

Eggers' Eccentric Style Earns Praise 'Staggering Genius' Gives 'Heartbreaking' Interview

David Eggers uses a wry, clever style to achieve a profound sincerity in his autobiographical book.

By JOANNA PEARSON
Staff Writer

Hamlet, the Disney cartoon version of Aladdin, Christian Slater's character in "Pump Up the Volume," Woody Allen ...

These are but a few of the figures who fall into a special category in my mind - a category of people I will never actually meet but with whom I'm still oddly infatuated. After reading "A Heartbreaking Work of Staggering Genius," I added David Eggers to this list.

Along with having earned a reputation with this best-selling book, Eggers, who will appear at a book signing at 3 p.m. today at the Bull's Head Book Shop, was a founding editor of the now-defunct *Might* magazine and is presently editor of the quarterly journal *McSweeney's*.



And, as the caption below Eggers' book-jacket picture of himself (with a dog) states, "He lives in Brooklyn with his brother. This is not their dog."

"AHWOSC" is the story of how, after the death of both of his parents, Eggers moved to California and raised his younger brother, Toph. As Eggers himself describes the book in his acknowledgments, it's a "memoir-y kind of thing."

Conveniently for his writing career, Eggers has lived the sort of life most fiction writers dream about: surreal sudden-orphan status; hitting the open road, just you and your sibling eating french fries in your dirty house; trying to launch a smart, hip magazine with your buddies; almost getting a part in MTV's "The Real World."

Of course, the things that are a boon to one's writing career tend not to be so convenient to one's everyday life. Losing one's parents, for instance, seems good when you're one of the *Boxcar Children*, but once fiction meets reality, it's a little different. Eggers has lived his life at this intersection of convenient fictional circumstance and reality.

Thus, while the book is terrifically sharp, witty and sarcastic, it hits at real sadness. In one of the most interesting sections of the book, Eggers describes

his "Real World" interview only to launch into an exploration of both his Midwestern middle-class upbringing and his parents' battles with cancer. It is, as the tongue-in-cheek title suggests, a little heartbreaking.

It is also, as the title suggests, incredibly sassy and self-conscious. Eggers begins the book with "Rules and Suggestions for the Enjoyment of this Book," which includes the suggestion that readers skip pages 209-301 and only read the first three or four chapters.

Throughout the book, Eggers constantly licenses himself to make all sorts of claims by being extravagantly self-conscious about them. He epitomizes the sharp-tongued hipster, the self-deprecating yet pompous writer.

He is unabashedly nonliterary (as in the acknowledgement, wherein he says of himself, "And until last year he thought Evelyn Waugh was a woman, and that George Eliot was a man."), yet still obviously immersed in the world of literary cool (note the approving quotes on back cover from Rick Moody, David Sedaris and David Foster Wallace, among others.)

Eggers' writing style is conversational. He's prone to sudden bouts of streams of consciousness peppered with enthusiastic cursing. In a lot of ways, his novel heralds a brand-new written medi-

um that flourishes with a similar style - the Web log.

Like these "bloggers," Eggers reveals himself to you, and it's strangely endearing. The writing is self-absorbed, but Eggers manages to draw larger themes from these events.

And yes, throughout the book sometimes he's a little annoying - you get the sense that Eggers has listened to a little too much college radio, been a little too down with the underground, is a little too cleverly self-mocking, as if that will smooth it all over.

Sometimes he is such a smartass that you want to hate his "Oh-I'm-too-clever" guts.

Yet you like him. You just can't help it.

And in the end, you find yourself thinking that Eggers and "A Heartbreaking Work of Staggering Genius" are both just that - fresh, staggering and near-genius.

Editor's Note: An advertisement purchased by the Bull's Head Book Shop stated that Eggers' appearance begins at 3:30 p.m. Chelcy Boyer of the Bull's Head confirmed the correct time is 3:00 p.m.

The Arts & Entertainment Editor can be reached at artsdesk@unc.edu.

By JOANNA PEARSON
Staff Writer

In an e-mail conversation with David Eggers, author of "A Heartbreaking Work of Staggering Genius," Eggers discusses the importance of gardens, batteries and Glen Campbell.

Random topics indeed. But even more random when you consider these topics have nothing to do with the questions he was asked.

Below are excerpts from the interview with a man whose genius seems to be truly staggering. An unedited version of the interview is available at <http://www.dailytarheel.com>.

Q: You seem to have really good taste (REM since *Chronic Town* - I approve!) - what are you listening to/reading/partaking of at the moment?

A: Glen Campbell.

Q: How is (your younger brother) Toph? Are you guys alike?

A: Toph is in the Navy. I am not.

Q: What about your other brother and sister? What do they think of "AHWOSC"? I seem to recall their reactions weren't always favorable. Did/does that bother you at all?

A: They are also in the Navy.

Q: Does it bother you that after having written a somewhat revealing memoir-ish work random people (like me) ask such questions?

A: No. Their presence in the Navy is of public record.

Q: You ... tend to wrap yourself in so many layers of self-deprecation and half-feigned insecurity that you achieve a weird sort of sincerity. ... Is it impossible to achieve sincerity except through all those self-conscious layers?

A: Yes, but more importantly, how do we dispose of our batteries? Car batteries in particular? No one knows this.

Q: Do you ever worry that you'll ... get dismissed as just being too gimmicky?

A: Actually, I know we're allowed to throw regular smallish batteries in the garbage, but the car batteries - I still do not know this, what to do with these.

Q: Who do you predict will be considered the great literary figures of the early 21st century?

A: There is a young German writer named Steve. I forget his last name, but he will dominate all literature, at least until the middle of the century, at which point some other things will happen, involving gardens.

Q: Out of random curiosity, what do you think about poetry?

A: I find it very promising, if a bit faddish.

Q: Where can the average person find an extant copy of *Might*?

A: I actually think you might be able to bring the car batteries back to the garage or parts store. They probably have a place for them.

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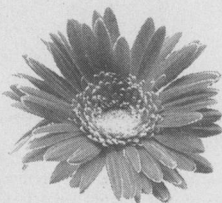
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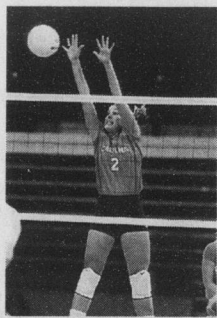
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Krista Buchholz

The University of North Carolina and Wachovia would like to congratulate Krista Buchholz, the Wachovia Woman of the Week.

Krista is a junior volleyball player from Waupun, Wisconsin. The captain of the team this spring, Krista is the starting middle blocker and leads the ACC in blocking. Off the court, Krista is a Philosophy and Communications major with plans to go to Law School. She is a Dean's List student as well as a member of the ACC Honor Roll.

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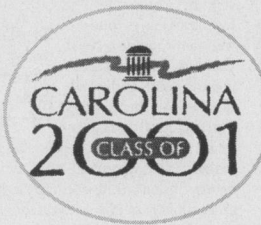
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Who will be chosen as this year's Outstanding Seniors & Favorite Faculty?

The Senior Class of 2001, The General Alumni Association, and The Division of Student Affairs requests the pleasure of your company at an awards presentation as we recognize Carolina's outstanding seniors and faculty on **Tuesday, April 24, 2001 at 3:30** in the afternoon at the George Watts Hill Alumni Center.

The student nominees are:

John Childress, UNC Racquetball Club
Julie Cooper, Phi Lambda Sigma
Matthew Dukes, Phi Sigma Pi
Mollie Fair, m.a.n.o.

Meg Gambrell, Association of Nursing Students
Elizabeth Gaskins, Young Democrats

Ann Hughes, Collegiate Music Educators National Conference
Maisha Kelly, Student National Pharmaceutical Association
Lynne Kerschensteiner, National Society of Collegiate Scholars

Devin Kirk, Lab! Theatre

Stephanie Lawrence, Mezmerbythm

David Lewis, Carolina Week

Dan Lucas, The Fifth Estate

Gregory Millikin, Episcopal Campus Ministry

Richard Moore, Student National Pharmaceutical Association

Emily Nelson, Phi Beta Kappa

Minali Patel, Donate Life

Ellen Phelps, Episcopal Campus Ministry

Courtnee Poole, National Pan-Hellenic Council

Tee Pruitt, Carolina Athletic Association

Brad Rathgeber, THINK Transit

Lea Ray, Project Literacy

Rye Schwartz-Barcott, Great Decisions

Andy Smith, APPLES Service Learning Program

Jenny Smith, Academic Enhancement Program

Deidre Stokes, Black Student Movement

Melissa Walker, General Alumni Association Student Membership Advisory Board

Jeff Williams, Episcopal Campus Ministry

Robin Yamakawa, Residence Hall Association

The faculty nominees are:

Deb Aikat, School of Journalism and Mass Communication

Zinaida Astrakhan, Department of Music

Doris Betts, Department of English

John Covach, Department of Music

Yves de la Quèrère, Department of Romance Languages

Jean DeSaix, Department of Biology

Donna LeFebvre, Department of Political Science

Michael Lienesch, Department of Political Science

William Lycan, Department of Philosophy

Judith Miller, School of Nursing

Nandra Perry, Department of English

John Sweeney, School of Journalism and Mass Communication

Rachel Willis, Curriculum in American Studies

Jessica Wolfe, Department of English