict: an always white, usually male adolescent or young adult imperiled by substance abuse and destructive peers, left vulnerable by his absent or negligent parents, but whose salvation will come through a moment of rebirth rather than an encounter with law enforcement or a stint in rehab. The literary Brat Pack of the 1980s, writers who achieved early success with stories about these redeemable characters, participate in the

narratives about addiction circulating during the time and engage with Reagan's War on Drugs in ways that question the simplicity of the VSE and Just Say No and, at times, its preemptive, colorblind imperative.

The Literary Brat Pack

The so-called "literary Brat Pack," Brett Easton Ellis, Tama Janowitz, and Jay McInerney, identified in a 1987 *Village Voice* article, each produced a major bestseller before the age of 30, in Ellis's case, at the age of 21.⁵⁰ Critics quickly grouped these writers (along with a few others) by virtue of their shared themes and styles. James Annesley's study of the "blank fictions" of the Brat Pack is organized around common themes: "Violence," "Sex," "Shopping," "Labels," and "Decadence." Bruce Bawer notes several motifs running throughout Brat Pack fiction including shallow characterization (318), dead or dying mothers (319), and a fascination with TV (320). Leigh Claire La Berge succinctly summarizes much of the criticism of its style by noting "brat-pack fiction underwhelms rather than overwhelms, reading more like advertising copy than prose" (273). Brat Pack fiction was indeed perceived to be more "commercialized" than

⁵⁰ In 1985, a *New York* magazine article announced the birth of "Hollywood's Brat Pack," a group of actors under the age of 25 who were commanding huge salaries and dominating the box office. David Blum describes the group, consisting of Emilio Estevez, Tom Cruise, Rob Lowe, Judd Nelson, Timothy Hutton, Matt Dillon, Nicholas Cage, Sean Penn, Matthew Broderick, and Matthew Modine, as coalescing around their participation in ensemble films, their lack of education and formal training, their predilection for partying, and their ephemeral "hotness." Despite their common youth, age isn't the only reason Blum chooses the moniker "brat": there's a suggestion throughout the article, that the actors have earned neither their wealth nor their status. Instead, they are bolstered by networking and nepotism, as well as an innate sense of how and when to leverage their fame. Emilio Estevez searches for a phone to call a theater for free movie tickets rather than pay the \$6 admission. Later, however, he waits in line to get into club with the rest of the masses, telling Blum "Some people have no shame about such things... I have shame" (Blum).

earlier literary fiction, in part because, according to Mark Fenster, the novels “were marketed to both represent and to reach the young urban audience through more stylish covers, larger size, higher quality paper, and higher prices than typical mass market paperbacks” (Fenster 51). Stephanie Girard’s analysis of the creation of the Vintage Contemporaries imprint complicates the assertion that Brat Pack fiction was simply “yuppie lit” by explaining the ways the novels, particularly McInerney’s *Bright Lights, Big City* “encode[s] ‘betweenness’ on the levels of both narrative and material form and content” (Girard 168). Like the Very Special Episode, the commercially and critically successful Brat Pack fiction also reflected and responded to the cultural understanding of addiction and recovery wrought by the Reagan War on Drugs.

If the VSE offered its child characters safe passage through addiction in 23 minutes or less, the fiction of the Brat Pack depicted a decadent urban landscape of drug-addled and media-inundated teenagers and young adults with inattentive or absentee parents. McInerney’s *Bright Lights, Big City*, Ellis’s *Less than Zero*, and Janowitz’s *Slaves of New York* invoke the dire situation Nancy Reagan described while critiquing the public relations methods the Just Say No relied on to prevent incipient addiction. Brat Pack fiction, in other words, is symptomatic of Reagan’s War on Drugs, a real and political war that shifted the place of the intervention for ideological purposes. The perspective and narrative structure of McInerney’s and Ellis’s novels depict addiction as a chronic illness for which divine intervention, particularly intervention invoked through the process of being “born again,” is the only viable option. Even as they attempt to contradict it by humanizing the addict and linking addiction to culture, the features of the addiction and/or recovery narratives in these novels complement the political ideology of

Just Say No and the Reagan War on Drugs. The novels, and Tama Janowitz's stories in *Slaves of New York*, depict a world in which the distinction between reality and simulation is steadily diminishing, as advertisements, music videos, television shows, and other fiction replace and complicate the memories and experiences of the protagonists. This ascension of representation over reality is reminiscent not only of the Intervention's simulation of crises, but of the simulacrum Jean Baudrillard described as a feature of postmodernism. However, while Janowitz and Ellis are skeptical about the potential for individual conversion (or rebirth), McInerney's novel, *Bright Lights, Big City*, focuses exclusively on an unnamed protagonist who seems to overcome his cocaine addiction and his grief through a rebirth at the novel's end.

“F. Scott Fitzgerald without the crack-up”: Jay McInerney's Rewriting of Rebirth

Bright Lights, Big City presents the story of an unnamed protagonist who, adrift after the death of his mother and the break-up of his marriage, spirals into a cocaine addiction. Three months before the opening of the novel, the protagonist's wife, Amanda, leaves him. She has become a successful model while the protagonist has been unable to advance either in his aspirations as a writer or in his current position as a fact-checker for a *New Yorker*-esque magazine. Angry with his estranged wife, unhappy in his work, and avoiding his family, the protagonist attempts to distract himself with tabloid magazines and wild nights out with his friend, Tad Allagash. He seeks out Amanda at a fashion show, but his erratic behavior gets him removed from the audience. He is fired from his job for allowing errors to be published in an article he fails to vet, and finds temporary satisfaction in plotting revenge against his former boss. He also rallies for a couple of

dates with other women, a friend from the office and a relative of Allagash's. Throughout the novel, his brother Michael attempts to get in touch with him, but the protagonist evades him until the end, when he is finally confronted at his apartment. The protagonist then recounts his mother's death a year ago and concludes that both his marriage to Amanda and his grief at their separation were responses to his mother's illness and death. Reunited, he and Michael go out drinking together. Despite his apparent epiphany, the protagonist meets up again with Allagash, an encounter that leads him to his newly engaged ex-wife. After an underwhelming conversation between the protagonist and Amanda, the novel ends with him trading his Ray-Bans for bread, a symbol of his new beginning.

The story is told in present tense through second-person narration with the "you" referring to the unnamed protagonist. McInerney's extended use of the second person was perhaps the only formal experimentation among the works of the generally literary-realist Brat Pack that attracted significant critical interest at the time. Monika Fludernik recognizes the radical potential of second person narration to "invite active participation and even identification by real readers" (445). Second-person narration can disrupt the "reading strategies" employed to "naturalize" postmodernist fiction (Fludernik 445). However, as Richard Sisk argues, real readers also realize rather quickly that McInerney isn't truly addressing them, but someone else (94). Even if the real reader is a young man reading *Bright Lights, Big City* in a sleazy bar, as specifics filter in, the reader will find himself further distanced from "You" with each sentence. Instead of confusing the reader, the device shows the confusion of the protagonist, as it is "unclear not only whether or not this character knows himself, but also whether or not he can honestly relate his story"

(Sisk 94). Another option, as Joshua Parker points out in a broader analysis of the second person technique, is to see that second person narrator enables the writer both to craft the “ideal listener” (the “You”) and to inhabit more completely the “telling position” of the story (172). Michael Gorra argues that the beginning of the novel “suggests a crucial shift in the perception of the American self... [the unnamed protagonist] isn’t free to make the terms on which he’ll engage the world” (401). This explanatory mode is reminiscent of the task of the Interventionists, who must describe for the addicted person disconnected from reality what he/she has done. Read this way, the narrative voice takes on an instructive, didactic tone; explaining physical reality and the protagonist’s emotional state to him. The opening of the novel, which places the protagonist in a nightclub early in the morning, hoping that more cocaine will clarify the his muddled thoughts, that an “overpriced drink” might quiet his conscience, or that a sexual encounter with a strange woman might offer him “earthly salvation” (McInerney 6), suggests addiction is his milieu, a ubiquitous force that structures many of his actions.

Separating the protagonist’s various addictions is an impossible and unnecessary task. As an ideal subject for intervention, he is best understood through Johnson’s understanding of addiction as a break with reality. Addiction is not substance-based, but everywhere: it is his response to a media inundated life, the logical extension of consumer culture, a side-effect of self-medicating his nagging conscience, and the pastime of his literary idols. Each of these arenas is presented as in opposition to reality. The protagonist’s difficulty with his work as a fact-checker symbolizes his larger struggle with reality. He is not a particularly good fact-checker, in part because he is frequently late to work and often hung over when he arrives, but also because he is overwhelmed by

the task of “factual verification.” Verifying stories requires energy and resources that he does not possess; in one instance, he needs to telephone an office in France to verify a story but is hindered first by the time difference and then by the language barrier that he fails to overcome with his limited French. Unsurprisingly, the protagonist dislikes his job and would “much rather be in Fiction” (McInerney 22). Fiction is his refuge, both the physical space he turns to when he runs into trouble in *Fact* and the literalization of his fantasies. He fantasizes *about* fiction, about fiction writers he yearns to be like, about fictions his life could resemble.

He also finds succor in the fictionalized news stories of the tabloids. He refers to the *New York Post* as “the most shameful of [his] several addictions,” equating consumption of the publication to his consumption of cocaine and alcohol the night before. While fiction provides him with a refuge from the real world (and from the consequences of his destructive behavior), the *Post* provides, through its fictions, paradigms for understanding reality in ways that reinforce his perception and that provide “a nice, simple world view” (McInerney 57), consistent with the Reagans’ approach to addiction. The *Post* reflects the protagonist’s “sense of impending disaster,” (57) even as it provides a heuristic for interpreting his own life, in the form of a long-running story on Coma Baby, a fetus whose comatose mother is dying. The protagonist has recently lost his mother, as Coma Baby soon will. The emphasis on Coma Baby (to the neglect of the less-often mentioned Coma Mom) also suggests the mid-1980s hysteria over “crack babies” and the “unprecedented strategy... [of prosecuting] pregnant addicts under state criminal statutes involving child endangerment, assault with a deadly weapon, and the delivery of a controlled substance to a minor” (Kandall 273). The protagonist dreams of

trying to coax Coma Baby out of the womb, and the dream's mise-en-scene, the Department of Factual Verification, its cast of characters, his coworkers and his feared and hated boss, Clara, and the presence of cocaine make it clear "you" is the Coma Baby, made dependent by his grief, looking to maintain a status quo, where "everything [he] need[s] is pumped in" (54). The protagonist's dream also suggests that prolonging his own gestational period could result in death, as the fetus threatens "they'll never take me alive" when the doctor (the protagonist's boss) tries to intervene (55). Because the protagonist's addictions have created in him a dependence akin to gestation, such that he must be (re)born to escape his addictions, the novel contemplates the trajectory of his fantasized narratives of growth and self-improvement.

For the protagonist, the first step to changing his life is narrating a new one, and throughout the novel, the narrator projects alternate lives that he could begin living at that pivotal moment. However, the pivotal moment is difficult to seize in the fleeting present tense narration. Matt DelConte argues that present-tense narration makes it especially difficult for readers to identify a narratee: because "the narratee is not present at the time of narrating and... there is no indication that a future narratee will experience the narrative, we are faced with a narrative that does not contain a narratee within the ontology of the fiction" (DelConte 432). The narrative's insistence on rendering its protagonist an object of narration rather than the narrator is underscored by his habitual tardiness, a motif that emphasizes not so much irresponsibility as the inability to organize "the slippery flux of [his] life" (28), to make a coherent narrative of his experiences. He frequently feels "too late" to effect change, but the narrative itself questions whether or not moments of potential change are even identifiable. The protagonist feels his grief for

his mother was delayed for nine months, making him mistake it for despair over the end of his marriage (162). In one episode, he notices a woman being sat on by a man on the subway. At first he doesn't help because he "assumed someone closer to the action would act" (13). As the episode wears on, he finds "as each moment passes it becomes harder and harder to do anything without calling attention to the fact that [he] hadn't done anything earlier" (13). Unwilling to preempt the men seated nearer the woman, he is trapped in a narrative in which the best moment to act is always the moment that has just passed. Later, he buys a watch from a man on the street, hoping that "knowing the time at any given moment might be a good first step toward" addressing his problems. But when he worries whether or not the watch is really Cartier, the man selling it responds, "How do you know anything's real?" (28). The watch's "realness" ends up being of paramount importance, as it falls apart the same day he purchases it. Twice, the protagonist thinks wistfully about "time warps" (33, 95) that would allow him to visit the past and escape from it cleanly, as someone outside of time. The novel suggests, then, that the problem is more with time itself than with "you," but only because Time is not a reliable, objective constant, but experienced through an individual's perception. Opportunities for change, therefore, are always filtered through subjectivity, through one's own sense of agency and time.

Just as the use of second person may raise questions about the protagonist's ability to understand himself, the novel also questions whether or not the individual perception can ever be understood or empathized with by a third party. As the protagonist has spiraled into addiction and depression, he has replaced his family and friends who "speak the language of the inner self" with Tadd Allagash, his drug-supplying

acquaintance who “never asks you how you are and [doesn’t wait] for you to answer his questions” (32). The protagonist prefers this kind of superficial interaction, in part because he wants to conceal the desperation of his situation from those around him, but also because his decline has been accompanied by an increasing confusion about his self-conception. Thus he considers his fall from grace to be, in a manner of speaking, a shift in perspective. When he first got his job at the magazine, the narrator tells us, “You thought of yourself in the third person: *He arrived for his first interview in a navy-blue blazer. He was interviewed for a position in the Department of Factual Verification, a job which must have seemed even then to be singularly unsuited to his flamboyant temperament. But he was not to languish long among the facts*” (34, italics in original). The shift to second person can also be read as a sign of the speaker’s decline. While a third person, past tense narration suggests the protagonist has a narrative trajectory that can be objectively interpreted by an outside party, the present tense second person narration of *Bright Lights, Big City* connotes the urgency of the speaker’s plight: the future is uncertain, and the outside party (the narrator who is apparently telling “You” this story) is perhaps the protagonist’s own creation.

Narration itself, then, is both the method of and a metaphor for the narrator’s recovery. In language that recalls the writing difficulties of Don Birnam in Charles Jackson’s *The Lost Weekend*, the narrator laments, “You feel that if only you could make yourself sit down at a typewriter you could give shape to what seems merely a chain reaction of pointless disasters. Or you could get revenge, tell your side of the story, cast some version of yourself in the role of wronged hero” (39). But, like Jackson’s hero, McInerney’s narrator never moves from bleak Facts to a useful Fiction, a recovery

narrative. The second person, present tense narration of the novel suggests that particular narrative belongs to an irretrievable past.

Nonetheless, by the end, the narrator does seem to be at the beginning of a recovery narrative, but its genre is one of rebirth rather than conversion. The only way for “you” to recover is to be reborn, and so the novel pushes its protagonist back toward the womb, making the subject *in utero* the most viable candidate for Intervention. A few interventions on behalf of the narrator fall flat before the end: a few women appear to him to be chances for “salvation,” but the relationships stall or else they don’t even begin; his younger brother, Michael, arrives in New York City after being unable to reach him by phone for several weeks. Michael occasions the narrator’s revelations to the reader about the death of his mother and his recognition that this is the true source of his grief. After reconciling with Michael, however, the narrator purchases cocaine despite claiming he is “basically through with this compulsion” (163). He then has an anticlimactic run-in with his estranged wife, does more cocaine, and achieves yet another anticlimax: “as the coke ran out; as you hovered the last line, you saw yourself hideously close-up with a rolled twenty sticking out of your nose. The goal is receding. Whatever it was. You can’t get everything straight in one night” (170). These false starts could be read as a complex understanding of addiction, one that recognizes relapses as part of the process. However, in the novel’s final scene, the narrator trades his sunglasses (a symbol of both his status and addiction) for fresh bread that reminds him of the bread his mother baked. Standing near the ocean, an almost too obvious symbol of birth, he tries to eat the bread but almost chokes on the first bite. This image, which tends to infantilize the protagonist, so much so that he cannot yet eat solid foods, underscores the motif of rebirth. The final lines of the

novel, “You will have to go slowly. You will have to learn everything all over again” (182) explicitly link rebirth and rehabilitation. Only by being “born again” can recovery be effected.

“The inescapable Jay Gatsby”: Colorblindness and Violence in *Less Than Zero*

“I should have been in *The Breakfast Club*. How are you going to have kids in detention, and there aren’t any black kids in detention? I mean, come on” (Todd Bridges, *Killing Willis: From Different Strokes to the Mean Streets to the Life I Always Wanted* 115).

Learning “everything all over again” will require the narrator to relinquish narratives that no longer make sense. *Bright Lights, Big City* is itself emblematic of this kind of relearning. Although the story of coming of age in the decadent Big City is a familiar one, McInerney’s unconventional narrative perspective suggests new ways of relaying it. However, the novel also makes many allusions to the early and mid-twentieth century novels the narrator (and the novel itself) relied upon to construct narratives that are no longer viable. The myth of the “Great Drunk Writer” (discussed in Chapter 1) informs the narrator’s conception of himself and his relationship to work. Though he doesn’t do any writing outside of that which is required for his job, he mentions his desire to be like F. Scott Fitzgerald “without the crack up” (40). He dreams that an association with the magazine’s Fiction Editor could spur him to productivity, as Alex could teach him and they could become “a team, Fitzgerald and [Maxwell] Perkins all over again” (64). The Great Drunk Writer archetype is the narrator’s fondest desire and the fate that must be avoided.

While McInerney’s protagonist yearned to become like Fitzgerald, Girard observes, “That Fitzgerald is also the kind of guy McInerney wants to be is lost on no

one, least of all McInerney” (180). And McInerney was by no means alone in his adulation of Fitzgerald. While it falls outside the scope of this project to speculate about why Fitzgerald in general and *The Great Gatsby* in particular were the subjects of renewed interest in the Reagan years, one might assume that the biographical details of McInerney’s life, combined with culture-wide obsessions with youth and wealth, and sifted through the filter of increasingly prohibitive drug and alcohol legislation, would invite comparisons to Fitzgerald and his novel of the Roaring Twenties. In his *Gatsby: A Cultural History of the Great American Novel*, Bob Batchelor observes that the “term ‘Gatsby’ fluctuated across a number of themes [during the period], usually as a synonym for any wealthy person that rose from humble beginnings or perceived unassuming origins to economic or political power, extravagance, or over-the-top behavior” (Batchelor 89). During the summer of 1987, in the wake of the Iran Contra scandal, Reagan’s principal speechwriter, Anthony R. Dolan, wrote an editorial for the *New York Times* extolling Reagan’s ability to weather the controversy by comparing him to Jay Gatsby. Dolan, who was responsible for Reagan’s “Evil Empire” speech, wrote that Reagan evoked “the inescapable Jay Gatsby, F. Scott Fitzgerald’s symbol of American optimism” through his gracefulness and poise. Despite the scandal, Reagan would “[remind us] once again that we have always been Nick Carraways to his Gatsby” (Dolan A35). Astounded by his fundamental misunderstanding of the novel, columnist Anthony Lewis responded in print, articulating the ways in which Dolan’s comparison was unintentionally apt. “When Reagan fixes on an end,” Lewis wrote, “like Gatsby he is indifferent to means... Like Gatsby, too, Reagan has created his own world. In it facts yield to fantasy and obsession. The answer to economic problems is to lower taxes. That

the deficit is out of control, that the world is alarmed at American policy: None of that is to be admitted, much less faced. Someone else will have to clear away the wreckage” (Lewis). It should also be noted that Gatsby’s incredulous claim to Carraway that “of course” he could repeat the past is a significant part of his fantasy. Gatsby’s ability to construct fantasies comes not only from his charismatic personality, but from his wealth. National Prohibition, the attempt to suppress the desire for alcohol, enabled Gatsby’s accumulation of wealth and thus his pursuit of his own desires, unmoored from their times and places. Unlike Reagan, however, Gatsby is an economic and racial Other, a fact to which Dolan seems blind. Tom Buchanan links him again and again to the “dark races” that are taking over. Dolan’s and the Reagan Era’s invocation of Gatsby also strips away context to create a colorblind version of the novel.

Through this lens, the racial politics of *Bright Lights, Big City* are more apparent and more troubling than at first glance, and we must remind ourselves that despite the proliferation of rebirth narratives featuring white male protagonists, despite Nancy Reagan posing with Gary Coleman on the cover of *TV Guide*, the Reagan War on Drugs disproportionately ended and ruined the lives of people of color; not only were African Americans more likely to be arrested for drug offenses, more likely to be convicted, and more likely to serve longer sentences than their white counterparts (Alexander 6-7), the effects of the attempts to stop drug addiction, arguably, exacted an greater personal and social toll from black communities than did addiction itself. McInerney’s novel participates in a cultural narrative about addiction and recovery that obscures this fact even as it challenges other parts of the Just Say No narrative. The difficult rebirth effected in McInerney’s novel seems to present a more complicated portrait of addiction:

McInerney's narrator is not a child (he's 24) and the source of his drug problem cannot be attributed simply to peer pressure. The novel incorporates relapse into the story of the narrator's addiction, and it raises questions about the practicality and morality of total prohibition by having the narrator's mother and the mother surrogate, Megan, (his slightly older coworker who takes him in, feeds him, and tucks him in bed after he's fired from the magazine, and who may be a recovering addict herself) relate positive experiences using drugs. However, *Bright Lights, Big City* leaves uncontested the Reagan War on Drugs' de jure colorblindness despite its de facto persecution of African Americans. While the novel is clearly more invested in depicting the breakdown of an individual addict than the societal toll of addiction (or the War on Drugs), the treatment of race and class in the novel as invisible factors that must be ignored is similar to their depiction in Just Say No's oversimplified narratives.

The narrator's race and ethnicity are peripheral, almost invisible concerns. His whiteness is invisible to him and, in a sense, to the reader as well, until a Jewish gangster, Bernie, tells him "You've got Ivy League written all over you" (116). As Bernie goes on to explain that Hasidic Jews are responsible for much of the cocaine dealt in the city, the narrator tells him he doesn't want to know. For Bernie, drug dealing is a racialized story. In his brief encounter with the narrator, he differentiates among whites, Italians, Latinos, and Jews, remarking on their class identifiers as well (e.g. "Ivy League," "*Bubie* and *Zadie* ruined their health in a sweatshop" (117)). Bernie is spurned by the protagonist, not because he deals drugs or because he's Jewish, but because he is crass enough to remark on both finances and race, two taboo subjects for the WASPs from which the narrator clearly descends.

While *Bright Lights, Big City* reserves overt racism for the slur-spewing Tad Allagash, its presumption of whiteness as universal supports the continuation of a colorblind War on Drugs. The narrator, however, sees the blackness, the “otherness,” of the few black characters in the novel immediately. The narrator claims he can’t remember what his wife looks like, so at a fashion show in which she’s supposed to appear, he can only say that the first model, “black as a Zulu” is not his wife (124). The scene is framed by “two large black men in turbans” working at the show, who are supposed, according to the narrator, “to be Nubian slaves or something” (120). This costume choice, he says, could only be perpetrated by an “Italian fashion designer” (120). The narrator’s whiteness allows him to rule out “others” in his search, but it does not allow him to acknowledge the reality of slavery or its aftereffects. These subjects are also taboo. While it could be argued that his consciousness of these characters’ blackness gestures to the unsustainability of colorblind ideology, his confusion differentiating white women from each other turns whiteness into an invisible norm, a way of not-seeing that allows white experiences to be universalized. Considering McInerney’s use of the nameless narrator to constitute an “Everyman,” Girard notes that “his narrator can be said to be an Everyman if the ‘every’ is restricted to a particular social group” (170). As the quote from Todd Bridges (who played Willis on *Diff’rent Strokes*) at the beginning of this section suggests, the absence of black characters in the major narratives of the period made little sense, particularly as the national news media increasingly portrayed black youth using drugs. However, as Reeves and Campbell point out, shifting the problem of cocaine use from white upper-class users to black lower-class users also shifted the narrative of recovery from the “therapeutic branch of the medical-industrial complex to its armed disciplinary

forces” (130). Thus, we can read McInerney’s narrative of rebirth as a therapeutic-spiritual conversion and the stories Bernie tells as tales of criminal justice.

Ellis’s *Less than Zero* also evokes Fitzgerald’s *The Great Gatsby* in several ways, though, I will argue, it does so to problematize colorblindness. The novel is narrated by Clay, a young man who returns to Los Angeles after his first semester in college on the East Coast. By virtue of his separation from the California milieu, he approaches the parties of his former friends and acquaintances with a Nick Carraway-like detachment. Clay’s friend, Julian, invites comparisons to Jay Gatsby: sought after (and missing) for part of the novel, Julian eventually asks for Clay’s help. Clay has fond memories of Julian as a child, but he also wants to “see the worst” that can happen to Julian (Ellis 172). His interactions are marked by his disconnection from other characters; his father ignores him to network with business associates during lunch, his mother is oblivious to the fact that he and his younger sisters are using drugs, and his friends repeatedly comment that he needs a tan. Echoes of *Gatsby* sound elsewhere as well: Clay’s ex-girlfriend, Blair, makes more of his interest in her than he intends (as Jordan Baker does with Carraway), friends Spin and Rip make increasingly xenophobic comments, hangers-on appear on bedroom floors and at pool sides, a pair of 3-D glasses on an Elvis Costello poster watch the whole sordid scene, and at the end of the novel, a car with a vanity license plate reading “GABSTOY” catches Clay’s attention (Ellis 200-1).

The novel lacks a central plot, though subplots like a potential reunion with his ex-girlfriend, Blair, and his attempt to help his friend Julian get out of debt transcend single episodes. In addition, between scenes at parties and nightclubs narrated in the present tense, Clay includes flashbacks to a family vacation in the desert shortly before

his grandmother died. Despite the lack of a major plot, the episodes in the novel get progressively more violent, and Clay vacillates between turning away from the violence and embracing it fully as a spectator. The most important thing missing from Ellis's *Gatsby* is a Daisy, but this absence can be easily understood in the context of the rest of the novel: though addiction is rampant, desire itself is absent. When Rip justifies his rape of a twelve-year-old girl by saying, "If you want something, you have the right to take it" (189), Clay reminds him that desire has to come from absence. Rip can't *want* anything because he already *has* "everything" (189). Rip's response, "No, I don't... I don't have anything to lose" (189-90), suggests that desire itself is what the characters are pursuing, through drugs, sex, voyeurism, shopping, psychotherapy, and entertainment.

Less Than Zero's characters are mostly unsympathetic in these pursuits, and one of Clay's recurring observations is how similar they are in their appearance as well. Despite their similarities, however, Clay can see himself as separate and as situated; he is "this eighteen-year-old boy with shaking hands and blond hair and the beginnings of a tan and semistoned sitting in Chasen's on Dohney and Beverley, waiting for my father to ask me what I want for Christmas" (66). In spare prose, Ellis makes legible immediately the identity markers that are important to Clay's narrative: his youth, gender, race, class, and his status as an addict. The racial and economic homogeneity of Clay's social group, and Clay's awareness of it, can be contrasted with Trent, Clay's friend and sometimes drug dealer, who mistakes "a black teenage boy, not anorexic" for their mutual friend Muriel, a white, blonde, anorexic teenage girl (Ellis 21). Trent's mistake evinces his colorblindness; it is also significant that he links this unknown black teenager with Muriel, whose use of heroin is treated as more threatening than the general use of cocaine

by the others. Unlike McInerney's mostly white New York City, Ellis's Los Angeles features people of color inhabiting the same nightclubs and ritzy parties. Clay relates both the racial epithets uttered by Rip and Spin (184-5) and the uneasy relations between the wealthy whites in his parents' generation and the people of color they've hired to watch their children, tend their homes, and serve their guests (52, 130). This suggests an array of attitudes toward difference: grudging tolerance, hostility, and a radically willful colorblindness. Each of these attitudes is part of a hyperviolent society in which there seems to be no alternative to addiction.

The extreme violence of *Less Than Zero* led some critics to consider it and other Brat Pack-adjacent novels portraying "Teenage Wastelands," such as Blake Nelson's *Girl* (1994) and Michael Chabon's *The Mysteries of Pittsburgh* (1988), to be "unlikely allies to cultural conservatives who insist that a simple reconstitution of patriarchal authority will resolve the crisis of youth" (Curnutt 94). More recently, however, Georgina Colby has argued that Ellis's work is not, as Curnutt argues, "oblivious to issues of class stratification, economic displacement, and racial conflict" (Curnutt 94), but that it "manifests this 'vicious cycle' [of late capitalist American culture] in order to subvert it" (Colby 10). The structure of Ellis's narrative would tend to support Colby's assertion. While *Less Than Zero* seems to lack a clear major conflict, and many of Clay's actions appear unmotivated and are often delivered in a list punctuated by "ands" and "thens," the episodes of violence in the novel become more extreme and edge closer to Clay as diegetic time passes: a minor assault at a diner (62), Blair and Clay strike and kill a coyote with their car (142-3), Clay's friends watch a snuff film (153), Clay watches Julian forced to have sex for money (176), Clay sees a dead body in an alley (186), Rip

shows Clay the twelve-year-old girl he's tied up, drugged, and allowed his friends to beat and rape (188-9). The build-up of episodes suggests that breaking the cycle of violence is the obstacle Clay faces. Moreover, this violence has its roots in the wrongs of his parents' generation and not peer pressure. Clay (and Blair as well) consistently rejects his friends' offers to participate in the violence. Instead, at the end of the novel, the images that Los Angeles evokes for him are "Images of parents who were so hungry and unfulfilled that they ate their own children. Images of people, teenagers my own age, looking up from the asphalt and being blinded by the sun" (Ellis 207-8). Consumed by their parents' selfishness, Clay's generation is overwhelmed by the task of pulling themselves up out of misery and addiction.

Clay leaves LA at the novel's end, and Ellis leaves the reader without a clear sense of what can be done to address the problems outlined in the novel. A dream Clay has earlier in the novel does suggest an earlier understanding of addiction, one in which individuals must progress to a rock bottom before they can change. In the dream, Clay is running through the rain when he trips and falls into a mud puddle. The mud puddle sucks him in like quicksand and, he recounts, "I start to sink, and the mud fills my mouth and I start to swallow it and then it goes up through my nose and finally into my eyes, and I don't wake up until I'm completely underground" (114). Despite this allusion to an individual pathology of addiction, in *Less Than Zero* addiction is not, as the Reagan Administration would understand it, the problem of individual delinquents that can be addressed privately by families. The novel specifically critiques the assumption that Clay's family could help him in a scene where his father turns their lunch together into an opportunity to network with other film industries types (42). The closest the novel comes

to offering a spiritual solution to Clay is the appearance of a televangelist who exhorts his viewers, “Tell Jesus, ‘Forgive me of my sins,’ and then you may feel the joy that is unspeakable.” Affected somehow by this “religious program,” Clay sits and waits for almost an hour for “something to happen” before concluding “Nothing does. I get up, do the rest of the coke” (140). The novel also indicts medical approaches, as Clay finally fires his ineffectual psychiatrist with an uncharacteristically emotional “Go fuck yourself” near the end (Ellis 162). Tellingly, the psychiatrist wants to engage Clay in discussion of popular culture: his idea for a new screenplay (109), the new Elvis Costello album (123). Clay sees this attempt to relate to him obliquely through pop culture as callous and devastatingly oblivious. So too might we judge the cultural products of Just Say No: attempts to reach young people through these media cannot be taken seriously. Rather, the media participate in the same culture of addiction Just Say No wishes to discourage.

Slaves and Simulation

Tama Janowitz’s stories in *Slaves of New York* are populated almost entirely by young artists whose work, tastes, and economic struggles dramatize the status of artistic creation in the postmodern era. The collection of mostly interconnected stories deals predominantly two main characters: Eleanor, an unsuccessful jewelry designer forced to stay with her possessive boyfriend because of the lack of affordable housing in the city who, by the book’s end, becomes a moderately successful hat designer living in a place of her own; and Marley Mantello, a struggling artist who relies on his mother’s financial support while trying to sell his paintings and find a patron for a modern cathedral he

wants to design. As Sonia Baelo Allue points out in her essay on the book, both Marley and Eleanor, along with other characters, are plagued by “the exhaustion of originality [that] has made it harder to come up with new ideas” (Allue 97). The ascension of the simulacra has not liberated these characters, but made them dependent: on the ever-changing tastes of the consumers, on patrons, on art dealers, and on their lovers. According to Allue, “slaves” of New York are, in general, individuals who possess less artistic and personal agency than they believe once possessed by their forebears—the artists who created the “original” pieces Janowitz’s characters recycle, imitate, or parody. By relating culture to dependence in this way, the book reinforces the theme running throughout the Brat Pack stories: that popular culture reinforces or supports the proliferation of addiction.

Unlike Ellis or McInerney, who place female characters in the roles of victim or savior, however, Janowitz uses female protagonists dealing with dependency. The story, “The Slaves in New York,” introduces the issue of codependence when Eleanor explains to an apparently unsatisfied interlocutor why she’s stayed with Stash, her possessive, critical, and probably philandering boyfriend. After narrating an episode in which Stash angrily prevents the development of a friendship between Eleanor and a male friend in a similar situation (i.e. living with a more successful woman in a somewhat tumultuous relationship), the story ends with Eleanor advising her friend Abby, via telephone, not to come to New York: “In the old days, marriages were arranged by the parents, and maybe you ended up with a jerk but at least you had the security of marriage, no one could dump you out on the street. In today’s world, it’s the slave system. If you live with this guy in New York, you’ll be the slave” (Janowitz 15). At this point in the book, the only escape

from the “slave system” Eleanor can imagine is not joining it at all. This view of dependence, which echoes the preemptive strike ethos of Just Say No, is not a position that the text maintains for long. The characters in *Slaves of New York* are shown to be capable of resisting the “slave system” and finding ways around the “exhaustion of originality” that hinders them.

Through her dependent female characters, Janowitz subverts the dominant cultural narrative of addiction that cast men as the most likely sufferers. She also challenges the idea central to the Johnson Intervention that vigilant mothers and wives are necessary to arrest addiction. This premise is implicit in the Reagans’ gendered construction of the War on Drugs, which made the President the masculine enforcer of drug laws and Mrs. Reagan the nation’s maternal “aware parent” who offered incipient addicts their own hope for early intervention through Just Say No. Though Allue argues that “*Slaves of New York* does not aim at portraying fragmented pictures of women but fragmented pictures of people, whatever their sex” (103), the different effects of dependence on men and women can be seen by juxtaposing the narration of the Eleanor stories with that of the Marley Mantello stories. Marley, unlike Eleanor, has a last name, one that reaffirms his maleness, and he uses it frequently when referring to himself, both in dialogue and narration.⁵¹ Like Eleanor, Marley makes very little money from his art and has a tenuous housing arrangement, but he sees himself as a “saint,” not a slave.

⁵¹ “I, Marley Mantello,” (42), “Here I was, Marley Mantello, a genius of an artist” (50), ““Me. Marley Mantello—”” (51), “But I was myself, Marley Mantello,” (53), “Oh, Marley, I thought, my boy, there is nothing you can’t do,” (53), “such was the nature of all that had been touched by me, Marley Mantello” (54), “I, Marley Mantello” (102), “I, Marley Mantello, sensitive artist” (140), “I, Marley Mantello, had always thought of myself as coming pretty damn close to saintliness” (143), “Why must I, Marley Mantello, be the one to bear witness to such events?” (221).

However, Marley also imagines a different path for himself than Eleanor does for herself. He imagines himself a “hero of the future” (200), who will be an active creator of his own greatness unlike the current “celebrities, people known for their well-knownness. Creations only of the media” (201). He envisions the individual not only as having more agency, but also being able to transcend the media-inundated culture of celebrity. Marley’s visionary optimism separates him from Eleanor and aligns him with McInerney’s narrator who used to think “of [himself] in the third person” (McInerney 34). While McInerney’s hero has been made into an object by virtue of the second-person narration, Marley retains the ability to tell his own story.

In “Ode to the Heroine of the Future,” Marley’s extreme optimism about individual agency has been tempered as reflected by alterations in his narrative voice: in this story, he never refers to himself by name. He focuses on the story of his sister and the final time he saw her before she fell from the window of a seventh-floor apartment. Amaretta Mantello dies, Marley notes, “after a long string of events,” including a driving under the influence charge and a cocaine bender (245). The story recounts their last meeting. The day before she died, they are in a bar with Amaretta’s boyfriend. There, she tells Marley about her DUI, the course she had to take as a result, a guru she met with, and an encounter she had with a woman whom she had met at a lesbian bar. Acknowledging that his sister as an addict, Marley questions whether her death was preventable. The story engages questions about addiction (who can arrest or prevent an addict’s use/addiction/rock bottom and how best to do so) privileged by the Intervention, while the narrative critiques the methods of Just Say No.

After indicating that Amaretta's death was the result of a chain of events, Marley compares her to "heroes in ancient Greece" (245), all of whom were fated to die, as "the sons and daughters of gods and humans were never destined to be around for very long; my sister was a throwback to these earlier times" (245). To underscore further his powerlessness to help her, he explains that "she had always looked after herself, and she would have belted me in the face if I had even tried to tell her what to do" (259). In between these comments, however, the narrative reveals that Amaretta was pressured and perhaps beaten by her boyfriend, Jonny, then goaded into other destructive behaviors by a group of "German drug dealers" (249) whom Jonny brings to join them. Amaretta seems to be at the mercy of her addiction, of Jonny, and of the men around her. When she relates her story about abusing and taking advantage of the woman she had met in a lesbian bar, she concludes, "I was like a goddess mucking about with a mortal. I knew what it was like to have power" (258), suggesting that her brief homosexual encounter may have been caused by a desire for power she is unable to satisfy in her relationships with men. The men in Amaretta's life, with the exception of Marley, seem to have enormous power over her and to contribute actively to her feelings of helplessness. In addition, the classes her "guru" advises her to attend after her DUI offer unattractive, even unsustainable models of agency. One course, which advertises itself as "How to Make Money Doing Anything," in fact presents a radical form of positive thinking that claims individuals are responsible for everything that happens to them. After the instructor tells a woman she was mugged because "yes, she had wanted to be mugged," Amaretta quits the class (249). A second class on becoming a whirling dervish requires Amaretta to empty her mind completely; she quits because she's unable to do so (249).

After Amaretta's death, Marley concludes that the guru was a "dangerous character" who "made her think that what she did made no difference at all" (245). Unable to find a medium between total agency and total surrender of ego, Amaretta becomes paralyzed with hopelessness. Having given up trying to understand herself, she dismisses attempts to parse her cynicism and suggests that understanding it is not very difficult, but that the "answer both intelligent and wise" does "nothing for the person with the problem," like reading "a sad bit of information about our times in the daily paper—why children take drugs, or a letter to Dear Abby" (251). Her cynical response to a question about her own cynicism reveals Amaretta's disenchantment with the oversimplified conception of addiction offered by Just Say No; implicit is the critique of the very mechanism, the mass media represented by the "daily paper," the Just Say No campaign relied upon to disseminate its simplistic message.

"Ode to the Heroine of the Future" is one of the few overtly tragic stories in the collection. Marley balances praise of Amaretta's beauty and his tender feelings for her with disappointment and frustration with her behavior. He is blunt about her addiction: all she does is "take drugs and drink and pick up men," (245); cocaine use in Marley's experience makes people "criminally vicious" (255). It is not immediately apparent how Marley's story constitutes an ode, nor how Amaretta might be viewed as a heroine, except through allusion to drug use made by the homophone heroin/heroine. However, Marley's final words suggest that the title is meant to reframe the impression of his sister that the narratee, whom Marley assumes to have seen the daily newspapers Amaretta disdains, might be familiar with: pictures the newspapers published of her corpse, "like a broken cup, flecked with dust and pencil shavings on the pavement" (259). Only in death

is Amaretta's story known. She becomes a celebrity, a spectacle of the media, the very thing that Marley's "hero of the future" would overcome by virtue of his self-creation. Seeing Amaretta as a heroine requires the reader to dismiss narratives that would render her a passive victim of her addiction and/or a media spectacle and to see her instead as one who will be, in the post-celebrity future, complicated and venerable. This suggests once again that the media-inundated culture of Brat Pack characters, which *Just Say No* seeks to leverage, is complicit in the proliferation of addiction.

Another story, "You and the Boss," also indicts popular culture's pernicious tendencies to cultivate addiction and stifle agency, again using narrative to critique the methods of *Just Say No*. Using Bruce Springsteen ("The Boss") as an avatar for mass culture, the story critiques the shallowness and even the violence of popular tastes. Like McInerney's novel, the story features a nameless second-person narrator speaking in the present tense. The female protagonist kidnaps and lobotomizes Bruce's current wife and then attempts to insinuate herself in his life. She quickly sees, however, that Bruce, who acts as though nothing has changed, is oblivious to the switch. Nor is life with the Boss as fulfilling as she had expected. After a series of disappointments, the protagonist discovers she's pregnant and decides to flee. Tracking down the previous Mrs. Springsteen, now working at a wax museum in Hollywood, she offers to take her place if his wife will return to the Boss, which she does, and the story ends with the protagonist alone in the wax museum. Once again "You and the Boss" underscores the differences between male and female agency. The protagonist imagines she's not like Bruce's wife: "You are educated, you have studied anthropology. You can help Bruce with his music, give him ideas about American culture. You are a real woman" (36). The second person narration

presages what the story bears out: the individualistic “real” woman’s replication of her predecessor’s fate. The use of the modal verb “must” in the first sentence—“First, you must dispose of his wife” (36)— suggests that the protagonist’s actions might be repeated, with the same consequences, by any other “you” who cares to do so. Popular culture, itself, fails to acknowledge differences among individuals, making human beings essentially the same and therefore “disposable.”

This skeptical view of popular culture is at least as old as the institution of the Western literary canon. The narrator’s initial discontent with Bruce seems to mimic an elitist view of culture, one that might just as soon dismiss the works of the Brat Pack as commercialist, “blank fictions.” However, the narrator’s disdain seems to stem from Bruce’s efforts to live out the blue collar, provincial ethos of his music without acknowledging the extent to which “Bruce Springsteen” has become a brand like any other. Almost everything he does in the story is underwhelming: he decorates their home with furnishings from Sears (37), overcooks barbecued chicken and slathers it with a sauce from Kraft (37), likes to make love at garbage dumps (38), and takes the protagonist to the Baseball Hall of Fame for a vacation (39). The couple eats fast food and processed food exclusively, and he sings his own songs when they’re in the car together (39). And yet, despite Bruce’s banal tastes, the narrator describes him as somehow more than human. She finds him “larger than life...the size of a monster” (37) and relates that “the terminally ill recover after licking up just one drop of Bruce’s sweat” (38). He is unaware of or at least unmoved by his immense power because what he desires more than admiration is authenticity. He believes his fans merely flatter him and he’s “not really any good”; he was happier “when [he] was just Bruce, playing in [his]

garage” (39). Despite his immense power, Bruce is not immune to insecurity about his status as a producer of culture.

The close of the story further suggests that his power is not benign. Finding herself alone in the wax museum, the protagonist stares at the figures of “Michael Jackson, Jack the Ripper, President Reagan, Sylvester Stallone, Muhammad Ali, Adolf Hitler” (41). Although each of the men aligns power with violence, the protagonist concludes that each is a “superstar” in his own right (41). As if responding to the assembled celebrities, the protagonist feels “something violent [start] to kick” in her womb (41). The Boss’s gestating offspring seems motivated by this group of simulacra.⁵² Popular culture thus perniciously links celebrity to totalitarianism, violence, and masculinity. The interconnections of these traits underscores the ideology’s pervasiveness: Ripper and Hitler become “celebrities” by virtue of their inclusion in the museum; the masculinity of boxing and action movies is violent; the cult of personality surrounding Jackson and Reagan gestures to totalitarianism. President Reagan’s inclusion in this cadre of superstars implicitly compares the President and the story’s Boss. In the thrall of these two violent superstars, the protagonist is in danger of losing her identity. Janowitz’s use of the second person narrator, therefore, is the inverse of McInerney’s: the beginning of the story provides the most specific details about the narrator, and subsequent sentences reveal nothing new about her. Instead the story illustrates her interchangeability with Bruce’s wife or with any “you” who might want to take her place. Thus the homogenizing tendencies of the Reagan-era are shown to obscure the dark,

⁵² In the case of Jack the Ripper, whose identity has never been determined, the wax statue is a pure simulation, a copy that has no original.

violent obsessions at the root of celebrity worship, itself a byproduct of late capitalist consumer culture.

Slaves of New York is the narrative antithesis of *Just Say No*. While *Just Say No* makes the moment of decision clear and simple, Janowitz's stories work to conceal the turning points in the characters' lives. One of the clearest examples of a major turning point being elided is in the story "Fondue," which begins "For dinner that night I made cheese fondue" (Janowitz 185). The significance of "that" night is not available to the reader at first. At the close of the previous story with Eleanor, she and Stash were watching TV in bed after a short argument. At the beginning of "Fondue," Stash is out, but Eleanor expects him home and even saves him half of the fondue she makes. Much of the story involves a memory of a trip to London, but Eleanor's tears while eating and a phone conversation with her mother reveal that she and Stash have broken up and this is her last night in the apartment they share (196). How Eleanor and Stash finally arrived at their break-up is never revealed. However, the absence of the break-up scene should not inflate its significance or suggest it was particularly climactic. In "Patterns," Eleanor, now living alone, relays a moment after their break-up when she runs into Stash and has a minor epiphany about their incompatibility: when he tells her he has realized their relationship was doomed because a contestant on *The Mating Game* (Janowitz's anthropologically inflected version of *The Dating Game*) explained the different "levels" of compatibility (228). The reader has seen Stash say things far more ridiculous and be cruel to Eleanor; her revelation is not so much resulting from a spontaneous insight as it is from a gradual accumulation. Janowitz hides from the reader the specific events that

led to Eleanor shaking off her “slavery,” indicating that human agency is too complex to be reduced to a single event or action.

More so than the other texts discussed in this chapter, Janowitz’s stories challenge the premises of the Johnson Intervention, premises that, while obscured by the Reagan Administration’s neglect of rehabilitation and treatment, inform the logic of Just Say No. Janowitz’s characters are not, as Marley suggests of Amaretta, “fated” to any particular outcome. Rather than explore the root causes of any of the problems that beset them, *Slaves of New York* exposes the complexities of dependence and agency by disguising or omitting turning point events. In doing so, Janowitz undermines the Intervention’s (and Just Say No’s) attempt to make these turning points legible.

Conclusion

Given how profoundly Reagan’s War on Drugs shaped law enforcement, governmental, and political institutions, it may seem frivolous to analyze the rhetoric of Just Say No and narratives featuring privileged white addicts. If Reagan was certainly less invested in promoting rehabilitation or treatment than his predecessors, it may be assumed then that he was also less interested in interventions. The emphasis on preventative education and the young in Just Say No reinforces this interpretation. From a narrative standpoint, however, the Reagan War on Drugs depends upon the premises of the Johnson Intervention: that addiction is a break with reality and that people can be arrested in addictive careers by third parties. Reagan and Just Say No merely applied these ideas to a smaller group of addicts. By focusing on prevention, they labeled a larger group irredeemable. More importantly, Just Say No’s desire to be a “war waged by the

stars” suggests that the Intervention’s privileging of representation over reality was paramount for Reagan.

The Very Special Episode and Brat Pack texts illustrate how features of the Reagan War on Drugs and the Just Say No campaign filtered into American mainstream culture. The VSE shared with the minimalist writings of the era’s novelists relatively simple narrative structures; the works of Ellis and McInerney, as well as many other writers considered Brat Packers, lack the complicated plots and language games of the postmodernist novelists that preceded them. McInerney’s use of the unconventional second person narrator, an experiment that could perhaps associate him more closely to his postmodernist literary forebears, links him as well to the exhortative VSE, which often featured segments at the beginning or end where the actors broke character to reinforce the very special moral. But, if the VSE uncritically offered television as a means to prevent addiction, the Brat Pack, specifically Janowitz’s *Slaves of New York*, suggested media inundation was a symptom, like drug addiction, of the times. Instead, McInerney offers rebirth as a more viable road to recovery, Ellis complete disconnection from the site of addiction, and Janowitz inscrutable personal epiphanies.

Reagan may be remembered now as the “Great Communicator” for his mastery of presidential rhetoric and manipulation of the media, but his War on Drugs and Just Say No approach to addiction are today playfully mocked when not strongly criticized. The early and mid 1990s saw a significant amount of scholarly interest in the failure of the War on Drugs. Also by this time, the very special episode was quickly losing the cultural cache it once held. Episodes of *Seinfeld*, *Friends*, and *The Simpsons* parodied the VSE without tackling the socially relevant themes of their 1970s predecessors.

In his essay “E Unibus Pluram,” David Foster Wallace identifies in television and popular culture a pervasive irony that prevented critical assessments of late capitalism from taking place. *Infinite Jest* further suggests that irony stifles attempts to recover from addiction. In the examination of the War on Drugs under Bill Clinton that follows, I examine manifestations of and responses to this irony and consider their effects on an understanding of addiction that relied on the Intervention as a means to recovery.

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Chapter Five: Irony and Recovery: *Infinite Jest* and Bill Clinton's Postmodern War on Drugs

“When you find yourself in many respects to the right of Richard Nixon, you'd better have a cultural style to fall back on” (Lott 112)

In an analysis of the ways in which the President stands in for the state in the national imagination, Eric Lott makes much of the fact that Bill Clinton was the first “Baby Boomer” President. By virtue of this generational distinction, Clinton had a unique relationship to the radical politics of the 1960s. As Lott explains, Clinton, along with the “writers and academics” of the Baby Boom generation who constituted the “current political-intellectual center” (Lott 104), shifted rightward in the 1980s, forcing him to renounce or merely forget his more radical years. For Clinton, this process began in 1978, when, according to Fred I. Greenstein, as newly elected Governor, he “peopled his administration with bearded political activists, and otherwise failed to conform to the political mores of his state” (179). Clinton was voted out of office after one term, but he won a new term in 1982 after promoting himself as a more conservative and “pragmatic” executive (Greenstein 179). For Lott, the point is not that New Democrats were more conservative than the old ones of the Popular Front or their radical 1960s counterparts, but that they have “ironically brought a version of ‘60s idealism to bear on current affairs *as a way of refusing* certain strains of radical thought and activism today” (Lott 105-6, italics in original). Their deployment of irony serves to discredit the aims and methods of the leftists with whom they once identified. Irony, I argue in this chapter, is an essential component of the continuation of the War on Drugs under Bill Clinton and to the narratives of addiction and recovery that proliferated during the 1990s.

The War on Drugs changed little during the presidency of George H. W. Bush. As Reagan's Vice President and former director of the CIA, Bush had a vested interest in the institutions created during the 1980s to interdict illegal drugs and prosecute users. However, even after Bush left office in 1993, the War on Drugs continued in much the same fashion. In fact, Michelle Alexander claims "the Clinton years" were "among the worst of times for African Americans" because of the continuation of the War on Drugs and mass incarceration of black men (Alexander 228-9). Despite this, cultural narratives surrounding addiction underwent a series of changes. First, Just Say No media campaign, though it left indelible traces in popular culture, became inactive and was replaced by more conventional anti-drug messages through media such as Public Service Announcements. Second, a multitude of recovery organizations based on the 12 Steps of AA emerged—perhaps because, as Valverde notes, the Steps entered the public domain in 1989 (29)—creating the broad-based Recovery Movement analyzed by critics such as Trysh Travis, Elayne Rapping, and Wendy Kaminer. The language of recovery and the conventional recovery narrative described by AA were more prevalent than ever and applied to more aspects of life than previously considered. Thus, as the number of incarcerated drug users continued to increase under the first Baby Boomer president, Americans were increasingly exposed to addiction narratives as ways to interpret social and personal problems. It's easy to see why recovery rhetoric would be especially appropriate for Clinton's positioning of himself as a New Democrat: the Recovery Movement, according to Rapping, "works to defuse the political tensions which fuel so much of what is now called 'addiction' by focusing only on the *effects* of our confusion and pain, not the causes" (7). Political problems, thus personalized and pathologized,

would respond well to Clinton's repeated calls for "responsibility." Furthermore, Rapping notes, recovery rhetoric allowed former radicals to construct new narratives reconciling their experiences "with sex, work, and especially drugs like marijuana and LSD" in the 1960s under the rubric of addiction. Thus, memories of "countercultural euphoria" were pressed into service to become "self-critical stories of weakness and excess," from which the storyteller was clearly, through her or his narration, recovering (Rapping 141).

Taken together, the spread of the Recovery Movement and the continuation of the War on Drugs do not depict a unified cultural narrative about addiction and recovery. Instead, they appear to contradict and distort each other. While recovery became more available than ever, the concept of the addict as irredeemable criminal seemed to survive, influencing the continuation of Drug War policies like mandatory minimum sentences and the disparity between crack and cocaine penalties. If, as Thomas Gilmore has already noted, Americans tend to be "equivocal" about addictive substances, the Clinton Era's informing narratives evidence irony rather than equivocation. That is, rather than allowing for multiple interpretations of drug use, as Americans have regarding alcohol, the contradictory messages about addiction obscured the dominant ideology of consumption.

Bill Clinton: Postmodern President

In 1989, Richard Rose identified Jimmy Carter as the first "postmodern" president, building on the paradigm established by scholars of the presidency that divided Presidents into the "Traditional" and "Modern" eras. Rose's assessment of Carter and the presidency as a whole was predicated on what he saw as the growing constraints on the

chief executive to function in an increasing global context. As Craig Rimmerman noted in 1991, several scholars were attempting to make sense of the Presidency in a postmodern context. By the time Clinton took office, this appellation, the postmodern president, infiltrated mainstream culture. In the *Atlantic* in 1993, Steven Stark declared Clinton's the "first postmodern presidency" and delineated the ways in which mass communications, globalization, and personal politics would create obstacles for the President. A year later, *Newsweek* also proclaimed Clinton a postmodern president, focusing more on Clinton's personality and psychological factors than on the external constraints of the job of Chief Executive. Opening with an anecdote about late night comedians' apparent inability to imitate Clinton satisfactorily, the article suggests, "there is a persistent queasiness about Bill Clinton himself. People aren't sure if he really believes the things he says or if he's just trying to seduce them" ("A Postmodern President"). No specific mention is made of the "postmodern" alluded to in the title, but the article does claim Clinton must also grapple with the "false sense of intimacy and very real cynicism that seem natural byproducts of the information age" ("A Postmodern President"). Perhaps because Clinton himself was perceived to be a better listener and empathizer than a communicator and commander, the empty center of Clinton's presidential persona was a psychological defect or a sign of the times, or both.

These mainstream interpretations of the early Clinton presidency misapplied the "postmodern" label, conflating insincerity with the postmodern's ontological uncertainty (or, perhaps more charitably, its playful irony). In fact, Clinton's foreign and domestic policy, including his drug policy, adhered to the Third Way strategy of the Democratic Leadership Council he had helped to found. If citizens could not easily pin down Clinton

in the first year of his presidency, it may have been because Clinton's triangulation strategy made him a moving target.

Taking a cue from the much maligned Michael Dukakis, Clinton campaigned as a "tough on crime" Democrat. As President, he maintained this hardline approach in both his rhetoric and his allocation of funds in the federal budget. Tony Proveda notes that the "ideological narrowing of the crime debate" was a lasting legacy of the Reagan-Bush years, but that it had its earliest roots in policies of Richard Nixon (75). He further suggests that the traditional poles of the debate, "crime prevention versus punishment and due process versus crime control," had mostly disappeared by the time Clinton took office (73). However, as I noted in Chapter 2, Nixon was less punitive in his approach to drug use than were his successors, including Clinton. In 1994, Clinton's national drug strategy claimed to emphasize increased funding for prevention and treatment, but funding for drug law enforcement remained static (Proveda 77). The continuation of Reagan-Bush policies surprised some who expected more liberal policies from the President, but early in Clinton's first term it became clear that he had "little interest in drug policy" and that cuts to staff in the Office of National Drug Control Policy reflected not a change in course but that "altering policy has been assigned a relatively low priority" (Gorman 370). At least in Clinton's first term, this seems to be the case. According to Stephen D. Easton, "during his first two years as president, Clinton mentioned illegal drugs in less than one percent of the statements, addresses, and interviews memorialized in his 1993 and 1994 Presidential Papers and in none of his seven 1993 addresses to the nation" (136). After Clinton's presidency, Peter Scrag notes

that Clinton's later promises to emphasize "prevention and treatment" rather than "interdiction and crop destruction" were never acted on (288).

History shows that Clinton's drug policy was, at best, a thoughtless continuation of those of his predecessors, so he is not often remembered for his contributions to the War on Drugs. Instead he is remembered for his scandals, particularly his relationship with White House intern Monica Lewinsky. Noting that President Clinton waged unilateral war by executive action in Yugoslavia "in the face of a direct congressional refusal to authorize the war" (156), David Gray Adler finds it ironic that Congress "chose to impeach Bill Clinton for lying about a sexual encounter" rather than for the legitimate breach of constitutional authority represented by his multiple unilateral military actions (167). Clinton's "womanizing" was consistently portrayed as far more serious than a charge of simple perjury: it was part of a dangerous pattern of behavior indicating Clinton's inability to control himself. Fred I. Greenstein even links Clinton's "excessively long speeches" and "overload[ed]...policy agenda" to his "lack of self-discipline and imperfect impulse control" (Greenstein 180). Psychoanalyzing Clinton further, Greenstein suggests that Clinton's "dependency" may arise from his having been raised by a "doting mother" and an alcoholic stepfather (181). Using recent research (he cites studies from 1982 and 1989) on adult children of alcoholics to blame the too-attentive mother, Greenstein manages to make Clinton's apparent addictions the result of both too much and not enough love. The implication is that a responsible biological father would have tamped down Clinton's excesses; because Clinton's father died three months before Clinton was born *and* his stepfather was an alcoholic, Clinton now needs "external correction" from Republicans (181). This view not only justifies Third Way

politics (like those policies that returned Clinton to the Arkansas governor's mansion in 1983), but necessitates them. Ironically, Clinton's approach to social problems, including addiction, emphasized "personal responsibility." Monte Piliawsky notes that Clinton used the word "responsibility" "over twenty times" in his acceptance speech at the Democratic National Convention in 1992 (Piliawsky 4).

Similarly, the narrative of Clinton-as-irresponsible-addict was supported by a complementary narrative of Hillary-as-denial-ridden-enabler. In an article entitled "The Enabler," Barbara Kellerman alleges that Mrs. Clinton, "by not demanding that he address a problem that threatened them and us with irreparable harm, lent covert support to his destructive behavior" (889). Labeling Clinton's behavior "outrageous and risky," (890) but reserving her contempt primarily for Hillary, Kellerman deploys the language of the Intervention, privileging the people and processes that might arrest an addict's decline over the narrative of the addict himself. The consequence is twofold: Hillary-as-enabler reinforces the notion that Clinton requires an external check on his excessive drives and it delegitimizes the most overtly political (and politically ambitious) First Lady in the history of the Presidency. Valverde notes that codependency, the "disease entity born out of the Adult Children of Alcoholics organization," of which enabling an addict is a symptom, radically subverts the formerly "morally superior position of forbearance and support—the position of the sober wife and the long-suffering teenage son or daughter of an alcoholic" into "a disease in its own right, a disease characterized precisely by a tendency to 'love too much' to the neglect of the care of self" (Valverde 30). In Hillary Clinton's case, the label of codependent invited criticism rather than understanding.

My goal is not to illustrate how Clinton was vilified for his “liberalism” even as he moved further to the right, but rather to try to account for the deeper ironies of his presidency: that his continuing of Reagan’s War on Drugs policies would somehow earn him the admiration of African American voters and even the affectionate moniker “the first black President”; that a consistent political strategy (Third Way politics) would appear so inconsistent and ephemeral to observers; that Congress would abdicate their war powers in favor of the ability to subpoena more and more evidence of comparatively minor indiscretions. Perhaps the deepest irony of all is that allegedly postmodern, highly ironic American culture, so well-versed in indeterminism, nihilism, and political satire, seemed unable to do more than merely note the ironies.

***Infinite Jest* and the Recovery Movement**

The Recovery Movement in the 1990s provides an important context for this analysis. In her cultural history of the movement, Trysh Travis cites Bill Clinton as the “first recovery president” (1) and delineates how for citizens under Clinton (and later Bush) “the discourse of addiction and recovery became a prism that focused disparate and seemingly incomprehensible acts into coherent (if deplorable) approaches to governance” (2). As Travis notes (and as I have discussed in Chapter 1), the postwar expansion of Alcoholics Anonymous, by the 1980s, had spread to a variety of “publishing and reading communities...Once the polite literary world realized the commercial viability of recovery discourse, new avenues for exploring its nuances opened up” (13). By the time of David Foster Wallace’s *Infinite Jest*, the Recovery Movement was inescapable in its “promiscuous print culture” (Travis 12), in allusions to

Twelve Step groups in popular film and television, in Presidents using the language of recovery to narrate their own lives, and in criticisms of the movement by people such as Stanton Peele and Wendy Kaminer, as well as by counter-movements like Rational Recovery. Wallace's novel engages deeply with the proliferation of addiction and recovery rhetoric. Eoin Cannon argues that recovery in the novel is "a form for developing alternative social relations in an apocalyptic, post-liberal milieu" (Cannon 251). Critics have taken issue with Wallace's use of Alcoholics Anonymous in the novel, sometimes in much the same way that Peele and Kaminer criticized the disease concept and recovery itself. However, the recovery movement that permeates the novel's futuristic mise-en-scene is not monolithic. Wallace devotes considerable space to delineating the functions of AA, to representing pernicious appropriations of the Recovery Movement (such as the Inner Infant support group and W.H.I.N.E.R.S. "an Adult-Child-type thing" (Wallace 372)), and to clarifying the distinctions between a sincere and an ironic recovery movement. In so doing, I argue, *Infinite Jest* offers an older, pre-Intervention narrative of recovery as the solution to the problems of postmodernism, problems that manifest themselves as culture-wide addiction to passivity, illusion, and irony.

Infinite Jest braids together the paths of a teenaged tennis star, Hal Incandenza, a recovering drug addict, Don Gately, and a Canadian terrorist, Remy Marathe, working with the United States' shadowy Office of Unspecified Services. Hal, a student at the Enfield Tennis Academy, founded by his late father and currently overseen by his mother, Avril Incandenza, and her step-brother, is a senior in high school and a tennis prodigy who may be on the verge of a professional career in the sport. Down the hill from

the academy is the Ennet House Drug and Alcohol Recovery House (*sic*, as Wallace's narrator points out), where Gately lives and works as a sort of layperson recovery counselor. Though Hal comes to think he may have a problem with substance abuse himself, the two may never have met were it not for the immensely complicated geopolitical situation that impacts each of the novel's characters. In a post-environmental apocalypse North America, a germophobe lounge-singer turned duly elected President has annexed a toxic portion of New England (perhaps after engineering a nuclear event to create the waste in the first place) and given it to Canada. The "Experialist 'gift'" (Wallace 58) has caused new international tensions as well as increased hostility between the Canadian government and Quebecois separatists. A group of terrorists known as the Wheelchair Assassins hopes to secure a free Quebec by disseminating a film cartridge so entertaining it renders viewers paralyzed and devoted to endless rewatching. This cartridge, called *Infinite Jest*, (sometimes also referred to as the "Entertainment," the name I'll use throughout) was created by Hal's father, James Incandenza, an experimental filmmaker, who committed suicide four years before the novel opens. Spies for the Wheelchair Assassins and the American government track the Incandenza family (including Hal's estranged brother Orin, a punter for the Arizona Cardinals), hoping they'll lead them to the master copy of the cartridge. They also follow Joelle VanDyne, the ex-girlfriend of Orin Incandenza and James's one-time ingénue, who is believed to have appeared in the film. After a failed suicide attempt, Joelle ends up in Ennet House, where she meets Gately and other characters who unwittingly draw the attention of the Wheelchair Assassins. At the novel's end, there's a suggestion that Hal, Gately, Joelle, and a Canadian student at Enfield named John "No Relation" Wayne come together to

exhume James's body in the so-called "Concavity/Convexity," but do not find the cartridge buried there. Nonetheless, hemispheric catastrophe seems to be averted: the beginning of the novel occurs at the latest moment in narrative time, the "Year of Glad" which sees an incapacitated Hal trying to fake his way through a college interview. He alludes to memories of the encounter with Gately at his father's grave, but otherwise time, subsidized by the Glad company, seems to have gone on as before.

Addiction is a thematic concern of the novel throughout, and Wallace explores multiple dimensions of the issue from etiology to the nature and progression of the disease to possibilities for treatment to ongoing recovery to Alcoholics Anonymous to the broader recovery movement. Addiction is both a real social problem that afflicts the characters and a metaphor for the state of late 20th century American culture. *Infinite Jest's* emphasis on the arduous process of on-going recovery distinguishes it from the other texts I have discussed thus far, texts that, despite their significant differences either treat Intervention or a "rock bottom" as an event that symbolizes recovery (or death) or neglect to explore the dimensions of any character's post-active-addiction life. However, before discussing the implications of this focus on recovery, an area that several critics have already explored, I wish to look more closely at two other facets of addiction Wallace also prioritizes: the etiology of addiction and addiction's progression. Through these foci, Wallace both extends and disrupts addiction as metaphor for late 20th century American life. In doing so, he offers a response to Clinton's continuation of the War on Drugs and a critique of the disingenuous Third Way politics that enabled it.

As I mentioned in Chapters 1 and 2, etiology is a question often neglected in narrative understandings of addiction, particularly during the War on Drugs when

politicians on both sides of the aisle have moved away from understanding causes in favor of being (perceived as) “tough on crime.” In addition, Alcoholics Anonymous, while throughout its history offering etiological explanations such as allergies and hereditary predispositions, has insisted on the relative unimportance of knowing what causes addiction in order to treat it. Despite the novel’s clear interest in AA, its ideology, and the narrative implications thereof, the potential causes of addiction are explored through several of its characters. In the ubiquitous AA speaker and discussion meetings featured in the novel, minor characters reveal traumatic events that precipitated their use of drugs. Many of the stories feature details of extreme physical and sexual abuse; several characters’ backstories, including Hal’s and Gately’s depict one or both parents struggling with alcoholism or other addictions. At the Enfield Tennis Academy, the narrator suggests, several students deal with the immense pressure to perform athletically and academically through “recreational substances” (Wallace 53). But, undercutting this array of explanations, the narrator further asks “Like who isn’t, [using drugs] at some life-stage, in the U.S.A. and Interdependent regions, in these troubled times, for the most part” (Wallace 53).

Despite these clear allusions to genetic predispositions and self-medication resulting from abuse or stress, the novel presents cases that defy explanation. At an inner child support meeting Hal accidentally attends trying to find a Narcotics Anonymous meeting, he concludes “getting held and told you were loved didn’t automatically seem like it rendered you emotionally whole or Substance-free” (805). He juxtaposes himself with his friend and drug supplier, Michael Pemulis, whose father raped Michael’s older brother Matty throughout his childhood. Michael Pemulis, though an active user of drugs,

does not consider himself addicted or “unfree” (805), nor does he seem to blame his traumatic childhood for any of the problems he faces. Hal and Michael’s mothers, in particular, represent a spectrum of parental involvement, with Avril Incandenza depicted as hypervigilant and neurotic, a “kind of contortionist with other people’s bodies” (Wallace 285), and Mrs. Pemulis as a negligent cipher about whom the narrator asks “Where was *Mrs.* Pemulis all this time, late at night, with dear old Da P. shaking Matty ‘awake’ until his teeth rattled and little Micky curled up against the far wall, shell-breathing, silent as death, is what I’d want to know” (Wallace 1052, note 278, italics in original). Like childhood trauma, one’s parents, whether hyperpresent or guiltily absent, cannot be used as the sole predictor of whether one will become an addict.

Addiction’s progression is similarly complicated in the novel. *Infinite Jest*’s large cast of characters features individuals struggling with a range of substances (marijuana, cocaine, heroin, prescription drugs, alcohol) as well as behaviors: sex addiction (Orin Incandenza), codependence (Avril), gambling (Gene Fackelmann), and compulsive killing (Randy Lenz). Each character has precise rituals for engaging in his/her addictive behavior, and in many cases those rituals are predicated on the notion that this will be the “last time” he or she uses. Both Joelle and Ken Erdedy resolve to quit and throw away their drug paraphernalia, ultimately having to purchase new pipes or to improvise smoking devices from clothes and bottles. They, like Gene Fackelmann, purchase exceptionally large quantities of their drugs of choice, judging overindulgence to be an appropriate punishment for their excesses and a proper way to terminate their use (in Joelle’s case, she intends the final use to result in her death (Wallace 240)). The repetition of this pattern of behavior—use, frustration, determination to quit/die,

elaborate preparation for final use, subsequent continuation of use—suggests the relative uniformity of the addicted experience. However, all of the characters experience their “rock bottom” at different points on their trajectory. For Gately, accidentally killing a man during a burglary and the threat of extended prison time inspire his decision to stay sober. The manager of Ennet House, Pat Montesian, suffers paralyzing strokes before being able to quit. Court ordered treatment and failed suicide attempts feature in the reasons characters come to Ennet House. Hal decides to stop smoking marijuana when threatened with urinalysis.

While a range of experiences constitutes the “last straw” for many characters in the novel, others never approach the “rock bottom,” and no threat of harm or even death would compel them to stop. “Poor Tony” Krause, a drug addict who eventually falls prey to the Entertainment, suffers immensely. Poor Tony is implicated or involved in several of the novel’s episodes of senseless pain and death: he is present at the torture and execution of Gately’s friend Gene Fackelmann and is himself responsible for the death of a woman when he robs her, inadvertently stealing her external artificial heart rather than her purse. After going through a withdrawal process described in vivid detail, seizures force his agony to a climax that is depicted as a painful rebirth (Wallace 306). The rebirth, however, affects no lasting change in Poor Tony’s situation. Later in the novel he is confined to a stall in a public bathroom, soiled and sick, with nowhere else to go.

Nonetheless, the novel seems to privilege hitting rock bottom, suggesting that the empathy necessary for identification (and subsequently, recovery) can only come about once an addict is “in the kind of hell of a mess that either ends lives or turns them around” (Wallace 347). Being able to confront one’s addiction in the context of a real

event, as opposed to the simulations of the Intervention, is key to recovery. This theme is reinforced in the tactics of the Wheelchair Assassins. In a conversation interspersed throughout the novel, Remy Marathe, a member of the Wheelchair Assassins, explains to Hugh Steeply, an agent of the Office of Unspecified Services, the problems that make U.S. citizens especially vulnerable to addiction (and thus to the Entertainment, the master cartridge of which both men are seeking). For Marathe, Americans' fatal self-love and basic insincerity, their tendency to make him feel "vaguely ashamed after saying things he believed" (318) has left them unable to make careful choices. The Wheelchair Assassins' first strikes against the U.S. symbolically emphasized (rather than exploited) the citizens' addictive tendencies. One such plot involved placing gigantic mirrors "across U.S. Interstate 87 at selected dangerous narrow winding Adirondack passes" (311). This cartoonish gambit resulted in several deaths, as drivers would see headlights approaching, try to signal to other driver to get out of the wrong lane, and ultimately swerve off the road (and down a chasm) to avoid the "suicidal idiot" coming towards them. The Wheelchair Assassins would then take the mirror away, resulting in an apparently unexplainable single-car fatality. The plot exploited Americans' "well-known" aggressive driving tactics. If a driver were to stop or slow down before hitting the other car, he might realize that he was looking at his reflection. The trick only works if the driver insists on his right of way until the very end. The plot is eventually uncovered, but not for that reason. Instead, "it was an actual U.S. would-be suicide, a late stage Valium-addicted Amway distributor from Schenectady," who smashes through the glass when she decides to gun it for the headlights rather than swerve away (312). The addict from Schenectady's suicidal trajectory functions as synecdoche for the self-

absorbed addictive tendencies of U.S. citizens as a whole. However, it's only by seeing the narrative through that the addict "SMASHE[S] THE ILLUSION" (312) and avoids death. Drivers who are convinced of the illusion's reality avoid the illusion and suffer death. Importantly, the narrator notes that the Schenectady addict "saw the sudden impending headlights in her northbound lane as Grace" and closed her eyes (312). Her figurative and literal breakthrough is preceded by a surrender to what she believes is a Higher Power. Her recovery aligns with the Alcoholics Anonymous model of recovery that the novel so clearly advocates.

Before discussing the significance of AA in the text, and thus risking the suggestion that the novel's ideology of addiction and recovery and AA's are the same, I want to point out the ways in which *Infinite Jest's* is specifically a post-Intervention conception of recovery, one that doesn't treat the Intervention as if it never existed, but instead confronts the elevation of simulated crises over real ones. The Schenectady addict illustrates not only the importance of a real "rock bottom" experience, but also the role of illusion in perpetuating addiction. The Schenectady addict shares with the drivers who swerve off the road the acceptance of the reality of the illusion. Wallace emphasizes the importance of illusion to understanding contemporary social ills. Technological advances have offered increasing amounts of mediated images, often in the service of verisimilitude, as in the cases of videophony and the hyperrealistic ad campaigns of Viney and Veals. In *Infinite Jest*, video conferencing replaced traditional telephone use, but has gradually transitioned, due to "videophonic stress" (146), from showing the callers' faces to showing composite images of their faces to showing tableaux of minor celebrities instead of the callers. At one point in this transition, callers without the money

to use composite images simply wore masks (148). Finally, “a return to aural-only telephony became... a kind of status-symbol of anti-vanity, such that only callers utterly lacking in self-awareness continued to use videophony and Tableaux, to say nothing of masks, and these tacky facsimile-using people became ironic cultural symbols of tacky vain slavery to corporate PR and high-tech novelty” (151). In contrast are the hyperrealistic images of the Viney and Veals’s NoCoat tongue scraper commercials, featuring a “lingering close-up” on a “near-geologic layer of gray-white material coating the tongue of [an] otherwise handsome pedestrian” (413-4). The consequences of the revolting ads are enumerated at length by Hal (whose term paper about the fall of broadcast television the narrator is paraphrasing in this section of the novel); more importantly, they also include an ironic rejection of the ads and television altogether. In both cases, the ironic attitude leads to an entrenchment of larger social problems: videophony goes by the wayside, but the advertising of masks and tableaux has created additional anxiety about appearances, causing people to want to stay home rather than go out and be seen; the NoCoat ads set off a chain reaction of events that lead to the fall of broadcast television and the rise of InterLace, Wallace’s prescient, Netflix-like cartridge subscription service, which allows viewers the illusion of “total control” over their entertainment. *Infinite Jest* suggests the proliferation of mediated images has fueled the self-conscious ironic attitude that hinders recovery.

The importance of Wallace’s critique of irony, in *Infinite Jest* and in “E Unibus Pluram,” a 1993 essay that is frequently read alongside the novel, is difficult to overstate. Self-conscious irony in early postmodern literature “started out the same way youthful rebellion did. It was difficult and painful and *productive*—a grim diagnosis of a long-

denied disease” (Wallace, “E Unibus Pluram,” 183). However, as Wallace painstakingly points out, television caught on to the nihilistic techniques of postmodern “fictionists” and pressed them into the service of commercialism and the reification of TV’s authority; Wallace cites Pepsi and Isuzu television commercials (178-179) that mock both the conventions of traditional advertising and the products themselves and analyzes the dizzying self-referentiality of episodes of television shows like *St. Elsewhere*, *The Bob Newhart Show*, and *The Mary Tyler Moore Show* (158). These techniques serve to impart feelings of superiority of the viewer, who ““see[s] through’ the pretentiousness and hypocrisy of outdated values,” mocked by TV and is yet “dependent on the cynical TV-watching that alone afford this feeling” of superiority (180). Thus, ironic critiques of televisual culture in the “image fiction” of Wallace’s contemporaries are, in Althusserian terms, interpellated by the very ideological apparatus they apparently seek to resist. In Wallace’s words, “This is because irony, entertaining as it is, serves an exclusively negative function...But irony’s singularly unuseful when it comes to constructing anything to replace the hypocrisies it debunks” (183). Overuse of irony creates a power vacuum that television easily fills. However, if technological advances make broadcast television obsolete, Wallace argues “the passivity of Audience, the acquiescence inherent in a whole culture of and about watching” will be unaffected, even if what replaces it allows viewers infinitely more choices in their viewing content (188). It’s our addiction to the image, the illusion, not simply television, that Wallace seeks to confront.

The use of AA in the novel functions as a microcosm of this critique of irony. In place of Intervention, Alcoholics Anonymous offers identification achieved through empathy. That is, rather responding to an image of themselves “bottoming out” presented

in an Intervention, Wallace's addicts sustain recovery by attempting to experience through empathy the recovery narratives of others as told to them in AA meetings. Wallace's apparent enthusiasm for AA, both as treatment for addiction and metaphorical solution for the problem of image-addicted American culture, has caused some consternation among critics, who have difficulty accepting the platitudinous premises of the program. Advocating for the importance of play in the novel, Mark Bresnan qualifies Don Gately's participation in AA, arguing his "success with AA is germinated not by the program itself but rather by his provisional and playful approach to it. Rather than conceiving of AA as an opportunity for revelatory self-examination, Gately constructs the program as precisely the sort of closed ludicrous space that has eluded the novel's other characters" (65). In an argument that relies on AA as the antidote to "the debility of interiority" (Freudenthal 195), Elizabeth Freudenthal demurs "despite the problems one many have with AA as a vehicle for healthy living, Gately's mode of fighting addiction is the only one in the novel that actually works" (191). Tim Aubry, combining two common topoi of *Infinite Jest* criticism, suggests that Wallace anticipated "readers will likely view [AA's] practices and values as unappealingly trite and old-fashioned" and so created in his novel "a compulsive reading experience designed to simulate the trajectory of addiction in order to overwhelm and oversaturate his readers' desires, exhaust their internal mechanisms of defensive sophistication and thus prepare them to confront AA as a salutary model" (Aubry 99). It's fair to say that Wallace anticipated scholars' skepticism about AA, as the novel is filled with characters, one of them a scholar himself, who express skepticism about AA. Geoffrey Day, a professor at a junior college, laments to a fellow Ennet House Member, "So then at forty-six years of age I came here to learn

to live by clichés... To turn my will and life over to the care of clichés” (Wallace 270). Gately engages with Day’s arguments patiently; the narrator predicts “If Day ever gets lucky and breaks down, finally,... Gately’ll get to tell Day the thing is that the clichéd directives are a lot more deep and hard to actually *do*. To try and live by instead of just say” (273). Nonetheless, Wallace also leaves room for more legitimate critiques from more sympathetic characters, as when a minor character named Alfonso asks Pat Montesian, director of Ennet House, “How does to admit I am powerless make me stop what the thing is I am powerless to stop? My head it is crazy from this fearing of no power. I am now hope for *power*, Mrs. Pat. I want to advice. Is hope of power the bad way for Alfonso as drug addict?” (178). Alfonso’s idiosyncratic use of language marks him as a minority and possibly a person of color. Marginalized people, especially women, have taken issue with the AA requirement of admitting powerlessness and surrendering one’s will. In addition, Wallace is willing to poke fun at the extremities of AA, as evidenced by the existence of the founder of the Ennet House, a “nail-tough old chronic drug addict and alcoholic” who “so valued AA’s tradition of anonymity that he refused even to use his first name, and was known in Boston AA simply as the Guy Who Didn’t Even Use His First Name” (137). The founder’s predilection for cult-like behavior extends beyond his innocuous name, though.⁵³ He also “in the House’s early days, required incoming residents to attempt to eat rocks—as in like rocks from the ground—to demonstrate their willingness to go to any lengths for the gift of sobriety” (138). These

⁵³ An exchange between two women in Ennet House’s lobby underscores the critique of the Founder. Both apparently former cult members, the two try to outdo each other’s stories of miserable treatment under their “Semi Divine One” and “Divinely Chosen Leader.” Both were required to give their teeth to their cult’s leader, but one brags that she was allowed to keep “the ones for gnawing” wood in “like subzero wintertime” (729-730).

criticisms both anticipate and contain the criticisms of AA (and Wallace's advocacy for sincerity).

In addition, AA is not the only mutual aid recovery program discussed in the novel. Wallace creates groups based on real phenomena like Al-Anon and Adult Children of Alcoholics, two support groups for the family members of addicts, and the proliferation of the "Inner Child," a psychological concept that achieved immense popularity in the early 1990s; he also devises wholly original support groups, like the Union of the Hideously and Improbably Deformed (U.H.I.D., discussed below). Both iterations are deviations from AA's program. A member of the "splinter 12-Step Fellowship...called Wounded, Hurting, Inadequately Nurtured but Ever-Recovering Survivors" (Wallace 372) commits the cardinal sin of "causal attribution" (370) at an AA meeting. Hal accidentally attends an "Inner Infant" support meeting while trying to find a Narcotics Anonymous meeting. The leader of this meeting advises its attendees to "work on our dysfunctional passivity and tendency to wait silently for our Inner Infant's needs to be magically met," goals that sound like they might be sanctioned by Wallace's Boston AA (802). However, this leader is also described thus: "he's got blond eyebrows and creepy blond eyelashes and violently flushed face of a true Norwegian blond, and his little beard is an imperial so sharply waxed it looks like a truncated star" (Wallace 800). Like the acronym W.H.I.N.E.R.S., the leader's overtly caricature-like appearance uses sarcastic humor to mark the distinction between these misappropriations of AA and the anti-ironic Boston AA the novel promotes.

However, it must be noted that several critics of the novel have essayed deconstructive readings that insist Wallace is indebted to irony, that he is unable to

escape it. Wallace seems to be the test case for the underlying, unassailable logic of deconstruction, as *Infinite Jest* seems to contain its own undoing, whether that be through “linguistic and formal play” in a novel skeptical of play (Bresnan 63), an addictive reading experience in a novel highly critical of all forms of addiction (Aubry 99), or through dependence on irony through “meta-irony” (Scott). Indeed, that Wallace is himself “addicted” to irony and postmodernist technique seems to follow from readings of the novel’s form and narrative structure without much inquiry into what constitutes addiction. Frank Cioffi suggests that because the reader “is longing to know what will happen to this or that character, what strange new twist will emerge, or how one plot will ultimately intersect with the others” the novel “has an addictive quality” (Cioffi 163). The overstuffed, encyclopedic form of *Infinite Jest* is evidence, in A. O. Scott’s view, of Wallace’s “interlocking addictions to irony, metafiction, and the other cheap postmodern highs” (Scott). Importantly, neither of these analogies of addiction bears scrutiny when one compares Wallace’s “addictions” to medical models or to the model of addiction described at length in *Infinite Jest*. Readers longing to know what will happen next, as Cioffi suggests is evidence of addiction, is quite different from the miserable, recursive chasing of an already experienced scene (a high) that remains elusive. Addiction in Wallace’s text is marked by repetition and despair rather than the pleasure found in narrative. Similarly, the size of *Infinite Jest*, an aspect of the novel few critics can resist finding deeper thematic significance in, is not evidence in itself of an “addictive” reading experience. Kendall Gerdes argues that the convention of using bookmarks to read Wallace’s endnotes and merely “carrying or holding the nearly two-pound book” can result in “ritual (and even secretive) reading habits [that] have the effect of making the

reader feel like an addict” (346). This anecdotal evidence seeks to universalize the experience of reading *Infinite Jest* rather than prove that the novel is addictive in the same way that the novel’s Entertainment is. In his discussion of irony in the novel, Iannis Goerlandt specifically rejects this conflation of *Infinite Jest* (the novel) with *Infinite Jest* (the film within the novel), arguing that the novel’s structure resists such ironic readings (324-5). Instead, the novel invites readers to create extratextual meaning, acknowledging “that the novel’s ambiguity...cannot be resolved on the level of narration” (325).

Similarly, Allard Den Dulk points out that, “most interpretations of Wallace’s critique [of irony] have approached irony as a linguistic phenomenon, and not so much as an existential attitude” (326). The problem with this approach, in Dulk’s view, is that *Infinite Jest* “primarily deals with ‘irony as a position’ through the portrayal of the life-view of the novel’s many addicted characters, for whom irony is inextricably tied up with addiction, as an escape from responsibility and their problems. The novel describes this addict-type attitude as a culture-wide phenomenon” (327).

Following Goerlandt and Dulk, I suggest that the distinction between the textual and the extratextual, between the linguistic and the existential, is at the crux of *Infinite Jest*’s argument against addiction and the ironic “cure” suggested by the Intervention. For Wallace, irony, with its negative function, tends to conflate diagnosis with cure (“E Unibus Pluram” 183); the Intervention, so long as it presents an illusion, does not help the addict face reality. In the section that follows, I highlight several instances in the novel where Wallace explores the extratextual through the trope of the map. In their literal and idiomatic manifestations in the novel, maps both mark the insufficiency of

purely textual interpretations and represent an important boundary between reality and mediation.

“The world becomes a map of the world”: the Flawed Premise of the Intervention

In describing what it feels like to be anhedonic, *Infinite Jest*'s Kate Gompert notes that “terms the undepressed toss around and take for granted as full and fleshy—*happiness, joie de vivre, preference, love*—are stripped to their skeletons and reduced to abstract ideas. They have, as it were, denotation but not connotation... The world becomes a map of the world” (Wallace 693). Gompert’s analogy links the linguistic and existential through the trope of the map. To be truly depressed is, in a sense, to be trapped in pure language. The misery of this position is further demonstrated in the “militant grammarian” Avril Incandenza and, at one point, in Joelle, who tells Don Gately her problem with one of AA’s slogans is not its triteness but its grammatical incoherence: “‘But For the Grace of God’ is a subjunctive, a counterfactual, she says, and can make sense only when introducing a conditional clause... so that an indicative transposition like ‘I’m here But For the Grace of God’ is, she says, literally senseless, and regardless of whether she *hears* it or not it’s meaningless” (366). Though the less educated Gately barely understands Joelle’s meaning, “he feels a greasy wave of an old and almost unfamiliar panic” (366). Joelle’s insistence on a literal interpretation of a phrase that she admits she understands in context shakes Gately’s hard-earned tranquility, and it seems that the danger of the world becoming “a map of the world” is that the life-saving empathy Gately finds in his real experiences is constantly in danger of evaporating. In the novel, maps figure in three important ways: the literal map of the United States has been

“Reconfigured,” creating the “Organization of North American Nations” or O.N.A.N.; maps are a crucial component of Eschaton, the nuclear apocalypse game students at Enfield play during downtime, particularly during the extended break offered by the “Interdependence Day” holiday commemorating the creation of O.N.A.N.; and the word “map” is used to mean a person’s face or life, with the idiom “to eliminate one’s own map,” a phrase used by several characters as well as the narrator, to mean to commit suicide. In examining these three uses of maps in *Infinite Jest*, I wish to make connections between Wallace’s critique of addiction and irony and the ironic continuation of the War on Drugs under President Clinton.

Eschaton, a geopolitical strategy role-playing game played primarily by Enfield students “in the very earliest stages of puberty” (Wallace 321), is at the center of one of the novel’s most memorable and remarked upon scenes. The game takes place on Interdependence Day, a holiday that allows the players extra food and time off from practice and schoolwork. However, to call Eschaton simply a game would be to ignore the incredible amount of intellectual and physical preparation necessary for it. The game requires a game-master, in this case 13-year-old Otis P. Lord, who programs a computer with data about world nations and develops “World Situations” for the participants to agree on, complicated scenarios that include “ethnic, sociologic, economic, and even religious demographics for each Combatant, plus broadly sketched psych-profiles of all relevant heads of state; prevailing weather in all the map’s quadrants; etc.” (Wallace 324). The tennis courts are divided into territories based on “*The Rand McNally Slightly Rectangular Hanging Map of the World*” (322), and participants are given old tennis balls to serve as nuclear warheads. Participants must use tennis rackets to lob the warheads at

their opponents during the game, thus making those more skilled in their sport even more valuable Eschaton players. The narrator notes that a player is drawn to Eschaton at the age “when one’s allergy to the confining realities of the present is just starting to emerge as weird kind of nostalgia for stuff you never even knew” (321-22). Bradley Fest points out that the participants seem to have nostalgia for “the threat of global nuclear war... for a world marked both politically and historically by such a grand narrative” (Fest, “The Inverted Nuke in the Garden,” 135). Having been born after the Cold War ended, the Eschaton players are attracted to a game that imagines its apocalyptic potential end. Significantly, it is also a game in which the map of the world has boundaries that dictate the rules of play.

The November 8 Year of the Depend Adult Undergarment game of Eschaton ends without a simulated global apocalypse but instead with actual fighting among the participants. The conflict arises when it begins lightly snowing. J. J. Penn, the player representing India and Pakistan (“INDPAK” in the game) argues that the snow on the tennis court should be factored in when calculating the damage caused by a tennis ball/warhead launched by China (“REDCHI”). Pemulis, considered to be one of the greatest retired Eschaton players and the person responsible for using technology to increase its complexity, argues “It’s snowing on the goddamn *map*, not the *territory*” (Wallace 333). Essentially correct in his statement, Pemulis is nonetheless unable to prevent fighting from breaking out among participants as they begin using tennis balls/warheads to hit each other instead of “the gear that *maps* what’s real” (338, italics in original). Pemulis argues throughout the conflict that “delimiting boundaries,” both the boundaries between the nations on the map and the boundaries between the “mapped”

and the real, are “Eschaton’s very life-blood” (335). On the level of the game, smaller state actors, like the “postage-stamp-sized nation of Sierra Leone” (337) become immensely significant, and Evan Ingersoll, the player representing Iran, Libya, and Syrian (“IRLIBSYR”), takes advantage of a conference between players on the map’s western Africa to launch a strike against superpowers America (“AMNAT”) and the Soviet Union (“SOVWAR”) (335-336). Ingersoll and Penn are both willing to exploit the boundary confusion in the name of winning when they would otherwise be unable to do so. Pemulis argues that they are trying to “eliminate Eschaton’s map for keeps for one slimy cheesy victory” (339). The breakdown of these boundaries might be heralded as progress; the end of Eschaton means the end of “nostalgia” for Cold War politics, for the international death wish of nuclear annihilation. However, what replaces Eschaton is arguably worse. From Hal’s perspective, the melee is described as “a degenerative chaos so complex in its disorder that it’s hard to tell whether it seems choreographed or simply chaotically disordered” (341). The real players break limbs and bleed. Otis Lord, whose name marks him as an overlord and whose function in the game is that of “God” (333), is perhaps the most seriously injured. Trying to flee with his computer cart and other Eschaton paraphernalia, Lord is tackled, trips over other prone players, and ends up with his head stuck in the computer monitor, a condition he remains in for most of the novel.

It is significant that Lord’s face becomes/takes the place of a screen, as screens and faces (also called “maps”) are juxtaposed in numerous instances throughout the novel. In addition to Lord’s predicament and the aforementioned convention of wearing masks or otherwise “masking” the screen on which callers’ faces/maps would appear to reduce “videophonic stress,” is the advent of the Union of the Hideously and Improbably

Deformed (U.H.I.D.), an “11-Step” (363) support group of which Joelle is a member. Members of this group wear veils over their faces and a “decent percentage” of them “are also in 12-Step fellowships for other issues besides hideous deformity” (363). As Joelle explains it, people with physical deformities both want to hide from the stares of the general public and to be perceived as strong enough to resist the temptation to hide, to deny altogether their desire to hide, “in other words, [to] hide your hiding” (535). U.H.I.D. and the wearing of the veil allow “members to be open about their essential need for concealment” (535). During the scene in which Joelle criticizes the grammar of an AA slogan, Gately’s panic is accompanied by a feeling that “the blank white veil levelled [sic] at him seems a screen on which might well be projected a casual and impressive black and yellow smily-face” (366-367). The veil is in direct opposition to the faces of the speakers at the AA meeting, whom newcomers are advised to sit close enough to “see the pores in the speaker’s nose and try to Identify instead of Compare” (345). Thus, Joelle’s hidden visage becomes a site of projection rather than identification, despite her apparent “honesty.” Being open about a desire to hide represents the kind of metairony some critics have accused Wallace of falling prey to. It’s clear that U.H.I.D. offers no true hope of recovery (i.e. in the same sense of the 12-Step AA fellowship) for its members, and the replacing of a face/map with a screen/veil prevents identification and true connection.⁵⁴ When Joelle experiences identification with an (unveiled) AA

⁵⁴ That U.H.I.D. has eleven steps to AA’s twelve suggests something is missing from their program. Significantly, the 12th Step of AA is, after having a “spiritual awakening as the result of these steps” to “carry this [AA’s] message to alcoholics, and to practice these principles in all our affairs” (Alcoholics Anonymous). In other words, the final step asks participants to move from reciting slogans to living them. It may be that U.H.I.D. lacks the final step that would turn words into actions. However, a brief episode in the novel suggests otherwise. A “veiled legate” from U.H.I.D. tries to recruit Mario to the Union

speaker, that speaker's face loses "its color, shape, everything distinctive." In turn, Joelle, for "the first time in a long time" considers whether she will show Gately her own face (710).

Through these connections, faces/maps become important to survival, perhaps explaining in part why "map" also means "life," such that "to eliminate one's own map" means to commit suicide. This dual usage of the "map" metaphor underscores *Infinite Jest's* investment in the embodied. In one of a very glimpses of the young James Incandenza's upbringing, his father (James Incandenza Sr.) warns him, "Son, you're a body, son" (159). The body's needs, its shape, its deformities, its positioning; these factors shape the life of the individual, and James Sr. argues that a good life is found "transcending" the mind, "living in your body" (158). As Emily Russell points out, the disabled and disfigured bodies throughout the novel, particularly Hal's uncontrollable body in the novel's opening episode, challenge "models in which the mind acts as the secure captain of the body. Rather than serve at the pleasure of the mind, disabled bodies reject narratives of this personal hierarchy as easy or natural" (Russell 187). Similarly, conflating the face/map with life/map complicates rather than simplifies the Cartesian self: one needs a face/body (no matter how disfigured or disabled) to identify with others, but one cannot be simply a body, as James Sr. recommends. Late in the novel, when Hal first begins to show symptoms of the disorder or disability he has in the novel's beginning, his seemingly inappropriate facial expressions are tested in response to the predicament of Ortho Stice, his friend and fellow Enfield student, who, after freezing his

and is driven away by Hal "brandishing his Dunlop stick, who told the guy to go peddle his linen someplace else" (317). Nonetheless, the missing step suggests some crucial deficiency in U.H.I.D.'s program.

face against a cold window pane, loses strips of forehead and nose skin when he is detached. Ortho Stice's "ruined map" (956) coincides with Hal's inscrutable one.

Rather than being eliminated, both Ortho and Hal's maps are in a sense "reconfigured." Reconfiguration is also the term for the political and ecological changes wrought by the presidential administration of Johnny Gentle, the United States President responsible for such absurdities as the Great Concavity/Convexity, the institution of subsidized time, and the Clean US Party. It seems clear that Gentle is not a simple stand-in for Bill Clinton; to my knowledge, no critic of the novel has attempted to draw that parallel. However, there are important ways in which the reconfiguration of the U.S. into O.N.A.N. reflects and comments on the challenges of NAFTA and Clinton's third-way neoliberal politics. In his analysis of Clinton's inter-American policies, Robert A. Pastor fruitfully mixes the metaphors of music and maps, arguing that as "the first US President to take office after the Cold War... [Clinton] moved to the rhythm of a postwar era. The anti-communist landmarks which had guided his predecessors across a treacherous international political landscape were no longer of use. The compass bequeathed to him by the US electorate compelled him to look inward" (Pastor 119). If the Cold War provided a political roadmap for presidents, the post-Cold War era would be defined by less external, verifiable symbols and more by the shifting rhythms of domestic concerns. Some critics have identified Clinton's political fluidity as a feature of his personality. Echoing the psychoanalytic criticism of Clinton discussed above, John F. Harris suggests Clinton's reliance on public polls, "reflect[s] a family upbringing that, by Clinton's own testimony, left him with a powerful attentiveness to winning the approval of others" (Harris 97). Douglas Brinkley argues, "elastic foreign policymaking appealed to Clinton;

it allowed him the freedom to maneuver as the day's headlines dictated and to be exponent of realpolitik one week and of Eleanor Roosevelt's idealism the next" (Brinkley 114). A reconfigured map in Clinton's United States not only includes borders made more porous by the North America Free Trade Agreement, but changes the terms of how to read the map altogether, turning the "compass" inward, using domestic and economic policy to shape foreign policy rather than the other way around.

Gentle and his reconfiguration of the United States' map (in both literal and figurative senses) seem similarly guided by an odd mixture of populism and personal pathology. Rather than an addict, Gentle is a germophobe and former lounge singer ("Famous Crooner," the novel repeatedly reminds the reader), and his desire to "clean up" the United States unites "ultra-right jingoist hunt-deer-with-automatic-weapons types and far-left macrobiotic Save-the-Ozone, -Rain-Forests, -Whales, -Spotted-Owl-and-High-pH-Waterways ponytailed granola crunchers" (Wallace 382). He charts a third way, but it is not, as in the case of Clinton, a centrist path. While Clinton depended on polls, Gentle reassures voters "he was going to make [the hard choices] for us. [He] asked us simply to sit back and enjoy the show" (383). Instead Gentle becomes, by exposing the commonalities of the fringes, an ironic inversion of Clinton, turning inward only to search for "some cohesion-renewing Other" that Americans can unite against (384). This Other is not found in "in the Ukraine, or the Teutons, or the wacko Latins" (384), but within. The Other is the annexed portion of New England Gentle "gives" to the Canadians after filling it with the United States' toxic waste; experialism, an ironic reversal of imperialism, is still imperialism. However, the annex of the Concavity (or Convexity, depending on which side of the map it's viewed from) also resonates with the

psychological aspect of Gentle's campaign promises to "clean up government and trim fat and sweep out waste and hose down our chemically troubled streets and to sleep darn little until he'd fashioned a way to rid the American psychosphere of the unpleasant debris of a throw-away past" (382). The ubiquity of homeless addicts in the novel suggests Gentle has not succeeded in solving the nation's chemical troubles. Drugs, like the fans that "blow the tidy U.S.'s northern oxides north" seep through borders (385). But the annexation of the Concavity and the creation of O.N.A.N. represent attempts to repress the effects and ignore the causes of addiction. "Interdependence" is a mask for both the continuation of U.S. hegemony and its citizens' dependence and their vulnerability to the fatal lure of the Entertainment.

Conclusion

The post-Cold War reconfiguration and elimination of maps represent the challenging political context any U.S. President would have to work within. President Clinton's apparent reluctance to engage in a sincere continuation of the War on Drugs reflects more his concept of the Presidency as a global office, one that uses domestic policy to influence foreign policy, and his willingness to triangulate between the two major parties in order to govern. The language of recovery, as Clinton used it to frame his own story, turned against him during the scandals of his presidency. *Infinite Jest*, even as it promotes recovery for America's addiction to unproductive irony, suggests how difficult it is to maintain in the face of late 20th century media-inundated culture. The opening of the novel, in which Hal is unable to communicate in the diegetic world, reveals a more sincere, perhaps more compassionate Hal to the reader. Despite having

been coached on how to appear “neutral and affectless” during his college interview (Wallace 9), Hal attempts to tell the Dean “I cannot make myself understood, now” (Wallace 10). He pleads “Please don’t think I don’t care... I am not what you see and hear” (12-13). The reader can understand him, but within the world of the novel, the other characters react with “horror...jowls sagging, eyebrows high on trembling foreheads, cheeks bright-white” (12). Perhaps Hal has been damaged (by a drug he’s been given or by having to watch the Entertainment), but perhaps he has instead become “really human”: “unavoidably sentimental and naïve and goo-prone and generally pathetic... in some basic interior way forever infantile, some sort of not-quite-right-looking infant dragging itself anaclitically around the map” (Wallace 695). If Hal has become this kind of real human, the rest of the world is not ready to understand him. For Wallace, this is the danger of trying to be sincere in a culture in which irony has taken over.

Because the Intervention offers an addict a simulated crisis rather than a real one, it is precisely the sort of ironic solution that perpetuates the problem. *Infinite Jest* takes place in a post-apocalyptic world in which the apocalypse revealed nothing, changed nothing. Children go on playing the games of nuclear age, while new threats, ones that transcend borders and target civilians, are difficult to contain, especially when they seem to exploit, as the Entertainment does, Americans’ fatal desires for pleasure. After the events of September 11, 2001, American foreign policy did not need to create an “Other” to unify against. Terrorism represented the same kind of state-less, border-transgressing threat identified in Wallace’s novel. However, with the presidency of George W. Bush, the War on Drugs would receive an apparently sincere rejuvenation. Rather than being

solved by this renewed earnestness, the problems of the Intervention's conflation of diagnosis and cure achieve their apogee during the War on Terror.

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Chapter Six: Breaking with Reality: Divine Interventions after 9/11

“Everything is the Alamo. You claim victory in every loss, life in every death. Declare war when there is no war, and when you are at war, pretend you aren’t. The rest of the world wails and vows revenge and buries its dead and you turn on the television. Go to the cinema.”

(Walter, *The Zero*, 222)

On September 11, 2001, Peter Jennings smoked a cigarette. As anchor of ABC News, he had been on air throughout the day, covering the attacks on the World Trade Center and Pentagon. Perhaps the long hours (seventeen uninterrupted hours of broadcasting) on a day of chaos, confusion, and grief compelled Jennings to return to a once comforting habit. An expert on the Middle East with years of experience working in the region, Jennings wisely cautioned viewers not to rush to judgment. Perhaps his first cigarette in twenty years was smoked in frustration late in the evening, as racist and xenophobic reactions mounted. Perhaps he smoked in anger, knowing that the images of celebration also being broadcasted would solidify the prejudices he warned against. Whatever the constellation of factors that led to his smoking on that day, when he revealed in April 2005 that he had lung cancer, he seemed to understand that his viewers would understand 9/11 as genesis of his relapse with a few halting words about it. We did. By 2005, I argue, what we understood about 9/11 and the War on Terror was influenced by narratives of addiction and recovery.

More specifically, Americans understood 9/11 as the impetus for literal and metaphorical relapse. Jennings was not the only person to return to an addiction immediately after the event. In fact, a study published in the wake of 9/11 sought to determine to what extent the terrorist attacks would jeopardize the sobriety of the recently

detoxed and increase the consumption of the actively addicted.⁵⁵ Cigarettes and alcohol were the primary targets of this research, but illicit drugs and legal prescriptions were also studied. This widespread interest in relapse triggered by 9/11 was complemented by an interpretation of the attacks as the wages of a national “addiction” to oil. The Bush Administration attempted to link the nascent War on Terror with the War on Drugs. In 2002 the White House Office of National Drug Control Policy issued public service announcements that asked “Where do terrorists get their money?... If you buy drugs, some of it might come from you.”⁵⁶ President Bush echoed this sentiment when he signed the Drug-Free Communities Act, claiming “If you quit drugs, you join in the fight against terror in America” (qtd. in Bovard B05). In the post-9/11 nation, addiction had provided another way of talking about terror and trauma, and recovery came to symbolize an exit strategy.

President Bush’s linking of Wars on Terror and on Drugs should call to mind President Nixon’s strategy of linking Vietnam and Drugs. As I discussed in Chapter 2, Nixon’s approach bolstered support for him by attributing failure in Vietnam to addiction and deflecting attention away from the military conflict by focusing on domestic drug policy. Unlike Nixon, Bush initially needed no diversion from the War on Terror; the events of 9/11 in fact served to legitimize the President, who had lost the popular vote

⁵⁵ See Zywiak et al “Alcohol Relapses Associated with September 11, 2001: A Case Report” *Substance Abuse* (June 2003) 24:2, 123-128. Print.

⁵⁶ The reach and relevance of PSAs are debatable. However, Dan Gardner points out that these ads (two thirty-second spots) had the distinction of being “the most expensive public service advertisements ever,” costing the taxpayer \$3.4 million. They ran on Super Bowl Sunday 2002 (Gardner A12).

less than a year before, and to boost his approval rating to unprecedented heights.⁵⁷ Why, then, would Bush align the popular War on Terror with the War on Drugs, especially considering the diminishing popularity of the latter since Reagan? Why ask a temporarily united citizenry to identify the universally condemned terrorist attacks with drugs, a social problem they had long been ambivalent about? I argue the connection served multiple purposes. First, the War on Drugs supplied, through its narratives about addiction and recovery, metaphors for understanding 9/11 as an event without cause, a trauma Americans could feel guilty about without feeling responsible for. If Americans were “addicted” to foreign oil, to imperialism, or even to war, addiction was a useful concept for absolving ourselves of responsibility; presidential rhetoric had long denied the importance of etiology in addressing addiction. Second, the connection between Drugs and Terror solidified the divine authority to govern Bush invoked in his own recovery narrative. Though he wouldn’t admit to being a recovering alcoholic, Bush used a traditional addiction narrative to tell the story of how he quit drinking, thus identifying himself as an addict. Like Clinton before him, he was a “recovery president,” in that he came to office after the Recovery Movement and had to navigate its narratives as he explained his own past with alcohol and addiction. However, as Trysh Travis notes, Bush’s “ability to stop drinking without recourse to a 12-Step program, he claimed, demonstrated he was no alcoholic” (Travis 1-2). He instead invested the narrative with spiritual significance, eschewing recovery groups he may or may not have met with. Finally, he used the decision to quit drinking to frame the history of his life leading to the

⁵⁷ According to a Gallup poll, Bush enjoyed approval ratings of 86% September 14-15, 2001, and 90%, the highest ever recorded by Gallup, September 20-21, 2001 (Moore).

Presidency, suggesting, ultimately, that God helped him quit drinking so that he could rule the United States in its time of trials.

Even before 9/11, the Bush presidency and even candidacy was filtered through the lens of addiction. It is not surprising then that Bush made this connection, especially in light of the ubiquity of addiction narratives and rhetoric in popular culture, and also because of his personal history of addiction. Late in the 2000 Presidential campaign, then-Governor George W. Bush's "alcohol problem" was poised to become a major issue. He announced publicly that he would not discuss his drinking problem. And he claimed he was not an alcoholic. Al Gore said that he didn't believe Bush to be an alcoholic and it was not an issue for the campaign: "I take it at face value what he has said – that he wasn't [an alcoholic], that he's had a personal transformation and a period of growth, and that's common in all our lives" (qtd. in Singer). The strategically timed release of Bush's decades-old DUI arrest did not win the election for Gore, but it ensured that Bush's drinking problem would be discussed for several months afterward, both in terms of Bush's character (based on the narrative of how he "sobered up") and how his alcoholism would affect his presidency. In a more general sense, a discussion of how and why Bush recovered from his drinking problem was also a discussion of interventions.

Bush's recovery narrative told some listeners how to interpret his character. After the events of 9/11, the narrative took on added significance; I argue it did so in part because his narrative engaged with the concept of Intervention. How Bush overcame alcoholism became a key for understanding how he would approach the War on Terror. What he believed about individual agency, the role of God, and the possibility of change colored not only his statements about his recovery, but also his statements about war. If

the Intervention has provided the foundation for previous iterations of the War on Drugs, the Bush Era saw the Intervention turned into the sole avenue to recovery and the Interventionist elevated to an intermediary between the addict and the will of God. In this chapter, I analyze several Intervention-themed television shows to argue that the increasing faith in an Intervention reflected anxieties about the Wars in Afghanistan and Iraq and on Terror.

“George W. Booze”: A Story of Sobriety

The story of Bush’s personal recovery from alcoholism is inescapable in this analysis. I argue that Bush’s recovery impacted the way he thought about addiction and about individual agency more generally. In reviewing the story Bush told as well as reactions to the story, I mean to draw out some of the themes that will be relevant in my analysis of Intervention-themed television shows that will follow. Alongside these shows, I will discuss an example of literary fiction about 9/11 that exemplifies the more complicated connections between addiction and terrorism when the Intervention is no longer privileged.

The simple version of Bush’s “sobering up” narrative is that he woke on the morning of his fortieth birthday with a hangover and decided to quit. In his 2010 memoir, *Decision Points*, Bush opens with his decision to quit drinking and claims that “without [the decision to quit drinking], none of the [other decisions] that follow in this book would have been possible” (Bush 3). That Bush frames his entire presidency (the subject of the rest of the memoir) with the story of his sobriety suggests the centrality of his identity as a former addict to his self-conception. The structure is also similar to the

stories of recovering alcoholics in AA, who conventionally begin with their names and “I’m an alcoholic,” before telling their stories. However, Bush is hesitant to call himself an alcoholic. He writes that he has a “habitual personality” (1, 34), but “can’t say for sure” whether he is an alcoholic (34). Certain details about Bush’s drinking habits, including that he couldn’t remember the last time he went a day without a drink (1), that he endured terrible hangovers (2), that his personality was very different when drinking (33), that he drank “too much and it was starting to create problems” (34), and that, after he quit, his “body craved alcohol...was screaming for sugar” (2-3) suggest that he could probably identify with alcoholics in terms of patterns of behavior and physiological responses to alcohol. Nonetheless, Bush claims both that his “ability to quit cold leads [him] to believe [he] didn’t have a chemical addiction” and that he “could not have quit drinking without faith” (34). I suggest Bush does not truly deny the identity of the alcoholic so much as he uses the genre of the recovery narrative to reinforce his spiritual ethos. Thus, while he emphasizes that he had prayed for guidance about his drinking and alludes to conversations with Billy Graham and other evangelicals who helped him stay sober, his recovery is foremost an event, an identifiable “decision point” that functioned as a conversion to a sober and more Godly person. Oliver Stone’s 2008 biopic *W.* makes the spiritual conversion/rock bottom elision visually explicit. On the morning of his 40th birthday, Bush (Josh Brolin) wakes up hungover, low-key lighting creating large dark shadows that seem to trap him in his bed. He gets up and goes for a run (just as Bush suggests he did in *Decision Points*), the shaky camera and extreme close-ups of Brolin’s confused, sweaty face reflecting Bush’s muddled state of mind. Bush falls to the ground and the camera, perpendicular to the ground, alternates between a spinning view of the

trees against a burning white sky and Bush screaming, the audio removed. The effect is of a sublime encounter with God, made explicit by a slow dissolve to an image of Jesus at a prayer meeting Bush attends in the next scene.

This narrative of recovery as event resembles a moment of grace (or divine intervention) in which God permits the individual to experience instantaneous, apocalyptic change. This narrative was particularly interesting to recovering alcoholics, who would in some cases compare and contrast Bush's narrative with their own. Cary Tennis of Salon.com saw Bush as "a drinker much like myself who one day awoke and saw that he was drowning and started swimming for his life, and got lucky and made it to shore" (Tennis). Tennis accepts Bush's miraculous recovery, stating "throughout history, as Carl Jung and William James have reported, spontaneous spiritual conversions have provided a mysterious but verifiable release from the grip of alcoholism" (Tennis). Others branded Bush a "dry drunk" and worried that he was "white-knuckling it." John Sutherland of *The Guardian* painted Bush as "the unhappy man on the TV screen, pacing round his ranch, boils breaking out on his face... explosively tense." Sutherland believes that "American voters admire recovered drunks, but they don't trust them," and seems to almost presciently touch upon the issues that "George W. Booze" would be most capable of messing up: "Fourteen years sober? Terrific! But let's not have the former alcoholic piloting our jumbo-jets, driving the kids to school, or deciding whether to nuke Saddam this time around" (Sutherland). Criticism of Bush's recovery focused on the omission in his narrative of any on-going treatment. Several editorials and letters to the editor around this time advised that Bush "needed a program" in order to maintain what many saw as cessation, not sobriety. One such letter argues, "without benefit of therapy, without any

understanding of why he became an alcoholic in the first place, Mr. Bush remains the same person he was when he drinking – wily, deceitful, impulsive and egocentric” (Matas A16).

After September 11th and the beginning of the war in Iraq, Bush the explosive drunk morphed into Bush the teetotaler bully.⁵⁸ An editorial in *The Daily Telegraph* points out that several academic studies explored the effect that his total abstinence from alcohol had on his foreign policies.⁵⁹ The studies suggest that “his supposedly bullying war policies were a direct result of his swaggeringly drunk days,” but the editorial argues, “it seems more likely that, with the hell of alcoholism out of the way, the President’s mind became uncluttered and devoted to the job in hand. The simplicity and directness of his words and policies are natural by-products of a visions that, blurred and shaky for years, is now set in startlingly black and white tones” (“Bush on the wagon”). In this range of responses to Bush’s recovery, though critics of Bush were deeply distrustful of his mental state and eager to use the identity of the alcoholic to malign him, none questioned the validity of his recovery story and none questioned how the belief in a “miraculous” recovery (the narrative of recovery as divine intervention) might have affected him.

A number of post-9/11 books that sought to psychoanalyze Bush in absentia and to understand his alcoholism both in terms of how it affected his governing and the

⁵⁸ The transition from the President who might crack under the pressure and drink to the President whose abstinence from alcohol represents a totalizing worldview could also be considered through the lens of Bush’s frequent vacationing pre-9/11. Frank notes that Bush appeared to need rest and relaxation “more than most. And this is hardly a surprise – among other reasons, because the anxiety of being president might pose a real risk of leading him back to drinking” (Frank 43).

⁵⁹ The writer of the editorial credits these studies to Alan Bisbort in the *American Politics Journal* and Katherine van Wormer of the University of North Iowa.

personal roots from which it sprang began to question this narrative. Reevaluating the “sobering up” narrative (which streamlined recovery into a single event: revelation and immediate recovery, no treatment center required, not a single Step taken), Justin A. Frank and Jacob Weisberg both point out that there are competing stories about his recovery that focus less on the divine aspect and more on the interpersonal. In *Bush on the Couch: Inside the Mind of the President*, Justin Frank notes that “Bush has said publicly that he quit drinking without the help of AA or any substance abuse program, claiming that he stopped forever with the assistance of such spiritual tools as Bible study and conversations with the evangelist Bill [sic] Graham” (Frank 40). Jacob Weisberg’s *The Bush Tragedy* compares Bush’s recovery to Barbara Bush’s method of dealing with grief as “he confronted his drinking problem the way his mother had dealt with depression, through willpower alone, though with help from a newfound evangelical faith” (Weisberg 58). Weisberg later labels this recovery a parable “crafted to convey an idea about the protagonist rather than to relate the literal truth of what happened. Almost every detail about his spiritual life that Bush has chosen to reveal shows evidence of being shaped and packaged” (Weisberg 75). Far from being the recipient of a miracle, Bush required on-going treatment in the form the Midland Bible Study that “functioned as therapy for someone who doesn’t believe in therapy, more AA meeting than religious exploration. Prayer—which as a friend of the president’s who is still in the Bible Study told me, just means talking to God—gave Bush a sense of serenity and control that enabled him to redirect his stalled career” (Weisberg 84).⁶⁰ Both readings of the event

⁶⁰ Weisberg also quotes Doug Wead, who maintained that “Bush’s break with the bottle came after he and Laura read an Alcoholics Anonymous pamphlet that emphasized the need for help from a higher power.” Weisberg argues that “Bush has never spoken of

suggest that Bush ultimately downplayed the role of his family, the secular principles of AA, and the importance of an on-going process of recovery (or maintenance of sobriety) in favor of a narrative of recovery in which the (divine) intervention is the event that effects recovery.

Perhaps because of Bush's personal experience with addiction, another aspect of this on-going conversation was the question of how Bush's alcoholism (as many critics labeled it) would affect domestic drug policy. As part of his faith-based initiatives, Bush stressed local, religious programs that mirrored more closely his own experience with recovery. Bush's trademark "compassionate conservatism" perhaps has its genesis in 1997 legislation to "free faith-based rehab facilities from state oversight" in Texas, after Teen Challenge, a "religiously based drug and alcohol rehabilitation center in San Antonio" almost lost its license (Weisberg 92). Bush's downplaying of the state's role in favor of private, faith-based programs naturally leads to a belief in drug addiction as an individual spiritual (or pathological) problem, not one created or exasperated by contextual factors. Like all of his predecessors, Bush was less concerned about the causes of addiction than in politically meaningful interventions. In December of 2001, Bush sought to address drug abuse on a local level (and perhaps a national level as well, since this act also created the PSAs that linked drug use with terrorism) by "empowering communities" through "parent drug education programs, youth summits where young people learn to resist drugs, local drug use surveys in middle and high schools, drug intervention counseling services, tutoring and financial incentives for businesses that adopt drug-free workplace programs" ("President Empowers Communities"). In 2004,

reading AA literature [because] following twelve-step guidance would make him sound like an alcoholic" (Weisberg 79).

Bush directed \$35 million to programs (many of which were considered “intervention” programs) that emphasized addiction as a local problem.⁶¹ Charles G. Cure of the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration countered the long-standing belief in the universality of drug abuse: “Drug abuse is regional in nature. There are shifting trends, resulting in changes in treatment need” (“\$35 Million”). Intervention as the Bush White House conceived of it was narrow in scope, deeply personal, and religious.

Yet, if the PSAs and the discourse about addiction that surrounded the War on Terror are taken into consideration, it becomes apparent that once again, the cover story (“recovery is personal and miraculous”) exists alongside narratives about the universal efficacy of interventions, both in the addict’s life and in the War on Terror. To represent recovery as immediate and divinely willed presents problems not just for the treatment of alcohol and drug addiction, but for social change and foreign policy as well. Narratives of recovery as event were consistently at odds with narratives of recovery as process. In Bush’s case, a narrative of “divine intervention” was used to obscure the interpersonal and process-oriented roots of his sobriety in order to evade the label of “alcoholic.” The narrative of personal salvation allowed Bush to situate the U.S. (as represented by himself) as the unfailing interventionist, that which could bring divinely-mandated recovery to the afflicted. The recovery would not only heal the wounds of 9/11, but also

⁶¹ As Ken Dilanian writes in *The Philadelphia Enquirer*, a 2002 study had already disproved the notion that faith-based programs were more effective than secular ones. He also notes that a study issued in 2000 by the Milton S. Eisenhower Foundation “examined 81 social-services groups in 27 states over 10 years. That study found that sound financial management and quality of staff were far more important than religious affiliation in predicting a program’s success” (Dilanian).

to make sure that those wounded did not consider themselves in any way culpable for their pain.

The Zero: “the loose string between cause and effect”

That the linking of 9/11 and addiction helped expiate feelings of guilt, loss, and confusion is evident in Jess Walter’s 2006 novel, *The Zero*, which takes place in the days and weeks after the attacks on the World Trade Center. Brian Remy, a former New York City police officer, wakes up after shooting himself in the head. Unable to remember why he shot himself (was it intentional or an accident?), Remy attributes the gap in his memory to his drinking, also a factor in his divorce and increasing estrangement from his sixteen year old son, Edgar, who decides to live his life as though Remy were killed in the attacks. However, as the novel goes on, the gaps in his memory continue, and the narrative breaks off, sometimes in the middle of the narrator’s sentence, and picks up again in a new place and time, with Remy unable to remember why he’s there or how much time has passed. Remy also suffers from macular degeneration, making the events he does remember marked by the “floaters and streaks” of his diminishing vision. The debris floating before Remy’s eyes, even when he closes them, both obscures his vision and replicates scenes from the collapse of the Twin Towers. The parallel to the floating debris created by the attacks is made explicit, especially as Remy “retires” from the police force to join a quasi-secret, federal agency in the “Office of Liberty and Recovery,” (OLR) whose task it is to account for all of the papers misplaced on September 11. The survival of a single recipe card has launched an extensive search for a woman, March Selios, who may have escaped the attacks and who may be connected at a

tertiary level to Middle Eastern terrorism. If Remy's failing eyesight and vision are not quite assets in his new role, they are at least easily hidden from his new coworkers and the people he interrogates. When he asks "Where am I?" or "What are we doing here?" in complete sincerity, those around him assume he's being ironic, rhetorical, or even aggressive. While the reader isn't privy to the events that take place during Remy's lapses, one can infer that his behavior is interpreted as mainly consistent, conscious or not.

John N. Duvall argues that the novel's deployment of postmodern irony is what makes Remy's actions consistent to the characters in the novel. He divides Remy into two entities: the "reader's Remy," who focalizes the events of the narrative, and the other, inaccessible Remy who operates during the reader's Remy's "gaps." When the reader's Remy tells Markham, one of his partners in the ORL, that he doesn't want to participate in the kidnapping or torture of suspects, that he wants them to be released, Markham assumes he is using verbal irony. Duvall states "the Remy we do not have access to must use verbal irony," intending Markham to do the opposite of his commands "otherwise, Markham would not immediately know to take Remy's words as simple verbal irony" (Duvall 287). This "third level" of irony is attended by yet another level of irony in Duvall's reading: "Remy's self-proclaimed innocence in no way disrupts the Homeland Security State; his actions consistently support the state of exception" (Duvall 287). Thus, the reader's Remy is "the representative American who cannot grasp his implication in the domestic war on terror, [who] believes his personal suffering to be exceptional—unlike any heretofore experienced by anyone else" (Duvall 293). Duvall's compelling reading of Walter's novel, a woefully underappreciated contribution to the

canon of 9/11 literature, omits one aspect of Remy's life that I find crucial to understanding the nexus of addiction and terror: his drinking (which can easily be read as at least problematic if not addiction). In examining this aspect of the novel, I wish to add to Duvall's cogent analysis of Walter's text as an ethical, postmodern response to 9/11 and the War on Terror. While Duvall cautions against reading Remy's condition clinically (as PTSD or a personality disorder), I argue that his addiction is a symbolic rather than a truly pathological condition. In reading the novel this way, I offer *The Zero* as an alternative to the Intervention-focused texts discussed below.

The opening of the novel literalizes the parallel between Remy's condition and his drinking. Regaining consciousness after being grazed with a self-inflicted bullet, Remy finds himself next to an empty bottle of bourbon. Both Remy and the bottle are "tipped over on their right sides on the rug, parallel to one another" (Walter 3). To conjure this scene, the bourbon must be specified and anthropomorphized to a degree: in how many contexts is a bottle (even a rectangular one like those used by Knob Creek) considered to have a right and left side? The parallel bottle and body also mirror the image on the book's cover, two parallel cubes representing the Twin Towers. Alcohol's significance in Remy's life and its thematic importance to the novel are clear from the outset.

Additionally, Remy's drinking appears to be compulsive. His desire for whiskey is described as a craving (Walter 126). His hands shake (120). His frequent blackouts (what he and Duvall call his "gaps") could also be alcohol related. Though it is clear they also function symbolically, blackouts are both a symptom of alcoholism and the narrative technique that allows for the creation of the inaccessible Remy. The presence of the inaccessible Remy further underlines the possibility of his addiction. During Remy's

blackouts, he “do[es] things that [he doesn’t] understand and [he] wish[es] [he] hadn’t done them” (128). Like the addict caught in the empty repetition of an act that no longer satisfies him, the reader’s Remy keeps experiencing the painful situations that the inaccessible Remy keeps creating. Like an addiction, the inaccessible Remy functions in the unconscious, with motives and desires that are only accessible to the reader’s Remy in their aftereffects.

The symbolic function of the “gaps” is to represent the impaired vision of contemporary Americans who are always able, in the words of “Jaguar,” a Middle Eastern man with whom Remy frequently consults in his work for the OLR, to “convinc[e] yourselves that the world isn’t what it is, that no one’s reality matters except your own” (222). Conveniently, Remy’s gaps allow him to maintain his innocence. Duvall argues Remy’s “innocent” obliviousness “enacts a post-9/11 ideology” that “also actually enhances his abilities as an interrogator” (Duvall 282). In other words, the United States’ own faulty historical memory allows for the kind of hypocrisy that facilitates extralegal tactics. Americans are trained in this capacity by the oversaturation of media—images of 9/11, but also images of life from reality television and police procedural programs. Remy’s occasional acceptance of his memory gaps is adjacent and compared to channel-surfing: he realizes “this is a life...smooth skipping stones bounding across the surfaces of time, with brief moments of deepened consciousness as you hit the water before going airborne again,” with the “glow from television sets” one piece of the “drifting contentment” that would make up the “rest of your life” (163-4). Later, Remy is “mesmeriz[ed]” when his girlfriend April Kraft (who is also the sister of March Selios and therefore a subject the inaccessible Remy is investigating) “pick[s] up

the remote control and start[s] running through the channels again. Remy watched the TV go from one reality to another and again” (240). The effect is familiar to Remy, “the way these imperceptible *gaps* led from sorrow to humor and pathos” (240, emphasis mine). At the end of the novel, a semiconscious Remy has his dreams infiltrated by the television as his hospital roommate flicks through channels. He then “recognized that this had been his condition. This was what life felt like. This” (325). The emphasis, as it has been in nearly every text I have discussed in this dissertation, is on the connection between the ubiquity of mediated images in popular culture and addiction.

Even more so than his impaired memory, Remy’s degenerative eye condition serves a symbolic function in the novel. Rather than being completely blind, Remy sees “streaks and floaters” (21) in front of his eyes. These floaters echo the “burning scraps of paper” (3) Remy saw on 9/11 as well as the scraps of paper he chases in job at the OLR. Remy’s vision also, of course, resembles the static of a television screen without reception. When Remy closes his eyes he sees “a kind of captured reality: a black screen with snowflakes falling and streaking” (119). Though Remy, as a first responder, experienced the attacks in real time, the image he has retained suggests the medium through which most Americans not only initially experienced the attacks, but continued to relive them. Ann Rogers, an acquaintance of March Selios Remy interviews, relates the experience of reliving the attacks through constant television watching: “I haven’t turned off my TV since it happened. I was glued to the news coverage for the first few days...I ordered out every meal and just went from channel to channel, watching it from different angles, listening to the newscasters and the public officials” (65-66). Ann

Rogers's compulsive television watching is embodied in Remy, whose channel-switching memory lapses and static-screened vision align him with the television itself.

As a receiver of images flowing through him, Remy struggles with his own agency. In the passages quoted above, Remy seems to accept his passivity, but at other times, he attempts to resist it. Angry at his son's obstinate decision to "mourn" him, Remy feels for a moment "powerful enough to simply decide to throw off this strange jerking life, whatever it was—hallucinations or an illness or just the way life was lived now. A life is made up of actions, and if he wanted the world to be different, then he only needed to *act* differently" (212, italics in original). This feeling is fleeting, however, and several allusions to the scripting of "reality" on television and in film make clear Remy's agency is an illusion. Remy's former partner on the police force, Paul Guterak, capitalizes on his "fame" as a 9/11 first responder to become a celebrity. In the immediate aftermath, his gigs are "cut[ting] ribbons and salut[ing] flags and throw[ing] out pitches and read[ing] poems and shit," but he hopes to progress to acting when "the movie market matures for [his] kind of story" (150). Guterak's agent tells him "everything goes through this cycle of opportunity: first inspirational stories, kids and animals, shit like that; then the backdrop stories... and then the big money—thrillers... it's all about thrillers now... history has become a thriller plot" (150). April Kraft reluctantly participates in a reality TV show called *From the Ashes*, which films her reunion with her brother Gus. After shooting their interaction, the producers offer feedback and then attempt to script their parting. When April expresses discomfort, one producer attempts to assuage her fears, explaining that they "don't want you to do anything that makes you feel phony... Do you know why we call it 'reality'? Do you? Because it's best when

it's...*real*. The realer the better" (207). Like Guterak's agent, the producer understands the cycles of media and can bend April's experiences, even her revulsion to the show itself, into the narrative of the show. Remy experiences this phenomenon in reverse when, while waiting for Guterak's television commercial for cereal to air, he sees an episode of a police procedural (clearly based on *Law and Order*) that recreates a conversation he had with Guterak about his memory lapses. These scripted moments, combined with Remy's lapses, contribute to his growing feeling that "if he waited long enough... whatever was going to happen would happen" (129), that "this bad thing is going to happen no what [he] do[es]" (282).

Advertising itself as "a novel of September 12," *The Zero* challenges notions of innocence, collective grief, and agency. Remy begins the novel wishing he had a "reliever," "a coach just watching us, looking for any sign of fatigue or confusion, specialists waiting just down the foul line to stride in and save our work, to salvage what we've done so far, make sure we don't waste the end of a well-lived life... That's all Remy wanted: someone to save him" (26-7). His relationship with April appears to offer him this relief, but she senses that true connection might be impossible in the post-9/11 moment: maybe everyone is like Remy now, "like people in dreams... aware that something isn't right, but unable to shake the illusion. And maybe we could save each other, but we just drift past" (103). Remy seeks relief with Guterak as well, whom he asks to follow him and make a report of his actions so that he can figure out what happens in the gaps (204-5). Guterak is unwilling to intervene and thinks Remy's request is a joke. Whether or not Remy will continue to suffer as he has throughout the novel is left unanswered at the end, where Remy, having been critically injured in a bomb blast

that kills April (and that the OLR is ultimately responsible for), squeezes his eyes shut when the nurse removes the gauze from his face. His vision in one eye is gone completely, and his other eye still has “the old flecks...It was the most heartbreaking thing he’d ever seen” (326). Remy’s extreme disappointment suggests new consciousness of his limitations and his culpability, but his refusal to open his eyes suggests he may be clinging to the televised dreams that have suffused his recovery.

In the section that follows, I examine a different televised dream offered to the American public: the Iraq War. This intervention too offered an alternative to the grief and confusion of 9/11 and the ongoing War on Terror. Rhetoric surrounding the war privileges the intervention and paves the way for texts that conflate Intervention and recovery to achieve coherence.

“We’ve turned the corner”: Privileging the Intervention

Bush’s intervention in Iraq relied on the divine premise that Bush had been chosen by God to lead the nation in time of holy war. As with his recovery from alcoholism, “success” was almost immediate and defined in language. The declaration of “Mission Accomplished” in Iraq in May of 2003 was another event that signaled both the success of the intervention and instantaneous recovery. However, Bush still had to contend with defining the continued violence in Iraq, and his speechwriters seized on the metaphor of “turning the corner” or reaching a “turning point” to reframe events. In a speech on November 6, 2003, Bush invoked President Reagan’s allusion to the forward march of freedom and argued that America had “reached another great turning point” as democracy was being spread in Afghanistan and Iraq. In December of 2005, he specified,

predicting that 2005 would be recorded in history as a “turning point” for Iraq. In May of 2006, however, Americans were told they had again reached a “turning point” in the “struggle between freedom and terror.” This motif reveals an investment in the moment of intervention as an indicator of success. Throughout the War on Terror, Bush asked Americans to linger in these moments, to see history as a march toward progress and freedom, but to accept they dwelt somewhere between terror and triumph.

After 2004, as these narratives about intervention in Iraq played out, similar anxieties about the efficacy of Intervention emerge in a spate of television shows about addiction and recovery. The first of this group, A&E’s reality series *Intervention* premiered in 2005 as the cable channel once called “Arts and Entertainment” sought to rebrand itself (Salamon E1). In each episode, an addict’s family has appealed to the show for help and agrees to let the show film the family interactions and the intervention on behalf of the addict. The addict, however, has been told that he/she is the subject of a documentary about addiction and has been told nothing of the impending Intervention. Telling the addict he or she is representing “addiction” works remarkably well for creating drama in each episode. The addict almost always uses his or her drug of choice openly and comments on his or her excess. At the beginning of each episode, between scenes of the addict’s life, interviews with family members tell the story of “what went wrong.” This is usually a moment of trauma, not the moment at which they were recognized as problem drinkers or drug abusers. The narrative of “what went wrong” braids together the addict’s narrative and the family’s. This occurs again when the Intervention takes place. The project of each episode is 1) to establish the subject of the Intervention as an addict, 2) attempt to pinpoint “what went wrong,” and 3) to stage an

Intervention in which family members confront the addict in the presence of a trained “Interventionist.” After the Intervention, the addict is offered an opportunity to go into a treatment center, expenses covered by the show. If the addict agrees, he or she is whisked away immediately. The addict almost always chooses this option. The alternative is ostensibly to bear the consequences threatened by the family during the Intervention, which are usually the revocation of financial and personal support. The cameras usually follow the addict all the way to intake at the treatment center. Then, after a black screen and an indication of how many days the addict spends in treatment, we see the addict again and hear how his or her life has changed since the Intervention and entering treatment.

As I’ve argued throughout, addiction and recovery narratives have been not only ubiquitous in American culture since 1970, but have also served as metaphors for our relationships to that culture. Nonetheless, A&E attributed the appeal and continued relevance of *Intervention* not only to a cultural fascination with addiction in general, but with a new interest in the process of Intervention and recovery. Dan Partland, executive producer of the show, told NPR that “the current climate is more about what’s going on in the tabloids ... [which] is a real fascination with addiction relapse and recovery. My sister got me a T-shirt that she was seeing people wearing in New York City and it says ‘Rehab is the New Black.’ And I think that that’s kind of evidence of where we’re at... and I wonder if we should be bemoaning that the [sic] part of it that’s about drug use, or maybe just celebrating that at least rehab has become part of the equation” (“Analyzing Addiction”). Critics of *Intervention* did, however, bemoan what they saw as the exploitation of the addicts. Andrew Ryan argued that the Intervention proper was “hardly

the draw of *Intervention*. The show is clearly assembled to showcase the unwitting subjects, with each one providing a new sad, occasionally startling character study of an addict” (Ryan R25). Matthew Gilbert of *The Boston Globe* went further and labeled the show “vile” and duplicitous: “On the surface, it’s a benevolent effort to reveal the power and beauty of interventions... But underneath the charitable veneer, the show ... is about watching broken addicts destroy themselves” (Gilbert C1). *Intervention* had to defend itself against these claims that it was a merely another voyeuristic reality series, like *Big Brother* and *The Real World*, where the most entertaining episodes are ones in which something goes wrong. However, even as these critics question the morality of watching (the first obligation of potential Interventionists), they reinforce the legitimacy of the Intervention by praising its ostensible “beauty” and effectiveness.⁶²

A separate concern about *Intervention* derives from fears of reality television’s potential to shape reality. Instead of fearing images of addiction would affect unaddicted viewers, some suggested that the knowledge they were being filmed would cause addicts to perform addiction in more violent and destructive ways. An episode of the *Today Show* showcased a conversation between A&E vice president Robert Sharenow and media analyst Steve Adubato, the latter of whom took *Intervention* to task for “going too far.” Adubato displays an almost paranoid nervousness about what might happen if *Intervention* continues filming addicts. Like Gilbert and Ryan above, he sees the *Intervention* show as exploitative, but his main concern is for the addict’s potential

⁶² An earlier critic of *Intervention* denied the universal efficacy of interventions in the first place. Lynn Crosbie writes that “profound addiction has so many underlying psychological and causal factors that its cure is very rarely this simply effected. Kurt Cobain’s friends and wife gang-interviewed him, he went to rehab, escaped and killed himself, very likely feeling morbidly drug-crazed and deserted” (Crosbie R3).

victims, hypothetical mothers and children, who will inevitably be killed because they are “in the wrong place at the wrong time” (“Going too far”). Asking addicts to represent addiction for the camera will heighten their destructive behavior, and he fears that the producers of *Intervention* will stand by as innocent lives are destroyed. He asks Sharenow, “how far is reality TV going to go? Why don’t you just get a sociopath that you know is likely to commit a murder; [what] he’s about to do, you can’t stop it because you don’t really know for sure. My question is, aren’t there some people who are so emotionally and psychologically damaged that they don’t belong on reality TV” (“Going too far”). The fear about exposing addicts to the medium of television reflects a changing conception of an individual’s relationship to culture. Rather than being passively susceptible to images, the addict, conditioned by reality television to behave in a certain way, will actively represent the role. Both Adubato and the other critics feared not only for the passive viewer of television, but for the *viewed*: the new breed of celebrity, the reality TV star.

One critic of *Intervention* turned his misgivings into a reality TV franchise. Dr. Drew Pinsky of *Loveline* fame helmed three separate reality shows in the genre: *Celebrity Rehab*, *Sober House*, and *Sex Rehab*. Pinsky had also been critical of *Intervention*, not because it exploited addicts, but because it did not show recovery as a process, but as an event. He told CNN’s Sanjay Gupta in 2004 that he was concerned “people believe somehow the detox is all they need to do. The fact is nothing could be further from the truth” (Gupta et al). Despite Pinsky’s pleas for shows which focused on the process, MTV (owned by the same company as VH1) debuted its reality *Intervention* show, *Gone Too Far*, in 2009, weeks after the death by drug overdose of its star, Adam “DJ AM”

Goldstein. The show, styled after *Intervention*, featured Goldstein interviewing and counseling active drug addicts, comparing his experiences to theirs, and helping them seek treatment. Goldstein, a celebrity DJ with ten years of sobriety, returned to smoking crack at some point after the show began production. Reactions to Goldstein's death echoed the concerns of *Intervention*'s critics. A *New York Times* article printed after the first episode aired describes the precautions Goldstein and his producers took to ensure his sobriety: a personal therapist accompanied him on shoots, he regularly attended Alcoholics Anonymous meetings, and he talked to his AA sponsor daily (Salkin ST1). Nonetheless, addiction specialists interviewed for the piece suggest that merely hosting the show could have triggered a relapse. Tony DiSanto, president of programming for MTV, concurred: "It crosses all of our minds" (qtd. in Salkin). Given far less attention is a cause two of his friends quoted in the article blame for his early death: a year before, Goldstein had survived a plane crash that killed four of the six people on board. The accident left him badly burned and afraid to fly. He took prescription painkillers and anti-anxiety medicines. According to one of Goldstein's friends, the drugs triggered his relapse, and thus the plane crash, not the television show, was ultimately responsible for his death (Salkin). That this cause is for the most part overlooked reinforces the shift in emphasis from viewer to viewed. While those quoted in the article are more focused on his proximity to drugs than on his being filmed, it's worth pointing out that Goldstein's years of working in the music industry may very well have put him in contact with drug users and drug paraphernalia as much or more than did his participation in *Gone Too Far*. Milieu only becomes a factor when the recovering addict is also, through his performance of a role for television, asked to identify with active addicts.

Despite the widespread concern about the format, A&E followed up *Intervention* with *Obsessed* and *Hoarders*, reality shows which focus on obsessive-compulsive disorder. In 2007, A&E introduced *The Cleaner*, a show that focuses on an Interventionist. Though allegedly based on a real person, *The Cleaner* is, unlike the rest of the shows listed here, a drama, not reality TV. *The Cleaner* thus offers a unique opportunity to assess how narratives about Intervention were deployed free of the constraints and controversies of reality television.

Cleaner Than Thou: Extreme Interventions as (Divine) Recovery Event

Running for two seasons, *The Cleaner* centered on the life of William Banks, a heroin addict in recovery, who performs “extreme Interventions.” Instead of luring the addict to grandma’s living room and having a conversation with him/her, Banks literally kidnaps the addict and forces detox upon him/her. The addict is then supposedly placed in a treatment center that Banks is loosely affiliated with called “Transitions.” However, the addict’s on-going treatment is never a factor of any single episode or the show in general. Like police procedural shows such as *Law and Order*, each episode deals with a specific case. These cases provide the immediate drama, while continuing plotlines about Banks’ relationships with his family (he and his wife are in the process of reconciliation at the beginning of the first season) and his “team” (three recovering addicts who help him perform the extreme Interventions and who have also been “cleaned” by Banks at some point previous) supply conflicts that extend over several episodes.

Each episode of *The Cleaner* begins with a black screen on which the following words are written in white letters: “Williams Banks has saved [X] people from addiction

to drugs, sex and gambling. He's not a cop. He's not a superhero. He's just a man with a Calling. This is his story." I use the variable "X" because this number changes with each episode. At the beginning of season one, he's saved only 257. By the end of the season, he's increased this number by thirty, despite the fact that there are only thirteen episodes featuring approximately fifteen addicts, and of these featured addicts, two die after a failed Intervention and one runs away. In addition to these failures of Intervention, Banks loses a member of his team, Mick, who commits suicide in the pilot, after a relapse apparently triggered by his wife leaving him. Another member of the team, Swenton, trying to infiltrate a biker gang's methamphetamine ring, is forced at gunpoint to smoke meth, triggering a relapse that lasts until the end of the season, at which point Banks himself determines to intervene and prevent what happened to Mick from happening to Swenton. Death and drug use make it clear when an Intervention has failed, but success is much more difficult to measure or represent visually. And yet Banks' tally keeps creeping up.

I suggest that being "saved" from addiction in the context of *The Cleaner* means being on the receiving end of a divine Intervention by the Christ-like William Banks. As it was for George W. Bush, in *The Cleaner*, recovery is an event rather than a process. This understanding of recovery is made apparent in a promotional video for the show in which members of Banks' team and family attempt to describe him. Swenton calls him "Savior, man of god, personal messiah." Banks' wife Melissa adds "husband, father, addict. Action figure." As contradicting statements about Banks add to an aura of indescribability, Banks himself appears to reinforce his omnipotence and omniscience. He says, "Technically, I don't exist, unless you need me." He is an elusive, but all

knowing figure who will fight (you) to “keep you away from the hell that I’ve been through... You may not be able to find me. But that’s all right. I’ll find you” (“Mystery of William Banks”). Banks also insists that he is not religious. He does not pray; he merely, like the men Bush got sober with, *talks* to God. He seems to interpret everything that happens to him as a sign from God, as when his son kicks a field goal for his high school football team and the ball bounces against the goal post before making it through. In addition to the Interventions, Banks performs Biblical miracles. In the pilot episode, the team brings Banks a woman who was found after overdosing. She is unresponsive, and Akani, the female member of Banks’ team, tells us that her “BP is crashing.” Banks works quickly, narrating the perils of addiction as he brings the woman back to life. Seventy per cent of the addicts he encounters will relapse, he says (“Pilot”). If we apply this figure to the ever-increasing tally of people “saved” by Banks, we see quickly how impossible it would be for him to achieve this number if salvation is measured by anything other than just contact with Banks. He has no way of knowing when or if relapse will occur. The Intervention, then, is the event that marks the addict as saved, even if he or she later relapses.⁶³

The Intervention is not what saves the addict from his or her addiction, but that which validates Banks’ omniscience and the incredible surveillance he must perform in order to target an addict. Part of why Banks needs a team of individuals to help him is because he first gathers information about the target to confirm that he or she is an addict. The team follows the addict. They infiltrate gangs, neighborhoods, sororities: any

⁶³ In an episode entitled “Here Comes the Boom,” the son of a woman Banks “cleaned” tells Banks that she died of a drug overdose six months prior. This episode also features Swenton’s relapse. Neither event has an appreciable effect on the tally.

community to which the addict belongs. They review his or her financial information to find evidence of drug use. They talk to his or her friends. However, Banks always already knows that the person is an addict. He can tell by looking at them. Like President Bush, he trusts his gut, but verifies through extraordinary surveillance. The gathering of information also provides the story of “what went wrong,” a narrative that is also crucial to *Intervention*. Whatever went wrong though, and whatever specific personal details the team gathers about the addict, has no bearing on the Intervention itself. The Interventions happen almost the same way each time.

This strict adherence to the procedure of the Intervention exposes contradictions. Ginia Bellafante points out that in *The Cleaner*, “addiction is understood as a corrosive, omnipresent threat, and recovery a myth as much as it is an imperative” (“Man on a Mission: Intervention With Attitude” E1). This corrosive threat, however, is a necessary evil, and one that Banks contributes to in order to “save” his target addict. Several episodes show Banks or a member of the team giving money to stereotypical street junkies in order to get information about the target (information which, once again, only confirms what they already know). Sometimes, Banks even works with drug dealers, promising to look away with regards to their enterprise as long as he is allowed access from time to time to intervene and “save” just one of their customers. In the penultimate episode of the first season, Banks is actually employed by the drug dealer Gaza to save his daughter, who he thinks may be using drugs. Unlike every other target of the season, Nikala is not using drugs; she’s bulimic. Her unpredictable behavior, however, brings Gaza and Banks together long enough for Gaza to discuss with Banks at length the similarities between them, primarily that they both “need addicts” (“Five Little Words”).

Whether or not this comparison disturbs Banks is unclear. It does seem, however, that Banks, like the producer of *Intervention*, clings to the “success” of his methods in the face of questions about the morality of his actions.

Banks insists that he knows what works, but this insistence underlines another contradiction. Like George W. Bush, Banks has a number of different narratives about his sobriety circulating. He explains to his children, aged fifteen and thirteen, that when his younger child was born, he made a deal with God that he would devote himself to being his “avenging angel” in the war on drugs, if God would only help him get sober. If this moment is the genesis of Banks’ sobriety, it would mean he has been clean around thirteen years, and his oldest child, his field goal-kicking son, would have last seen his father using when he was two. Several incidents in the series undercut this narrative. First, his son is visibly enraged and frequently reminds his father of moments when he was using in front of him or had gone to prison (“again”) because of drugs. Also, at the end of the second and final season, Banks celebrates ten years of sobriety with addicts he’s “cleaned.” The divine intervention narrative, then, has cleaned up the murky basis of Banks’ sobriety.

Furthermore, in the pilot episode, Banks makes several allusions to Alcoholics Anonymous with regards to the doomed Mick. For example, Mick tells Banks it’s his birthday, and Banks asks, “What meeting are you going to be at?” referring to the practice of AA to celebrate anniversaries of sobriety. In the fourth episode, “Chaos Theory,” we meet Banks’ “sponsor” Quinn, who Banks credits with getting him sober (again undercutting the divine Intervention narrative). These brief gestures to a program that emphasizes maintenance of sobriety are at odds with the show’s understanding of

Intervention as salvation. Therefore, Banks never attends an AA, NA, or any other meeting. He does not see a drug counselor or attend therapy at the treatment center he works with. He rarely even visits the treatment center. He is also skeptical or at least blasé about long-term treatment. A recently saved crack-smoking pianist named Rebecca asks him “Do you believe in the Twelve Steps?” to which Banks replies “Sure. Twelve. Fifteen. Whatever it takes” (“Rebecca”). In another episode, Banks butts heads with a traditional Interventionist when two members of an addict’s family are at odds about her treatment. The Interventionist tells Banks, “If you take my client against her will, I’ll press charges for kidnapping... You and your calling are not needed here.” Banks’ response is to proceed as usual, gathering information and planning the “extreme Intervention.” The Interventionist is portrayed as an over-educated, out of touch wimp. Banks tells his team that the Interventionist has “got his PhD panties all in a twist” (“The Eleventh Hour”). The PhD reminds Banks that they both have the same seventy per cent failure rate, but Banks replies that he knows how the addict feels, and this is what makes the difference between them. The family ultimately decides that the traditional Interventionist is mercenary and vain and uses Banks’s service instead. He finds and saves the addict. The tally goes up.

Conclusion

Despite the longer history of the Intervention I have been tracing in this dissertation, the War on Terror and the presidency of George W. Bush may best represent the “age of intervention.” During this time, narratives about the War on Drugs and in Iraq relied on the trope of Intervention to simplify the difficult and messy processes of

recovery. *The Zero* indicates the limitations of Americans' memories and vision to navigate the confusing post-9/11 world. Bush's eagerness to intervene offered an easier way to interpret our collective grief and channel it into another war. Drawing parallels between the War on Terror and the War on Drugs, Bush may have unwittingly linked his protracted, ineffective campaign to an earlier protracted, ineffective campaign. However, it seems apparent that Bush was able to capitalize on the popular understandings of addiction that fueled the War on Drugs and to project those understandings on to the causes of and best course of action against terrorism. The potential causes of 9/11 were overlooked and preemptive strikes, the earliest possible Intervention, necessitated to stop terrorism because of its progressive and chronic nature. The reality TV shows I've discussed above prime their viewers for the rapid defeat of terrorism by conflating the Intervention and recovery, even as they raise questions about the nature of reality itself and the connection between the viewer and the viewed. *The Cleaner*, by virtue of its status as a fictional drama, obviates the need to consider the ethical dilemmas of representing real addicts. Subsequently, the rhetoric of the extreme Interventionist nearly echoes the rhetoric of Bush's divinely mandated War on Terror, itself inflected with his own conversion from addiction to sobriety.

In the following short chapter, I turn briefly to the Intervention during the Obama Administration. Ascending to the presidency in the aftermath of the worst economic crisis since the Depression, President Obama became a "recovery president" in another sense. It is too soon to assess Obama's drug policy fully. However, the narrative trope of the Intervention remains important to mainstream American culture, and its iterations during Obama's presidency disclose its lingering, problematic racial dimensions.

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Chapter Seven: Intervention in the Age of Obama: Race and Trajectories of Addiction in *Cast Away* and *Flight*

On July 30, 2009, a drug warrior, a police officer, a literary critic, and the United States' first black President held a "Beer Summit" to discuss racial profiling by the police. The summit was organized by Barack Obama after Henry Louis Gates Jr. was arrested for disorderly conduct outside his home. The arrest, according to Sergeant James Crowley, occurred because Gates "acted belligerently" when Crowley, who was called to the scene by a neighbor who thought someone might be breaking into the house, questioned Gates about whether he was in his own home rightfully (Saltzman, Ellement, and Noonan). Gates alleged Crowley suspected him because of racial profiling. President Obama initially responded to the incident by saying the police "acted stupidly in arresting somebody when there was already proof that they were in their own home" (qtd. in Khan, McPhee, and Goldman). Obama faced a backlash from law enforcement organizations; he in turn said he regretted his choice of words, but not the sentiment. However, he then went on to invite Gates and Crowley to share some beers at the White House to talk things over. They agreed, and Vice President Joe Biden, who Zachary Siegel calls "one of the primary architects behind the disparity in crack versus powder cocaine" sentencing (Siegel), joined them later with a nonalcoholic beer for himself. An article in the *New York Times* notes: "The addition of Mr. Biden was interesting, for a number of reasons. Mr. Biden was able to draw on his credibility with blue-collar, labor union America and his roots in Scranton, Pa., to add balance to the photo op that the White House presented: two black guys, two white guys, sitting around a table" (Cooper and Goodnough). This moment, and the few images of it photographers captured, interests me as well. Not

simply because at this table sat four representatives of the social, cultural, and institutional forces that have shaped the War on Drugs and its narratives or because Obama eschewed the teetotaling moral certainty of his predecessor in favor of discussing differences over mildly intoxicating beverages, though those are fascinating aspects. Instead, I want to consider Gates's comment following what is described by all parties as a pleasant encounter: "I don't think anybody but Barack Obama would have thought about bringing us together" (qtd. in Cooper and Goodnough). The election of the nation's first black President presented opportunities to reexamine the War on Drugs, the execution of which Vice President Biden played an integral part. Rather than taking a holistic view of Obama's drug policies before his administration has ended, however, I want to examine briefly a text that suggests the Intervention may be deployed to perpetuate the enduring racial dichotomy of the War on Drugs in the Obama era.

David Musto notes attempts to control substances like cocaine, marijuana, and opium are "associated with fear of a given drug's effect on a specific minority" (Musto 294). Marijuana and opium were linked with Mexican and Chinese immigrants in the 19th century, and rhetoric about their use also served to justify American imperialism and institutionalized discrimination. In the case of cocaine, white fears about the threat of "cocainized black" men with superhuman strength and enhanced libidos led not only to proscription of the drug, but "the peak of lynchings, legal segregation, and voting laws" in the Jim Crow era (Musto 7). As I've mentioned in Chapter 3, during President Reagan's War on Drugs, the racial dichotomy was evident in the disparity in mandatory minimum sentences for possession of crack versus powder cocaine, a discrepancy that required judges to punish crack users with five grams of crack at the same rate as they

would punish users possessing 500 grams of powder cocaine. As Michelle Alexander notes, “the majority of those charged with crimes involving crack at that time were black...whereas powder cocaine offenders were predominantly white” (112). While Reagan’s War on Drugs was “formally colorblind” in its execution it replicated the racial discrimination that has coincided with drug prohibition from the beginning.

After Obama’s election, we might question whether depictions of addiction still uphold this racial binary particularly in cases where the addictive substance is not illegal and when mainstream American culture accepts addiction as a disease rather than a crime. In theory, the disease concept of addiction should serve as an antidote to the narratives of addiction as a racialized criminal justice problem. Robert Zemeckis’s 2012 film, *Flight*, demonstrates the discursive, ideological, and narrative gymnastics required to recriminalize addiction, to mark the addict as criminal. Significantly, *Flight* relies on a version of the recovery narratives proliferated through Alcoholics Anonymous, an organization that sought to remove the stigma of alcoholism through universalizing the experience of the disease into a masternarrative. This injection of the criminal identity into the AA recovery narrative is accomplished, I believe, through a metaphorical depiction of the Intervention.

Flight seems to disrupt the dichotomy between narratives of criminality and of recovery. Structurally, the narrative generally conforms to an inverted Freytag pyramid recognizable in recovery stories from nineteenth century testimonials of reformed drunkards through its twentieth and twenty-first century equivalencies in Alcoholics Anonymous, talk shows, and reality TV, some of which I have explored in earlier chapters. In *Flight*, Whip Whittaker, played by Denzel Washington, is a commercial pilot

who battles substance abuse problems. Despite being hung-over and drinking a few minibar bottles of vodka, Whip skillfully lands malfunctioning plane, saving the vast majority of his passengers. During the official investigation of the crash, Whip struggles to rein in his drinking and develops a relationship with Nicole, a white heroin addict he meets in the hospital. Whip attempts to stay sober, but relapses several times, most spectacularly the night before his National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) hearing. At the hearing, Whip is given the opportunity to escape blame for the empty bottles recovered from the crash site, but instead decides to come clean about his drinking, and confesses that he is an alcoholic. As a consequence of this admission, Whip is sentenced to prison. The majority of the film, including Whip's frequent relapses, constitutes the drunkologue; his epiphany occurs at the NTSB hearing; and his recovery is summarized briefly in a monologue near the end.

The film presents multiple addiction trajectories throughout. Whip's girlfriend Katrina, a flight attendant on the doomed plane, joins him in the night of alcohol and drug-fueled revelry that precedes the crash. She dies trying to save a passenger on the plane. At the hearing, Whip learns that she had previously sought help for her alcoholism in rehabilitation centers. We see Nicole and Whip's paths cross before the hospital when the plane, flying upside down, passes over the apartment complex where Nicole has overdosed on heroin. Katrina and Nicole's stories provide alternative endings for Whip's addiction: death or recovery. That Nicole and Katrina differ in race (they are white and Latina, respectively) and gender from Whip reinforces the AA's universality of addictive experience.

The range of alcoholism narrative endings and variety of racial identities in *Flight* suggest the film is invested in portraying addiction as a disease unconcerned with race. The fact that it is one of a very few American films featuring a black protagonist in a genre dominated by whites would tend to indicate that race no longer signifies in addiction narratives.⁶⁴ However, in her defense of feminist narrative theory, Warhol reminds us that gender, race, and class “always signif[y]” in the production and reception of narratives (Herman et al 202). Whip delivers his recovery monologue in prison, reinvoking the criminality trope, especially because he sees punishment as the inevitable outcome for a narrative featuring the alcoholic identity. Prior to his recovery monologue, Whip had insisted on a behavioral interpretation of the crash, claiming, “No one could have landed that plane,” a claim the NTSB confirms. When Whip exchanges his behavioral interpretations for an alcoholic identity, he must also accept his criminality, losing his freedom, his pilot’s license, and his franchise, and he must accept blame for the accident, even though the film makes absolutely clear he neither caused it nor exacerbated its effects. Thus, even though the film follows the structure of AA recovery narratives that treat addiction as disease, the specter of criminality emerges, suggesting that these narratives still have the potential to reify racial stereotypes.

One might question, however, how race functions in this narrative. Though Whip never expresses any indication that he thinks he’s being targeted because he’s black, a few brief allusions to race invite closer analysis. First, Whip mentions that his father was a Tuskegee airman and his love of flying was passed down through the generations;

⁶⁴ Films that feature a white male protagonist whose struggles with addiction constitute a major part of the plot and/or his character include: Ray Milland in *The Lost Weekend*, Frank Sinatra in *The Man with the Golden Arm*, Paul Newman in *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, Michael Keaton in *Clean and Sober*, and Nicolas Cage in *Leaving Las Vegas*.

Whip's son, Knuckles, is heard on a home video telling both Whip and his grandfather that he too wants to be a pilot. That Whip's vocation is inherited suggests that it is a part of his identity, an identity closely bound up with histories of racial segregation. Whip's career is constructed, therefore, less as the result of the advances of the Civil Rights movement than of a long arc of Whitakers overcoming oppression. When the audience first meets Nicole, moreover, she is on the set of a pornographic film, in which the director envisions her as his "Desdemona." While Whip and Nicole only superficially resemble Othello and Desdemona, the allusion injects the forbidden and doomed into a relationship that ends up being nurturing and affirming. The allusion thus does less to interpret this particular interracial relationship than to evoke the possibility of interracial violence, contingent on a black man's obsessive need to control a white woman's sexuality. If these allusions to race lack coherence in the film, they are consistent with Zemeckis's oeuvre. As Kagan notes, the director's "reactionary" worldview often manifests itself in the raising of controversial topics only to deal with them fatalistically (Kagan 197).

Another Zemeckis, *Cast Away* (2000), provides a telling contrast. In addition to being the only two live action films Zemeckis has made since the 1990s, both films use plane crashes as the inciting event for the story of the protagonist's survival. Chuck Noland (Tom Hanks) is a middle manager for FedEx who leaves his fiancée, Kelly, (Helen Hunt) on Christmas Eve to fly across the Pacific Ocean on one of his frequent business trips. Bad weather brings the plane down, killing the pilots and stranding Chuck on a remote island where he spends the next four years fending for himself. Chuck eventually gets off the island and returns to the United States to find that his fiancée is

married and has a child. Coming to terms with this, Chuck sets off on his own, presumably filled with hope at the film's conclusion. While Chuck does not suffer from alcoholism, the beginning of the film suggests he has an obsessive desire for control that may be read as an addiction. Among the employees of FedEx, Chuck has a reputation for taking extreme measures to deliver packages. His coworkers tell a story about his stealing a child's bicycle to complete a delivery on time. Now that he has moved up the corporate ladder, Chuck is known for being an exacting manager who uses stopwatches, clocks, and pagers to micromanage his employees and himself. Chuck can be read as a control addict because of these personality traits, and also because the addict identity is a function of the narrative in which Chuck operates. *Cast Away* also features an addiction narrative similar to the one described in *Flight*, itself a product of AA and earlier narratives: Chuck's pre-crash life and early days on the island constitute his drunkologue, the rock bottom event is a suicide attempt that is not depicted on screen, and his recovery begins with a monologue he recites after confronting his former fiancée. Chuck's narrative, however, ends with his freedom, but Whip's ends with incarceration.

It's useful to remember that Whip is not guilty of the plane crash in *Flight* any more than Chuck is as a passenger of the plane in *Cast Away*; Whip insists several times that he was put in a broken plane, and everyone agrees.⁶⁵ However, his friends also warn him that the airline and the plane's manufacturer will happily make him a scapegoat for the crash. His lawyer, Hugh Lang, played by Don Cheadle, reminds him that the penalty

⁶⁵ Viewers of the film seem to have a more difficult time holding Whip blameless for the accident. Several postings in the IMDB discussion forum for *Flight* propose scenarios in which Whip's piloting might have caused or exacerbated the damage that later brought the plane down. These hypotheses seem to reflect, contrary to the explicit information in the film, a need to hold Whip responsible for the crash, and thus link his addiction to criminality.

for flying while intoxicated is up to twelve years in prison; his detractors suggest that he might spend his life in prison, as he'll ultimately be found liable for the six deaths that occurred in the crash. The owner of the airline is particularly hostile to him. Avington Carr, the only character besides Nicole with a discernible Southern accent (an interesting choice for a film set in Georgia) gazes out like a plantation owner over the lush green baseball field he also owns, and asks if Whip is a "drunk." Whip's friend and union representative, Charlie, acknowledges that Whip is a heavy drinker (denying the identities of "drunk" or "alcoholic") but also a great pilot. As Whip waits outside the conference room, Charlie, Hugh, and Carr discuss the toxicology reports that incriminate Whip, and Carr tells Hugh that Whip is going to jail: "He belongs in jail. You bet your ass he's going to jail." When Hugh tells him he's wrong, he taunts Hugh and Charlie, exaggerating his accent even further, "Life in prison. What we in Georgia call, 'all day long.'" Although Carr clearly functions as a strawman racist, his assertion that Whip "belongs" in prison remains unchallenged. By the end, even Whip concurs that he belongs there, not necessarily because of his crime (though he says the sentence was "fair"), but because being in prison allowed him to reach the recovery part of his addiction narrative and in doing so, become truly "free."

However, comparing events in *Flight*'s addiction and recovery narratives with parallel moments in *Cast Away*, suggests alternative endings for Whip. Both Whip and Chuck conclude their journeys by narrating their experiences, the recitation of one's recovery story being necessary to the AA metanarrative. At the end of *Cast Away*, Chuck recites his narrative to his friend and coworker, Stan. In a dimly lit room, while Stan remains silent and out of focus, Chuck reveals that he considered killing himself while on

the island because his death had become “the only thing I could control.” However, when Chuck found himself unable to carry out the suicide in the way he wanted, he relinquished control. “I had power over *nothing*,” he tells Stan. “And that’s when this feeling came over me like a warm blanket. I knew. Somehow, that I had to stay alive... I had to keep breathing even though there was no reason to hope. And all my logic said that I would never see this place again... I kept breathing, and one day that logic was proven all wrong because the tide came in and gave me a sail.” Chuck’s admitting he was powerless over his fate replicates the first Step in the Twelve Steps of AA: “Admitted we were powerless over alcohol.” After Chuck admits that he is powerless, he performs a version of Steps Two and Three, by deciding that there is a power greater than his logic and deciding to turn his will over to its decrees. It’s important to note that, following his admission of powerlessness, Chuck must still exercise his intellect and agency to get off the island. According to Kagan, Zemeckis only agreed to do the film when the script was changed to have Chuck engineering his way off the island (206).

Flight also concludes with a recovery narrative monologue. In this case, however, Whip admits his powerlessness in the scene immediately before he recounts it in the monologue. At the NTSB hearing, Whip, upon finding out that Katrina had sought treatment for alcoholism herself, admits not only that he drank the vodka on the plane but that he is an alcoholic. He says, “I was drunk. I’m drunk now. I’m drunk right now... Because I’m an alcoholic.” His admission encapsulates the shift from behavior to identity, as Whip swiftly progresses from copping to the empty bottles as evidence of his (criminal) deeds to declaring that he is drunk not because of what he does (drinks) but who he is (an alcoholic). The camera pulls out as his interlocutor, Hearing Officer Ellen

Block, closes her folder and walks away. Then, the camera slowly moves in to reveal Whip's tear-stained cheeks and bloodshot eyes. An almost imperceptible dissolve dries his tears and brightens his eyes, as he is now concluding his recovery monologue at what looks to be an AA meeting in prison. He explains his decision to confess by saying "It was as if I had reached my lifelong limit of lies. I could not tell one more lie." Whip is describing his rock bottom and epiphany. He then lists his punishments, punctuating them with the statement, "And that's fair," suggesting he has submitted to the authorities of Higher Powers. Whip is responding and submitting to external human authority, though. Unlike Chuck, Whip has to be presented with his addiction and its consequences by a third party. Whip requires an Intervention. The Intervention allows for the specter of criminality to assert itself in what seems to be a disease narrative.

The scene of the NTSB hearing serves the functions of an Intervention. Prior to the hearing, the hung-over but recently cocainized Whip glides into an elevator with Charlie and Hugh, strutting to Joe Cocker's "Feelin' Alright." The music and the cinematography—a following shot of Whip centered in the frame at medium distance—replicate exactly the scene at the beginning immediately before Whip boards the fatal plane. In this iteration, however, when Whip boards the elevator and the door closes, the nondiegetic music is abruptly replaced by a diegetic elevator version of the Beatles' "With a Little Help from My Friends." Whip looks at a young girl standing in the elevator with her mother, and then, prompted by Hugh to wipe his nose, he stares up at his reflection in the mirrored ceiling while the elevator descends. This brief scene alludes to the plane crash: plummeting down in the elevator, Whip stares up at the mirror, an inversion of himself. Given this opportunity to "see" himself, to identify his descent into

addiction, Whip does not appear to respond. At the hearing, however, Ellen Block provides Whip with digital images of the plane crash, animated models of the flight's trajectory, and audio recordings from the cockpit. She then attempts to project additional images, but says her remote isn't working. This calls attention to the act of representation upon which the intervention depends. She moves to a laptop where she "manually" projects both the evidence that exonerates Whip of pilot error and the evidence of his alcoholism that convicts him.

When Block describes the malfunction, she states that it was a "catastrophic event from which recovery was improbable and stable flight impossible," drawing a parallel between Whip's addiction and the doomed flight. The flight in *Flight* and the flight in *Cast Away* literalize the trajectories of the protagonists' addiction and recovery narratives. In *Cast Away*, Chuck's Christmas Eve flight across the Pacific is disrupted by turbulence. The flight crew is unable to make radio contact with anyone, beginning the process of cutting Chuck off from human contact. Chuck watches as the plane hits the water and is able, unlike the flight crew, to activate his life raft shortly thereafter and speed to the surface. Because an act of God causes the nosedive, Chuck is unable to do anything to prevent it. Cut off from contact with both the crew and the outside world, however, he is able to save himself from a watery death. Pulling away from the vortex created by the still spinning engine, he boards a life raft. The waves wash him away from the wreckage to the shore of the island where he'll spend the next four years. The establishing shot of this island shows a high, jagged cliff, followed immediately by a slightly high angle shot of the washed up Chuck.

The cliff also holds spatial significance in the narrative. In *Empire Islands: Castaways, Cannibals, and Fantasies of Conquest*, Rebecca Hightower-Weaver notes that fictional castaway narratives often include the castaway climbing to the highest point on the island. She calls this the “monarch-of-all-I-survey” moment (xviii), and notes that Chuck, unlike his eighteenth and nineteenth century predecessors, experiences this moment as “grief-filled instead of thrilling” (209). While I find Hightower-Weaver’s reading of the film as a “myth of *noncolonization*” (210) compelling, disrupting Chuck’s moment of triumph at the high point of the island by linking it to low points in his morale reinforces the AA metanarrative. While Chuck climbs to survey the island, he remains addicted to control. He sees his own fate in the corpse he discovers when he climbs the cliff the first time. When he climbs to attempt suicide, he experiences the epiphanic moment that allows him to relinquish control and keep surviving. When he does this, he’s rewarded with the sail that eventually washes ashore (another act of God, perhaps), allowing him to effect his escape from the island.

Chuck’s comparatively brief sea voyage re-establishes his agency. Chuck, the “bright technocrat” Kagan identifies as a staple of Zemeckis’s roster of characters (206), has charted the tides and discovered that he needs a sail to ascend the waves. The large piece of stiff plastic that washes ashore after Chuck relinquishes control of the situation allows him to harness wind power and ascend the crest of the waves that would otherwise wash him back to shore. The peaks of the waves are now obstacles he must overcome, and with the help of divine intervention, he does. Adrift at sea for an indeterminate amount of time, Chuck is kept alive by providence, as a pod of seemingly magical whales cool him with bursts of water and wake him to the passing of the barge that rescues him.

After a brief scene showing Kelly fainting at the news of Chuck's rescue, the narrative jumps forward several weeks, to Chuck sitting in a luxurious FedEx plane, silently marveling at ice and cool drinks, watching out the window as the plane passes over a checkerboard of green pastures. Back in Tennessee, Chuck is welcomed home by his FedEx family in a ceremony where they "pause" the FedEx works in honor of Chuck. Time, the thing Chuck was controlled by, now is seemingly under his control. Later, Chuck learns that Kelly has held on to and maintained his car. This allows him to take off on his own at the end of the film. The concluding images of the film, in which Chuck considers the four paths at a crossroads, signify Chuck's freedom, not his indecision. Chuck's recovery, facilitated by divine intervention, was ultimately within his control.

Whip's flight and eventual recovery follow a very different path. The flight to Atlanta is initially troubled by severe turbulence. When Whip's copilot, Evans, tries to switch on autopilot, Whip stops him. He clearly enjoys the challenge of navigating the plane through what he calls the "shitty air." Whip powers through the kind of "act of God" that brought down Chuck's plane and settles the aircraft in calm air before turning it over to Evans. In the hands of the copilot, the plane experiences the mechanical malfunction, later proven to be the result of improper maintenance. Nonetheless, instead of plummeting to the earth as Chuck does, Whip uses his technical expertise to regain control of the flight. Instead of "hitting bottom," he avoids it by bringing the bottom of the plane to the top. This spatial inversion echoes Chuck's experience on the island, with the crucial exceptions that Whip remains in contact with other humans beings, ordering Margaret the flight attendant and Evans the copilot to assist him and remain calm, and he maintains control (for the most part) of the plane. As the plane glides to the ground, Whip

tilts the controls to try to avoid hitting a white-steepled church, but is unable to, and watches as the wing clips off the top of the steeple, a sequence that the film shows in slow motion.

The heavy-handed symbolism of the subsequent shots, including a point of view sequence in which Whip's feet frame the white-robed congregation members as they pull passengers from the wreckage, indicates Whip's conflict with religion. Unable to avoid the church in his flight, he is similarly unable to avoid contending with the religious interpretation many other people in the film have of the miraculous landing. However, the religious interpretation does not belong to Whip, nor, I would argue, to the film itself. Soon after the crash, while Whip is still in the hospital, he first meets Nicole in a stairwell where they've both gone to smoke a cigarette. As they begin talking, a man enters from downstairs, hauling an IV bag on a metal stand and singing. Sick with cancer, the man makes jokes about his condition, describes himself as "closer to the other side," expresses love for Nicole and gratitude for his life, and acts as though he possesses special insight into both Nicole and Whip's lives. This unnamed character also delivers a platitude about God that Whip does not accept until the end: "Once you realize all the random events in your life are God, you will live a much easier life." A realistic capitulation to fate rather than a spiritual belief in an active God who intervenes to prevent plane crashes, the statement also evokes the pragmatic theology of Alcoholics Anonymous. Further distinguishing him from the other religious characters in the film, the man smokes cigarettes, identifies Whip as "the fucking pilot" of the crashed plane, and vacillates between tough talk (calling Whip on his "bullshit") and descriptions of his experiences as "a trip" and "beautiful." Even this AA-influenced and New Age-inflected version of

spirituality is debunked, as Nicole chalks the man's behavior up to "chemo brain," after he leaves.

The other religious characters in the film, with the exception of Margaret, whose pleas for Whip to go to church cease after the crash, are the least sympathetic in the film. When Whip visits Ken in the hospital, his abrasively evangelical wife, Vicki, is lit from above in such a way to make her eyes disappear into deep, sinister-looking shadows. Hers is a threatening evangelism: she corrects her husband's assertion that he's "happy to be alive," with a pointed "*blessed* to be alive," clutches and kisses the cross around her neck while Ken tells Whip that the plane was "doomed" by Whip's presence. When Whip tries to get him to articulate what he thinks caused the crash, Ken begins proselytizing, and Vicki unblinkingly echoes with "Praise Jesus... Praise Jesus!" Although Whip, perhaps to enlist Ken's favorable testimony, joins them in prayer, Vicki and Ken do not offer him any meaningful encounter with a Higher Power.

While Kagan critiques the lackluster "spiritual insight" of Chuck in *Cast Away* as not consisting of "religious faith nor social brotherhood nor a form individuality—just passively hoping 'the tide' may bring in something at random to save you" (207), it is important to distinguish the spiritual ethos of each film. The obligation to submit to a higher authority is the moral of both *Cast Away* and *Flight*, as well as the resolution to the protagonists' respective addictions. In *Cast Away*, Chuck is able to engineer access to community and God. After a few days on the island, FedEx packages begin to wash ashore. Chuck finds ingenious uses for many of the packages, making rope from the VHS tapes and using the ice skates to extract an aching tooth. He also uses two of the packages to create a community and engender hope. He uses a volleyball for companionship,

giving it a name, drawing a face on it, and having extended conversations with it. Hightower-Weaver notes that the volleyball is “a reflection of Chuck’s profound loneliness, since Chuck’s ‘conversations’ with Wilson are really only projections of his own desires and anxieties,” (Hightower-Weaver 209). Wilson is also the companion necessary to an AA recovery narrative. Notable not only for his white “skin,” but also his name, Wilson bears the same last name of AA’s founder, Bill Wilson, who claimed that fellowship among alcoholics was essential to recovery. Chuck’s conversations with Wilson are indeed one-sided, but since the point of these conversations is mutual identification and “coming together,” it hardly matters that Chuck only imagines Wilson’s responses. When Chuck returns home, he has learned the importance of fellowship, as demonstrated by his surprising apology to his friend Stan for not being there for him when his wife, Mary, died. Although a ridiculous apology from someone stranded on an island and presumed dead, it does mark the shift from Chuck’s earlier discomfort discussing Mary’s illness. Wilson may not have responded to Chuck, but talking to the volleyball has somehow taught Chuck to be a more empathetic communicator.

The viewer never sees the contents of the other package Chuck uses for spiritual purposes. The box, stamped with an image resembling a pair of golden wings encircled by a blue ribbon, resembles the package the camera follows at the beginning of the film, which leads the viewer to Chuck in Russia, at the peak of his addiction to control. The box comes from a ranch where a woman makes sculptures shaped like wings. Seeing the image of the wings on the package, Chuck places it aside. Pandora-like, Chuck retains “hope” by keeping this box unopened. He takes the package with him when he leaves the

island and even manages to hold on to it when he loses Wilson at sea. He returns the package, unopened, to the ranch at the end of the film with a note that reads, "This package saved my life. Thank you." The unopened package thus represents Chuck's faith in providence. That he returns it to the sender, instead of delivering it to the recipient (a point Zemeckis reiterates through the use of Elvis Presley's "Return to Sender"), underscores Chuck's recovery from his compulsive desire to complete the deliveries on time.

In *Flight*, if providence does not to work against Whip, it does lead him to Intervention rather than recovery. The night before the NTSB hearing, Whip stays in a hotel room. Having managed to stay sober for several weeks by living with Charlie, Whip is trusted to be alone in the hotel room, though his minibar has been emptied of alcohol and a guard is posted outside his door. After a quiet night of room service and television, Whip goes to bed, only to be awakened by a knocking sound. When he gets out of bed to find the source of the noise, he discovers that the door to the adjoining room is ajar, and the noise is coming from an open window in the unoccupied room next door. The hotel room sequence is a montage, and in almost every shot until Whip finds the open door, the camera slowly rotates around Whip, giving the impression that the mundane events of the night build to the series of remarkable coincidences after Whip hears the knocking: it is remarkable he didn't hear it before, remarkable that the door is ajar, remarkable that the window is open, remarkable that the room is unoccupied, and remarkable that the minibar fridge within is stocked with enough alcohol (and alcohol only!) to incapacitate Whip entirely. The rows of alcohol glow silver and gold inside the white, brightly lit fridge, emphasizing the quantity and appearing almost like a revelation. Whip lingers over the

fridge, taking out a bottle of vodka, removing the cap, and sniffing it before placing it on top of the fridge and walking away. The camera does not follow Whip as it had in his own hotel room, but instead stays with the bottle, indicating he is fated to come back to it. The camera remains focused on the vodka for fifteen seconds, slowly shifting until the bottle is in the center of the frame. Then, Whip's hand slides in from the left and snatches it away. The next shot presents Charlie and Hugh arriving to pick Whip up in the morning. They find Whip and both hotel rooms destroyed by Whip's bender. Fate would have Whip drink one more time, to demonstrate his powerlessness, to lead him into the Intervention at the hearing having recently been unable to control himself. In this narrative, seemingly divine forces work to bring Whip to justice, not necessarily salvation.

Flight withholds fellowship or a connection to a higher power from Whip until after he has been imprisoned. Though Katrina had attended rehabilitation for alcoholism in the past and Nicole is currently attending Twelve Step meetings, Whip does not identify with either of them until the NTSB hearing. During the hearing, several eye-line matches depict Whip looking at Katrina's picture, suggesting identification with a fellow addict is beginning to take place. The identification is coerced rather than spontaneous, though, as Ellen Block compares Whip and Katrina's blood tests, forcing Whip to consider their similarities. After Whip is sentenced to jail, however, identification and fellowship are developed along more voluntary veins—Whip's association with AA, the continuation of his relationship with Nicole, and the renewal of his relationship with his son, who had earlier wanted nothing to do with him.

The final scene of *Flight* also resembles *Cast Away*'s final scene, as it offers the protagonist a new life. As Whip visits with his son in the yard of the prison, planes audibly roaring past, he answers Knuckles's question, "Who are you?," with "That's a good question," portending a period of self-invention, now that he's sober. However, if Chuck's confusion at the crossroads is cleared up by the helpful directions of the woman who had shipped the package he never opened, Whip's confusion about his identity is compounded by his son's admission that he "never met" him. Prison guards and barbed wire fences remain visible in the background during this exchange, reminders that while the planes fly freely overhead, Whip is incarcerated. He may begin to tell his son a new story, perhaps one of his addiction and recovery, but as a euphoric alcoholism narrative, *Flight* has already provided viewers with the recovery monologue that concludes the narrative. Recovery is situated inside the prison, and identity reformation will have to take place at some future date. This process will be haunted by the specter of criminality. *Flight*'s narrative structure reinscribes Intervention as a vehicle for the criminality stereotypes historically applied to persons of color.

In 2010, President Obama announced a new drug control strategy that would bring a "balance of prevention, treatment, and law enforcement" efforts ("National Drug Control Strategy" 1). According to an article in the *Atlantic*, Obama's vision has been to treat drugs as a "public health" issue rather than a criminal justice issue, though efforts to shift funds and change policies to those ends has been slow (Novack and Reis). However, as I have shown throughout this dissertation, the premises of the Intervention, itself conceived as a therapeutic, compassionate approach to addiction, raise questions about agency and surveillance that make it easy to conflate addiction and criminality. The

narratives featured in *Flight* and *Cast Away* suggest our understandings of addiction and recovery are slow to change as well.

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Conclusion: After the War on Drugs?

“In a small number of cases an Intervention may fall short of its goal, but no Intervention fails. Once the problem has been brought into the open, no one involved in the disease—the person affected or those around him—can ever retreat into denial again. I suppose it is possible that they may convince themselves the Intervention never happened; but if they follow the advice they are given, they will not be able to hide behind denial” (Pinkham 20).

There is some evidence to suggest that both the War on Drugs and the Intervention’s popularity may be waning. As a narrative trope, the Intervention is increasingly parodied or undermined. Episodes of *How I Met Your Mother*, *The Office*, *Arrested Development*, and *The Big Bang Theory* feature Interventions that are unrelated to addiction, entirely self-serving, or ineffective. In the case of *How I Met Your Mother*, an episode entitled “Intervention” features several Interventions to discourage characters from wearing hats, speaking in British accents, or performing magic before culminating in an Intervention-Intervention: an Intervention staged to discourage further Interventions. The spread of the Intervention from drama and reality TV to situation comedies suggest a tendency to see addiction (especially in the high-bottom manifestations the Intervention was created to address) as a less pressing issue. In addition, as states decriminalize and legalize marijuana, some of the effects of the War on Drugs are being ameliorated. The disparity between crack and cocaine sentencing has been reduced (though not eliminated) and in December 2015, President Obama commuted the sentences of 95 federal drug offenders (Horwitz). While this number represents only .1% of prisoners serving sentences for federal drug crimes, it is an unprecedented step.

However, presidential pardons and commutations do not change the system, nor do ironic representations of the Intervention undermine the ideological premises of the concept: that bystanders can and should use surveillance and coercion to arrest an addict's progression. Addressing the "kinder, gentler" rhetoric of President Obama and his drug czar Gil Kerlikowske, Michelle Alexander argues, "Obama is in no hurry to scale [the War on Drugs] back to any significant degree, much less end it. The drug war is now too deeply rooted in our nation's political and economic structure to be cast aside. The war rhetoric may have ended and the song may have changed, but the system hums along" (Alexander).

I have shown throughout this dissertation the shifting nature of the War on Drugs: its rhetoric was politically expedient for Richard Nixon and successful in boosting the images of the Reagans. It continued without vocal support from Bill Clinton and was linked to the War on Terror under George W. Bush. Whether the Obama Administration (or its successor) will be remembered as the beginning of the end of the War on Drugs remains to be seen, though Alexander and other critics of the administration are not optimistic. I suggest that the drug war is rooted deeply in American culture as well; through narratives of addiction and recovery, we consider questions of agency, identity, and reality. The Intervention as a narrative trope can provide agency to formerly powerless actors and identities as survivors to non-addicts. Its emphasis on the constructed nature of reality is empowering and, in the context of postmodernity, coalesces with the saturation of mediated experiences and images Americans daily experience. An end to the War on Drugs may require we stop believing in our abilities to intervene, to "save" addicts through enforced treatment, "tough love," or incarceration.

The Intervention always brings relief to the Interveners, as the quote by Mary Ellen Pinkham above suggests. It never fails, because its primary goal is to establish the presence of another reality. In the horror texts discussed in Chapter 2, that alternate reality was terrifying, but by being able to blame a supernatural evil force for one's child's (or one's own) actions reduces anxiety. A moral dimension is reinstated in the disease concept of addiction in these texts, but this serves to deify medical-legal approaches to addiction rather than debunk them. Reagan's preemptive Interventions, including the Just Say No campaign, reinforced the notion that the representation of reality (on television) could be more powerful than lived experience. While the literary texts I discuss in Chapter 3 grapple with this assumption, David Foster Wallace makes a compelling case, in *Infinite Jest* and "E Unibus Pluram," for the ineffectiveness of contemporary literary fiction to combat the addictive forces of consumer culture and television. What Wallace seems to advocate for through his "new sincerity" Jess Walter promotes with rejuvenated postmodern irony in *The Zero*: an unmediated encounter with the consequences of one's actions, in the hope of better identifying and empathizing with others.

How we will respond to addiction after the War on Drugs (or, failing that, in the next iteration of it) will depend on a number of factors, including changes in addiction medicine and health insurance. However, while scientific breakthroughs in the study of addiction have occurred since 1971, the solutions are not themselves so new. Addiction treatment seems to go through a cycle of approaches; it is seen as a spiritual/symbolic problem, a pathology, a criminal justice issue. When the Obama Administration advocates for harm reduction measures such as making naloxone more available, they are

in part echoing the harm reduction approach of the early Nixon War on Drugs. When judges can sentence addicts to treatment rather than prison, they may be spared the pain of felony conviction and its attendant miseries, but the system itself remains in tact. As William White argues, and as I noted at the beginning of this dissertation, prisons, like treatment centers, “serve symbolic functions that have little to do with their actual capacity to punish, protect, or rehabilitate. Caretaking and punishment are venues through which the culture expiates its most powerful emotions. The acts of caring and punishing are more about ourselves than about the consequences of those acts on the addict” (White 331). Narratives of Intervention illustrate more clearly than ever the truth of this statement. The Intervention provides an opportunity to expiate feelings of anger and resentment while extending a symbolic offer of help. In our current moment, we seem as dependent on the promise of the Intervention to changes our lives as any addict is on the escape offered by drugs.

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PUBLICATIONS

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