

Dave eggers and reality television



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Dave Eggers's satirical and self-referential memoir *A Heartbreaking Work of Staggering Genius* documents his external and internal life. While the book is technically a work of nonfiction, Eggers externalizes and exposes much of his personal life through internal thoughts and ideas that were not necessarily represented in real-time, as they are in the book. Eggers seems to be attempting to create an environment in which the performance and charade of social interaction and the act of writing a book are both combined with actual experiences and emotions, highlighting dramatic portions and exaggerating issues. Simultaneously, he normalizes these extreme experiences that are highlighted, creating so many that the overview of his life seems to be part of a specific theme. In my experience, this seems to be what reality television aims to do. Eggers's interaction with the ideas of exploitation, created stories and dialogue, and satire around celebrity, fame, and other elements gives him a close relationship with the concept of reality television - something that is almost real, but not quite (in a very intentional way).

Firstly, Eggers comments on his own tendency to treat people as usable characters for his own benefit, much as reality TV is portrayed, by using Toph as a critical mechanism. Toph asserts, " But don't you see this is a kind of cannibalism? That you're just grabbing at people, toys from a box, dressing them up, taking them apart, ripping their heads off, discarding them [...]" (318-319). Eggers then points to the psychology behind the choice to treat people in this way, particularly those who are famous. Toph, or Eggers-as-Toph, again argues at Eggers in regard to his slandering interviews: " These people have already attained, at whatever age, a degree of celebrity

that you assholes will never reach, and you feel, deep down, that because there is no life before or after this, that fame is, essentially, God—all you people know that, believe it, even if you don't admit it" (317). He claims that Eggers uses his position because it " gives power over [celebrities], the ability to embarrass [them], to equalize the terrible imbalance you feel about your relationship to those who project their charisma directly, not sublimated through snarky little magazines" (317). In this way, Eggers claims his position as an intellectual, somehow above those at whom he pokes fun; this is yet another shield (one of the many we have seen thus far in the memoir) that Eggers uses to protect his intense vulnerability, derived from his situation and his personality in general.

Interestingly enough, however, Eggers also writes about himself in a way that evokes reality television. Reality television seems to be designed to expose others' lives and reveal some kinds of secret. They also act as ways to produce drama, often artificial, and create entertainment in general with a hefty plot often riddled with complications (also known as drama). Eggers battles with himself constantly throughout the memoir about his struggle between creating something of a dramatic " exposé" and creating a heartfelt way to relieve pain; it is somewhat up to the reader to decide whether or not the exposing of his loved ones and other elements of his life is worth the ultimate mourning tool he gains. Reality television, of course, is generally not an author-made grieving mechanism and is designed intentionally to expose entirely. If the reader considers Eggers's reflections as a dramatic betrayal of his family, the similarities between the two are astonishing. Eggers brings forth drama for the reader with everything from simple lines in an interview

and the acknowledgement of his exciting life (“ Dramatic, right” (233)?) to small incidents which, in the scheme of his life, seem somewhat trivial, that he escalates to huge levels (“ I’m dying” (307).). While the exploitation may not be seen as an incredibly important or relevant theme in Eggers’s memoir, he may want it to be apparent and to seem like a reality show.

Reality shows advertise their drama prominently, yet the stories of these shows still have an underlying plot of some kind, or at least a premise on which they should be focusing; Eggers does the same thing by whining, seeking attention, and being an overall quite loud narrator, and yet crafting a story that is artful and beautiful beyond this popular culture phenomenon. After all, Eggers constantly makes references to the importance of himself, the need to be famous, and his desire to be on MTV; what better way to achieve this long-awaited fame than to create one’s own reality show centered around the most important character of all—himself?