

Book festival Northern Arizona

A Heartbreaking Work of Staggering Genius, by Dave Eggers Reviewed by Carolyn Batchelor

Written when the author was 30 years old, this is a long, sometimes rhapsodic, mostly true memoir about Eggers' life in the eight years following his parents' deaths from cancer within months of one another. He becomes the surrogate parent for his young brother, Christopher, who is the subject of some of the most engaging parts of the book. Also emotionally powerful are Eggers' lyrical passages filled with grief and love for his mother.



Eggers lived in San Francisco during the 1990s, a member of the young, hip Generation X. His friends are in the book, his cars and neighborhoods, and his early labors starting an alternative magazine called "Might." Media savvy plays a big role in Eggers' life and writing. He plays the participant-observer, commenting on his life even as he experiences it.

The book employs some unusual editorial apparatus, including lengthy front matter and back matter that is printed upside down. Three years after its publication, *A Heartbreaking Work* now has become a cult novel, and the author has won a cult following.

Fans of this book will largely be drawn from the under-35 crowd. That's not surprising given that it is a book about growing up, a book that can only be written once.

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