

Review

Reviewed Work(s): Infinite Jest by David Foster Wallace

Review by: Steve Brzezinski

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conceptions of baseball, both universal, enduring struggles and strictly American preoccupations are dramatized and resolved. Enormous human questions spanning time and space and human occupation are resolved in the physical and temporal geography of the game. The enduring and pervasive nature of social evil is embodied in the treatment of the baseball dwarf. The literal object of baseball—to come home—is deftly connected by Westbrook to threads of absent or abusive mother themes in social and literary texts. Atonement, fathers and sons, and the figure of the selfless, rugged individual American hero are, Westbrook argues, realized in baseball and baseball literature—a game imitating life imitated in literature. *Ground Rules* has many virtues, and it will interest fans, aficionados, and literary critics.

• Melinda Kanner

Infinite Jest by David Foster Wallace. Little, Brown, 1,079 pp., \$30.00. Set in the near future, this sprawling monster of a novel is among the most discussed works of fiction in recent years. Relentlessly hyped by its publisher, the young author compared by critics to Pynchon, Barth, and Gaddis, this is an imposing and difficult work. It brims with erudition, wit, and stylistic brilliance, yet its sheer length enervates and overwhelms all but the most dedicated reader. It is a wickedly funny look at a world where marketing and the pursuit of pleasure have become the apotheosis of civilization, a world so commercialized that even the rights to the new year have been licensed to corporations. The action of the novel takes place in The Year of the Depend Adult Undergarment, 2014 in the old numbering system. The technology of

pleasure is so advanced that the book posits a video “entertainment” so seductive that one viewing reduces the watcher to permanent vegetable status, no longer able to do anything but endlessly fixate on the tape loop. The desperate search to acquire this video is at the center of the novel’s dramatic structure.

Though the novel interweaves multiple stories, perspectives, and narratives into a single feverish vision of the future, the one constancy is Wallace’s musing on the addictive nature of human yearnings. All his characters either want something they do not possess or are depressed by getting what they want only to discover that satiation does not equal satisfaction. The only characters who seem to escape the author’s approbation and detached ridicule are the inhabitants of Enfield House, a drug and alcohol treatment center where residents try to learn to live from day to day, free from the addictive desires that ruined their lives.

• Steve Brzezinski

Italian Industrialists from Liberalism to Fascism: The Political Development of the Industrial Bourgeoisie, 1906-1934 by Franklin Hugh Adler. Cambridge University Press, 458 pp., \$59.95. Adler’s monumental study makes several unique and original contributions to our understanding of the role of Italy’s industrial associations in the coming to power of fascism in that country. First, his approach transcends the futile structuralist-nominalist debates by means of a dynamic analysis which tacks adroitly between the subjective self-constitution of the industrialists’ collective consciousness and the objective political, structural, and institutional constraints within which they were