



## ***Every Love Story Is a Ghost Story: A Life of David Foster Wallace* by D. T. Max**

This week my non-fiction book is *Every Love Story Is a Ghost Story: A Life of David Foster Wallace* by D. T. Max. I have read a bit more than half of this book. I think it is a pretty good biography. Aside from the usual gags, for example the explanation that Wallace wore his bandana to “keep his head from exploding,” we learn just how sick he often was. Max does not spare the occasional gruesome detail about just how hard knowing Wallace was on his friends, family, and lovers. He was not always, or perhaps was never, the gentle Buddha of the Midwest of myth and legend. That, I think, is OK — especially given that, in what I’ve read so far, he is still very young, and had a sort of shocking inexperience with anything resembling the real world. It is troubling to read of his occasionally abusive, stalker-ish relationships with a couple of women, though. One wishes to believe that the artists one admires are good at everything, in all aspects of their lives — but of course, the world is short of saints, and even saints probably did not always live up to their publicity.

There are the occasional beautifully-written moments that give me pause. It captures the painful details of Wallace’s repeated bouts with severe anxiety and depression, which is heartbreaking, but it seems to rarely portray Wallace the way he comes across in his writing — that is, a person of enormous energy, almost mania, and confidence. The contrast is unnerving. I recently read his essay on *Wittgenstein’s Mistress*. From the biography we learn that he started, then set aside, then returned to, this essay, and agonized over it, and wrote it during a period of his life where he was undergoing huge upheaval. But the essay itself betrays only, it seems, energy, authority, and no small amount of obsessive focus. The contrast is strange, and something it looks like I’m going to have to come to terms with again and again as I complete this book, because, unfortunately, I know how it ends.

## **Connecting Through Reading**

I have also tried to put in time, each weeknight this week, to remain connected with my children and my wife. So I’ve been reading them *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer’s Stone*, the first Harry Potter book. I’ve read all the Harry Potter books before, and I thought I had read this one to the children before a few years ago, but they tell me I haven’t. It wouldn’t matter much even if I had — there are several new ones, and the older ones are years older, and wouldn’t remember the details anyway. They have seen the movie many times, and so reading the book is an interesting jumping-off point to talk about the differences between books and their movie adaptations.

## **China Mieville**

My novel this week is *Embassytown* by China Mieville. I have a somewhat difficult relationship with Mieville. I really enjoyed *Perdido Street Station* and

*The Scar* when they came out. I have tried to read *Iron Council* and something seemed off; I could not really get into the groove with that book, although I would like to try again. I have tried to read *Embassytown* before, and somehow became bored or distracted with it. I am trying again because I consistently read very positive reviews of the book, so I'm willing to believe I just didn't give it enough of a chance. I hear good things about some of Mieville's other work, including the new story collection *Three Moments of an Explosion*.

## Essays and Stories in the Queue

The essay collection in the box in my car this week was *I Am Sorry to Think I Have Raised a Timid Son* by Kent Russell. My short story collection was *Twelve Monkeys, Twelve Minutes* by Peter Watts. Since I didn't even crack the covers of either of these this week, they will go back in the box for next week. I also have agreed to try a virtual "book club" to read *S.* by Doug Dorst and J. J. Abrams, a sort of experimental novel/art project. It seems a little daunting, like something I would have loved more when I was younger, but now might not have the patience for.

I might have to start putting in overtime next week, so this month might not be the best for achieving my reading goals. What are you reading this week?

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