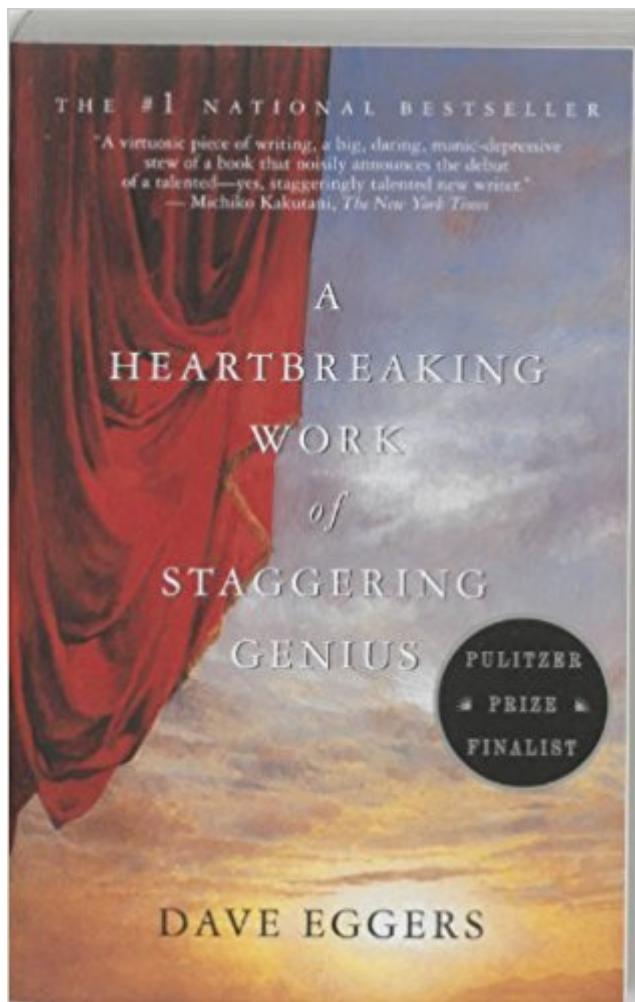


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A Heartbreaking Work Of Staggering Genius



Synopsis

National BestsellerÂ The literary sensation of the year, a book that redefines both family and narrative for the twenty-first century. A Heartbreaking Work of Staggering Genius is the moving memoir of a college senior who, in the space of five weeks, loses both of his parents to cancer and inherits his eight-year-old brother. Here is an exhilarating debut that manages to be simultaneously hilarious and wildly inventive as well as a deeply heartfelt story of the love that holds a family together. A Heartbreaking Work of Staggering Genius is an instant classic that will be read for decades to come.

Book Information

Paperback: 437 pages

Publisher: Vintage; Reprint edition (February 13, 2001)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0375725784

ISBN-13: 978-0375725784

Product Dimensions: 5.1 x 1 x 8 inches

Shipping Weight: 1 pounds (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 3.2 out of 5 stars 1,284 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #10,826 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #27 inÂ Books > Biographies & Memoirs > Professionals & Academics > Journalists #65 inÂ Books > Biographies & Memoirs > Arts & Literature > Authors #467 inÂ Books > Biographies & Memoirs > Memoirs

Customer Reviews

Dave Eggers is a terrifically talented writer; don't hold his cleverness against him. What to make of a book called A Heartbreaking Work of Staggering Genius: Based on a True Story? For starters, there's a good bit of staggering genius before you even get to the true story, including a preface, a list of "Rules and Suggestions for Enjoyment of This Book," and a 20-page acknowledgements section complete with special mail-in offer, flow chart of the book's themes, and a lovely pen-and-ink drawing of a stapler (helpfully labeled "Here is a drawing of a stapler:"). But on to the true story. At the age of 22, Eggers became both an orphan and a "single mother" when his parents died within five months of one another of unrelated cancers. In the ensuing sibling division of labor, Dave is appointed unofficial guardian of his 8-year-old brother, Christopher. The two live together in semi-squalor, decaying food and sports equipment scattered about, while Eggers worries obsessively about child-welfare authorities, molesting babysitters, and his own health. His

child-rearing strategy swings between making his brother's upbringing manically fun and performing bizarre developmental experiments on him. (Case in point: his idea of suitable bedtime reading is John Hersey's *Hiroshima*.) The book is also, perhaps less successfully, about being young and hip and out to conquer the world (in an ironic, media-savvy, Gen-X way, naturally). In the early '90s, Eggers was one of the founders of the very funny *Might Magazine*, and he spends a fair amount of time here on *Might*, the hipster culture of San Francisco's South Park, and his own efforts to get on to MTV's *Real World*. This sort of thing doesn't age very well--but then, Eggers knows that. There's no criticism you can come up with that he hasn't put into *A.H.W.O.S.G.* already. "The book thereafter is kind of uneven," he tells us regarding the contents after page 109, and while that's true, it's still uneven in a way that is funny and heartfelt and interesting. All this self-consciousness could have become unbearably arch. It's a testament to Eggers's skill as a writer--and to the heartbreakingly particulars of his story--that it doesn't. Currently the editor of the footnote-and-marginalia-intensive journal *McSweeney's* (the last issue featured an entire story by David Foster Wallace printed tinily on its spine), Eggers comes from the most media-saturated generation in history--so much so that he can't feel an emotion without the sense that it's already been felt for him. What may seem like postmodern noodling is really just Eggers writing about pain in the only honest way available to him. Oddly enough, the effect is one of complete sincerity, and--especially in its concluding pages--this memoir as metafiction is affecting beyond all rational explanation. --Mary Park --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Literary self-consciousness and technical invention mix unexpectedly in this engaging memoir by Eggers, editor of the literary magazine *McSweeney's* and the creator of a satiric 'zine called *Might*, who subverts the conventions of the memoir by questioning his memory, motivations and interpretations so thoroughly that the form itself becomes comic. Despite the layers of ironic hesitation, the reader soon discerns that the emotions informing the book are raw and, more importantly, authentic. After presenting a self-effacing set of "Rules and Suggestions for the Enjoyment of this Book" ("Actually, you might want to skip much of the middle, namely pages 209-301") and an extended, hilarious set of acknowledgments (which include an itemized account of his gross and net book advance), Eggers describes his parents' horrific deaths from cancer within a few weeks of each other during his senior year of college, and his decision to move with his eight year-old brother, Toph, from the suburbs of Chicago to Berkeley, near where his sister, Beth, lives. In California, he manages to care for Toph, work at various jobs, found *Might*, and even take a star turn on MTV's *The Real World*. While his is an amazing story, Eggers, now 29, mainly focuses on

the ethics of the memoir and of his behavior--his desire to be loved because he is an orphan and admired for caring for his brother versus his fear that he is attempting to profit from his terrible experiences and that he is only sharing his pain in an attempt to dilute it. Though the book is marred by its ending--an unsuccessful parody of teenage rage against the cruel world--it will still delight admirers of structural experimentation and Gen-Xers alike. Agent, Elyse Cheney, Sanford Greenberger Assoc.; 7-city author tour. (Feb.) Copyright 1999 Reed Business Information, Inc.

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A great memoir written with compassion and humor. My favorite book. I read it cover to cover, including all the footnotes at the end, which were great, too. Thanks, Mr. Eggers!

Dave Eggers writes of simple and ordinary stories, unless losing two parents in five months and moving to California to work and raise your younger brother while you are trying to pull together some sort of sexual and social life while these morons are all around you, not even noticing how smart and clever you are and then just going on with their ordinary lives as if YOU never existed. Well. I apologize. That was my seriously pathetic attempt at mimicing Mr. Eggers style. One cannot mimic Mr. Eggers style. It is...un-mimicable! His style can drive you buggers, as he writes in a run-on, stream of consciousness, "fight or flight", semi-neurotic, nearly amphetaminically induced mania enhanced state. Then he pulls back. Kind of. Maybe. Maybe not. I'm not sure. Oh hell. Does it matter? Yes it does. But I cannot review this book so soon after reading it as I am developing the same kind of obsessive-compulsive narcissistic self-indulgence that the author is so good at doing to himself (and others, if you really want to know), but that is none of my business and none of yours either, except that he writes it all down so well, you just want to hug him, and then kick him really hard in the face, no, in the leg, no the face. Yes. That will do. In the face. But I highly recommend this book to anyone who can sit on BART and manage to completely enjoy everything about this new wave West Coast twenty-something book.. Even the maudlin tales are way excellent. Sorry. I did not mean to say, "way".

I had a fairly hard time with the first one or two paragraphs of this book. Eventually, I was able to figure out the author's style, unlike any other I've read. There are a lot of run-on sentences, little punctuation, and a good bit of swearing. Actually, I read it because I was aware of the title, but I don't really understand why it was such a hit.

I really enjoyed reading A Heartbreaking work of Staggering Genius. Although it is a long memoir, it was a quick read after getting used to the present tense that Dave Eggers uses throughout the book. Initially, it threw me off, now that I've finished, I realize it is such an interesting way of recounting a story. It gave me a different perspective, making me feel as if I were there while his memories were happening as opposed to listening to him recount them. The beginning of the book, in my opinion, was his best work. What I liked most was how honest he was about her sickness. He hid nothing, often explaining in graphic detail her illness. This openness is very inspiring because he is, in essence, reliving a very emotional part of his life in writing about it and hiding nothing. As a reader, I felt like I was almost intruding on this period of his life; I was sometimes uncomfortable, yet it made me respect Eggers and at the same time, feel remorse. His honest and descriptive details were memorable and relatable. His specific descriptions were very potent and gave us insight on him as well. A balloon covered in dirt, or A rotting fruit, graying at the edges, were a couple of the many ways he described his mother's tumor, which not only provide a vivid mental picture, but show us that during this time, he was uncertain, and always looked at her illness differently. What I did not like were his rants that would last page about nothing important, which became boring and redundant. While most of his details added to my understanding of who he is and how he was feeling I felt that these were unnecessary and hard to read. The book could have been much shorter and more concise, which would have made me like it more.

This is a very entertaining book. In my twenties, this is likely the novel I would have liked to write. The breakneck speed at which Eggers' ideas appear on the pages before you is a little startling at first, but his thoughts and themes are expressed and examined with great clarity and plain language, making the book easy to follow. From the beginning the theme of this novel is loss; "heartbreaking" loss, as it were. This theme sets the mood for the entire story. But Eggers lets the tale evolve into something more substantial, never allowing his loss to overwhelm him, or even bring him down. The theme eventually transitions into the overcoming of bad luck and negative situations, and the manner in which an extraordinary vision of life and the world we live in go hand in hand with youth and pretentiousness. Eggers' whimsical writing keeps the experience amusing and his self-deprecating humor makes the material more lighthearted than it otherwise might be. Only those who are capable of laughing at themselves will be able to enjoy this book. I certainly did. Everyone should.

Not for everyone, you either love or hate this book.

Well, well, well. What to say about this book. The reviews are all over the place so I guess I'll join in. First of all, you would have to be an idiot to think Eggers can't write. He can. Parts of the book are very good, funny and sad and gross and touching, especially his relationship with his little brother, whom the author adores. But then the middle part, about his stupid job, should have been left out. (or at least the boring details) Why do writers, even talented writers, think their books have to be over 400 pages? This could have been a neat little book, if it had been whittled down to about half the size. Leave in the good parts and take out the fillers. (Ever heard of Hemingway?) Eggers writes a lot like Mark Haddon, bold and fresh and irreverent. The big difference is Haddon is a lot better.

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