

Understanding David Foster Wallace

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marshall boswell examines the four major works of fiction david foster wallace has produced thus far the novels the broom of the system and infinite jest and the story collections girl with curious hair and brief interviews with hideous men

in david foster wallace fiction and form david hering analyses the structures of david foster wallace s fiction from his debut the broom of the system to his final unfinished novel the pale king incorporating extensive analysis of wallace s drafts notes and letters and taking account of the rapidly expanding field of wallace scholarship this book argues that the form of wallace s fiction is always inextricably bound up within an ongoing conflict between the monologic and the dialogic one strongly connected with wallace s sense of his own authorial presence and identity in the work hering suggests that this conflict occurs at the level of both subject and composition analysing the importance of a number of provocative structural and critical contexts ghostliness institutionality reflection to the fiction while describing how this argument is also visible within the development of wallace s manuscripts comparing early drafts with published material to offer a career long framework of the construction of wallace s fiction the final chapter offers an unprecedentedly detailed analysis of the troubled decade long construction of the work that became the pale king

from tristram shandy to fredric jameson consider david foster wallace blazes a trail into the new territory of david foster wallace studies greg carlisle author of the landmark wallace study elegant complexity provides an introduction that sets the scene and speculates on the future of wallace studies editor david hering provides a provocative look at

the triangular symbols in infinite jest adam kelly explores the intriguing question of why wallace is considered to be at the forefront of a new sincerity in american fiction thomas tracey discusses trauma in oblivion gregory phipps examines infinite jest s john no relation wayne and the concept of the ideal athlete daniel turnbull compares wallace s kenyon college commencement address to the ethics of iris murdoch these 17 essays stem from the first ever academic conference devoted the work of david foster wallace held in liverpool england in 2009 the conference sparked a worldwide discussion of the place of wallace s work in academia and popular culture essential for all wallace scholars fans of wallace s fiction and nonfiction will also find the collection full of insights that span wallace s career yes there are footnotes

across two decades of intense creativity david foster wallace 1962 2008 crafted a remarkable body of work that ranged from unclassifiable essays to a book about transfinite mathematics to vertiginous fictions whether through essay volumes a supposedly fun thing i ll never do again consider the lobster short story collections girl with curious hair brief interviews with hideous men oblivion or his novels infinite jest the broom of the system the luminous qualities of wallace s work recalibrated our measures of modern literary achievement conversations with david foster wallace gathers twenty two interviews and profiles that trace the arc of wallace s career shedding light on his omnivorous talent jonathan franzen has argued that for wallace an interview provided a formal enclosure in which the writer could safely draw on his enormous native store of kindness and wisdom and expertise wallace s interviews create a wormhole in which an author s private theorizing about art spill into the public record wallace s best interviews are vital extra literary documents in which we catch him thinking aloud about his signature concerns irony s magnetic hold on contemporary language the pale last days of postmodernism the delicate exchange that exists between reader and writer at the same time his acute focus moves across mfa programs his negotiations with religious belief the role of footnotes in his writing and his multifaceted conception of his work s architecture conversations with david foster wallace includes a previously unpublished interview from 2005 and a version of larry mccaffery s influential review of contemporary fiction interview with wallace that has been expanded with new material drawn from the original raw transcript

as one of the most celebrated novelists and essayists of the new millennium david foster wallace quickly rose to prominence as the voice of his generation the publication of infinite jest in 1996 cemented his status if david foster wallace had written nothing besides infinite jest his legacy would be secure as one of the most important artists of the new millennium but he did so much more than that he left behind a diverse body of creative nonfiction that was held together by his sincere approach to any subject he positively influenced thousands of students in his writing workshops and literary seminars over the years more than anything he gave a shape and a voice to the confused conflicted internet generation this short biography traces the life and career of one america s most complex and gifted writers

in intimate and eloquent interviews including the last he gave before his suicide the writer hailed by a o scott of the new york times as the best mind of his generation considers the state of modern america entertainment and discipline adulthood literature and his own inimitable writing style in addition to wallace s last interview the volume features a conversation with dave eggars a revealing q a with the magazine of his alma mater amherst his famous salon interview with laura miller following the publication of infinite jest and more these conversations showcase and illuminate the traits for which wallace remains so beloved his incomparable humility and enormous erudition his wit sensitivity and humanity as he eloquently describes his writing process and motivations displays his curiosity by time and again turning the tables on his interviewers and delivers thoughtful idiosyncratic views on literature politics entertainment and discipline and the state of modern america a fuller picture of this remarkable mind is revealed

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where do you begin with a writer as original and brilliant as david foster wallace here with a carefully considered selection of his extraordinary body of work chosen by a range of great writers critics and those who worked with him most closely this volume presents his most dazzling funniest and most heartbreaking work essays like his famous cruise ship piece a supposedly fun thing i ll never do again excerpts from his novels the broom of the system infinite jest and the pale king and legendary stories like the depressed person wallace s explorations of morality self consciousness addiction sports love and the many other subjects that occupied him are represented here in both fiction and nonfiction collected for the first time are wallace s first published story the view from planet trillaphon as seen in relation to the bad thing and a selection of his work as a writing instructor including reading lists grammar guides and general guidelines for his students a dozen writers and critics including hari kunzru anne fadiman and nam le add afterwords to favorite pieces expanding our appreciation of the unique pleasures of wallace s writing the result is an astonishing volume that shows the breadth and range of one of america s most daring and talented writers los angeles times book review whose work was full of humor insight and beauty

of the twelve books david foster wallace published both during his lifetime and posthumously only three were novels nevertheless wallace always thought of himself primarily as a novelist from his college years at amherst when he wrote his first novel as part of a creative honors thesis to his final days wallace was buried in a novel project which he often referred to as the long thing meanwhile the short stories and journalistic assignments he worked on during those years he characterized as playing hooky from a certain larger thing wallace was also a specific kind of novelist devoted to producing a specific kind of novel namely the omnivorous culture consuming encyclopedic novel as described in 1976 by edward mendelson in a ground breaking essay on thomas pynchon s gravity s rainbow david foster wallace and the long thing is a state of the art guide through wallace s three major works including the generation defining infinite jest these essays provide fresh new readings of each of wallace s novels as well as thematic essays that trace out patterns and connections across the three works most importantly the collection includes six chapters on wallace s unfinished novel the pale king which will prove to be foundational for future scholars of this important text

david foster wallace is regarded as one of the most important american writers of the twentieth and twenty first centuries this book introduces readers to the literary philosophical and political contexts of wallace s work an accessible and useable resource this volume conceptualizes his work within long standing critical traditions and with a new awareness of his importance for american literary studies it shows the range of issues and contexts that inform the work and reading of david foster wallace connecting his writing to diverse ideas periods and themes essays cover topics on gender sex violence race philosophy poetry and geography among many others guiding new and long standing readers in understanding the work and influence of this important writer

an expanded edition featuring new interviews and an introduction by the editor a new york times journalist and friend of the author a unique selection of the best interviews given by david foster wallace including the last he gave before his suicide in 2008 complete with an introduction by foster wallace s friend and ny times journalist david streitfeld and including a new never before published interview between streitfeld and wallace

american novelist essayist and short story writer david foster wallace was known for his experimental writing style influenced by contemporary american culture essays from his most noted works including his critically acclaimed novel infinite jest survey the various themes that appear in his work such as his exploration of philosophy meta fiction satire psychology and the irony of postmodernism

david foster wallace and the body is the first full length study to focus on wallace s career long fascination with the human body and the textual representation of the body the book provides engaging accessible close readings that highlight the importance of the overlooked and yet central theme of all of this major american author s works having a body wallace repeatedly made clear that good fiction is about what it means to be a human being a large part of what that means is having a body and being conscious of the conflicts that arise morally and physically as a result a fact with which as wallace forcefully and convincingly argues we all desire to be reconciled given the ubiquity of the themes of embodiment in wallace s work this study is an important addition to an expanding field the book also opens up the themes addressed to interrogate aspects of contemporary literature culture and society more generally placing wallace s works in the history of literary and philosophical engagements with the brute fact of embodiment

in this elegant volume literary critics scrutinize the existing wallace scholarship and at the same time pioneer new ways of understanding wallace s fiction and journalism in critical essays exploring a variety of topics including wallace s relationship to american literary history his place in literary journalism his complicated relationship to his postmodernist predecessors the formal difficulties of his 1996 magnum opus infinite jest his environmental imagination and the social life of his fiction and nonfiction contributors plumb sources as diverse as amazon com reader recommendations professional book reviews the 2009 infinite summer project and the david foster wallace archive at the university of texas s harry ransom center

criticism of the work of david foster wallace has tended to be atomistic focusing on a single aspect of individual works a companion to the work of david foster wallace is designed as a professional study of all of wallace s creative work this volume includes both thematic essays and focused examinations of each of his major works of fiction

this book examines the writing of david foster wallace hailed as the voice of a generation on his death critics have identified horror of solipsism obsession with sincerity and a corresponding ambivalence regarding postmodern irony and detailed attention to contemporary culture as the central elements of wallace s writing clare hayes brady draws on the evolving discourses of wallace studies focusing on the unifying anti teleology of his writing arguing that that position is a fundamentally political response to the condition of neo liberal america she argues that wallace s work is most unified by its resistance to closure which pervades the structural narrative and stylistic elements of his writing taking a broadly thematic approach to the numerous types of failure or lack of completion visible throughout his work the book offers a framework within which to read wallace s work as a coherent whole rather than split along the lines of fiction versus non fiction or pre and post infinite jest two critical positions that have become dominant over the last five years while demonstrating the centrality of failure the book also explores wallace s approach to sincere communication as a recurring response to what he saw as the inane self absorbed commodification of language and society along with less explored themes such as gender naming and heroism situating wallace as both a product of his time and an artist sui generis hayes brady details his abiding interest in philosophy language and the struggle for an authentic self in late twentieth century america

what do we value why do we value it and in a neoliberal age can morality ever displace money as the primary means of defining value these are the questions that drove david foster wallace a writer widely credited with changing the face of contemporary fiction and moving it beyond an emotionless postmodern irony jeffrey severs argues in david

foster wallace s balancing books that wallace was also deeply engaged with the social political and economic issues of the twentieth and twenty first centuries a rebellious economic thinker wallace satirized the deforming effects of money questioned the logic of the monetary system and saw the world through the lens of value s many hidden and untapped meanings in original readings of all of wallace s fiction from the broom of the system and infinite jest to his story collections and the pale king severs reveals wallace to be a thoroughly political writer whose works provide an often surreal history of financial crises and economic policies as severs demonstrates the concept of value occupied the intersection of wallace s major interests economics work metaphysics mathematics and morality severs ranges from the great depression and the new deal to the realms of finance insurance and taxation to detail wallace s quest for balance and grace in a world of excess and entropy wallace showed characters struggling to place two feet on the ground and restlessly sought to balance the books of a chaotic culture explaining why wallace s work has galvanized a new phase in contemporary global literature severs draws connections to key wallace forerunners don delillo thomas pynchon and william gaddis as well as his successors including dave eggers teddy wayne jonathan lethem and zadie smith interpreting wallace s legacy in terms of finance the gift and office life

david foster wallace is to contemporary literature what kurt cobain is to music he died young enough for his promise and his achievements to solidify into a legend for many he became someone worth reading revering following how had a teen tennis prodigy turned ace philosophy student turned novelist managed to become a generation defining star and how painful was that process for him what was it that he stood for that chimed with so many and how much did his and his country s addictions defeat him d t max was determined to find out and this scrupulous and revealing biographical study which draws on conversations with those closest to wallace and on extensive archive material is the haunting result

a gripping guide to the modern taming of the infinite new york times part history part philosophy part love letter to the study of mathematics everything and more is an illuminating tour of infinity with his infectious curiosity and trademark verbal pyrotechnics david foster wallace takes us from aristotle to newton leibniz karl weierstrass and finally georg cantor and his set theory through it all wallace proves to be an ideal guide funny wry and unfailingly enthusiastic featuring an introduction by neal stephenson this edition is a perfect introduction to the beauty of mathematics and the undeniable strangeness of the infinite

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Introduction

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