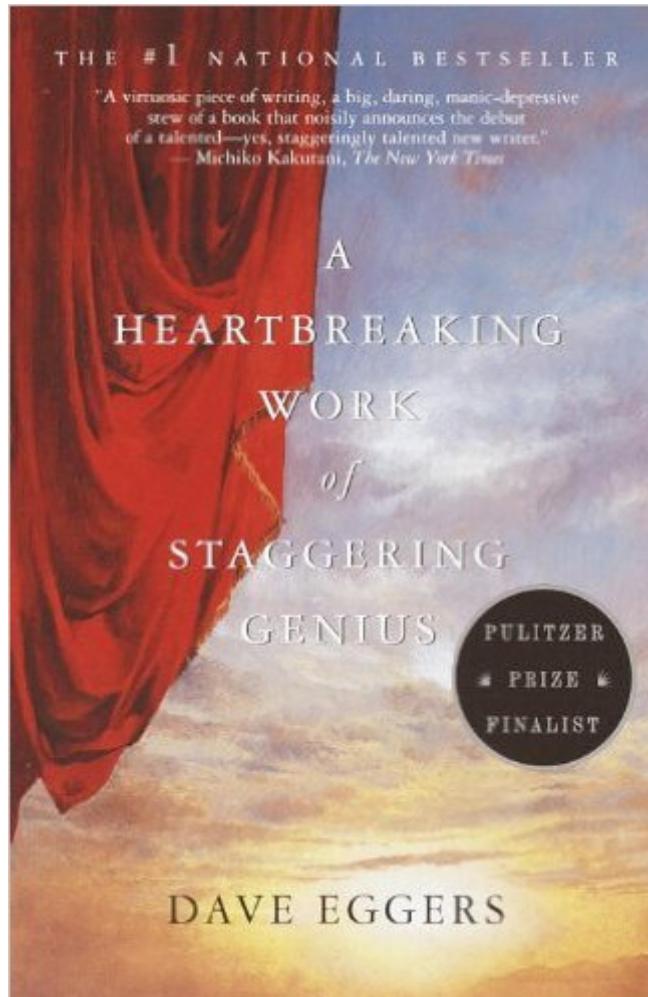


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A Heartbreaking Work Of Staggering Genius



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 in paperback for decades to come. The Vintage edition includes a new appendix by the author.

Book Information

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Average Customer Review: 3.4 out of 5 starsÂ See all reviewsÂ (1,254 customer reviews)

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Customer Reviews

The arch tone of the title and the wit of the preface may blind readers to the real wonder of Egger's book: he's telling the truth. In a world of air quotes and the constant misuse of the word "ironic", Eggers is trying very hard to tell a difficult story. He writes of the death of his parents in the most unflattering terms, without the soft focus and belabored sentiment our culture has lead us to expect. The slow death of someone you love is sometimes horrible, and this story never denies that, or the way your mind escapes from that horror and focuses on trivia. While the writing may be self-conscious, it isn't pretending to be anything else, and the wonder is that Eggers is willing to accept everything that comes into his head, regardless of whether it seems appropriate. No other book has so honestly touched me since the death of my father, or more accurately captured what his dying meant to me. Several reviewers have written of the way the book loses focus after the first section, but to me that is one of its strengths. In fiction the protagonist doesn't wander around

pointlessly, especially not after a significant event like the death of a parent, but in the real world lives are untidy. As a new parent I appreciated the author's experimental attitude toward child rearing as well as his attempt to create a fascinating life for himself. The quality of the writing made his business woes, his menus, and his Frisbee obsession equally fascinating. The memoirs of a man who isn't afraid to show his own warts, but is touchingly considerate of those closest to him, this is a kind and engaging book.

Clearly this book isn't for everyone. It's incredibly self-reflexive. It's more than willing to employ a device while simultaneously satirizing it. Eggers, as described in his own words, is rarely likeable, noble, humble, or charming. Instead, he's self-indulgent, arrogant, and so full of neurosis that Woody Allen looks calm and confident in comparison. And while these factors will elicit cries of how overrated the work is, I find them the fuel behind what is a darkly compelling fever dream. Eggers takes the theme of being consumed (by cancer, by being young and wanting to make a mark on the world, by the responsibility of raising a child while maintaining friendships) and exposes its results in a harsh light. And it's angry and difficult and ... well ... real. Far different and more challenging than the back-patting, self-congratulatory, "Gee, aren't I a strong and admirable person for surviving these tribulations?" tone that fills most stories of this genre. I congratulate him on avoiding making things neat and tidy. The result is an astonishing, staggering, and, ultimately, heartbreakingly work.

Maybe I'm just too old. Maybe I'm just not cool or hip enough. It has to be me, right? After all, this book was a book of the year according to the Los Angeles Times, the Washington Post, and USA Today among others. But I found it unreadable. Really. Sixty pages into this book and I wanted to just give up on it. Both of Eggers' parents died of cancer within a few months of each other and this is his memoir of their death and his raising of his younger brother. It actually starts off OK but fairly early in the book Eggers runs out of things to say. This probably could have been a good short story but at over 400 pages it just drags on and on endlessly. Even the writing style is annoying as he writes these long, boring run on sentences that go on to discuss how he and his brother are the coolest people on the planet and how he can throw a Frisbee higher and farther than anyone which the San Francisco Chronicle thinks is the Zen of Frisbee but that I think it is just attempting to write stream of consciousness sort of like you are James Joyce but Joyce took years to write Ulysses and the paragraphs here read like they were written in an afternoon after a couple of beers while Oprah's playing in the background and you really wish that you were back in the car driving to the nude beach because hanging out with your brother is a lot more fun than writing a book even if you

know that people are going to spend their money to read it but you did warn them in the preface so if they are bored beyond tears then too bad because they were warned and so they really have no right to complain about the dreary and pointless paragraphs about imagining that your brother is killed in some insanely tragic way like being run over by a van in slow motion or the uninspired complaints about neighbors or women at the little league games or any of the other dull, lackluster, pedestrian, spiritless, and unimaginative paragraphs that grace this tedious book. Anyway, I am sure you are much cooler than I am so you will love this book so don't pay any attention to this review and go out and buy the book and be fascinated by stories of warehouses and starting magazines and excrement coming out of backed up toilets and meeting Bill Clinton and wanting to kill people because they don't treat you and your brother like the horrible tragic victims of the worst thing that has ever happened to anyone because God knows that no one has ever lost their parents before and that no one has suffered as much tragedy as you and your family so writing a memoir and whining for 400 pages makes perfect sense and this reviewer is just a big jerk who doesn't get it.

I'm certainly not of the MTV generation, more like the AARP generation. This book cuts across generational lines with witty, profane, touching prose. The last few pages left me literally breathless. I'm going to pass this book around. But not before I read it again.

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