

THE AMPERSAND

It's everything between Arts & Life

Main | About | Contact Editor | Subscribe RSS

Canadian writers react to death of David Foster Wallace

Posted: September 17, 2008, 5:36 AM by Mark Medley
Books



American author David Foster Wallace [passed away late last week](#) at the age of 46. The news has sent shockwaves through the world's writing community. The *National Post* contacted a few writers across the country for their reaction to Wallace's death:

A man in a crane on top of an eighteen wheeler was hoisting sixteen cords of birch in his bucket, laying the cords gently beside our pickup trucks. I heard about you at that moment -- a woman watching us said, David Foster Wallace is dead, did you know that? Beside me a man who teaches Heidegger, collecting our wood for the winter. A third man who, thankfully, knew what he was doing, was yanking on his chainsaw to cut through the staggering width of some of those eight-foot birch lengths from central Newfoundland. I was helping load the lengths into trucks, and while I thought of you and your death I felt something hard run up the inside of my jeans -- it was the blade of the chainsaw, I realized, stuck in the wood, and it was about to zip through my groin and cut me in half and I had the rush of blood and panic that comes with near-death. But it was just a long branch full of fresh green leaves -- it leapt up into my face -- the log hadn't been limbed, and I had to keep moving with the log and so the moment of my death could not be remarked upon. I have a puny truck, it can handle only half a load before the mudflaps touch the road, and so my truck is rightly guffawed at. But in the end, at about ten o'clock at night, with Jupiter and his four Galilean moons out (which I'd seen through a bird telescope the night before), I towed home the largest eight cylinder truck -- a busted fuel pump caused it to break down. That night, with the woodstove crackling, we were in bed with an illegally downloaded episode of John From Cincinnati, and your west coast life seemed perfectly understandable to those of us here on the east coast. I thought you'd appreciate all this, David, and I wish you could. -- Michael Winter

I was devastated. I was surprised at how devastated I was. Part of it is selfish: I feel like he's the first important writer of my generation to die. But also his writing had such vitality, real playfulness and joy with language and ideas and form--it's heartbreaking that he ended with a suicide. -- Stephen Marche

I had hoped the funniness in David Foster Wallace's fiction meant that he was in control of the depression that was often his subject. He wrote about depression, compulsivity, and suicide in all his books, but I had hoped that by writing out his demons their grip on him weakened, and his ambitions would keep him going. His writing presents the reader with a game of neurotic mind-tennis that is revelatory and unparalleled. He played out a series of metaphysical oppositions in his fiction that rallied to the brink of psychological exhaustion on the page, with characters and the language spiking and lobbing off ideas of truth and fabrication, infinities and ephemerality, depression and creation, mediated fiction and lived, felt, blood-surgingly reality. Reading DFW always left me stunned. Even compared to other authors who examine the philosophical space between writer and reader, DFW's stories feel unmatched for the precision of his reflections on self-awareness. But there was always humour, absurd plots, hilarious facts, virtuoso wordplay, and an all-American appetite for pop culture that was fun and undaunting and joyous. DFW mastered the colloquial weave of speech and expanded upon it, snf his subject matter ground his literary ambitions deep into the contemporary pattern. He was so afraid of being sentimental, but he knew how to make a reader's heart stop. I think of when I first read the end of the story "Girl With Curious Hair," or the last line of Infinite Jest, or the final moments of his anguished masterpiece "Good Old Neon": "...the reader, more enduring and sentimental part of him commanding that other part to be silent as if looking it levelly in the eye and saying, almost aloud, 'Not another word.'

Ever since his death I have been frightened of DFW's trademark bandanna. That trademark bandanna is the darkest irony of all, it now looks to me like a precursor to the noose. It is a symbol of the chokehold his intellect had on him. I used to refer to as his "Suicidal Tendencies" headwrap because it was identical to Mike Muir's from that band. Suicidal Tendencies is a weird sort of chilling and surreal reference to Wallace's work. Muir and DFW are about the same age, and each became an antisocial hero at a different time and for different folks. -- Lee Henderson

Some writers will gather: Sheila Heti is organizing an open, public memorial in Toronto's Trinity Bellwoods Park. It takes place between 9-10pm in the pit of the park this coming Friday (Sept 19), wherein an hour of silence will be observed to commemorate Wallace.

And others put their thoughts in poem:

jungle
(after David Foster Wallace)
the music was incomprehensible until they realized that at each beat, the instruments were playing every note on the chromatic scale save one, and that the melody consisted entirely of its own delicate absence.-- Darren Wershler

BOOKMARK Comments (0) Send to a friend Permalink

No comments have been posted
You must be logged in to post a comment
Click here to post a comment

Related Posts

- September 16, 2008, 3:48 PM **Off the shelf: Bookslut talks to Miriam Toews, meet Al Gore's powerpoint slide designer, poetry's not dead just online by Ronald Nurwisah**
TAGS: Books 0 Comments
- September 15, 2008, 10:12 AM **What Bob Rae's been reading: Giller Prize longlist announced by Adam McDowell**
TAGS: Awards, Books 0 Comments
- September 13, 2008, 11:10 PM **Novelist David Foster Wallace found dead in his home by Ronald Nurwisah**
TAGS: Books 0 Comments
- September 13, 2008, 6:12 AM **The Travellers: Author David Rotenberg by Brad Frenette**
TAGS: Books, Travel, The Travellers 0 Comments
- September 12, 2008, 5:16 AM **The First 50: The Ravine by Paul Quarrington by Brad Frenette**
TAGS: Books, The First 50 1 Comments



The Ampersand goes backstage (and off-stage) with some of Canada's most exciting musicians.

Search... Search

moving tributes
memoriams
obituaries

remembering.ca

AROUND THE AMPERSAND

MUSIC: Daily Disc, concert reviews, Soundcheck video, festival coverage and many other things pleasing to the ear.

MOVIES: Bob Thompson and Chris Knight, plus Reel Time and complete film festival coverage. And for all the chatter from the red carpet and gossip from Hollywood, [visit our Shinan/Scandal Sheet blog](#).

TRAVEL: Trek Tracker and other adventures in travel and thrill-seeking.

ART AND CULTURE: Mixed Media and other news from the galleries, museums and institutions of higher art.

BOOKS: Where to turn between page turns.

TELEVISION: From Remote Patrol to show panels, we're tuned in.

RANDOMNESS: Extremely Bad Advice, Lunchtime Links, our Avenue page and other very fine ways to pass the time between coffee breaks.

FOOD AND DRINK: Feeling peckish?

Recent Comments

Hey, looks like honest satire to me!
--JackyA
The Ampersand

Great article, as if we needed further proof that Gary Calamar has excellent taste in music. As soon as I hear he is involved in a project I know it will be great and...
--Brenney
The Ampersand

--Select One--

Browse by Date

AUG		September					OCT
S	M	T	W	T	F	S	
31	1	2	3	4	5	6	
7	8	9	10	11	12	13	
14	15	16	17	18	19	20	
21	22	23	24	25	26	27	
28	29	30	1	2	3	4	
5	6	7	8	9	10	11	

Active Tags

Music Movies A.M. A&E Television Lunchtime links P.M. A&E Randomness Canadian Music Week Daily Disc TIFF 2008 Books news Extremely Bad Advice Canadian Idol CD Reviews Canon Fodder Diary Remote patrol Flip Service Reel Time TIFF Review Sniff Test Hidden Track TIFF Bob Thompson Concert Reviews Travel Art and Culture Found Mixed Media Must Read Awards L'Oreal Fashion Week Top 10 lists NXNE Trek Tracker Cultural Capital The Question Mark Lost Cannes Continental Riff Style Matters Must See Fashion Survivor Panel Theatre Soundcheck From the Cutting Room Floor Off The Charts Design of the Times Consumed Footprint Must Hear Avenue TIFF Day 4 Man with a Wedding Plan Six Free Songs TIFF Day 3 Swag Hag TIFF Day 2 Deconstructing the Video The First 50 film press conference TIFF Day 5 Parties TIFF Day 1 Lollapalooza Robots The Travellers TV TIFF Day 6 So You Think You Can Dance TIFF Day 7 graphic Comedy Monsters Between Commute Reboot TIFF Day 8 TIFF Day 9 A.M. A&E. Blockbusterology Box Office Madonna TIFF Day 10 Ricky Gervais Radio Ghost Town Deconstructing the Interview Mad Men History Lesson Greg Kinnear

Our Friends and Neighbours

- Popped Culture
- Scott Feschuk
- Maureen Ryan
- Whitney Matheson
- J. Kelly Nestruck
- Todd Babiak
- Ken Levine
- Steyn on arts/culture
- Vanessa Farquharson
- Montreal Gazette TV blog
- Reliable Sources
- Weekly World News
- Playback
- Town of Dog River
- TMZ
- Mr. Dressup tribute/theme song
- Dose
- Whats On Winnipeg
- andPOP
- JewReview.net
- Bark
- Flow TV
- The Humans Are Dead
- Beer map of Canada
- Dead Things ON Sticks
- Salon
- Heroes spoilers
- Slate
- canada.com Entertainment
- The Map Room
- A Writer's Musings
- Blogs
- Gawker
- Radar
- Posted Toronto
- Torontoist
- Pop Candy
- Bookninja

The Ampersand Mobile

Get headlines and stories from The Ampersand and other National Post feeds delivered straight to your BlackBerry or Windows Mobile-powered PDA with Viigo. Free, instant, lightning-fast access gets you what you want, when you want it.

Click here to get started.

nationalpost.com - Arts

- Brad Pitt helps fight against proposed gay marriage ban
- "KITtnapping" takes new Knight Rider viral
- Thumb hither: The kalimba goes pop
- Canadians can finally learn what Hillier thinks
- Why you are welcome

nationalpost.com - Life

- Hidden hotel costs (and how to avoid them)
- Eco-friendly products: not always as advertised
- Middle Eastern fashionistas not feeling the crunch
- Fergie, Michelle Obama top best-dressed list
- Whale tale: Researcher 'talks' to a beluga

NATIONAL POST

POPULAR

- (Update) Kanye arrested at LAX
- Michael Phelps makes a funny or two in SNL's premiere
- Canadian Idol: Theo Tams is your new Canadian Idol
- Novelist David Foster Wallace found dead in his home
- Canadian Idol: Theo Tams speaks about his win
- Canadian Idol: Second Opinion -- Ben Mulroney unmasked?
- Bob Thompson: Coens crack box-office code with Burn After Reading
- Canadian photographer Jill Greenberg in trouble with The Atlantic over manipulated photos of John McCain
- Canadian Idol: The final two perform
- Canadian Idol: Mitch MacDonald on being the runner up