



Infinite Jest

David Foster Wallace , Dave Eggers (Foreword)

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Infinite Jest is the name of a movie said to be so entertaining that anyone who watches it loses all desire to do anything but watch. People die happily, viewing it in endless repetition. The novel *Infinite Jest* is the story of this addictive entertainment, and in particular how it affects a Boston halfway house for recovering addicts and a nearby tennis academy, whose students have many budding addictions of their own. As the novel unfolds, various individuals, organisations, and governments vie to obtain the master copy of *Infinite Jest* for their own ends, and the denizens of the tennis school and halfway house are caught up in increasingly desperate efforts to control the movie—as is a cast including burglars, transvestite muggers, scam artists, medical professionals, pro football stars, bookies, drug addicts both active and recovering, film students, political assassins, and one of the most endearingly messed-up families ever captured in a novel.

On this outrageous frame hangs an exploration of essential questions about what entertainment is, and why it has come to so dominate our lives; about how our desire for entertainment interacts with our need to connect with other humans; and about what the pleasures we choose say about who we are. Equal parts philosophical quest and screwball comedy, *Infinite Jest* bends every rule of fiction without sacrificing for a moment its own entertainment value. The huge cast and multilevel narrative serve a story that accelerates to a breathtaking, heartbreaking, unforgettable conclusion. It is an exuberant, uniquely American exploration of the passions that make us human and one of those rare books that renew the very idea of what a novel can do.

Infinite Jest Details

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Author : David Foster Wallace , Dave Eggers (Foreword)

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From Reader Review Infinite Jest for online ebook

Kemper says

I should have hated this book. 1079 pages of small text with loooooonnnngggg paragraphs and little white space so it feels like you're reading a newspaper from 1881. Plus, 96 goddamn pages of endnotes. *1 The plot, such as it is, doesn't really come into focus until several hundred pages into it, and even though it's set in the near future where something very strange has happened in North America, this doesn't get explained until about mid-way through the book so you're left feeling confused and bewildered a lot of the time.

There's an almost endless cast of characters. Long sections of the book have detailed descriptions of things that don't seem crucial to the plot. *2 And then there's the fact you have to use two bookmarks because you're constantly going back to the endnotes. *3 Some of the endnotes contain long wandering passages that also don't seem relevant to anything. *4

The ending isn't very satisfying. *5 The main plot point about the search for a cartridge of 'entertainment' so good that it will literally make anyone who sees it immediately stop living their live and stay in front of the television until they die because they'll refuse to do anything but watch it, including eating, drinking, using the toilet, etc. *6, isn't given much resolution, either.

The book just kind of stops, and you have the distinct impression that DFW could have done another 1000 pages or so without breaking a sweat if he hadn't eventually eliminated his own map. *7

So after all that, why was my first instinct after finishing it to go back and immediately start re-reading it? *8

I was completely engrossed when I was reading this book. No matter what weird detours it took, I was more than happy to just keep turning pages like one of those poor suckers who got snared by The Entertainment. If this book was endless *9, I probably would have spent my life cheerfully reading it and then asked for a copy on my deathbed just to try and squeeze a few more pages in.

I'm not sure why I liked it so much. In fact, the way this book got into my head gives me a slight case of the howling fantods *10 Considering it's a book that deals a lot with obsession, this is more than a little unsettling.

I'm sure someone with an English degree could spend the rest of their life trying to deconstruct this book, but I don't have the intelligence, skill or patience to even try. Wallace did something unique and crazy with this, and he had the talent to make it work. I don't know how, and I think that figuring it out might be like when you learn how a magic trick was done so I'm just going to shelve it, always be glad that I took it on and managed to finish it, and re-read it someday once the memory of the endless pages of endnotes has faded. * 11

Oh, and I would have given it 5 stars, but you know, the endnote thing... *12

*1 - Yes, 96 goddamn pages.

*2 - I now know way more about tennis drills and Alcoholics Anonymous than I ever really wanted to learn.

*3 - Seriously, there are 388 endnotes in this freaking thing.

*4 - There's an 8 page filmography listing all the movies that were supposed to have been made by one of the characters.

*5 - Somebody email me and explain what the hell happened.

*6 - The closest comparison would probably be a really kick-ass episode of The Wire or Battlestar Galactica.

*7 - 'Eliminating maps' is a slang phrase from the book meaning to either kill someone or kill yourself.

*8 - I didn't. Mainly because I couldn't bear the thought of dealing with the endnotes again.

*9 - And DFW did his best to make it that way...

*10 - 'Howling fantods' is another slang term from the book that means to get creeped out. E.g. Seeing Michael Jackson's horrifically surgically altered face on magazine covers after his death gave me the howling fantods.

*11 - Some of the endnotes are so long that they have their own endnotes. That's just messed up.

*12 - I'm not kidding. They are completely out of control.

Herbie says

It's my habit to write on the inside sleeve of a book the words from the text that I can't define or don't understand. Here is the resulting list from the back inside sleeve of Infinite Jest:

apocopes
bolections
reglets
dipsomania
quincunx
varicoceles
simpatico
aleatory
experialist
agnate
pedalferrous
fulvous
louvered
sangfroid
gibbons
apercu
eidetic
mурated
tumescent
recidivism

erumpent
rutilant
hale
purled
nacelle
sulcus
imprecated
tumbrel
comportment
scopophobic
asperity
rapacious
afflatus
bathetic
brachiform
strabismic
ascapartic
avuncular
adit
factota
chuffing
neuralgiac
tumid
eustacian
xerophagy
gynecopia
suborning
solecistic
lissome
ascapartic
anapestic
bradyauxetic
lordosis
corticate
mucronate
codicil
lume
nacreous
puerile
thanatoptic
spansules
hasp
prognathous
nonuremic
apothegm
apical
selvaged
caparison
cunctations

aphasiac
etiology
prolix
chyme
amanuentic
falcate
jejune
catastatic
eschatology
declivity
mafficking
cuirass
vig
miasma
cordite
cirrhotic
reveille
tektitic
crepuscular
threnody
emery
mysticetously
anechoic
anorak
erumpent (again - apparently I didn't remember it from the first time)
aphasiac
reseau
diverticulitis
cathexis
skirling
dun
exaculates
aphasia
anodized
picayune
caprolaliac
verdigrised
coruscant
anaclitic
catexic
sybaritically
restenotic
malentendu
peripatetic
lordotic
rictal
thanatopic
olla podida
inguinal

sudoriferous
swart
emetic
parotitic
alacrity
sinciput
kyphotic
ciquatoxic

I didn't realize until later in the book that DFW often makes up words.

I will post a full review at my blog, meekadjustments.blogspot.com.

Manny says

I've finally reached the end of this amazing book. It's not an easy read, but after a while you discover that there are good reasons why it has to be the way it is.

The review is the mini-blog I kept while I was reading it. It sort of contains spoilers: I don't give away very much about the plot, but I do spend a lot of time speculating about what the overall point of the book is. So if that kind of thing bothers you, you probably shouldn't read on. Read *Infinite Jest* instead, then come back and see if you agree with me :)

The rest of this review is in my book *What Pooh Might Have Said to Dante and Other Futile Speculations*

Joshua Nomen-Mutatio says

While I don't *actually* have A Favorite Book (or Song, or Album, or Band, or Film, or Painting, or Sexual Position, or any other category of things that contain more than one equally great contender) *Infinite Jest* is the first book that immediately comes to mind when the idea of My Favorite Book arises.

As I've already alluded to and partially instantiated in a few scattered places around GoodReads, I feel that I read this book at the right time. The contingent particulars which culminated as the temporal whole that was My Life converged with my reading of this book rather beautifully.

First of all, I had zero knowledge of the book and author before and throughout my reading. I came upon it as a babe in the woods in these regards. I was completely unaware of its popular and largely positive critical reception seven years prior in 1996. For this I am grateful. It's all too easy to hop on the backlash bandwagon when "critical darlings" and "it-people" of the moment emerge on your radar. I take great pains to try to avoid this kind of thing, but it's not easy.

I also was juggling a variety of ongoing, confused trains of thought about the basic subjects that the book

focuses on—to boil them down as far as relevantly and reasonably possible: Addiction, Entertainment, and Western Culture, specifically that of the modern US of A. I was also deep in the trenches of "stomach-level sadness."^{1}

{1} What were you intending to do when you started this book?

I wanted to do something sad. I'd done some funny stuff and some heavy, intellectual stuff, but I'd never done anything sad. And I wanted it not to have a single main character. The other banality would be: I wanted to do something real American, about what it's like to live in America around the millennium.

And what is that like?

There's something particularly sad about it, something that doesn't have very much to do with physical circumstances, or the economy, or any of the stuff that gets talked about in the news. It's more like a stomach-level sadness. I see it in myself and my friends in different ways. It manifests itself as a kind of lostness. Whether it's unique to our generation I really don't know. (Interview)

I had borrowed the copy that I read the first time around from my best friend at the time, who I'd been close with since early childhood. I'd been confiding some existential angst to him about depression and the exacerbation of said depression with miscellaneous self-medicating behavioral patterns. He responded by solemnly handing me a thick book wrapped in the image of white cumulus clouds imposed upon a bright blue sky.

Cut to the summer of 2004: I'd just finished my first year of real (not community) college and was working on the buildings and grounds crew around the campus in exchange for eight dollars an hour and a free room. I spent the days doing all manner of maintenance and grunt work and my nights poring over this book and dramatically rediscovered the joys of falling head first into a fictional world and the redemptive value of communing with the consciousness of another person through reading and writing. I also found another artist to feel a deep kinship with and solely through the type of communion that is mediated by pulped trees and ink. Wallace was rather quickly inducted into the ever-expanding (and occasionally contracting) roster that is my pantheon of personal heroes, and as such also rapidly ascended through the ranks to sit somewhere vaguely near the zenith point (again, the trouble with ranking).

I was hooked in a big way by the time I hit upon the scene describing the tortuously self-conscious, self-doubting thoughts of a cannabis addict named Ken Erdedy. This was well before the hundredth page mark. It perfectly captured the mind of a hyper-analytic depressive and compulsive THC ingestor. From the sorrowfully resigned glee (that all minutely self-aware addicts feel at various points along the path of Addiction) of planning a two week long "marijuana vacation"^{2} to the descriptions of how depressing having sex with someone would be in such an excessively stoned and self-loathing state.^{3}

{2} Consisting mainly of drawing the blinds, shutting off the phone, being perpetually intoxicated with pot smoke, watching films, vigorously masturbating, and loads of fractally expanding and contracting shame and despair lurking beneath it all and frequently bursting through the surface for greedy gulps of oxygen and one-on-one time with the vacationer's psyche. This planning is all being done in the context of desperately attempting to find a way to finally pluck the compulsive behavior (getting high) from his life—excessive use of the demonized substance is rationalized as the savior, the one thing that will finally make him disgusted

enough to quit forever.

{3} "He had never once had actual intercourse on marijuana. Frankly, the idea repelled him. Two dry mouths bumping at each other, trying to kiss, his self-conscious thoughts twisting around on themselves like a snake on a stick while he bucked and snorted dryly above her, his swollen eyes red and his face sagging so that its slack folds maybe touch, limply, the folds of her own loose sagging face as it sloshed back and forth on his pillow, its mouth working dryly." (pp. 22-23)

There's simply too much—too many amazing scenes and characters—to even begin the process of surgically removing them, holding them up to the light of the review, and rendering them vague enough to maintain some requisite mystery and yet contextualized enough to give each pinned down specimen some mouth-watering OOMPF! for the Dear Reader. It simply cannot be done. (People can cast their gaze in the direction of the myriad collegiate dissertations already written about this book and/or a book called *Elegant Complexity* if they want in-depth analysis.) Luckily, many of the people I know who will read this review have already read the novel.

So there's a terrible type of rumor that roams around about this book, and Wallace more generally, and these sentiments can be rounded up and boiled down to "It's all PoMo trickery and no heart." **Wrong.** So very, very wrong. I've always seen this book as the emergent property/locus of a web-like arrangement of profoundly emotionally compelling portraits of people, places and things. This is its core, its essence, its fundamental organizing principle. Yes, there are some gags, like footnotes and some funny names, but what the naysayers seem to overlook are the hundreds of seismically moving descriptions of human struggles and triumphs; from the head-clutchingly/jaw-gapingly dramatic to the very recognizably monotonous (which can be very edifying, this process of recognition); from the painfully, *inherently* private and singular to the monumentally universal and public.

Wallace's desire to write a sorrowful book is fully realized here. I think it's safe to say that this a tragedy—in the Shakespearean{4} sense of the term—and that it, like the greatest tragedies, does not simply pummel you with darkness but pokes holes of humor and joy through the opaque veil to allow for some breathing room. Indeed, there are some extremely funny things going on in this book and it's mostly a darker shade of humor that is employing them. Not at all like putting a clown nose on a prisoner being executed or anything—DFW is much more naturally funny than that—but a beautiful balance of the genuinely sad, the genuinely funny and the instances of absurdity where both overlap.

{4} FYI: The title comes from a line in *Hamlet*, "Alas, poor Yorick!—I knew him, Horatio; a fellow of infinite jest, of most excellent fancy."

I also think of this book as mostly embodying a style of realism, though there are occasionally some rather extraordinary things taking place as well. What I'm trying to stress is that it's not some non-stop ride of wacky gimmicks and metafiction (which is strangely—and mistakenly—the impression some blurbs give of this book). Beneath the hilarious absurdity of things like business corporations annually purchasing the names of the year (which is a brilliant gag, by the way) there is a massive foundation of stark realism and humanism perched stoically beneath, and it's all just slightly, artfully tweaked in ways that makes you wonder how *this* or *that* instance of absurdity is really much different from the absurdity faced in your slice of the non-fictional world that you inhabit. I'll go ahead and just state it plainly: referring to our units of measurement, like our neat bundles of 365 days, as things like "Year of the Adult Depends Undergarment"

or "Year of the Trial-Sized Dove Bar" is *less* insane than the very real concept of corporate personhood.

As far as self-referentiality and the use of metafictional techniques are concerned, I simply see none of it. Nowhere are we "cleverly" "reminded" that we're reading a book—at least not explicitly. Nowhere is that little wink and nudge of "This is a book/I am an author writing a book" ever inserted into the prose. This was something Wallace very consciously avoided along with a species of irony that he's referred to as being representative of "**the song of a bird who's come to love its cage.**"

I've discussed this with Bram before and he makes some mention of DFW's self-consciousness seeping through the pages of *Infinite Jest* in his wonderful, if slightly less religiously devoted review. Bram's point seems to be more so that Wallace's voice throughout the novel is very much *his voice* (the same type of charge gets launched at DeLillo, as I briefly covered elsewhere). This is indisputable. The thing is this: it doesn't bother me in the least because, as Bram writes on the subject of DFW's voice, "*Whatever his reason for writing this way, it works because this voice is such a joy to read.*" Amen, brother Bram.

Indeed, I found it to be *such* a joy that I didn't even notice this fact about the prose-style in either my first or second reading. I don't mind that the thoughts of a physically deformed and mentally challenged teenager are narrated with the same voice as the thoughts of a clinically depressed thirtysomething woman, or a wheelchair-bound Québécoise assassin, or the prettiest (veiled) girl of all time, or an alcoholic experimental filmmaker *and* his childhood self, et cetera.

The book is written from a completely *third-person* perspective, too. This is an important fact to note. Had Wallace tried to cram his voice into *first-person* perspectives of the characters it would've been an unpublishable disaster. But he didn't, it wasn't, so let's get over it and just come to grips with what it means to write from the third-person perspective. In sum, this book is proof positive, by my lights, that characters don't have to take on wildly different tones of voice and manners of thought and speech in order to be rendered deeply sympathetic and compelling.

For most of the book the prose is so pitch-perfect and the on-page action so arresting that I simply didn't make a note of this just-now-mentioned technical stuff about perspective, tonal-shifts, and so on. There are some relative lulls, like some of the extended descriptions of tennis matches, but on the vastly larger slice of the pie chart the book remains extremely entertaining, thought-provoking, tear-duct-lubing, belly-tickling, soul-massaging, etc. The scenes at Ennett Recovery House and the AA meetings are flawless and much of it struck me quite strongly as being amazingly insightful and emotionally jarring. Upon my second reading of the novel I discovered where the cover image of the sky might *possibly* have come from:

"You are at a fork in the road that Boston AA calls your Bottom, though the term is misleading, because everybody here agrees it's more like someplace very high and unsupported: you're on the edge of something tall and leaning way out forward...." (p. 347)

Everything involving the Incandenza family is superb. Same with Joelle Van Dyne (aka Madame Psychosis, aka P.G.O.A.T {Prettiest Girl of All Time}). Same with Gately. Same with the entire conceptual-metaphorical apparatus behind the notorious film mostly known as "The Entertainment" (officially titled *Infinite Jest*) as well as the actual socio-political entanglements that surround it. Same with the brilliant conversational back 'n' forths between Marathe and Steeply, where some of the greatest insights into the three major themes of the novel occur. Same with Wallace's sheer talent with language, including the coining of highly memorable terms and idioms. There are now two phrases I use around fellow fans of this book when the moment is appropriate: "the howling fantods" (in reference to feelings of extreme nervousness and high-strung emotional strain) and "to eliminate one's map" (in reference to suicide). I could gush on and on

and on and on...

This all just makes me want to settle into Round Three right this very second and read it all over again—and I just might. *Infinite Jest* has the quality of slowly unfurling in your memory, which makes sense considering the sheer length, the descriptive depth, and the broad spectrum of content. Each re-exposed detail symbiotically attaches itself into the larger, self-organizing, cumulative memory of how fucking amazing the book was and indeed still is.

When I met the tome's final sentence and finished it off I was left with an amazing set of feelings that's very difficult to describe satisfactorily. Basically, I felt a deep abiding sadness at the fact that it was now finished. I found myself somewhat frantically flipping between the final page and the "Notes & Errata" section, irrationally seeking more words—I may as well have been tearing the room apart looking for meth money. I felt a physiological craving confined and radiating within. I wanted *more!* More entertainment! More communion. More redemption. More identification. And then as I sat stunned and staring at the final paragraph it hit me: David Foster Wallace wanted the reader to feel this way.{5}

{5} On some level all writers and artists and anyone trying to "sell" anything (ideas, feelings, books, etc) to other people all want those people to keep coming back for more, but there was more than that standard set of intentions going on in *Infinite Jest*. He was trying to show people something about themselves, namely that sad, funny, and strange spectacle of continually seeking pleasure and relief.

He wanted the reader to acknowledge Craving. He turned the mirror of the Ennett House upon the reader and captured their reflection and left them with things to think deeply about outside of the book. My eyes widened and my jaw literally dropped open and the word "Genius" popped into my head, scattering the cognitive noise and bringing me one more brief moment of Thoughtless Bliss.

David Beavers says

I've been waiting, panther-like, for the right combination of caffeine and personal gumption to strike, to attack writing about this, since it really is one of my favorite books ever-ever, and one of the most fascinating things I've ever read. I've read this book twice and I could care less what people say about it, because when I *do* care, I tend to grit my teeth over the ridiculous comments & reviews that tend to come up in discussing David Foster Wallace's work. People like to levy the criticism that the book is "sloppy" or "digressive". Really? You think? An 1100 page book with 200 pages of small-print footnotes might be a little digressive or indulgent or maddening? It might stray a wee bit into uncharted, dark-woods territory? Jeez.

There is, in art, what I like to call the "crazy project". Once you go to work on the Crazy Project -- C.P. for short -- you don't leave the Crazy Project. You don't FINISH the crazy project. You can -- when you are really involved in it, I mean really involved -- scarcely even talk about it; you may not even realize you're involved in it. The C.P. involves being given a hammer (the only real tool of the artist), a mouthful of nails, and being sent "over yonder hill" and told to do AS MUCH DAMAGE AS YOU POSSIBLY CAN with the hammer you have been given. When working on the C.P., the creative force is one in the same as the destructive force, and your hammer is a useful tool regardless of which way you are swinging it.

I think DFW is one of the most fascinating authors alive -- he's doing work with the English language in the tradition of Kathy Acker, Bill Burroughs, or James Joyce. The marketplace demands "novels" and so people oblige, but there is a difference between a "novel" and a BOOK, and I would consider a book to be more interesting -- if more difficult and less "composed"-- and Infinite Jest is definitely a BOOK, and shouldn't be treated as a "novel" in the same way, say, "Life of Pi" is a novel (and I do think Life of Pi is terrific, don't get me wrong). But, if you want immaculately written works of fiction by Wallace, check out his short stories -- especially the ones in Girl w/ Curious Hair -- because these conform more to what you would expect from traditional notions of "reading fiction". If you want a beautiful, wildly ambitious, insanely indulgent, uncompromising mind-bending skull-violating MESS, one that comprises an entire Victorian manor of the Crazy Project, then Infinite Jest may well be worth your while.

The book is, definitely, a mess, let's not mince words. It is also obsessively-compulsively mathematical in the way that DFW seems to enjoy; there is an order to the chaos, and it did take reading it a second time to pull out some of the exquisitely crafted crystalline plot strands he was working at. Linearity & coherence of disparate plot elements is not what the book is interested in, be warned.

But before I make the case of this being some academic project with no soul, let me say that reading this, I was genuinely surprised and moved by how deep & real the characters in it become. The characters in here are terribly tragic, in a real Shakespearian sense (the book's title is after all a reference to Hamlet), and their tapestry in this book's pages is as intimate and heartrending as it is vast; this book is a language project but one that remains absolutely invested in the lives of the people involved in that "project".

The book is about a lot of things: American culture & the nature of desire, fathers and sons, art, addiction, institutions, drugs, consciousness, film & the nature of narrative . . . too much to go into. More than anything, I think, the book is about addiction, and how our desires are moderated and mediated by culture, and how desire & addiction are entwined, and how Westerners approach these things.

Infinite Jest is wildly funny and, like I mentioned above, almost unexpectedly moving: there is a kind of veneer between the reader and the characters; they are guarded and stoic people, for the most part, and "getting to know" them can be as frustrating as trying to "get to know" someone in your own life who is guarded and careful with their emotions. But over the course of hundreds of pages you learn the inner-workings of IJ's huge cast, and their emotional motivations and subtleties begin to resonate with you in ways that dig so deep I think they're almost frightening.

This book is dense enough -- to say the least -- that I think you can get out of it whatever you are willing to put into it. Isn't this true of most good art? But the depth here is incredible. To say I'm "biased" and a bit blinded to criticisms about this book is hardly the point -- I think its a marvel, I think its a mess, I think it taught me what the difference is between a book & a novel, and why I think BOOKS are what the front-line artists working on the Crazy Project are really hammering out.

update/addendum: I wrote this when DFW was still alive. It pains me to even go back and read this review -- "one of the most fascinating authors alive". I can reliably drop the last word of that now. DFW's suicide still stings like no other artist for me. I do know I'm not alone there, a lot of people who admire his work feel it. We were robbed -- it's selfish, incredibly so, but so is suicide.

Objectively, I still think Girl With Curious Hair is probably the best place to start, but I didn't start there, I started here, and it worked out okay. Just know this is a glorious mess, be patient with it, the book wants to be your daddy, but you have to be its daddy, let it teach you as you guide it it -- it's a living thing, this book, all the more precious now.

El says

In 1863 Abraham Lincoln decided that the fourth Thursday of each November would be recognized nationally as Thanksgiving. Today happens to be the fourth Thursday in November. Happy Thanksgiving.

I would like to give thanks to the fact that I finished this mother-effing book today.

It's now 9:40 EST as I start to write this review. I finished reading approximately five hours ago. Since then I have polished off almost an entire bottle of Chardonnay. It's taken me this long to a) get a nice enough buzz on, and b) have any desire to update my review to this book. My desire to review this book is equal to the desire I had to *read* this book - both seem like a really good idea, but in the process of either I sort of feel like I'd probably be better off wrangling a squirrel with my bare hands. But, okay, to be fair, there were times while I read this that I really enjoyed it. My wrists never actually enjoyed holding the book, but my mind was amused once in a while at the mental gymnastics which were required to get through some of the passages. Other times my mind told my eyeballs they were really effing dumb to keep looking at the page. Those were the times in which the book was set off to the side and wasn't picked up again for sometimes weeks at a time. It sat next my bed for the most part. I hated this book during those times. It was there when I went to sleep at night and it was there when I woke up in the morning. It might as well have had eyes because I felt it constantly looking at me. I think one morning it even handed me my glasses.

Infinite Jest became a third roommate. One that wasn't even paying rent, but it gives okay head so I kept it around.

I read 37 other books in the time that I spent also reading Infinite Jest. Another GR friend read only 24 other books during her reading of this book. No, I'm not judging myself. Okay, maybe I am a little bit. Excuse me, I need another glass of wine.

I know, I know. This whole review is completely unstable. Why rate a book so high if the review itself sounds so low? I never take almost four months to read a book that I love, so that fact alone must mean I really hated this, right?

Oh, if only it were that easy.

I don't love Infinite Jest. I think a part of me hates it. Actually, a large part of me hates it. I hate that it took me almost four months to read it, and I hate that it consumed so much of my time and energy. I hate that I so very much wanted to know how it ended, preventing me from abandoning it entirely. I hate that there were so many endnotes, and sometimes those footnotes went on for a really long time and may as well have been whole chapters in and of themselves. The different story lines? Hated them. I can't tell you how many times I swore at the book, how many times I swore at the memory of David Foster Wallace himself for writing such a book, how many times I argued with myself, "Summabitch, this is like postmodernist fiction - no, it's *worse* than postmodern literature... this is like... *post-postmodern* literature..." At times I thought that maybe I should give Ulysses another read because in comparison it's like reading those Dick and Jane books. (BTW, reading Joyce is nothing like reading Dick and Jane books, and Infinite Jest is really no more difficult than

reading Ulysses. I'm just waxing hyperbolic here.)

But there were some really incredible aspects to Infinite Jest, and I would be wrong not to give some shout-outs to those things as well. The story lines that I hated? I also sort of loved them. There's really no good way of giving the story line any sort of true justice here. There's a reason the book is over a thousand pages - you're crazy if you think I'm going to even try to sum it up here. Don't be lazy, read it yourself. Anyway, I loved the stories, which only makes me hate the book even more. Hi, I'm a woman, get over it.

Incidentally, at the same time I've been reading this I've also been reading some crazy modern French philosophy dudes, and secretly I've been making comparisons between the two books. Which is why when I reached this passage (highly edited to hurry along my point for this purpose, bold fonts are mine for emphasis) on page 792 I sort of vomited a little in my mouth before screaming and passing out a bit:

*...the entire perfect-entertainment-as- Liebestod myth surrounding the purportedly lethal final cartridge was nothing more than a classic illustration of the antinomically **schizoid** function of the post-industrial **capitalist** mechanism, whose logic presented commodity as the escape-from-anxieties-of-mortality-which-escape-is-itself-psychologically-fatal, as detailed in perspicuous detail in **M. Gilles Deleuze's** posthumous Incest and the Life of Death in Capitalist Entertainment...*

On page 838-9:

To concoct something the gifted boy couldn't simply master and move on from to a new plateau.

In case you were wondering, the other book I am reading at this time is A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia by Deleuze and his buddy, Guattari. Hello! Coincidence!? That's pretty crazy. That requires another glass of wine to process.

Seriously, Deleuze and Guattari are written all over this Wallace guy. I know very little about Wallace. I know he wrote books like Infinite Jest, had a rough life, died way too young at his own hand, and... well, that's pretty much it. I haven't read anything else by him, though I might. The point is I don't know how much he was into those crazy Frenchies, but I would say he had to have read them, studied them, or maybe, like myself, was a part of a really pretentious book club in which they spend almost five hours dissecting three chapters of A Thousand Plateaus at a time. The thought actually made me feel a little closer to Wallace.

But then I remembered how angry I've been at Deleuze and Guattari as well over the past few months and decided they're all back on the bus. (The Bus, btw, is just a pretend bus inside my head where I imagine putting people that I don't like onto said bus and then eventually driving them all off a cliff. A really high cliff.)

At the same time, it's genius. Wallace was genius for writing this book, a non-traditional dystopia which, I might add, also sort of gets me all hot and bothered because I do like a well-written dystopia. He was genius for making all these connections to things like Deleuze and Guattari, things that a lot of people don't really read; it made me wonder what other references he made that I'm not familiar with and therefore I missed completely. I was happy to at least catch that one.

It seems this is the sort of book that people either love or hate - there's very little middle-ground on this one. It seems people read this more than once, though for the life of me I can't imagine ever wanting to read it again. I'm glad I read it once, for sure. And when I say "glad" I mean it in the same way that I mean it when I say I'm "glad" my mom made me eat really nasty vegetables when I was a kid. I didn't like them but they were good for me. That's sort of what *Infinite Jest* is. A giant, thousand+-page vegetable that you know is good for you but it doesn't really taste that great, and putting ketchup on it doesn't help. I'm just a healthier reader because I was able to stomach it.

But it didn't change my life. I refuse to say that it did. It will, however, stick with me. And there again is that stupid genius of Wallace. He wrote a big spanking book that manages to really stick with a reader. But, like I ask constantly, especially when it comes to Deleuze and Guattari - *was it necessary??*

I sort of feel like that Rip Van Winkle guy in that Washington Irving story. Like I've been asleep for a really long time (in this case, it's been since August 2nd when I started reading *Infinite Jest*) and now I'm awake and holy crap, things have changed with the rest of the world. I would read *Infinite Jest* before going to bed at night, and then wake up suddenly only to realize I had been *dreaming* about reading *Infinite Jest*. There was no break between putting the book down, turning off the light and falling asleep. It all just continued in my head. And it seems this is the kind of book that people remember *where* they were while they were reading this more than they can actually remember what it's about. I remember where I was when I heard Kurt Cobain had died. I remember where I was in my life while I was reading *Infinite Jest*. The finer details of my life are actually a little blurry during this reading though because it consumes so much energy to read it that it sort of overshadows everything else.

So that was my Thanksgiving. I knew part of my plan for the day was to get totally trashed on wine and finish *Infinite Jest*, which is mostly why I didn't invite my brother over to celebrate the day with us. (Sorry bro!) Now I've been sitting here giving two big middle fingers to the copy of *Infinite Jest* beside me. Eventually maybe we'll make up, but for now it's time for bed because, alas, I have to work in the morning and I have to sleep this Wallace-Jest-Chardonnay-buzz off. If you read all the way down to this sentence then you're awesome and you are probably worthy and capable of reading *Infinite Jest* on your own. I wish you well. Tip: Read all of the endnotes.

Garima says

Know what they say about novels such as *Infinite Jest*: Don't seek Perfection or Pleasure but rather seek the Infinite Possibilities.

I have a lot to say about this book but before that there's a little I don't want to say about it. Here it is:

?This book is never ending.

?It bored me at times too.

?Some of the end notes were annoying.

?I read many other books when I was supposed to read this book.

?Whenever somebody asked me what IJ was all about, I was unable to come up with a clear-cut answer.

?I skipped few lines here and there.

?I think those who haven't read this book or won't read it, would have more or less incomplete existence as a reader.

?I think those who have read the whole book and still think it's no good are..well...just normal I guess.

?No reason is good enough for not reading this book.

?In spite of best of my efforts my mind diverted to DFW's suicide.

?I had thoughts of trying marijuana (it's not really a big deal in India).

?After reading few reviews here, I got panic attacks due to their awesomeness.

?This review went out of hand and got a 'bit' long, so oops.

?I don't want to say cheesy lines like:

- If IJ was a country, I'd applied for a permanent residency; or
- If IJ was a drug, I'd get high forever; or
- If IJ was a guy, I'd marry him; or
- I'm already missing reading it.

?I laughed when I said to myself after finishing it, "let me get my thoughts in order."

?The good news is you can read IJ again and again. The bad news is, you have to read it again.

Here's what I want to say

An Unexamined Life

E.M. Forster said, "*One always tends to overpraise a long book, because one has got through it.*"

Though I'm sure he didn't have a book like IJ in mind, but I agree with him to some extent. Reading a long book means devoting a substantial time of your life, a time which you value and there's no way one would like to declare that he/she/it spent that time on something unworthy. But when the book is Infinite Jest, then it deserves every iota of praise bestowed upon it. Its reading experience is something like the author takes your hand, makes you sit in front of a mirror and whisper in your ear, "now see the magic" and lo, you're sucked in by the mirror and the next moment you find yourself in a strange yet surprisingly familiar land and slowly the images, the scenery, the words starts unfolding themselves and you need to look out at each direction, else you'll be lost. You need to examine a life, which was left unexamined for a long time.

Day of finishing Infinite Jest

Jan 25, 2013 at around 2200hrs, I finished reading this book, closed it and put it aside. I stared at it for a while, then logged on to goodreads, gave it 5 stars, put it under my favorites shelf and asked myself, "Well what was that all about?" There was no answer in response but just an echo of words:

to write something that stabs you in the heart. That pierces you, makes you think you're going to die.

Day of starting reading Infinite jest

*There was a sudden knock on the door. I woke up with a start and reluctantly went to open the door. An adolescent boy promptly asked, "Do you want to get entertained?" "Huh.. what the .. ?" I slammed the door shut and went back to sleep. Few hours passed but again my sleep broke on hearing some loud cheering. I went out and much to my surprise there was a whole tennis court in front of me and two players were busy playing. There was a group of boys snorting coke sitting round the corner and on the opposite stands, some kind of class was going on. I recognized that it was Arthur Ashe stadium, but couldn't place the players. I looked at the score board: Wal and Fed. Wal was apparently leading with 6-3, 7-6, 5-3. Somebody tapped on my shoulder. He was the same boy. This time he handed me a book. I took it and immediately lost my balance. The alarm of my cell phone went off at that precise moment and welcomed me back to reality. Once the feeling of vertigo subsided, I checked the date. December 1, 2012. I said to myself, **Of course!***

The days in between

Over the period of almost two months, I read IJ every day. Having read *Girl with curious hair* and *A supposedly fun thing I'll never do again* I experienced both fiction and non-fiction writing by Wallace and loved it. It proved to be a boon because if nothing else, the disjointed stories in IJ were something like short stories from Girl... (although a lot more developed and maturely handled) and the long ramblings on different topics reminded me of essays in a Supposedly fun...so Yes! Reading Wallace's other works before attempting this book did help a lot more than I expected. There was something that made him work for me, which not only provided enjoyment but became a great source of knowledge and it won't be an exaggeration to say that I have found a book that shall remain with me both physically and emotionally throughout this modest and unexciting life of mine.

Infinite Jest is not a work of a genius. It's the work of someone who was all set to change the definition of word genius as we know it. He created a world that was consistently dark, desolate and most of the times demented but also witty, ingenious and oh so funny. This magnum opus is incredibly challenging but at the same time surprisingly accessible. It won't let the reader sit back, relax and enjoy it. It's no beach read but want its readers to sit up and take notice about what is going on. You can't afford to lose focus and track but the probability is that you'll lose both anyway. It's that kind of book, a literary equivalent of mobiusism, a never ending quest, a once in a lifetime experience. By expressing all this, I'm in no way glorifying its completion by me, but simply stating the facts. It's not possible to overestimate this book.

Wallace took the most wretched situations and characters and created such amazing backdrops, that in spite of everything so seemingly hopeless, he would still be able to present you with a glimpse of hope. In face of lot of desperate moves, he would teach you a lesson or two in patience. With so many impossibilities going on one after the other, he would tell what all is possible if one try to do just one thing: Realize.

His prose is exuberant with less scope of comfort. He won't surround you with the sea of beautiful flowing writing to make you feel that he has stated something profound but rather something relentless and contemporary that you're in a position to relate in both subjective and objective way, no matter how insane that way is. You'll lose count of neologism, solecism, colloquialism, malapropism, and many other -isms DFW employed within IJ, which not only proves fascinating but gives you an idea about the extent to which he allowed himself to experiment in order to say whatever he wanted to and you'll see how effortless it all looks as if DFW was telling something that's always been there and getting our attention by a simple psst-look-here expression. Dave Eggers in his wonderful foreword rightly stated: *A Wallace reader gets the*

impression of being in a room with a very talkative and brilliant uncle or cousin, who, just when he's about to push it too far, to try our patience with too much detail, has the good sense to throw in a good low-brow joke. He has employed an *allegorical structure* to this novel and develops it to an extraordinary proportion taking cues from many of his influences namely Joyce, Pynchon, Shakespeare and Dante to name a few.

I don't want to indulge much into plot(s), but just a brief and my practice in brevity, if I'm allowed. IJ primarily takes place in futuristic USA circa 2009-10 in Boston city. The setting for majority of the narration is based at Enfield Tennis Academy (ETA) and Ennet House, a drug and alcohol recovery house, where majority of the interesting characters reside, situating nearby ETA. ETA was founded by James. O. Incandenza, an avant-garde film maker, whose wife, Avril Incandenza heads the academy with their 2 sons, Mario and Hal being the current attendees of the ETA while their eldest brother, Orin being a previous attendee, now a punter in the NFL. Orin is a jerk, Mario is great and Hal is lonely. Avril is beautiful, very tall and delusional about her kids; James was taller, committed suicide and knew his kids just too well. He created a film known as The Entertainment, titled "Infinite Jest", which rumored to have '*qualities*' such that *whoever saw it wanted nothing else ever in life but to see it again, then again and so on*, rendering its audience fatally addicted to it. The quest of finding the master copy of this entertainment marks the entry of a group of Quebecois separatists in the book, known as Les Assassins des Fauteuils Rollents a.k.a Wheelchair Assassins or simply A.F.R, who wants to obtain a copy, which they called *Samizdat*, because of its lethal qualities that would make them dangerously powerful to meet their extremist goals. This group gave me creeps.

The book is mostly covered with Wallace commentary about drug addiction through myriad eccentric and bizarre characters at the Ennet House. Wallace presents the intake of drugs, its effects and substance withdrawal i.e. cold turkey in such merciless detail that one can't help to actually empathize with those involved in substance abuse. Apart from drugs, there's some wonderful description about depression, clinical depression to be precise. Here's one of my favorite passage which I've tagged as spoiler (view spoiler). At this point one can't help feeling for David's own struggle with depression and the justification of the eventual step he took.

With drugs and depression, there are AA meetings and telling of stories, some of which are so despicably ugly and dismal that it would make you think that you were better off without reading them. Then of course there is tennis and the pressure this competitive game induces on young minds but also tells how a thin line exists that separates Tennis with real life: *Tennis's beauty's infinite roots are self-competitive. You compete with your own limits to transcend the self in imagination and execution. Disappear inside the game: break through limits: transcend: improve: win.*

At ETA, through characters like Hal and Michael Pemulis, one gets the picture of how youngsters so easily resort to wrong paths, which could adversely affect their coming lives a sample of which could be witnessed through Ennet House residents. So in my opinion it won't be wrong to say that Wallace, in a masterful way presented a connection between past, present and future of different promising lives, which got destroyed because of the few choices wrongly made. At Ennet House, characters like Don Gately convey that despite being wrongdoers, they are good human beings at heart and are just a product of godforsaken circumstances amidst which they were born and at the same house there are people like Randy Lenz who are nothing less than a personification of devil.

From IJ, one gets a fitting impression of David's capability and scope as a writer. There could be nothing more challenging in picking the most undesired and ugly elements of the universe and weave them together and creating characters and situations of such unbelievable contrast that the end product dwelling them makes even a stone heart to wail in sympathy or reach a point of such profound epiphany that brings a huge

turn around in your life. He won't present you with anything normal but something lovable nevertheless. What's the most important thing that can happen after reading IJ? The world around you changes for better or for worse. One tends to acquire a whole new point of view of looking at people and can't help thinking, Well, what could be their story?

The most incredible example of David's talent can be seen through James O. Incandenza's filmography that is dripping with excruciatingly weird but magnificently witty ideas. I admit that there was not much I could relate with in great depth but there was a benign captivation about the whole text. My love for tennis and movies (especially Lynchian) wasn't the biggest support system and well, I'm not even American or Québécois, so all the more less relief nevertheless my motivation mainly rest with David's writing and the thought of reading a work of literature which is unique in a daunting yet immensely fulfilling manner. It's true that this novel is full of extraneous ramblings but they are not invasive to the main text. If you learn to like his writing, you will love everything written by him, well almost everything. I had my small issues with few things but I'm ready to overlook them. Moreover a clever move by Wallace can be identifiable in the manner of his use of so many 'errors' in different context. I know they were mainly attributed to various characters, but again, in a book so huge, the margin of error automatically increases, which could easily be neglect during editing too. So instead of sifting such errors out, Wallace made them the part of his work. If I'll give it a metaphoric angle as a result of some cogitation on my part, then it could also be seen as life, which can't be led without its due share of some big errors. After all that's what being human is all about.

One thing I can confidently say about his writing is that in this book, his prose though seemingly reckless at times, is an intentional move on his part. You'll see the range and depth of his skills throughout. Agreed that most of the topics covered had some deep connection with David personal life but that's exactly it makes it all the more brilliant as we get to read someone who had a lucid and precise view of what he had to say. Though I have read that this thing doesn't sit well with many, but that's what reading DFW means. A blogger rightly commented: *So many of his critics never realized the writer's relentless and extravagant prose was a deliberate and incredibly risky attempt to present reality as he experienced it, which was so vast and multi-layered as to make sharing it with another person who was experiencing a similar influx, an astonishing feat.*

Infinite Jest, among many things is homage to sobriety, happiness, loneliness, sadness and truth. For some, staying sober is happiness and for some *feeling* is happiness. Some will be happy in knowing the truth and some, in telling of the truth.

The trick is keeping the truth up-front in daily consciousness.

He brilliantly captured the fatuous nature of residents of a country in this era of pop culture in a flamboyant yet amazingly restrained manner that one can't help but feel the pain of the injury the text inflict upon the minds of its readers. *It's like watching a reality sit-com over a surveillance camera*, is one concise description I particularly like. A work of literature that was born to become immortal and shall teach you what all can be done with words and what power lies within the realm of writing.

My reading experience was more or less steady and enriching. Gradually through the main contents, I noticed the book weight shifting from my right hand to the left (though it happened a lot many times considering the endnotes) and reaching the last page and with that last page I realized, there's plenty to come yet. Denouement and IJ doesn't go together in the most conventional sense. There was a lot more left to 'figure out'. Before referring to external sources, I wanted to put together as many pieces of this bizarre puzzle at their right places. It was getting unbearable somehow. I was getting afraid what if I would fail or what if after 'getting the jest' I won't laugh. And it was then it dawned upon me that every reader of this

book becomes a part of it in such a way, that it won't let you fail. 'A Failed Entertainment' was the working title for David Foster Wallace's "Infinite Jest"; and I'm glad he didn't go for that, because I think he produced an entertainment so painfully addictive that It won't be easy to withdraw from it and consequently can't be regarded as a failure. One would carry one thing or the other out of it. There are many loose ends that are not being tied, may be because they are meant to be honored in isolation. The whole thing would turn up as fogged mirror, which only you can clean to see an image, either unbearably beautiful or unbearably ugly. Till that time, live accordingly to the image you want to see at the end. And here's me hoping that one day I'll 'get the jest' in toto. I'm so glad that this book exists.

Aubrey says

And Lo, for the Earth was empty of form, and void.

And Darkness was all over the Face of the Deep.

And We said:

Look at that fucker **Dance**

Real life is a pain. Real life is a bitch. Real life slumps you together from a squiggly mess and shoots you out to a cold and unfeeling world, empty in mind and soul. So you scrounge around for meaning, whatever fulfills your personal definition of said *meaning*, eyes gaping for that next slice of indomitable thrills and chills, mouth pincering over a statue in repose, your next served up fresh and toasty piece of Entertainment ready and waiting to fulfill your infinitesimal spout of pure pleasure.

And always you forget the trap, that whatever may keep your brain in thrall doesn't necessarily do anything for your heart, and you fill that deceptively compact skull of yours with a weave of disappointed memories of the past and existential dread concerning the future. You don't even need to know what 'existential' means, it'll latch on to your cranium and enjoy itself in your spent neurons just as well. Knowing the word just makes your coping mechanisms developed in response to living seem a little more validated.

DFW knew this. Not only did he know this, he was courageous enough to proclaim that he knew this from the highest rooftop, spilling out a novel that scoffs, declaims, and drowns the old conventions of making life this easy whore that only requires adherence to paper to make itself completely tangible and understandable in every way. Newsflash: That is Entertainment, Entertainment with a capital E, followed by the Infinite Jest, long lines of seconds bleeding themselves dry with gags, jokes, puns, witty remarks, comedic outbursts, impressive logistical maneuverings of physical feats, "I got that reference!", grasping in the dark after a fleeting feeling of actually being able to feel. It is not Life.

We live in a country in continuous denial, this United States of ours, where the words "depression" and "suicide" are met with brief uneasy titters and a quick skittering to the nearest source of short stem happiness. I mean, really. Who could possibly be unsatisfied in this First World conglomerate of ours, where the water is cheap and the food cheaper, everything clean and crisp and catered and tailored and custom built for even the most persnickety of personalities? Oh, you say you're not feeling well? Well, your temperature's drawn up at the right line, your lungs are clear of fluid, no physical aches to be registered on any limb or crevice. No need for a tox screen, it's obvious that since you are athletic and intelligent and your family is well adjusted, it's impossible that you would even *consider* recreational drugs. It just wouldn't make sense.

And when these people are forced up close to those with intimate knowledge of the difference between hip-

ennui and 'It'; the obvious mismatch of an unsatisfactory sex life and a rabid Spider masquerading as your own Personal Nightmare that has somehow escaped the sewers and lodged itself in your frontal lobe. A hawk in the sky and a handsaw on the nightstand. These people, they shame the "psychotically depressed", they box the sufferers up in a cynical outlook that doesn't allow them to treat their condition seriously, and the barest glimpse of a true outburst of "feeling" is quickly carted away and shut up in the walls of their own imagined loony bin. You call attempted suicides "Cries for Attention", after refusing to listen to anything else. And don't blame this on the availability of therapy. That's another bucket of worms entirely.

So what does the average, normal, not "psychotically depressed" individual do? Well, they have been blessed with a stable brain chemistry that is sufficiently satisfied with their addictions, enough to never entertain any ideas of going off the deep end, physically or otherwise. Course, they may feel the niggle of something not being right in their daily scheme, one that is vaguely persistent but easily squashed with another movie, another book, another morning run, another sandwich, another drink, another shot, another shooting up, another beating, another brown out, another black out, another spree of giving linear time the finger. It's hardly fair to complain about nonlinear narratives when you seem so desperate to avoid the concept yourself.

Life is a mess of half remembered instances and disjointed narratives, stream of conscious not being very concerned for its very few spectators. What good is a writing a novel portraying Life, if its main goal is to make sense?

Give me a ride compromised by emotion, drugs, unreliable narrators spilling their guts to a psychedelic riddle that crosses consciousness and space-time continuum. Give me unrelenting displays of cruelty and abuse and subsequent coping mechanisms whose effects are just as vicious as their causes, and sprinkle them with laugh out loud moments clouded by the memories of the aforementioned atrocities. Give me recognition that the brain is an organ just as unwieldy and unreliable as the heart or the kidney, and thinking your way out of something is sometimes the worst possible decision you could ever make. Give me the paragon of masculinity breaking down into snotty sobs in front of an openly weeping crowd of fellow human beings, in a system that cannot possibly work until it does. Give me the revival of hope in mankind, embodied in the briefest touch between one masquerading as the dregs of society, and one unaware of their hopeless plight to a heartrending degree. Give me miscommunication on a truly horrendous scale, conversers following their own narratives with minuscule attention paid to their conversees, many pairs of these circling in a room with no clear and singular "plot". Give me an apocalyptic attempt at righting this miscommunication. Give me a Truth that will have its way with me that I didn't realize I desperately craved until I am lying on the floor, breathless and aching with tears flowing freely down my cheeks, stunned in the realization that I am not the only one.

Keep your "Hipster Lit Flow Chart". It has no place here.

karen says

this book...

i think it is time to write a proper review for this book, as it is one of my all-time favorites and deserves way more than two words. back when i was a junior in college, i was at the nyu bookstore, trying to sell back some textbooks before going away for winter break. the person in line in front of me was trying to sell back infinite jest (where was i when this class was being offered??) and of course, they weren't taking it back because nyu is a stingy fucking school. she turned around to me and said "you want this???" and i said

"yes,"cuz i don't say no to free, and she said "merry christmas,"and kinda just thrust it at me. and it was the best present i ever got. a true christmas miracle. i was on my way to see my then-boyfriend in italy for the start of a european jaunt, and i missed out on a lot of european cities because i could not put this book down. i read it on planes and trains and a gondola, in restaurants and bars, by canals and in a cafe on top of the alps. fuck cathedrals, i had this book. i am a truly bad traveler, but i am a committed reader. as soon as i finished the book, i started right over. and since then i have read it a total of seven times. it is the most glorious collection of words that has ever been published. it is everything - it is funny and sad and creepy and disturbing and completely absorbing and brilliant. and he was just a gem of a man. the first time i got to meet him, i dropped this book in front of him - by now all tattered and smooshed, and he seemed surprised that "someone has actually read their copy." and then i gave him a card that had been a thank you card, but i crossed out "thank" and wrote "fuck" in its place and said "fuck you for writing the great american novel before i got the chance to." this is the kind of thing i think is charming because i am deeply flawed. but it worked, and he called me and it was really nice - he was a great man who was truly kind and courteous to his fans. i ended up getting a proper thank you card from him because he is more traditionally charming. and now i am sad just thinking about this. so the review ends here because it has served its cathartic purpose for me and i guess if anyone is reading this you just got a free glimpse into the softer side of karen. it happens.

come to my blog!

Warwick says

USHER: Goodreads court is now in session, the Honourable Judge Chandler presiding. All rise.

JUDGE: Mr Wise, you appear before the court today on the charge of *failing to adore Infinite Jest*, an act in gross and flagrant violation of basic Goodreads standards of decency. How do you plead?

WARWICK: Well...I mean presumably this kind of thing is all subjective opinion, so—

PROSECUTOR: Let the record show that the defendant utterly fails to deny his foul sin.

WARWICK: Hang on—

JUDGE: So noted. If found guilty, the maximum sentence I can hand down is...DEATH.

GOODREADS MEMBERS (*from gallery*): Hooray! Kill him! Burn the heretic!

WARWICK: Whoa, wait a minute there, don't you have to assign me some kind of lawyer or something, so I can defend myself? Like in Perry Mason?

PROSECUTOR: Your honour, in view of the gravity of his crimes, we believe the defendant should be compelled to represent himself.

JUDGE: I agree. Do you have any evidence to present in your defence, worm?

WARWICK: I'm glad you asked, m'lud, and thank you for showing such admirable neutrality.

VOICES FROM CROWD: Get on with it, scum!

WARWICK: All right! Well, to be completely honest, my heart began to sink from the very first page. This was my first exposure to Wallace's fiction, so I was paying quite close attention to the opening paragraphs to try and soak up this style that so many people have fallen in love with. Defence Exhibit A – the opening:

I am seated in an office, surrounded by heads and bodies. My posture is consciously congruent to the shape of my hard chair [...]. My fingers are mated into a mirrored series of what manifests, to me, as the letter X.

WARWICK. I submit I was justified in feeling immediate concern that the prose is awkward, unlovely, and try-hard, with outbreaks of horrendous juvenile alliteration.

PROSECUTOR: Objection! The opening section is clearly narrated by a precocious child genius, making the tone entirely appropriate.

JUDGE: Sustained.

WARWICK: That's true. And I was definitely willing to go along with that. The problem is that as the book goes on, you start to realise that basically all his narrators sound pretty much the same – they're all variants on the same depressive, overeducated outsider, speaking in these jagged, straining, uncomfortable sentences. On the few occasions when he attempts social dialects beyond his own – including a few passages of extremely ill-advised colloquial Ebonics – it sounds more like a grotesque parody than any serious attempt at a socially inclusive writing style. Besides, is it really an excuse for a writer to say 'My characters all happen to talk like malfunctioning robots, so you're just going to have to put up with it'?

PROSECUTOR: 'Overeducated'? Really? That may apply to the Incandenza family, but it's hardly something you could accuse the residents of Ennet House Drug and Alcohol Recovery Center of. Isn't it, in fact, the case that Wallace's daring new amalgam of contemporary patois and technical jargon simply went over your head?

WARWICK: Objection. Beyond the scope.

JUDGE: How is that beyond the scope?

WARWICK: I don't know, it's just one of those things they always say on *The Good Wife*.

JUDGE: Overruled. Answer the question.

WARWICK: All right, I *don't* think it's going over my head, no. The writing style is certainly innovative, but mainly in the sense that he sounds stilted and infelicitous in ways that no one has come up with before. His pile-ups of noun-phrases are particularly awkward, the nouns' plurals' genitives' apostrophes so aggressively correct that they actually manage to look wrong. I hate the sloppy attempt in general to use exaggerated colloquialisms as a deliberate style – this habit he has of rambling vaguely around a topic for several paragraphs in the hope that one of his phrases will hit home. I like writers who craft and refine their thoughts *before* typing them out, not during. Overall I just felt there was a horrible uncertainty of tone, the narrative voice channel-hopping compulsively from slangy to highly mannered to jargonistic, often within the same sentence. It doesn't cohere, but more to the point it doesn't feel like DFW is in any control.

PROSECUTOR: Does it not occur to you that this might be done for deliberate effect? Or were you perhaps just put off by all the long words? (*laughter from the jury*)

WARWICK: Well...I'm reasonably sure it's not that. I love complicated books with gigantic, exuberant vocabularies. It's just that here, because of the general sense of bloated free-fall, it all just seems so purposeless, so gratuitous. To me he comes across less as an artist with a fat vocabulary than a hack with a fat thesaurus.

(*Woman in gallery faints*)

MAN IN GALLERY: You monster!

WARWICK: Defence Exhibit B, m'lud – a description of a character's smile, which is said to be 'empty of all affect':

as if someone had contracted her circumorals with a thigmotactic electrode.

PROSECUTOR: Of course, one of those smiles. I can picture it perfectly.

WARWICK: You bloody can't! It's complete bollocks! 'Circumoral' isn't even a noun, is it? And a lot of the time this kind of thing is stretched into full paragraphs – have a look at this single sentence, Exhibit C, which is in no way unrepresentative:

And as InterLace's eventual outright purchase of the Networks' production talent and facilities, of two major home-computer conglomerates, of the cutting-edge Foxx 2100 CD-ROM licenses of Aapps Inc., of RCA's D.S.S. orbiters and hardware-patents, and of the digital-compatible patents to the still-needling-to-come-down-in-price-a-little technology of HDTV's visually enhanced color monitor with microprocessed circuitry and $2(\sqrt{area})!$ more lines of optical resolution – as these acquisitions allowed Noreen Lace-Forché's cartridge-dissemination network to achieve vertical integration and economies of scale, viewers' pulse-reception- and cartridge-fees went down markedly; and then the further increased revenues from consequent increases in order- and rental-volume were plowed presciently back into more fiber-optic-InterGrid-cable-laying, into outright purchase of three of the five Baby Bells InterNet'd started with, into extremely attractive rebate-offers on special new InterLace-designed R.I.S.C.-grade High-Def-screen PCs with mimetic-resolution cartridge-view motherboards (recognizably renamed by Veals's boys in Recognition 'Teleputers' or 'TPs'), into fiber-only modems, and, of course, into extremely high-quality entertainments that viewers would freely desire to choose even more.

WARWICK: This passage also contains three endnotes, which I will not go into for the sake of all our sanity. And don't even get me started on Wallace's Latin, which he persistently misunderstands. One footnote reads 'Q.v. note 304 *sub*', which is borderline illiterate – 'q.v.' is used *after* the thing you want to reference, and 'sub' is a preposition, not an adverb. What he apparently means is 'Cf. note 304 *infra*.' I couldn't normally care less about this sort of thing, except that in this book it coexists with a laboured subplot about militant

‘prescriptive grammarians’, for whom DFW clearly has much misguided sympathy.

PROSECUTOR: Your honour, surely it’s now clear that the defendant is trying to build a case based on trivial inconsequentialities of personal style.

WARWICK: I know it seems like nit-picking, but the thing is these little mis-steps here and there all contribute to a general sense that you are *not in safe hands*. It’s like his proliferation of initialisms – why are E.T.A. and A.F.R. and U.S.A. written with dots but MDMA and WETA and AA without them? There’s no answer except general inconsistency, which fans will no doubt tell me is intentional but which is no less annoying for that. The same goes for Wallace’s pseudo-encyclopaedic knowledge base. Hal Incandenza is supposed to be an etymology expert who grew up memorising the OED. But every time we see this put into practice, it’s hopelessly wrong. E.g.: “There are, by the *O.E.D.* VI’s count, nineteen nonarchaic synonyms for *unresponsive*” – which makes no sense, because OED 3 won’t be completed for another 25 years or so so there’s no chance of getting to “VI” by the near-future of the novel’s setting; and anyway the OED doesn’t even *list* synonyms because it’s a dictionary, not a thesaurus. He traces the word *anonymous* back to Greek but the Greek is horribly misspelled; he traces *acceptance* back to “14th-century langue-d’oc French” but this phrase is both oxymoronic and flat-out wrong. Where is the research here? All through the book there is a profound feeling that David Foster Wallace did not really understand the things he was looking up in order to seem clever.

PROSECUTOR: Need we remind you that this is a work of fiction and not an academic thesis?

WARWICK: Again, it’s about confidence in your author. Mine quickly evaporated. I’m concentrating on language stuff only because it’s an area where I have an admittedly very dilettantish but somewhat active interest. People who know more about these things than me tell me his maths is equally dodgy. Now contrast all this with a writer like Nabokov or Pynchon, to whom Wallace is sometimes cavalierly compared. When I read Pynchon I can spend hours chasing up throwaway references to some obscure language, some astronomical phenomenon, a paragraph of Argentine politics or an obsolete scientific theory – it’s part of the fun of these big encyclopedic books that you can research all the related knowledge that lies just outside the margins. The references hold up and they enrich the reading experience. When I try and do the same thing with DFW, I always seem to come away with the conviction that he doesn’t really know what he’s talking about.

PROSECUTOR (*with heavy sarcasm*): How unfortunate that so many people overlooked this and mistakenly found his writing moving and powerful.

WARWICK: Oh come on, don’t be like that. I am delighted that some people love his style, it’s just not for me. I totally admit that this is personal preference. I, personally, like writers who craft beautiful sentences. In my opinion, Wallace is just not very good at the level of the sentence, or even of the paragraph. But he can be great over longer distances – at the level of the chapter or long passage. There are several extended sequences of *Infinite Jest* that have a kind of cumulative power and excitement to them that I admired very much indeed. They were just padded out with far too many passages of inexcusable tedium.

VOICES FROM CROWD: Boo! Hanging’s too good for him!

JUDGE (*banging gavel*): Order! Order! (*to the prosecution*) Cross-examination?

PROSECUTOR: *Extremely* cross, your honour!

JUDGE: No, I mean do you want to cross-examine the witness.

PROSECUTOR: Oh. Yes! Or rather – (*consulting papers*) prosecution chooses to call a new witness, your honour – the defendant's wife.

WARWICK: What?! You can't—

Enter HANNAH, looking emotional.

PROSECUTOR: You are the defendant's wife, are you not?

HANNAH (*biting lip*): I am.

PROSECUTOR: And isn't it the case, ma'am, that on more than one occasion over the past few weeks, you witnessed the defendant *audibly chuckling* over what he was reading?

HANNAH: I...I might have done.

PROSECUTOR: Moreover on several occasions did you not see him underlining passages he thought particularly admirable?

HANNAH (*fighting back emotion*): I...yes. Yes, I did.

PROSECUTOR: And is it not true that those passages included, but were not limited to, the description of Poor Tony Krause having a seizure; the fight outside Ennet House; and Don Gately's fever-dream sequences?

HANNAH (*bursting into tears*): It's true! He said one of them was the...the best thing he'd read all year. He recited bits of it out to me in bed and everything.

PROSECUTOR: *And can you see the man who said these things anywhere in this courtroom?*

HANNAH (*pointing at defendant*): There! That's him! That's the man! Gaargh!

PROSECUTOR: No further questions, your honour.

HANNAH is led out in tears.

WARWICK: I – what?! This is ridiculous! Objection!

JUDGE: What is the nature of your objection?

WARWICK: The nature of it? Um...what's that one about badgers, again?

Pause.

JUDGE: ...Badgering the witness?

WARWICK: That's it! He was badgering her! She just got totally badgered!

JUDGE: Overruled.

WARWICK: Look, this is an eleven-hundred-page book. If a monkey throws a thousand darts at a dartboard, he's going to score a couple of bullseyes. He's also probably going to hit you in the eye a few times. And in the context of this metaphor, a monkey-inflicted dart-wound to the face can be taken as the equivalent of, say, an unforgivably tedious description of a geopolitical tennis game.

PROSECUTOR: The point remains, however, that you found yourself moved by parts of this book, didn't you? Affected by the characters' story?

WARWICK: Sure. Some characters worked better than others. I thought Don Gately in particular was a wonderful creation and I only wish he'd been in a tighter and better-controlled novel.

PROSECUTOR: You were moved, gripped, excited – even aroused at times.

WARWICK: Well, I wouldn't go *that* far.

PROSECUTOR: Oh really? Isn't it the case that, on one occasion last week, you found your mind, in an idle moment of alone time, returning to a certain cheerleader-based episode of mass knickerlessness...?

WARWICK (*leaping out of seat*): *Ob-jection*, your honour!! Surely this line of questioning can't be appropriate!

JUDGE: Oh...go on then, sustained. I really don't want to hear about it.

Sighs of relief from public gallery.

WARWICK: Although, thinking about it, the query does serve to highlight a certain strain of misogyny that bothered me about the book – where the narrator gives Avril Incandenza extra value by repeatedly telling us that she is particularly gorgeous 'for a woman her age', while the nearest thing we have to a female lead is known as 'PGOAT' – sorry, 'P.G.O.A.T.' – the 'Prettiest Girl Of All Time' – and is also defined by her physical attractiveness, or the possible marring thereof.

PROSECUTOR (*rolling his eyes at jury*): Oh that's right, play the sexism card now. And I suppose you were equally unmoved by the gripping descriptions of social deprivation – an insight into a world that doubtless a middle-class bourgeois reader like you couldn't hope to evaluate?

WARWICK: First of all, you should probably be careful what you assume about my background. Second of all, yes some of it worked really well. But again, there is a lack of authorial control. A lot of the violence and stories of drugged-out atrocities start off being genuinely disturbing, but end up going so far that they take on a Grand-Guignol aspect and become too ludicrous to take seriously. When one woman at an addiction meeting mentions her father's late-night visits to the bedroom of her severely disabled sister, it's very creepy and upsetting. But Wallace can't stop himself going on to give us three full, unnecessary pages of detailed "incestuous diddling" (his phrase) which turns the whole thing from disturbing into cartoonish and silly.

PROSECUTOR: So there's something 'silly' about sexual abuse, is there?

WARWICK: I'll ignore that. Look, I agree that there were parts of this book that I enjoyed very much, of course there were. But I would draw your attention to the fact that during these moments of narrative

brilliance, the footnotes and speech tics and other po-mo devices suddenly dry up: he doesn't need them. This leads me to conclude that they really serve no purpose except to distract from the turgid flabbiness of other sections of the novel. Whose plot, by the way, goes absolutely nowhere – nothing is resolved and no questions are answered.

PROSECUTOR: Again, we would argue that this is deliberate, your honour – forcing the reader back to the text so that the book itself becomes an ‘infinite’ form of Entertainment like the one it describes.

WARWICK: Oh come on. This argument stretches ‘generosity to the author’ beyond the bounds of credibility.

PROSECUTOR: And yet somehow, reviewers who are actually *paid* to review books – unlike you – have described this novel as ‘profound’ and ‘a masterpiece’ and ‘brilliant and witty’ – refer to prosecution exhibits A through W.

WARWICK: Let’s not forget the *London Review of Books* review, Defence Exhibit D – and I quote:

[I]t is, in a word, terrible.... I would, in fact, go so far as to say that *Infinite Jest* is one of the very few novels for which the phrase ‘not worth the paper it’s written on’ has real meaning in at least an ecological sense.

Shouts of anger from public gallery.

JUDGE: You disgust me. Are we ready for sentencing?

WARWICK: Wait! Wait! I have one more witness to call!

JUDGE: Very well. Who?

WARWICK: I call... (*dramatic pause*) ... David Foster Wallace!

[For reasons of space, the trial concludes here.]

Mike Puma says

“Sometimes excess isn’t enough.” –*some anonymous Springfield reader*

The Years of Humble Beginnings

A couple years ago, somehow I stumbled on this site and realized, very quickly, what a tremendous opportunity it presented. A chance to catalog *my* library *my way*. How nice for me. Even better, a chance to rate books, the ones I loved and the ones I liked less. Oh. Oh! And there were people here, names that kept popping up when I read reviews of books I’d loved. So I did what I imagined any intelligent person would do—I started stalking their reviews. Checking to see where consensus occurred. I even started Liking their

reviews—taking that initial plunge into making my humble presence known. Lo and behold, people started asking to be my Friend. My Friend! Yes, gladly, you bet—couldn’t get enough of them. Smart people. Funny people. People who knew each other. Relatively quickly, I found myself among the people who’d most impressed me to begin with. I was loving this place. It felt like home. The only social networking site I had any interest in—a site for readers. Which, of course, led me to the Gang of 59.

The Gang of 59

Who is this Gang of 59? Well, sir, ma’am, some of the brightest people on GR, some of the people whose opinions matter most to me—people whose recommendations, more often than not, have led me to purchase and frequently enjoy books I might not otherwise have found my way to. 59 readers who’ve friended me or whose reviews I follow. 59 people who gave *Infinite Jest* 4 or 5 stars. 59 who rated the title highly, and of whom, many had written glowing reviews—not only glowing, but smart, often witty, thoughtful, heartfelt, beautiful, impressive reviews. The Gang of 59 was actually the Gang of 14 when I first acquired IJ; I know this because I affixed a sticky-note to the cover to use in prioritizing my reading—and this one was Up There, nothing came close, this was the one I’d read next! Of course, being me, Next meant almost two years later, over a hundred other titles read first, and after signing up for a joint group read, I actually started it.

The (What Felt Like a) Year of Reading *Infinite Jest*

So I read. Interesting choices with regard to the subsidized calendar years. Hal Incandenza won me over immediately. And I read. Okay, jumps around a lot, that’s ok, events are occurring in the same time frames, but there aren’t many of them, and a lot of paper is dedicated to long scenes which seemed too long, and okay, the footnotes are an interesting ploy, but they’re beginning to wear thin. And I read more, and more. I thought: the magic is rather slow in the coming; people had predicted Aha! moments that didn’t materialize. I began to not anticipate an ending, but rather to dread it. I began thinking: Infinite Jest, huh—joke’s on me? Reading while doing a slow burn. All the talk of the novel’s humor, for me, became: there’s another one of those scenes/statements/moments that everyone else probably think was really funny; insert laugh track here.

The Year of the Interrogatory Paragraph

So what happened? How is it that my reading experience differed so dramatically from the Gang? Why do I have to be among the 7 people (friends and those I follow) who weren’t impressed with the novel and gave it only 2 or 3 stars? What’s wrong with *me*?

The Year I Didn’t Laugh Enüff

As mentioned, the humor, by and large, didn’t register. I recognized it. I kept thinking: there it is, here’s another one, I guess this is one—that sorta thing. I found many places that *had* to be the occurrences that I’d expected in some sort of laugh-fest abundance. Instead, the few places where I really did laugh, and laugh out loud, were sight gags (e.g. the dark tunnel, kids with flashlights, and the moment when they were asked some Who? question and all the beams of light pointed toward the ceiling) or the very funny forehead/windowpane scene. But most of the *humorous* just rolled by like wheelchairs. I should mention, I suppose, that I typically don’t find comedians funny, and I’m miserable on those rare occasions when friends are going to comedy clubs and I’m compelled to go along. So (or as the novel relentlessly says “So but” which annoys the hell outta me, much like all the “and but”s and, particularly, the “and so but”s), the humor may have been abundant, but it wasn’t particularly funny, for my taste (god, I love that phrase, one that Wood uses frequently in his discussions of DFW on YouTube).

The Year of the Foot, Noted

The footnotes quickly became an additional source of annoyance. They boil down to two types: the true/real (drug's chemical names, the laboratories that produce them, their effects/side effects) and those that actually relate to the story, either incidentally or actually by moving the story along. All too quickly, the footnotes that did relate to the story became fictional relics—something DFW just couldn't turn loose of; they could have been woven into the story (everything else was). It was almost as though some existed as notes intended for inclusion until some editor said You've got two weeks to wind this thing up, and footnotes seemed the only way to include the various pieces. To give those notes credibility, the inclusion of the True/Real notes leant some relevance. For me, they added to the bloat. Reading the novel on the Kindle made jumping back and forth pretty easy. What it couldn't add, the Kindle (don't you love apposition? I hope so if you're planning on reading IJ as it's loaded with it, apposition) was the sense that they mattered.

The Year of Excessive Excess

So what else bugs you? (I kept asking myself) Well, the relentless, tedious, overdone, badgered, tiresome, chronic, over-use of *free indirect style*. Those moments that could (should?) have been used to reinforce or make a point, but instead droned on and on reinforcing points already made. Particularly in the case of French Canadian Marathe, he of limited ESL (English as a Second Language). Marathe's language challenge could have been established and abandoned. Instead, we're treated to: "time of his sitting," "shine of the shoes," "His Blue Jeans of Levi #501," "hand of privacy," "face for poker," "no bolt of death for locking," "folder of Manilla," "seat of him," "patient of treatment," "figure of medical authority," "the white-suited forces." Need I go on? Okay: "the fight of nausea of the stomach," "papers of identity," "expressed surprise of the face," "hôpital of grave nature ." I'll stop. After any given Marathe section, I wanted to slink off to my *chair of reclining in the room of my reading and bob on a whopper of Hope*.

The Year of Can You Be Any More Petty?

Yes, I believe I can. How about all those compound possessives? "Madame Psychosis's plate's..." "older brother's doubles partner's..." "window sill's ventilator's..." "wraith's life's end."

The Year of the Postmodern Ending

The what?

The Year of Glad, or At Least He's Finally Winding Down

I asked myself if I'd have felt differently about IJ had it been written by a South American, or a Spaniard, or translated from any other language. I went to the South American, Bolaño, and found mention of DFW as a topic of conversation with Rodrigo Fresán, summed up, in RB's words, as, "David Lynch and the prolixity of David Foster Wallace." I reread sections of How Fiction Works for Wood's take on Wallace's use of language. I reached for The Irresponsible Self to reread Wood's essay "Hysterical Realism," before deciding Screw it, I just want this all behind me. Now that it's all said and done, I just want to reach for something I can be a little more confident of loving, maybe even something beautiful, maybe only anything else.

And for the record, I still believe I have the smartest, funniest, best-read, and most-coveted Friends on GR, and I stalk the reviews of a helluva bunch as well.

(Cheeses, Puma, for someone who just wants to put this behind him, you sure have a way of dragging this out) As interesting as the Gang of 59, when supplemented by Friends and the Followed who've marked this book To Read, is a rather interesting little non-list, conspicuous in their lack of interest, almost as if they

know better.

Fabian says

Anybody who completes "Infinite Jest" automatically receives a medal. Really. Just read every single (fucking!) word from beginning til the end, you get an award. & that's what THIS IS, basically. A badge of honor. Bragging rights. A Privilege. The experience which is so much like ogling the Mona Lisa live at the Louvre for the first time: you can already envision her in your mind. & you know what it is, even before you get to stand before it.

The literary equivalent of chasing the magic dragon. Just keeping at something--this being a very complex and cranial novel--like some zombie to get you absolutely nowhere. This is like a more insufferable Beckett in that at least Beckett's implaus-o-ramas have an ending. But here, get ready to get nowhere. Nowhere, not fast, but slowwwly. (Moments of "Eureka! I've found something concrete at last... Finally, a location upon which to hang"--it's all very brief [ha!!] and ethereal to grasp. Like some interesting but fleeting aroma.) The main driving force for the reader is to traverse the plot like some intrepid trekker--here, that motivation is eradicated & what we are left with is one fat big juicy "?".

The premise? That we live in a systematic place where components are controlled (by family, substances, life). The back and forth between the school and the rehab embody a game of tennis (emblematic "system" used to symbolize coming-of-age as well as the myriad needlepoint philosophies that go with it). No patterns arise! Yet the reader has (always) his wants. That you don't matter in the enterprise is what ultimately spoils this experience for me. The writer has very consciously tried to build a sturdy monolithic castle from individual grains of dry sand. An impossible endeavor, but it must be witnessed. The things that stick out are the sordid details: the head in the microwave, the shot in the face; the molestation of little boys, of invalids; a hanging fetus.

If you say I.J. is the future of the novel, you definitely haven't read 1936's "Gone with the Wind." Almost a full century old, that tome really justifies its girth (like "Lonesome Dove" & "The Stand" do, like "Don Quixote" & "Les Miserables" eons ago). I understand the allure of this, really, I do, but HOW MANY DIFFERENT WAYS CAN YOU SAY THE EXACT SAME THING? Definitely not in 1088 pages! But maybe eighty-eight.

Bottom line: this novel really gave me a serious case of the "howling fantods."

Ian "Marvin" Graye says

DJ Ian's Sunday Evening "Tell Me What You Really Think"

You're listening to Radio KCRCR, "Tell Me What You Really Think", where we listen to the critics and you talk back. That's if there's any time left after I finish my rant. Hehe.

A lot of listeners ask me about my namesake. What about that other Ian Graye, you say. The one on GoodReads. What do you think of him? And what did you think of his recent review of David Foster

Wallace's magnum opus?

Well, let me reassure you: that other Ian Graye is a wanker. Don't trust his five star review of "Infinite Jest" ("IJ" for short, but not for long).

He is a classic pseudo-intellectual, who occasionally comes under the sway of people like Nathan, MJ and a few female Good Readers with brains and/or ambition, and tries unconvincingly to run with their small herd, while simultaneously feigning the impression of reading, appreciating and reviewing the big books that appeal to them. He is a post-capitalist lapdog of the tamest and most ineffectual kind.

This is what he would say, if he had the guts. Actually, it's not what he would say, it's what I'm saying.

He can wallow in pretension.

IJ is a dogs breakfast. Nobody has actually read it from cover to cover. Nobody has understood it on its own terms. Anybody who reckons they've read it or understood it is lying and needs to be exposed for the fibbers they are.

The sooner there is something that is post-postmodernism that we can get our hands and minds and kindles and iPatches on the better. No wait, it doesn't matter.

Postmodernism was invented so that nerds could take money off other nerds.

Meanwhile, the rest of the world can eat, drink, snort, smoke, dance, party and have sex regardless and in spite of the postmodernist nerdfest going down, down, down in the library.

Length

Surely, it is enough to state the length of this book to condemn it.

If an author has 1,100 pages in them, then write four novels of 275 pages each.

Can Sting possibly be any better on the fourth day of his tantric sex than he is on the first?

What is the point? To achieve a target for the Guinness Book of Records? For as soon as you break the record, somebody else will want to beat you and your record will last for, how long, one year, at most?

Repetition

In a book that long, there must surely be a lot of repetition of themes and subject matter, if not dialogue and actual words.

As for a book whose ending simply takes you back to the beginning? That's not what I call recycling. Recycling is the yellow bin. Or, wishful thinking for charities, two copies sitting side by side in a second hand book store.

Self-Indulgence

See my comment about Sting. Beyond that, I risk being guilty of the post-modern crime of repetition. In fact,

I might already be guilty. Damn. How ironic.

Irony

Show me somebody who really knows what irony means and I'll show you a bullshit artist.

I mean, what does "an incongruity between the literal and the implied meaning" mean?

Is there any literal meaning that is not implied? Surely, DFW meant everything his words implied.

Therefore, they are not incongruous, they are deliberate and congruous.

This is starting to sound like that other Ian Graye, so I will stop.

Playfulness

OK, so they play tennis in this book. So what?

And so what if he plays with our minds? Writing this bloody book probably played with DFW's own mind. How can you control something as gargantuan and prolix as this?

It plays with our minds, because it played with his. If he had won the game, it would have been a shorter, sharper, better book and a more pleasant experience for us.

There is a reason tennis has a tie-breaker. IJ needed a tie-breaker. Around 300 pages.

Black Humor

I like black humor, white humor and Jewish humor. I haven't heard any other types yet. But I hope I do eventually.

However, I can't remember any good jokes in IJ, nor can I remember LOL'ing.

Even if I could remember one, there's no way I would ever tell a mate in a pub or print it on a t-shirt, which is my ultimate test of a good joke, well, an aphorism, anyway.

Intertextuality

I mean, are you serious? Who would invent a word like "intertextuality", but a postmodernist wanker?

Did the English language really need this word? Did it have to be imported from France or Italy, or wherever?

Intertextuality..."the relationship between one text (a novel for example) and another or one text within the interwoven fabric of literary history...an indication of postmodernism's lack of originality and reliance on clichés".

Put two things next to each other, juxtapose them, as the other Ian Graye would say, and you have a relationship (a "juxtaposition"). So what?

If you want to refer to another book in your book, it's a quote if it's acknowledged or plagiarism if it's not.

So what? Any graduate student can do this. We used to call it cheating.

As for cliches, we were taught to eschew them in my day. DFW uses truckloads of cliches, mostly old ones, but many new ones of his own creation. How pathetic. There are nearly as many cliches in IJ as there are in Hamlet. I mean, "To be, or not to be", if Shakespeare was half the writer he's supposed to be (or not to be), he would have steered clear of that old chestnut.

Pastiche

Once again, write your own bloody book. Don't copy somebody else's. Sampling is cheating. If I want to read the other book or listen to the other song, I'll find it on iTunes.

Metafiction

Another word created by postmodernists for postmodernists. It's like a secret handshake. A club for us and not for you. Because you won't let us into your club, and your club is blockbuster, best-selling fiction with a home and a boat in the Bahamas.

Anybody who can write should strive for a home and a boat, better still, a houseboat. If you haven't got it in you, don't waste trees or cyberspace. Write a blog. Do your pathetic little reviews on GoodReads. Or pathetically long reviews, in the case of my namesake.

Fabulation

I mean, honest, we're talking fiction here, and some critic has to introduce a synonym and pretend it means something different. A distinction without a difference. A high distinction without a job prospect. This is today's academia for you.

Poioumena

This word makes me want to vomit.

I mean I love Maoris and their language, but words weren't meant to consist of four consecutive vowels. It's inconsonant.

Historiographic Metafiction

Another one. What, aren't the old words good enough for postmodernists? This would have been edited out of the wiki article if anybody knew what it meant or had the guts.

Instead, it's left in, and college students in my wake will struggle to apply it correctly in a sentence for another 20 years.

If this term was a dog, it would be put down. In fact, this term is a dog. Bang.

Temporal Distortion

It gets worse. “Fragmentation and non-linear narratives”. In a word, drugs. Nobody used this language when the poison of choice was alcohol.

In the old days, the bell would ring, and you’d say, “Oh, is that the time?” Not temporal distortion.

Magic Realism

All the best drugs come from South America. Say no more. But put a frat boy in a broad brimmed hat and sit him on a horse and it doesn’t make him a gaucho or a magic realist.

Technoculture and Hyperreality

Doof doof. I can’t remember one computer in IJ. Unless you count microwaves and whatever they played the cartridges on. And, I mean, who remembers cartridges?

Paranoia

The only source of paranoia for me in IJ is the sense that DFW might have known what he was talking about and I didn’t get it. But if he did and I didn’t, then I’ve read all the other IJ reviews on Good Reads, and no two of them are the same, so quit the bullshit and admit it, nobody gets it. It’s time we fessed up, it can’t be got, we weren’t supposed to get it, DFW didn’t design it to be got, leave it alone.

IJ is a conspiracy by the paper manufacturing industry to consume paper, put it inside a hard cover and never let it see the light of day.

Yes, a paranoid conspiracy, I know, but guess what, it worked.

Maximalism

A big word for “long”.

Minimalism

A big word for a little idea. Incongruous, if not ironic, I know.

Encyclopaedic

Yes, IJ is long, but credit where credit is due, it contains a lot of words and meanings, about a lot of things, but let’s face it, nobody ever reads an encyclopaedia from beginning to end, we all dip in one entry at a time, if not randomly, and we wouldn’t know shit about all the other bits that we didn’t read.

Let’s hope there’s not a question about them in the exam.

Well, that’s about it from me. Let me leave you with one more serious thought.

Party at my place. Come on.

KCRCR. Whatever will be will be. And whatever will not be will not be. That is the answer and there’s the rub. Thanks, Bill. Can I have my bottle back now, please?

Oh, is that the time? Let's cross to Rupert for the news.

CHOOSE YOUR REVIEW:

"Infinite Jest" elicits diverse reactions. I thought I might try to express some of them, both negative and positive.

The above review is my attempt at a negative review.

My positive reviews are mentioned below.

TAME AND INEFFECTUAL POST-CAPITALIST LAPDOG FIVE STAR REVIEW

This is a positive capsule review with a few add-ons:

<http://www.goodreads.com/review/show/...>

NERDS ONLY PSEUDO-INTELLECTUAL FIVE STAR REVIEW

This review is my attempt at a more analytical, but positive, review:

<http://www.goodreads.com/story/show/2...>

THE "TELL ME WHAT YOU REALLY THINK" VOTE COUNT (AUDITED BY CHARTERED ACCOUNTANTS NICE WATERCLOSET)

DJ Ian:

February 17, 2013

41 likes

Post-Capitalist Lapdog Review

February 17, 2013

38 likes

Nerd's Only Pseudo-Intellectual Review

February 17, 2013

27 likes

DJ Ian's one star review jennifer garnered more "likes" in 12 hours than either of the other five star reviews did in 10 months (they were posted in April 2012).

Michael Finocchiaro says

Admittedly, Infinite Jest is a tough book. You start the book having no clue when it is happening and who the various characters are. There is stuff that happens in the opening pages that explains events at the end of the book. I'd say it is quite elliptical. That being said, it is an amazing piece of literature. I forced myself through the first 300 and then 400 pages and at about 500 pages I finally hit my stride and was able to follow through to 1071 (yes this was the British printing not the American one). I loved the characters and the high comedy that is here as well as all the wacky situations in the drug rehab centre and the tennis academy. The president reminded me a lot of the current American campaign (I could almost see the Statue of Liberty carrying a Trump Tower logo across her forehead) and the text was occasionally of incredible beauty and insight.

Take this passage from the Marathe/Steeply exchange from Marathe:

"Someone who had authority, or should have had authority and did not exercise authority. I do not know.

But someone sometime let you forget how to choose, and what. Someone let your peoples forget it was the only thing of importance, choosing. So completely forgetting that when I say choose to you you make expressions with your face such as "Herrrrrr we are going." Someone taught that temples are for fanatics only and took away the temples and promised there was no need for temples. **And now there is no shelter.** And no map for finding the shelter of a temple. And you all stumble about in the dark, this confusion of permissions."

This is such a perceptive description of why Drumpf was elected. A vast swath of Americans are driven by short attention, knee-jerk reactionism based on their inability to choose and their reliance of "alternative facts." President J. Gentle is eerily similar to Drumpf - the coming destruction of Standing Rock by the pipeline (from which Drumpf himself - oh, sorry his son - will profit), how is that different from the Concavity? DFW's book can be read as much of a warning against Drumpf as Roth's The Plot Against America or Lewis' It Can't Happen Here. And I digress...An important book for the 21st C! And oh, so relevant!

I talked for a few hours to fellow Goodreads reading addict Nocturnalux and tried to get her convinced that this should be on her reading list. It remains for me a landmark work requiring infinite patience to get the reveal of the infinite joke at the end.

Kevin Kelsey says

5/17/17 edit: I'm upgrading this one to 5 stars, because I still cannot stop thinking about it a year after finishing it.

There are 2 kinds of difficult novels: those that you don't enjoy *while* reading, but you genuinely enjoying

having read, and those that you only enjoy *while* reading because the small picture stuff is infinitely better than the novel as a whole. Infinite Jest is one of the latter, and I think that's why people never really stop reading it; it's only good *while* you're reading it. You finish and then start right over again, trying to piece things together until you create something in your mind that slightly makes sense of it all.

This thing is a real love/hate affair. There are moments of true brilliance that are exceptional achievements, and the characters are fantastic, the world-building absolute top-notch, but if you have to leave the "ending" up to your audience to imagine in their collective heads instead of – I don't know – WRITING IT, you wrote yourself into a corner and didn't/couldn't write your way out.

Yes, I've gone back and read the first chapter after finishing it. Yes, I understand the chronology. Yes, I've read all the theories online. I get what probably happened, but how did it happen? Why did it happen? How did those strings and threads of story and plot actually come together? The answer is: they didn't. If I have to construct a way for all of this brilliant stuff to come together myself, it means that the author never did. It's just a hand-wavy sort of "oh and then stuff happened and then the end" cop-out.

There are threads in this book that insinuate all kinds of things, meaning that you can find evidence to setup any sort of ending that your heart desires, and it's just as valid as anyone else's theories, because there is no actual ending. Think Hal in that first chapter is actually Mario pretending to be Hal? They're both described as fire hydrant shaped, maybe he was. Think John Wayne was an AFR plant all along, AFR agents and John Wayne are both described by the same quotes from The Terminator, maybe he was. Or maybe none of that, because there isn't an ending, so we do not and will not ever know what actually happened. DFW created a piece of entertainment that once read, leaves the reader only wanting to read it again and again and again and again. It is an Infinite Jest.

Again, the brilliant stuff is so brilliant that I still enjoyed it immensely, and have to give this 5 stars, and I get that postmodernism is all about ontological vs. epistemological approaches to fiction, but good lord at least have it slightly wrap up just a tiny bit!
