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This was uncalled for : Dave Eggers' A heartbreaking work of staggering genius subverts the genre of traditional autobiography as an attempt at rendering his life

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FLORIDA INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITY

Miami, Florida

THIS WAS UNCALLED FOR: DAVE EGGERS' A HEARTBREAKING WORK OF
STAGGERING GENIUS SUBVERTS THE GENRE OF TRADITIONAL
AUTOBIOGRAPHY AS AN ATTEMPT AT RENDERING HIS LIFE

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

MASTERS OF ARTS

in

ENGLISH

by

Krystal Alvarez

2009

To: Dean Kenneth Furton
College of Arts and Sciences

This thesis, written by Krystal Alvarez, and entitled This Was Uncalled For: Dave Eggers' A Heartbreaking Work of Staggering Genius Subverts the Genre of Traditional Autobiography as an Attempt at Rendering His Life, having been approved in respect to style and intellectual content, is referred to you for judgment.

We have read this thesis and recommend that it be approved.

Dr. Ana Luszczyńska

Dr. Bruce Harvey

Dr. Richard Schwartz, Major Professor

Date of Defense: June 17, 2009

The thesis of Krystal Alvarez is approved.

Dean Kenneth Furton
College of Arts and Sciences

Dean George Walker
University Graduate School

Florida International University, 2009

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Para Mami.

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ABSTRACT OF THESIS

THIS WAS UNCALLED FOR: DAVE EGGERS' A HEARTBREAKING WORK OF
STAGGERING GENIUS SUBVERTS THE GENRE OF TRADITIONAL
AUTOBIOGRAPHY AS AN ATTEMPT AT RENDERING HIS LIFE

by

Krystal Alvarez

Florida International University, 2009

Miami, Florida

Professor Richard Schwartz, Major Professor

The purpose of this thesis was to explore why and how the author Dave Eggers subverts the genre of traditional autobiography in his memoir A Heartbreaking Work of Staggering Genius. I compared Eggers' work to Gertrude Stein's The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas and William S. Burroughs' Junky. I found that like Stein and Burroughs, Eggers utilized various rhetorical devices outside of traditional autobiography because he could not find the means to express himself within the genre. Eggers employed various rhetorical methods reserved for fictional texts, such as stream of consciousness, characterization, and irony, in order to reconcile his feelings towards his parents' deaths and render those feelings in his memoir.

I established that Eggers concluded his memoir with impossibility of arriving at one Meaning that could summate his tragic experience. Thus, I proved that Eggers gave the reader the only authentic interpretation he could: the memoir as a small, incomplete glimpse into his life.

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I. Introduction

Traditionally, the genre of autobiography assumes that an author has an undeniable authority over the text he or she writes and the ability to convey a truthful depiction of events in his or her life. Dave Eggers' memoir *A Heartbreaking Work of Staggering Genius* (2000; referred here after as *A Heartbreaking Work*) is a meta-autobiographical text that explores the function and inaccuracy of autobiography (in this case, memoir) as a testimony of absolute truth. By deconstructing the artifice of the autobiographical label, Eggers' *A Heartbreaking Work* critiques logocentric ideals. According to the *Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy*, logocentrism is defined as "a term used in postmodernist writing to criticize what is perceived as an excessive faith in the stability of meanings [. . .] or indeed an excessive faith in the notions of truth and falsity themselves" (Blackburn 215). Pertaining to autobiography, logocentrism becomes particularly problematic because believing in absolute ideals such as truth and falsity lead to the Western metaphysical traditional autobiography: the author knows all and will render an *authentic* portrayal of his or her life. *A Heartbreaking Work* supplements and elaborates on modern works within the meta-biographical genre of literature that subvert the logocentric idea that this perfect rendering can occur, that there can be an authentic truth to be portrayed.

One of the earliest works to subvert American autobiography is Benjamin Franklin's *The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin* (1798). Franklin rebels against the norms of what an autobiographical text should entail by depicting his life as text—one that can be erased, edited, and revised—thereby inducing the reader to regard the autobiography as just another text. Franklin's autobiography lays the groundwork for

questioning, for if an autobiography is just text, then the author and his events hold no more authority than a fictional text. Hence, the importance of the author and the legitimacy of the genre of autobiography are suspect.

Like Franklin's *Autobiography*, more recent pseudo-autobiographical works like Gertrude Stein's *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* (1933) and William S. Burroughs' *Junky* (1977) revise the genre of autobiography by subverting the concept of author and undermining the veracity of the events described, thereby further challenging the importance of an author's authority over the text. Both Stein and Burroughs ultimately create a nonfiction autobiography that reads like a novel. During World War I, artists like Virginia Wolfe, James Joyce, and T.S. Eliot embodied the so-called High Modernism, which emphasized strict artistic control over the work. However, much like the rebellious Dadaists of the same era, Gertrude Stein broke away from the mainstream esoteric, elitist writing of high art by establishing herself as an avant-garde writer. In *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*, Stein exposes her life and the lives of rising artists in the Modernist art movement while writing under the name and persona of her lover, Alice B. Toklas. By writing through the voice of her lover, Stein critiques the role of art, women, and war in the early Twentieth century. In the semi-autobiographical *Junky*, William S. Burroughs reveals a profoundly disturbing account of drug use and sexual licentiousness at the root of the beat movement in the 1950s. Burroughs explores the life of literature, lies, and drugs at the heart of the New York art scene while admittedly concealing the real names and details involved in the depicted events. Both Stein and Burroughs' texts are staple works in genre of the American meta-autobiography, and

Dave Eggers' postmodern work *A Heartbreaking Work* adds a significant appendage to the genre of meta-autobiography.

Dave Eggers founded the literary magazines Might and a publishing company and literary magazine McSweeney's while subsequently publishing many popular, innovative novels like *You Shall Know Our Velocity!* (2003), *How We are Hungry* (2005), and *What is the What?* (2007). Being categorized as the autobiography of Valentino Achak Deng, a Sudanese refugee, yet written by Eggers, *What is the What?* questions the role and importance of autobiography in society; thus, the text also illustrates the insignificance of the autobiographical author. Who is the author of the text Deng or Eggers? What are the 'real' events if they are told after the translation and editing of a writer [Eggers]? In the preface, Deng states that "from the material [Deng's story] he [Eggers] created his work of art" illustrating the role author as translator and interpreter, while conveying the inability of the author to indicate ultimate truth, for it is Deng's story's being told through Egger's narrative (Eggers XIV). Through Deng, Eggers is able to write about the everyman in Sudanese society and bring to light the atrocities that are occurring in Sudan while subverting the idea of authorial importance in an autobiographical narrative—a subject which he first addresses in *A Heartbreaking Work*.

Dave Eggers' memoir *A Heartbreaking Work* is a candid depiction of the tragic passing of both Eggers' parents who leave the author (then in his early twenties) to raise his younger brother Toph. Even though *A Heartbreaking Work* is categorized as a memoir, the label fails to encompass Eggers' amalgamation of fiction and nonfiction: moments where Eggers admits to the exaggeration of real events, indulges in neurotic fantasies, posits self-aware characters who speak directly to Eggers the author and (at its

most absurd) exhibits diagrams and charts to explain how the work should be interpreted. *A Heartbreaking Work* is far from being a mere memoir, autobiography, or fiction; it serves to illustrate Eggers' ability to blur the genres of fiction and nonfiction, while forming a meta-fictional autobiography.

Even though there are a number of critical reviews of Eggers' *A Heartbreaking Work* and many articles about meta-fictional texts, there are no academic works that thoroughly explain the importance of Eggers' memoir. John Paul Eakin's essay, "Breaking the Rules the Consequences of Self-narration," explicates how *A Heartbreaking Work's* introduction encompasses all of the presuppositions society has about autobiography and satirizes these notions with "a delicious send-up of the promises and disclaimers that autobiographers instinctively make before they get started"(114). Although Eakin illustrates how Eggers' awareness of his role of writer of an autobiography in his humorous, mocking introduction foretells the author's ability to break form in the genre, Eakin fails to elaborate on how this technique is important to whole genre of autobiography, and Eakin does not fully explore how Eggers' preface satirizes both the author and the reader's expectation of finding meaning through the author. The same self-awareness that is praised in Eakin's essay is sometimes viewed as a gimmick. In "Paratextuality and Economic Disavowal in Dave Eggers' *You Shall Know Our Velocity*," Sarah Brouillette argues that Eggers' other book, which he labels as purely fictional, Eggers still manages to "exemplify the peculiar way in which Eggers' entire career is built circularly on reflections on itself" (par. 1).

In "The Author is Dead, Long Live the Author: Autobiography and the Fantasy of the Individual," Jack Spicer argues that the category of autobiography presents a

conundrum as it promises a truth that it cannot achieve, for autobiography becomes “negotiating among the seeming contradictions between truth and accuracy, memory and history, objective and subjective truth” (388). There is no possible way for the author to reconcile his or her own truth as absolute meaning over the text as Eggers warns his readers on the copyright page of *A Heartbreaking Work*: “NOTE: This is a work of fiction, only that in many cases, the author could not remember the exact words said by certain people, and the exact descriptions of certain things, so had to fill in the gaps as best he could.”

Dave Eggers’ *A Heartbreaking Work* transforms the notion of Author and exemplifies a quintessential postmodern example of a meta-autobiographical text. In the first chapter, I will display how Eggers embodies the point Roland Barthes makes in “Death of the Author,” which is that a book’s meaning can only be an infinite amount of “imitations” (53). Eggers prefaces *A Heartbreaking Work* with an ironic chart of symbolisms and meanings, an outline of themes, and an introduction that explains the title of the memoir; thus, through his satirical preface, Eggers indicates his understanding that his role as author is irrelevant to the memoir and meaning should be up to the reader. Using Derrida’s Dissemination, I will illustrate how Eggers’ work deconstructs itself, thereby achieving the culmination of meta-fiction and meta-autobiographical texts. The first chapter will provide context for the other arguments I will make throughout the chapters.

In the second chapter, I will compare Egger’s *A Heartbreaking Work* to Gertrude Stein’s *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* and their use of the self-aware, self-referential author altering the form of autobiography. Stein and Eggers are authors from

very different eras but both manage to create very similar deviations from the autobiographical genre by challenging the reality that is conveyed in their respective narratives. Following in the footsteps of Stein, Eggers strives to find the means to express his life story and finds means outside of nonfiction linear autobiography. The chapter will also show Stein and Eggers satirize the original pretense of an autobiography by using dialogue, self-awareness, and characterization, elements more closely related to a novel in order to attempt a more precise rendering of their lives.

The third chapter will compare Eggers' *A Heartbreaking Work* to the confessional Beat writer William Burroughs' novel *Junky*. Both Burroughs and Eggers must render worlds that are unknown to most: Eggers loses both parents within weeks of one another, and Burroughs' main character (which reflects his own life) is a junky. Thus, both authors in order to replicate "real" events must characterize the cities they live in and the people they are influenced by. Burroughs creates characters that embody junk and the seedy underbelly of the New York City drug life, while Eggers mixes elements of characterization and humor to depict the comforting new setting of San Francisco, California and the reminiscent feel of cold Lake Forest, Illinois. By addressing personal tragedy with a constant self-awareness of the reader's empathetic reaction to his writing, Eggers, like Burroughs, leaves the text open to the reader's judgment and analysis as they strive to find a better means of rendering their unique lives.

The final chapter, the conclusion, conveys the similarities between Eggers' final internal monologue and Molly Bloom's final monologue in James Joyce's *Ulysses* (1933). I reiterate how Eggers challenges the structure of nonfiction works by elaborating on the groundbreaking work of Stein's *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* and

Burroughs' *Junky* and never really can render an authentic portrayal of his life in accordance with Western metaphysical autobiography. Therefore, Egger's *A Heartbreaking Work* becomes the culmination of meta-autobiography: a dialogue with the reader that decentralizes power from the author, asserts an awareness of the preconceived notions about autobiography, and reinvents the perception of nonfiction texts as supreme truth.

II. Eggers' Preface as a Participation and Subversion of the Genre of Autobiography

Phillip Lejuene defines a traditional notion of autobiography as “a retrospective prose narrative produced by a real person concerning his own existence, focusing on his individual life, in particular on the development of his personality,” but his definition proves to be problematic when autobiography is examined through a post-structuralist lens (Lejuene qtd. in Anderson 2). Within Lejuene’s definition, there are certain implicit assumptions about language, being, and the world, indicating that all three ideas are separate entities working divisibly, independent of each other. In Lejuene’s traditional definition, the narrator utilizes language, his autobiographical text, to decipher, uncover, reveal the world ‘as it is’ i.e. a realistic account to the reader. By iterating that autobiography is a ‘retrospective prose’ Lejuene asserts that the subject of the autobiography “takes itself as an object” —a subject able to talk about itself objectively and retrospectively (Smith 132). The ‘development of his [the author’s] personality’ that will be revealed through the text will be defined as the ultimate Truth or Reality for the reader—a subject’s portrayal of his own life objectively. This notion of developing a Truth, assuming there is a final Truth to find, reflects a logocentric Western ideal of finding a final Meaning that can “commit to the belief of some ultimate word, presence, essence, truth, or reality which acts as foundation for thought and experience” (Eagleton 113). Traditional autobiography, like Lejuene’s definition suggests, assumes the reader can and should uncover some ultimate Truth within the text itself. Therefore, the reader must commit his or herself to decipher, discover, and decode the Truth hidden within the text, or in the case of autobiography, the author reflects on his or her Truth and conveys the Truth to the reader.

Lejuene's definition of autobiography presupposes that a being can reflect on his or her own existence using language, spotlight the essential themes of his or her life, and highlight the progress of his or her personality. This, however, becomes a problematic endeavor since being cannot step outside of language nor outside of the world to state a clear, formulated message. Being is within language and the world. In other words, being is language and is the world; the three cannot exist independently. The subject-object relationship displayed in Lejuene's quote presumes there is a definitive relationship amongst the three that is separate and definable. The quote presumes beings themselves can untangle from language and world. Under the logocentric relationship of being, language, and world, the reader is constantly pursuing and wanting an "anchoring for the unquestionable meaning" or a final signified, which reveals the Meaning in a text (Eagleton 113).

But according to a post-structuralist viewpoint, Lejuene's definition of autobiography fails to elucidate the structure of language, being, and the world, for all three are ineradicably linked together, an amalgamation, interwoven, and inseparable. There is no defined Truth or Meaning, or final signified, to post-structuralists as they work under the assumption there is no "transcendental signified" (Eagleton 113). Thus, there is no meaning to be presented as Truth; there is only interpretation. Autobiographical texts privilege the Author's experience and interpretation as Reality, but there is no Meaning to capture the moment that is being reiterated in language. Neither language, being, nor the world contains a final signified. If nothing can specify a final message, then autobiography is an impossibility, a narrative that falls suspect, functioning from a ground that there is a truth to be had, a meaning to be derived, and an

authorial intent to be revealed. Because there is communication between people through language, there is never total anarchy when it comes to language, but consequently, “nothing is *fully-present* [emphasis mine] in signs” (Eagleton 112). Therefore, the perception in a post structuralist thought is that “meaning is always somehow dispersed, divided, and never quite at one with itself,” making an impossibility of the narrator’s production of an objective, self-reflective text (Eagleton 112).

After the philosophy of Roland Barthes and Jacques Derrida questioned the notion that presumes the author can remove all biases and fortify a non-fictional recollection of life, further romanticizing and idolizing the author, contemporary autobiographies started to question the same conventional view of autobiography. Given that author Dave Eggers is a contemporary of theoretical orthodoxy of Barthes and Derrida, it is not surprising that he does not write a ‘straight’ autobiography but rather challenges parameters of what constitutes autobiography. Most poignantly, in the preface of Dave Eggers’ *A Heartbreaking Work of Staggering Genius*, Eggers subverts the traditional notions associated with autobiography including: writing as a vehicle for disseminating Truth and Meaning, the author as textual authority, and the reader as interpreter of textual Meaning.

In his critical essay “The Death of the Author” (1968), Roland Barthes eradicates the notion of authorial intent containing the absolute Truth, the Message, the Meaning of the narrative, dismissing these notions as logocentric, hierarchical, and problematic. Barthes accuses Western society of fixating itself on the author’s intent and ignoring other possible readings of the text. Barthes highlights that one present meaning of a text is impossible to determine because “the space of writing is to be transversed, not

pierced; writing constantly posits meaning, but always in order to evaporate it: writing seeks a systematic exemption of meaning” (Barthes 54). Hence, writing is not a stationary, fixed ideal with one invariable meaning but rather a ‘space’ that ‘constantly posits meaning’ only ‘to evaporate it.’ Meanings are continuously being disseminated through language, creating more meanings, with no final signified, so writing becomes an endless web of meaning—interpretations, not answers.

Similar to Barthes, Eggers also questions the metaphysical traditional notion that the author can and will create one solid Meaning, so he refuses to *assign*¹ his text “a ‘secret,’ i.e., an ultimate meaning,” or a final signified, for the reader to discover, exposing Meaning as a logocentric fallacy. Thus, Eggers conveys the impossibility of anyone’s assigning definitive Meaning onto a text (Barthes 54). Eggers recognizes that as an author, he does not have the power to control the reader and illustrates the absurdity of believing in authorial Meaning by ironically implementing the “major themes of the book” (Eggers preface), mocking the idea of Authorial intent. From the categorical themes of “The Unspoken Marriage of Parental Disappearance” to “The Self-flagellation as Art Form Aspect,” Eggers satirizes his role as Author, ridiculing the importance of Authorial Meaning over the autobiographical text. Eggers constructs these derisive themes in order to mock the logocentric, systematic belief that the Author can unearth and determine Meaning within a text and posit this Meaning in writing for the reader to discover. When Eggers creates a chart indicating a visual map that the reader can follow to reveal his Meaning, he is sarcastically responding to the belief that the text can hold a

¹ To assign a text a Meaning is impossible in and of itself, but Eggers is aware of the impossibility while the traditional autobiographical tradition believes it is a possibility to designate Meaning.

solid, absolute Meaning, which can be revealed through finding its various themes. Eggers' chart signifies the preposterous goal of obtaining a definitive Answer, Meaning, or Truth through a systematic analysis—a customarily practiced means of deriving Authorial Intent. Eggers denotes the equally laughable endeavor of trusting a methodical reading just because it is prompted by the Author as Truth, for there is no sincerity in Eggers' preface.

Eggers' ironic thematization of his narrative serves the function of both exposing the Author as an egocentric, romantic false idol and fortifying the absurdity of purporting a Meaning onto the text because “in multiple writing, in effect, everything is to be *disentangled*, but not *deciphered*, structure can be ‘threaded’ in all its reprises, all its stages, but there is no end, no bottom” (Barthes 54). Once a work is written, the text distributes and disperses; it can become anything and everything when reread. As previously mentioned, since being, language, and world are inseparable from one another, there could only be multiple readings of a text but never one truth. Thus, an author's words and thoughts are constantly changing (and already entangled in language and world) from the moment the author shifts his or her thoughts onto paper. Accordingly, even the writer is webbed within language and world; he becomes just another reader—another person spinning a take on what has been written because the text can never present “eternally here and now” synchronized with the Author's life (Barthes 52). Eggers admits that “this [the memoir] has of course been almost entirely reconstructed,” and the book “reflects both the author's memory's limitations and his imagination's nudgings” (preface). Eggers' admission in the preface demonstrates how traditional Author figures do not take into account their own role within language and

world, but Eggers knows he cannot fully render an accurate depiction, a Truth, or Meaning because his narrative can only be a 'limitation' of what he can remember what language he can describe and what he can interpret.

By providing his readers with a chart of the symbols within *A Heartbreaking Work*, Eggers continues his critique of logocentric Western authorial dominance, noting the absurdity of the author presuming to transmit a Meaning over the text and mocking the traditional manner in which readers have been trained to read it. Eggers conveys a disapproval of Truth and Meaning as fixed ideals by creating another ironic chart entitled the "Incomplete Guide to Symbols and Metaphors" which reads: "Sun=Mother, Moon=Father, Nosebleed=Decay, Lattice=Transcendental-equivalent," and so on (Eggers preface). By pre-fixing a Meaning onto the text, a re-presentation (a chart of symbols) of his presentation (his text), Eggers satirizes reader's project of having to determine Authorial intent and Meaning within the memoir. The chart of incomplete symbols is a formulaic imposition meant to admonish the idea that the narrator is "the voice of one and the same person, *the author*, which is transmitting his 'confidences'" (Barthes 50). Eggers removes any need for deciphering the text because he offers every tidbit of his 'confidences.' Through his presentation of ostensibly self-referential language, disclosed values, and symbols, Eggers ends the game of finding the Author's Intention while dismantling the notion itself. Eggers rebels against the ideal presumption that "once the Author is found, the text is 'explained' " by offering the reader an Answer, a Meaning, or Truth before they even start reading (Barthes 53).

By creating charts which represent a given meaning, ending the challenge of finding Authorial intent, and therefore, revealing his charts as humor and disingenuous,

Eggers conveys the impossibility of deciphering Authorial intention and demonstrates an absence of a final signified in a text. With these charts in place, finding a meaning within *A Heartbreaking Work* becomes a futile task, a fictional operation disseminated as a means of discovering a Truth in the text that is nonexistent. Also, by noting that his symbolism chart is incomplete, Eggers alludes to the codification of the text as an artificial practice that supposes that if performed accurately, a reader can decipher the Authorial Meaning and complete the reading endeavor. If Eggers' chart is incomplete, then even the Author does not know own his or her final meaning. Symbols and themes presume that the reader can uncover the Author's secret, but with Eggers already providing a mock chart, he is destroying pretense, reiterating the notion that to "assign an Author to a text is to impose a brake on it, to furnish it with a final signified, to close the writing" (Barthes 53). Eggers uses humor to relinquish the conception of a final signified, providing a fictitious arrangement of final signifieds for his text, consequently, satirizing its very existence and the reader's pursuit of a mystical Meaning posited in the text by the Author.

Eggers also addresses Barthes's notion of the author as merely a "scriptor," highlighting the problem with autobiographical texts that presume there is a memory, thought, or idea the author can recollect and manifest plainly in his or her writing (Barthes 52). In the traditional Western metaphysical perception, the Author accesses language in order to interpret the world, but the concept of Authorial conception becomes problematic as it assumes that "the Author is supposed to feed the book, i.e., he lives before it, thinks, suffers lives for it" (Barthes 52). In presuming the Author is the ultimate Creator of his text, the Author figure is worshipped for his design. This teleological

perspective wherein the Author gives birth to the text does not take into consideration that language functions as an *a priori*, existing before and after the Author with no identifiable origin. The author selects from a preexisting set of words and ideas that are already saturated with meaning. Language is always “ceaselessly call[ing] any origin into question” and always “posit[ing] meaning” independent of the Author (Barthes 53, 54). The temporality of the Author is merely as a scriptor who is “born *at the same time* as the text,” and for Eggers, it means that language is independent of his interpretation and free to mean outside of himself because language exists prior to his manuscript (Barthes 52). Eggers states in the copyright page of his preface:

NOTE: This is a work of fiction, only in that in many cases, the author could not remember the exact words said by certain people, and exact descriptions of certain things, so had to fill in the gaps as best he could. Otherwise, all characters and incidents and dialogue are real, are not products of the author’s imagination, because at the time of this writing, the author had no imagination for these sorts of things and couldn’t *make up* a story or characters... (Copyright page)

The ‘gaps’ Eggers is trying to fill can only be ‘filled as best as he could’, for language is slippery and cannot be limited to just an Authorial Meaning imposed upon it. The reason Eggers cannot get to the Meaning, the ‘exact words’ is because there are no ‘exact words’ that can encompass his life. There can only be an imitation “of an ever anterior, never original gesture,” an entrapment of language (Barthes 53). Eggers cannot step outside of the world and language to present a ‘real’ account of his life, making the task of autobiographical narrative an impossibility—just an interpretation. Eggers’ ‘filling of the gaps’ is all he can do as a scriptor because his work will always posit meaning outside of himself as Eggers merely creates a “a pure gesture of inscription (and not of expression)” (Barthes 52). Eggers acknowledges he cannot ‘make up a story or characters’ but

consequently, relishes his memory's failure. Furthermore, his preface illustrates an honest acknowledgement to the reader: the text cannot be inherently nonfiction because it is always entwined in the confines of language, being, world, unable to step outside of itself.

Eggers' Acknowledgments Page in *A Heartbreaking Work* thematizes the constructed nature of logocentric Meaning in a text, making the text a healthy sign. Barthes's healthy sign is "one which draws attention to its own arbitrariness" and does not "palm itself off as 'natural'" (Eagleton 117). Eggers refers to himself as "the author" and transforms the preface into a mocking jab at the authorial ego:

The author and those behind making this book, wish to acknowledge that yes, perhaps too many memoir-sorts of books are being written at this juncture, and that all such books, about real things and real people, as opposed to kind-of made up things and people are inherently vile and corrupt and wrong and evil and bad, but would like to remind everyone that we could do worse, as readers and as writers. (Acknowledgements page)

By referring to himself as author, Eggers calls attention to the signification of the conventional ideal of "author" as established and ratified in Barthes's "Death of the Author." Eggers is an author, taking about his authoriness, his authorial quality, and satirizing his traditional role as creator of the text and director of meaning. A conventional acknowledgment page would be written in the first-person, but instead Eggers speaks in the third-person, referring to himself as 'author', ironically shifting the perception and focus of the Acknowledgment Page from Eggers himself, to Eggers as author. Egger qualifies himself as author and therefore "communicates something of its own relative, artificial status" (Barthes 117).

Not only does Eggers call attention to his own role as author, but also, he modifies the traditional conception of the Acknowledgments Page by indicating stigmas associated with memoirs. Eggers' Acknowledgment Page does not present a nod to his sister or brother as traditional acknowledgments do, but instead, his acknowledgements recognize the role of the genre of memoir and the signs society associate with autobiographical texts in general. Eggers is self-aware of the tribulations associated with labeling *A Heartbreaking Work* as a memoir, and simultaneously, notes that his work is fiction even though it is classified under nonfiction memoir. The Acknowledgment Page acknowledges the unnaturalness of the label memoir, as it imposes a certain meaning onto the text (an absolute Truth). Eggers exposes Meaning as nonexistent and therefore, problematic at best. The ideological category of memoir implies an absolute rendition of a Truth, so Eggers explains his memoir's in-authenticity as it lies within a systematized category, allegedly ascertaining a Truth he cannot *acknowledge* as existing.

In calling attention to *A Heartbreaking Work's* "memoirness," Eggers' memoir is a sign that illustrates the illogical nature of the rules a memoir must comply to: a text written about 'real things and real people.' According to Barthes's theory, a sign that tries to pass itself off as natural is unhealthy, and it further:

denies the productive character of language: it suppresses the fact that we only have a 'world' at all because we have language to signify it, and that what we count as 'real' is bound up with what alterable structures of signification we live within (Eagleton 118).

A traditionally conceived autobiographical memoir presupposes that there is a final signified to understand, a real to record and textually transmit in a text; however, through his ironic tone, Eggers notes the impossibility of his memoir being 'real,' ultimately

denoting the ‘real’ as a Realist literary construct of the customary memoir. Not to say that there is no reality, but as Eggers ironic statement implies, there is no distinction between ‘real things and real people’ and ‘kind-of made up things and people.’ Moreover, in the context of writing, nothing can be stated as is—as pure Truth, for it is always already within world, being, and language. Therefore, when Eggers states “this is not, actually, a work of pure nonfiction,” he is acknowledging the book as a memoir categorically but also as a fiction because it can never capture Truth (Eggers preface).

Eggers mocks memoirs for being ‘corrupt,’ ‘vile,’ ‘wrong,’ ‘evil,’ and ‘bad,’ further demonstrating *A Heartbreaking Work* (because it falls into the category of memoir) is a healthy sign. He positions the memoir as a work of fiction, and does not “help confirm the prejudice that there is a form of ‘ordinary’ language which is somehow natural” (Barthes 117). In fact, Eggers’ sardonic tone disassociates *A Heartbreaking Work* from other memoirs claiming Truth and Meaning. By identifying his own text as an example of an overused genre, Eggers is being ironic and with a nudge and a wink, he asserts, ‘we could do worse, as readers and as writers.’ Eggers withdraws his text from systematized genre by indicating the inequities of the autobiographical genre’s unspoken declaration that it is “essentially right in unconvertible ways” (Barthes 118). By defacing the unhealthy sign that is memoir and its essential ‘memoirness,’ Eggers indicates a consciousness of the defects and false truth claims his text is making as a memoir, showing the reader the unhealthy aspects of the sign while rendering *A Heartbreaking Work*, a healthy sign aware of its own pretense, mask, artifice.

According to French philosopher Jacques Derrida, Western ideology has been “structured in terms of dichotomies and polarities,” and the schisms that are present in

text, produce certain inequalities about the connotation and meaning of the words themselves (Johnson viii). Within the dichotomies mentioned above there are binary pairs that oppose one another (i.e. presence vs. absence, real vs. fantasy, identity vs. difference). Binaries underline a preference for certain words over others: the first term is always perceived as positive, while the second term is an “undesirable version of the first, a fall away from it” (Johnson viii). By being unconstructive and corrupt, the second term somehow confirms that the first term is a constructive, good term, by becoming a deficiency or lack of the first term’s desirable qualities. Binary oppositions are part of logocentric ideals, leaving no room for a gray area, for these binaries produce clear, concise categorical reductions that invade the understandings within language through their totalization. What these “hierarchical oppositions do is to privilege unity, identity, immediacy, and temporal and spatial *presentness* over distance, difference, dissimulation, and deferment” (Johnson viii). Hence, in Western society, these dichotomies determine how people identify, classify, and judge every social concept within these categorical terms, so people will favor one term of the opposition binary over another even when dealing with writing, sexuality, education, culture, etc.

Derrida’s *main* objective in various projects including in *Dissemination’s* essay “A Dangerous Supplement” becomes to criticize and deconstruct the binaries that privilege the spoken word over the written. All autobiography is given to its own deconstruction because a critic may deconstruct a naïve autobiography just as easily as an author like Eggers can purposely deconstruct his own autobiography. However, the logocentric concept is that once author is removed from the immediacy of the moment, once he or she can no longer speak his point, the author can only re-present a version of

the truth. Therefore, the author's rendering of his or her life goes through editing, revising, and rewriting only to become an artificial or inauthentic representation of truth—not as immediate and authentic as speech. Western tradition labels writing a:

second-rate activity that tries to overcome distance by making use of it: the writer puts his thoughts on paper, distancing it from himself, transforming it into something that can be read by someone far away, even after the writer's death. This inclusion of death, distance, and difference is thought to be a corruption of the self-presence of meaning, to open meaning up to all forms of adulteration which immediacy would have prevented (Johnson ix).

The above reductive conception of writing does not take into account that there is just as large of a gap between the signified and the signifier in speech as there is in written language. There is always a constant difference and deferral of meaning from the signifier to the signified. Words constantly have to reference other words (to defer) and their meanings achieve definition or significantion via the difference from other words (to differ). Thus, both written and spoken language cannot mean an ultimate Truth, rendering the privilege of the spoken over the written word a logocentric fallacy. Moreover, what Derrida calls the *differance* (the difference and deferral of meaning from the signified) will always “inhabit[s] the very core of what *appears* [emphasis mine] to be immediate and present” (Johnson ix). No matter whether it is spoken or written language, words do not inherently mean one particular signified meaning; they have a variety of meanings. Hence, the ideological, systematic privileging of spoken language versus written language is just a construct, which can be deconstructed, or exposed as textual products of Western metaphysical ideology.

In Eggers' preface, the traditional binary that privileges the spoken word over the written also indicates metaphysical Western society's view on cinema as a direct,

authentic vehicle for the depiction of biography as opposed to a written memoir. Eggers is approached by one of his acquaintances he names “Oswald,” and as they engage in some small talk, the topic of Eggers’ writing project arises. Eggers begrudgingly states that he is in the process of writing a book; when revealed he is writing a memoir, the conversation turns sour and reveals the societal privileging of the immediacy of a biographical film versus a written autobiographical memoir. Oswald questions the validity of Eggers’ memoir calling it a “*trap*,” and further asserting: “*C’mon, don’t pull that old trick!*” (Eggers preface). Oswald is working on a screenplay about the life of William S. Burroughs, another life story, a biography, but his biographical text is visual and immediate. Oswald alleges that there is a negative association with an autobiographical memoir, versus a biographical film, provoking a sense of a memoir as trite and incapable of portraying Truth in the same manner the immediacy of film could. After that exchange, Egger states:

The author felt sort of bad. After all, maybe Oswald, [...] was right—maybe memoirs were *Bad*. Maybe writing about actual events, in the first person, if not from Ireland and before you turned seventy, was *Bad*. He had a point! (Eggers preface).

Through his mocking voice, Eggers displays the binaries of good versus bad, as it pertains to his memoir being ‘bad.’ According to Oswald’s logocentrism, a memoir does not directly render a Meaning to the audience like a biographical film does because a film projects images, sounds, and words immediately. Once again, the metaphysical ideals prefer immediacy, identity, and a sense of complete resolution that, Eggers ironically implies, is found and is *good* only in a medium outside of memoir. By capitalizing the B

in Bad, Eggers conveys the totalization of memoir as an absolute, negative term that goes against the “image of perfectly self-present meaning” (Johnson xi).

There is a significant difference between an autobiography, whose Author is writing about his or herself, and biography, whose Author is writing about someone else’s life, although both (in logocentric tradition) seek to accomplish finding and conveying a final Truth to the reader. In autobiography, *auto* means “the identity of the same” that which is “generated by the iterability, the power-to-be-repeated,” and it is repetition or self-sameness that “prohibits its stability and autonomy” (Smith 100). Eggers’ life in his memoir is constantly being read by new readers who posit his life in new contexts, changing the way his life is viewed, read, interpreted, and ultimately, the manner which his life (*auto*) is also perceived. Therefore, Eggers’ life can never be defined or totalized, but rather it is to be “altered or othered in repetition, and this is the very guarantee of its ‘existence’” (Smith 100). Since there can be no ultimate truth to be had, the reader will always alter, change, modify, Eggers’ narrative according to their interpretation. The medium of biography like that of autobiography must rely on “a fantasm of ideal distance or what is known as objectivity” (Smith 129); in other words, the *bio* in a biographical film must rely on an idea of ideal objectivity from the historians, writers, and directors that are portraying a person’s life as is just like Eggers must rely on his memories and ‘nudgings.’

In his autobiographical memoir, Eggers must somehow be both subject and object of his own narrative, which in Western logocentric tradition, requires he remains objective. Ostensibly, Eggers must look at his life from a distance and render an accurate illustration of events. Such detachment is impossible since Eggers cannot step outside of

language, world, and being to convey a ‘real’ but rather can only write an interpretation of his life. Oswald’s biographical film presumes that because the Author is not involved, the authors (in this case, the directors, writers, historians, etc.) can give an objective portrayal of life; however, it is a logocentric fallacy since no one can get to any objectivity because Oswald is just as entangled in language as Eggers. Hence, Oswald’s assumption (or Eggers’ assumption of Oswald’s comment on his memoir) that Eggers’ portrayal of ‘real’ people is more accurate because he uses the medium of biographical film versus that of autobiographical memoir highlights the absurdity of both biographical mediums getting at, arriving at, or deriving a Meaning. Oswald’s biographical film relies on an *objective*, historical telling of Burroughs’ life which is an unfeasible task, that parallels Eggers’ own unattainable goal of writing about ‘real people.’

Eggers utilizes his encounter with Oswald to acknowledge the privileging of biographical film over an autobiographical memoir as a mere social and hierarchal construct that favors the immediacy of visual text over the written. Assuming that Oswald is working on a ‘non-memoir,’ indicative of the memoir’s binary opposite, Eggers asks Oswald about the content of his work. Oswald’s biographical film is then viewed as more accurate, less artificial means of disseminating information than a written memoir because there is a supposition that film can instantaneously transfer an ocular experience to the audience. Just as the spoken word is given higher importance than the written, the transference of an autobiographical experience through the use of film promises to shift meaning without “spatial distance between the speaker, speech, and listener” as it recreates the intimacy of speech, assuring the viewer will listen, see, and experience the biographer’s meaning and intention (Johnson viii). The logocentric perception of the

visual film as opposed to the written memoir fails to realize that the ocular experience is also a text, so like the written form, there that is no means of finding a definitive Meaning. Immediacy is thought to be produced by film is an illusion that attempts to suggest that there is a definite final signified (a definite Meaning) that can be obtained; however, film, like speech, is “*already* structured by the difference and distance as much as writing is” (Johnson ix).

A preface’s metaphysical traditional accomplishment would be to represent the essential nature of what the book will be about, resulting in a “meta-linguistic movement of his self-reflection” (Johnson xxxii); in other words, the traditional preface is expected to display the profundity of self-reflective language within the book while still being a part of the book itself. The preface works under the auspices of being both “inside and outside, both before and after ‘the book’ whose ‘bookness’ it both promotes and transgresses, the preface has always inscribed itself in a strange warp of both time and space” (Johnson xxxii). The Preface is spatially in the beginning of the book although it was written after the book itself; furthermore, it relegates a certain authority over the book as if it was written before the book is published. Therefore, the Preface is an accepted apparatus within a book that is able to stand outside of its temporality (when it was written) and its spatiality (where it is located) to present itself as constructed both before and after the book is written. The Preface summarizes elements within the book that the reader can obtain by merely reading the book itself, while simultaneously designating a Meaning onto the book and itself.

Hence, the traditional Preface can ostensibly analyze the book in which it resides, so the customary Preface can access its own essence or ‘bookness’ in order to convey this

essence to its readers. The Preface becomes both a part of the book and apart from the book: a part of the book (the beginning) able to promote the book itself and apart from the book (distinguishing itself from the rest of the text) because of its ability to reflect on the rest on the book's 'bookness'. The preface demonstrates a presentation that molds, shapes, warps, and aestheticizes the book, creating a certain understanding of the text before the reader even begins to read the text itself.

If a preface is already a part of the book, then how can a preface stand outside of itself and promote its own bookness, the very Essence and Nature of the book? As Derrida states: "The question at issue here, precisely, is that of presentation" (Derrida 3). The logocentric notion of being able to present the state of the book, the book as arriving at a conclusion of its bookness, is just another contrived Western ideal that promotes identity, unity, and clarity, highlighting that "the Book, the Preface, and the Encyclopedia are all structures of unification and totalization" (Johnson xxxii). The Preface is a construct residing within the confines of the book itself, claiming to perceive and to authenticate a precise textual Meaning that can be present-ed, an authentic presentation, a present authentication that is presently present to reflect upon itself, yet it is merely another logocentric systemization and organization of a metaphysical notion within language.

Eggers, like Derrida, creates a preface that works both within the confines of Preface, and simultaneously deconstructs itself as Preface. Within his preface, Eggers sections a segment entitled "Rules and Suggestions for Enjoyment of This Book" where he gives readers six different regulations about how they should approach the text:

There is no overwhelming need to read the preface. Really. It exists mostly for the author, and those who, after finishing the book, have for some reason found themselves stuck with nothing else to read. If you have already read the preface, and wish you had not, we apologize. We should have told you sooner (Eggers preface).

Eggers' preface for *A Heartbreaking Work* works within the category of Preface, while simultaneously deconstructing the notion of preface. The reader would usually expect a preface to talk about the book itself; *A Heartbreaking Work's* preface is a series of rants that ends with no real summary of his book or attempt at getting at any Truth, thematizing its own arbitrariness. The preface, although already entangled in the binaries, deconstructs the notion of prefacing through stressing the limitations of the Preface as a mere logocentric construct. Moreover, *A Heartbreaking Work's* preface simultaneously "prefaces and *deconstructs* the preface" (Johnson xxxii). *A Heartbreaking Work* 'prefaces' by introducing the preface to the work itself, while working within the place of preface (spatially), but it also deconstructs the preface by conveying that there 'is no overwhelming need to read the preface.'

Deconstructing while prefacing is also found in Derrida's preface to *Dissemination* as both texts serve as a "systematic double-mark" of self-reflection (Johnson xxxii). In *Dissemination*, Derrida refuses to "feign, according to the code, either premeditation or improvisation," and so his preface becomes a double-mark of both preface and a consciousness of its systematic 'prefaceness', functioning in the same ideological, systematized manner: the preface in a book can pontificate on its bookness (Johnson xxxii). Derrida works within the preface and challenges the binary of the preface and its ability to be outside of the book temporally and spatially; he goes outside the preface itself—which is already systematically attempting to be outside the book

although physically within it—in order to call attention to the preface’s artifice. The preface in *Dissemination* then becomes both a preface and a preface calling attention to its logocentric ‘prefaceness’ (by mimicking the ideological actions that the preface is supposed to execute while never actually conceptualizing the book’s bookness). Like Derrida, Eggers is deconstructing the logocentric systematized idea of Preface, while still categorically within the confines of it being a ‘preface.’

Eggers’ preface that is dually a preface and a deconstruction of the preface, propels a double reading and writing of the text. The first, unnumbered, uncategorized page of *A Heartbreaking Work* serves as presentation to the preface as Eggers states, “THIS WAS UNCALLED FOR.” The page highlights how Eggers does not conform to the expectancy of delivering a concise, methodical presentation of his book, but rather, like Derrida, he presents the preface while exposing its “systematic impossibility and necessity of prefacing” (Johnson xxxii). Therefore, the text achieves “through its repetition without identity,” a lack of unity, clarity, and oneness that a Preface should attain, so it has “one mark inside and the other outside the deconstructed system” which “should give rise to a double reading and double writing,”—a split that underlines the hierarchical and standardized idea of Preface as a mere social construct while still existing within it (Derrida 4).

The preface presumes to tell the reader everything he or she needs to know about the book; it is the author’s way of telling the reader, “Here is what I wrote, then read, and what I am writing that you are going to read” (Derrida 7). Stating the book’s contents in the preface causes the rest of memoir to be irrelevant. When Eggers states ‘this was uncalled for,’ he is pointing out that the preface is uncalled for, an unnecessary part of a

book because it attempts to “reduc[e] text a as such to its effects of meaning, content, thesis, or theme” (7). Not only is the above activity impossible, but it is also assumes “once you have read it, you will already have anticipated everything that follows and thus you might as well dispense with reading the rest” (7). When Eggers points out in his “Rules for Suggestions for Enjoyment for Reading This Book” what parts to skip in his book and what parts not to read, he is ironically stating within the preface the unessential nature of the preface. As Eggers caustically states what could be edited out of his memoir and indicates the pages that are irrelevant and superfluous, he asserts, “the book thereafter is kind of uneven” (Eggers preface), which satirizes the notion that even with all the pages that are left after revision his memoir is not done in the traditional sense: a book having to have an event that concludes with a Meaning. In the preface, Eggers never accomplishes the task of summarizing the text or revealing any hidden Truths. On the contrary, Eggers goes off on tangents and recollects anecdotes until he ends the preface with a drawing of stapler. The stapler emphasizes the absurdity of the preface and the extent to which Eggers avoids summarizing his work.

Eggers’ preface to *A Heartbreaking Work of Staggering Genius* subverts the genre of autobiography through an articulation of post-structural concepts. Through never attempting to establish and consequently, rejecting the notion of a final signified, Eggers’ preface to *A Heartbreaking Work* becomes, what Barthes entitles, a healthy sign. *A Heartbreaking Work* is a sign that calls attention to its own artifice, never essentializing, categorizing, or totalizing itself as a mere autobiographical memoir, but rather revealing itself as a meta-autobiography—an autobiography aware of the logocentric system it works within. Eggers acknowledges his own traditional role as author by mocking the

role of Author—the hierarchical, teleological ideal of Creator of the text. By calling himself author, Eggers satirizes the conception of textual designer, and adheres to the message of Barthes’s “Death of the Author”: there is no ultimate meaning to be disseminated by the Author. Furthermore, Eggers’ preface conveys the preference of certain binaries over others like presence versus absence, identity versus difference, or speech versus writing. By acknowledging these binaries, Eggers’ preface exposes them as systematic structures that prefer or privilege certain words over others. Thus, *A Heartbreaking Work* deconstructs the notion of Preface while still performing as preface, defining the text as a double-mark resembling Derrida’s preface to *Dissemination*. *A Heartbreaking Work’s* preface works within the system of autobiography while simultaneously bringing to attention the logocentric construct it cannot escape.

Eggers’ preface demonstrates the inability to unravel and present to the reader a portrayal of being, language, and world as separate entities; thus, Eggers’ memoir cannot reflect, revisit, or re-present, any moment, memory, or person in a concise manner as a proposed by the genre of autobiography. The preface of *A Heartbreaking Work* displays post-structuralist themes by rejecting the ideological and systemized order of logocentric thought, mocking the essentializing of his life and prose, and ultimately, subverting the very genre of the autobiographical memoir in which it resides.

III. Modernist Influence: Gertrude Stein and Dave Eggers' Subversion of Autobiography

As World War I was beginning, an onset of political and social movements shaped the Modernist era, allowing for a shift in literary language from concrete realist rhetoric to a more elusive stream of consciousness, which altered the scope of literary and artistic perception. Rebellion against the war influenced language and produced a wave of writers who began to construct a new aesthetics of language. Writers experimented with the rhythm, syntax, and repetition, creating varying ways of displaying fiction and nonfictional texts that moved away from the traditional linear narrative. The writers of high Modernist era “rather than attempting to arrive at literary perfection, reflected the partial and fragmentary nature of their understanding of their culture” and desired an ultimate incorporation of “the destructive element into their work of art” (Lewis 120). Writers of the Modernist High Art Movement included Virginia Woolf, T.S. Eliot, and Ezra Pound, who wrote esoteric references to past literature they felt embodied the authenticity of life, and thus, they were commonly perceived as having “an elitist attitude to mass culture” even though their literature was considered mainstream (Lewis 96).

On the other end of the artistic spectrum, the avant-garde movement “tended to embrace the masses” and highlighted the “most radical innovators of art” including the Dadaists, Surrealists, Expressionists, and Cubists (Lewis 95,96). Avant-garde mainly “refers to continental European tendencies” in art and literature, and they were not well-known artists who ran in “small groups that tended to support one another” (95, 96). Gertrude Stein wrote *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* (1933) while living amidst the social sphere of avant-garde artists Pablo Picasso, Henri Matisse, Paul Gauguin, and others who later became famous through their innovative artistry. As a reflection of the

avant-garde artistic movement Stein was experiencing first-hand, Stein wrote *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* through the persona of her girlfriend, Toklas. Ultimately, Stein's autobiography of Toklas is an autobiography about Stein herself and an attempt at a rendering of Stein's life. The autobiography of Toklas subverts the typical first-person narrative form of autobiography because Stein cannot find a way to address the marginalization of women and rebel against the elitism and celebrity of the 'high art movement' within the parameters of traditional autobiography.

Much like Stein, the contemporary writer, Dave Eggers subverts the genre of autobiography and finds a means to step outside of conventional autobiography, but his impetus for writing is an attempt at acquiring a concrete summation of the tragic experiences he endured during his early twenties. In *A Heartbreaking Work*, Dave Eggers attempts to grieve the sudden, unexpected death of his parents. In trying to encapsulate one of the most tragically poignant moments in his life, Eggers chooses to write about his mother's illness and death, his father's alcoholism and shocking death, his struggles to care for his eight-year-old brother, Toph, and his attempt at running an avant-garde magazine. Eggers' inability to transfer these experiences into an accurate, nonfiction account fuels his subversion of the very genre that *A Heartbreaking Work* purports to be a part of. Eggers uses humor to defer emotions while he admits his own tendency to forget and exaggerate memories; in this very way, Eggers emphasizes the impossibility of objectively executing a memoir, or any nonfiction, without embellishing or distorting reality.

By challenging the conventional notions of who should author an autobiography and what the techniques should be used to render a their life story, both Stein and Eggers

convey the absurdity of attempting to achieve impartial truth in writing, and thereby destroy the notion of the omniscient author. While Stein subverts the traditional autobiographical texts to rebel against the Modernist high art movement and the marginalization of women, Eggers subverts the genre in attempt to illustrate the ineffability of his parents' deaths. Stein and Eggers evoke a humorous and ironic authorial voice as a means of dispensing their greater objective, which is to dismiss the conventional design of autobiography and transmit that same concept to the reader. *A Heartbreaking Work* follows in the footsteps of *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* by blurring the standards of narrative voice, the relationship between the reader and the author, and the socio-political framework of his time. By using rhetorical devices usually reserved for fictional texts to render his nonfictional autobiographical, Eggers, like Stein, challenges the logocentric ideal of accurately and completely representing experience in a nonfiction text.

Since a book's title offers its first indication of what the book's context will be, Stein plays with the conventions of her title and uses irony in order to challenge the authorial role in autobiographical writing. Stein's *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* presents Toklas as the self, the subject, of the autobiography and the person who will be rendering her own life story. However, the author of the autobiography is Gertrude Stein—not Toklas, and thus, Stein's authorship distorts the meaning of the word autobiography in the title. "Since the concept of truth in autobiography is based on qualities such as unity, coherence, authenticity, and stability," Stein's *Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* challenges the norm by not identifying the true author (Linzie 28). Right from the beginning, Stein invites the reader to contemplate the impossibility of the

authorial figure being able to render a supreme truth, so the title "call[s] upon the expectations for truth that adhere to the genre" as it is called *The Autobiography* (28). However, because the author is obviously not Toklas herself, it "is to be seen as a challenge, a paradox, and an ironic comment on the engagements of autobiography" (28). Through her title, Stein indicates that the authorial lens of the work determines the outcome, for there is not one united, identifiable, truth that can be presented in any text. The author is the lens through which the reader views or perceives a text, so there can never be authenticity or most importantly, in the case of autobiography, objectivity. Whether it is Toklas, or Stein writing about Toklas, or Stein writing about Stein through Toklas, Stein's title demonstrates the problematic nature of the author's attempt to render an *authentic* truth in autobiography. In fact, towards the end of the autobiography, Stein suggests to Toklas a list of possible titles for her autobiography including: "*My Life With The Great, Wives of Geniuses I Have Sat With, My Twenty-five Years With With Gertrude Stein [sic]*" (Stein 271, 272). All of these comical titles point to Stein as the central figure or subject of (presumably) Toklas' autobiography, which further reveals that Stein's definition of autobiography in the title is a deviation or "mockery of her genre" (Merrill 11).

Eggers' title attempts to convey the tragic events of his parents' deaths and the comical absurdities he endured as an inexperienced young adult thrust into fatherhood, which results in a paradoxical title that pairs comedy with tragedy. Eggers' unusual title does not reveal what his memoir will be about; in fact, the memoir's title prepares to reader for a seemingly light, humorous read. *A Heartbreaking Work of Staggering Genius* "comes emulsioned with the kind of compliments and absurd little pronunciamientos" that

prepare the reader for an artificial glance into someone's life--not the subjects of death, disillusion, and disparity which Eggers writes about (Sansom 23). However, the title of *A Heartbreaking Work of Staggering Genius* does reveal aspects of Eggers' life that are highlighted within the text: the ironic subversions of the genre (the staggering genius), and the waning desperation of losing his parents and acquiring premature responsibility (a heartbreaking work). What at first seems like a merely comical title is a sincere attempt at conveying what the memoir is about, what it will challenge, and what the reader can expect. Unlike Stein's title, Eggers' title offers no surprises about what the autobiographical context will be about. Instead, Eggers' title distorts the reader's expectations of what the memoir will be about by "preparing the reader to put on a happy face" without revealing the tragic aspects of the memoir that will culminate with a serious "settling of accounts" (Sansom 23).

Although Stein does not have a preface for *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*, she fashions a satire of an introduction in her follow-up book, *Everybody's Autobiography* (1937); wherein, she acknowledges the very failure of language within autobiography and the failure of the genre itself to provide a vehicle for Meaning. In *Everybody's Autobiography*, Stein begins her preface by emphasizing the necessity of autobiographical texts, claiming that since "Alice B. Toklas did hers [autobiography] and now anybody will do theirs" (Stein 1). However, the definition of an autobiography for Stein differs from that of the traditional sense and consequently, serves to satirize the genre itself. When Stein writes that she will write everyone's autobiography, she satirizes the assumption that writing everyone's autobiography is an objective possibility. Stein mocks the conventional structure of autobiography that there can be an objective reality--

one that belongs to one narrator. Stein highlights that autobiography can have only subjective narrators, so any person assuming meaning and authenticity over someone else's life can write an alleged autobiographical narrative. The meaning of Stein's portrayal of everyone's autobiography is just as valuable as his or her own portrayal. Georgia Johnston, in her essay "Narratologies of Pleasure: Gertrude Stein's *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*," asserts that Stein "creates a new economy of reading by extending expected limits of text, identity, and narrativity" (590). Stein encourages the reader to become an active part of the experience, which consequently, varies the interpretation or meaning of the text. Therefore, Stein asserts there is no ultimate meaning to be had or derived in her text, and she does so while satirizing the very genre she is working within. Stein is the author of the autobiography, but writing everyone's autobiography, everyone's interpretation, everyone's subjective implies an understanding that a text's meaning will vary, subject to subject, lens to lens.

Like Stein, Eggers' copyright page reflects his rebellion against the very conventional structures that he feels have failed at providing a means for his truth-rendering. Before the memoir even begins, Eggers warns the audience that *A Heartbreaking Work* is not the traditional autobiographical text, satirizing the traditional preface and copyright pages of a book. Eggers modifies the standard copyright page, where all information must be serious and formulated to ensure that no infringement laws will be permitted. Eggers mocks the formalities by naming the book's height, weight, and eye color, personifying the book as a living entity that rates a three on the sexual-orientation scale. On the surface, these statements are merely humorous and utterly silly, but to satirize the copyright page, conveys a message to the reader: "The events described

herein actually happened, though on occasion the author has taken certain, very small, liberties with chronology” (Eggers copyright). With his ironic copyright page, Eggers’ fortifies his exploration of the “epistemological, methodological, and linguistic problem” of formulating a memoir under the auspices of gauging a certain truth, a definitive reality (Nunning 202). From the copyright to the last page of the book, the reader is provided with a satirical lens, that explores the traditional nonfiction assumptions of rendering truth and objectivity as suspect. Eggers presents his message early in the text to ensure that the reader is cognizant of his inability to write a definitive truth. In the copyright page, Eggers invites the reader to recognize *A Heartbreaking Work* as a metaautobiographical text that is based on his memories, interpretations, and characterizations, of his life, while it cannot be an exact truth rendering. Eggers conveys that he has not followed the conventions of nonfiction by affirming a True sequence of events in the order in which they occurred; furthermore, he states that “this is a work of fiction, only that the author could not remember the exact words said by certain people, and exact descriptions of certain things” (Eggers copyright). Ansgar Nunning in his essay “Fictional Metabiographies and Metaautobiographies: Towards a Definition, Typology and Analysis of Self-Reflexive Hybrid Metagenres,” states that *A Heartbreaking Work* like other “metaautobiographies” breaks form by “exploring, crossing, and undermining the border between fiction and (factual) biography” and thereby serves to “problematize the whole issue of representation” (Nunning 208). Eggers warns the reader about the inevitable failure of memory, language, and writing when illustrating a definable truth. Traditional means of conveying his life have failed to please Eggers. This failure of language is why Eggers attempts to portray his experiences by using unconventional,

fictional means in his autobiographical memoir, so he might get closer to rendering the experience onto the reader.

Stein's authorial voice in the introduction to *Everybody's Autobiography* rejects all formalities, generating an informal discourse within the text that reflects the same ideals expressed in *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* and reveals a subversion of the nonfictional genre the book resides within. Stein posits her feelings of authorial inconsequence into a discussion of friends and acquaintances rather than speaking of herself within her autobiography: "This is the way an autobiography has to be written which reminds me of Dashiell Hammett" (Stein 1). By talking about her friend's wooden umbrella, New York, and a photograph, Stein diverts the reader's attention from herself onto anything else around her. Undercutting of the typical authorial introduction is an extension of what Stein accomplishes in *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* by experimenting "with text, reader, and author" (Johnston 591). *Everybody's Autobiography* only further develops Stein's project of challenging the very notion of typological nonfiction. Stein's introduction warrants a sense of irony that readers can adopt as a part of their own lens and identify as a radically new perspective to experience an autobiography. Stein creates an autobiography that never speaks directly about herself, redefining the genre of autobiography and idea of what constitutes nonfiction.

By naming Toklas the author and narrator of the autobiography, Stein challenges the narration of conventional autobiography and detracts attention away from her authorial voice, so Stein is free to say whatever she wants about herself, her writing, and others because she speaks through a characterization, rather than her own accord. At first glance, Stein begins the text through conventional autobiographical means and does talk

about Toklas' life (who the autobiography is supposed to be about). In the first Chapter entitled "Before I came to Paris," Stein lists biographical stats about Toklas: where she was born, her mother and father's ethnic and social background, and a brief summary of her childhood. The biographical facts end right after the mentioning of Toklas's mother's death when Toklas notes how Stein has given "a very good description of me as I was at that time" (Stein 8). The first mentioning of Stein in the autobiography describes her as an author who is able to portray Toklas's life accurately, and the sentiment becomes more than an ironic statement since Stein is currently writing for Toklas. The humorous self-indulgent response Stein crafts, this "joke," may ultimately be "on the reader who believes that genre definitions control a writer and, therefore, that Toklas is really the author" (Johnston 595). However, it is also a ruse on the genre itself, which produces the definitions that Stein subverts, causing Stein to be an authorial comic; thus, Stein, through Toklas, utilizes humor to display the inability of autobiography to provide an accurate portrayal of a subjective reality. Instead, Stein utilizes Toklas as a literary tool, a rhetorical device, for it is Toklas who is doing Stein's bidding. Stein relegates Toklas as a ever-so clever narrator who divulges all of Stein's secrets, insecurities, and ultimately, does all of Stein's boasting for her. Toklas acts as a "ventriloquistic persona," the person through which Stein is speaking through (Bloom 83). By using Toklas' voice, Stein could reveal intimacies about herself without sounding self-absorbed or arrogant because it was Toklas, not Stein herself, who was dubbed Stein a genius (Stein 9). Through Toklas' narration, her autobiography, Stein could "*disarm* or *distract* the reader from the egotism inherent in conventional autobiography" (Bloom 83). Telling Stein's story through a character, through her lover Toklas, provides a way of writing a narrative that is aware of

the inability to be completely authentic in its rendering of a subjective truth. Stein still uses Toklas, as her narrator, because she wants to communicate Stein's life experiences to the reader without imposing some logocentric idea of subjective truth and authorship. Stein strives to find a means of communicating her story outside of traditional linear, autobiographical narrative; thus, she experiments with fictional techniques like characterization and narrative voice that help her write an autobiography that ventures outside the parameters of traditional autobiographical texts.

Similar to Stein's use of characterization, Eggers utilizes Toph as his mouthpiece for the sake of exploring Eggers' own emotions, further undercutting the genre of autobiography. Toph breaks character on more than one occasion in the memoir, revealing that his voice, thoughts, and actions are really Eggers' own feelings:

You know, to be honest, though, what I see is less a problem with form, all that garbage, and more a problem with conscience. You are completely paralyzed with guilt about relating all this in the first place, especially the stuff earlier on. You feel somehow obligated to do it, but you also know that Mom and Dad would *hate* it, would crucify you—[...] (Eggers 115)

As Stein uses Toklas as a tool to amplify her feelings, Eggers utilizes Toph to convey insecurities about raising his brother and about his parents' deaths; both subjects which, until now, Eggers has been "reduced to complaining about it. Or worse, doing little tricks, out of frustration" (Eggers 115). Eggers finds that the conventional means of autobiographical narrative (one where he would dictate to the reader directly how he feels about the most pivotal moments in his life) cannot accurately render how he is feeling. Instead, like Stein, Eggers employs the technique of characterization, which is usually reserved for fictional texts. As an attempt to render an authentic portrayal of his emotions, Eggers reveals, by proxy, his insecurities about his memoir.

Stein uses humor to highlight the seriousness of being a female artist amidst a all-male artists. Stein guards all her writing from the reader who has the potential of “contaminating it [the text] by projecting extrinsic assumptions about the author's identity upon it” (Curnett 300). In *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*, Stein fortifies the text by eliminating prefixed notions of sexual stereotypes and focusing, instead on Stein's individual accomplishments through Toklas' female perspective:

I may say that only three times in my life have I met a genius and each time a bell within me rang and I was not mistaken, and I may say in each case it was before there was any general recognition of the quality of genius in them. The three geniuses of whom I wish to speak are Gertrude Stein, Pablo Picasso and Alfred Whitehead (Stein 9).

Through Toklas, Stein calls herself a genius, but Stein's statement is more than a comically egotistical declaration. Stein is the only female genius on that list; she stands out from the rest of the list as a female author and as someone who is declaring her own genius. Stein pats herself on the back for her clever experimentation with writing, language, and authorship. Stein implies that indeed, *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* is a work of a genius—a subversion of the conventional autobiographies of her time. However, without the voice of another, without the voice of a female Toklas, Stein cannot moderate the egotism in such a statement. Stein needs Toklas' voice in order for her autobiography to be genius. Specifically, Stein needs the voice of a female, of her lover, to make her statement particularly evocative. Toklas places her female lover in the mix with two other male geniuses. Stein is up to par with the other two males, and the readers know, with a nod and a wink, that Stein put herself on that genius list. She changes the conventions of what constitutes as a genius artist: from all male, to anyone that has the talent to produce creative art like hers. Stein uses the humor to approach the

seriousness of being the only female artist amongst the rest of the male artists that are considered genius.

Stein also addresses the serious issue of socially marginalized women of the Twentieth century by juxtaposing it with humorous perceptions Toklas makes about the artists' wives. Other than Toklas, the rest of the women portrayed in the autobiography are stereotypically flat, one-dimensional wives of geniuses who do not have an identity for themselves outside of their partners. Toklas observes the wives of various artistic geniuses and cultivates the minimal role they play within artistic society; for example, Toklas notes the artificial role of Picasso's wife Ferdinand plays as she only has "two subjects hats and perfume" (Stein 19). Stein's representation of life through Toklas "permit[s] her [Stein] to treat herself and her milieu with considerable humor" (Bloom 89). It is the humorousness that emphasizes the seriousness of the condition to which the women in the artistic circle are usually inconsequential and treat themselves as such. Through Toklas's observations, Stein illustrates the absurdly nominal position women adopt within society, for Ferdinand serves as the typical female socialite who purports that the only validation derived from life must come from men because "if a hat did not provoke some witticism from a man on the street the hat was not a success" (Stein 19). Ferdinand becomes as dispensable and accessorial as her hats. Ferdinand's sense of selfhood derives from male authentication, and although Toklas' statements about Ferdinand are humorous, they seriously illustrate how superficial and inconsequential the women were perceived within these artistic circles.

Like Stein, Eggers avoids directly addressing any serious topic; instead, he uses humor as a means of understanding the seriousness of any given situation. When Eggers

first introduces himself in the narrative, he is helping his sick mother, and instead of describing her stomach cancer in a typically tragic, melancholic manner, he uses a humorous reference to the movie *Alien* (1979) to describe her disease:

They took my mother's stomach out about six month's ago. At that point, there wasn't a lot left to remove—they had already taken out [I would use a medical terms here if I knew them] the rest of it about a year before. Then they tied the [something] to the [something], hoped they had removed the offending portion, and set her on a schedule of chemotherapy. But of course, they didn't get it all. They had left some it and it had come back, it had laid eggs, was stowed away, was stuck to the side of a spaceship (Eggers 3, 4).

By omitting the medical terms and replacing them with the word 'something,' Eggers mocks his own lack of medical knowledge, thereby deflecting attention from the seriousness of the situation. Moreover, Eggers' humorous tone and allusion to a popular movie emphasizes his inability to describe in seriousness the news of his mother's cancer. Eggers utilizes an analogy which portrays cancer as an alien force violating his mother's stomach by laying 'eggs' that are 'stuck to the side of a spaceship'—highlighting the absurdity of the situation and his inability to deal with death and failure to render the as is. Since Eggers knows he cannot explain his emotions and convey them accurately to the reader in a traditional manner, he portrays his mom's cancer as comic and tragic event simultaneously, expecting that the paradoxical pairing of irony and seriousness will lead to a better explanation of the events. Eggers uses the allusion of the movie *Alien* because it is a movie people know, a reference they can understand even though they may not understand cancer. Eggers tries to connect his experiences with anything the reader can recognize, hoping that his emotions, his life can be rendered.

According to Roy Pascual, the reader is encouraged to “trust the author” only if “he/she seems to be trustworthy” which if true, would seem to discourage some readers from believing the sardonic Eggers who uses 'little tricks' all throughout the memoir, yet if read carefully, Eggers encourages readers to perceive his humor as a coping mechanism, rather than a gimmick (Pascual as qtd. in Anderson 3). Pascual never reconciles how the reader goes about distinguishing a trustworthy author from an untrustworthy one; therefore, the reader can approach an autobiographical text with a variety of expectations that subjectively test the veracity of an author's experience. It is Eggers' mocking narrative voice that either engenders readers to read the text as genuine or to dismiss it as a fiction. Eggers' humor often categorizes his memoir as a gimmick, an artifice rather than a genuine portrayal of events. When Eggers' very unstable friend, John, breaks out of character a second time, Eggers explores his own authenticity as an author and person:

I mean, how much do you really care about me, outside of some kind of cautionary tale, a stand-in for someone else, for your dad, for these people who disappointed you---[...] I'm not this. I can't be reduced to this (Eggers 423).

John becomes the amalgamation of Eggers' father and friends who have disappointed him, but does John's inauthenticity as a 'real' person really matter to Eggers' authorial credibility? Eggers exposes the functions of his characters; consequently, the character of John reveals aspects of Eggers that are genuine and "sett[le] accounts" (Sansom 23). Eggers' 'little tricks' express a self-interrogation of his motives and trustworthiness as a person and author. Eggers has John break character, expressing the author's self-conscious concerns with his use of unconventional narrative techniques. When John asks

not to be 'reduced to this,' Eggers explores what affect he might be having by characterizing real people and events in his memoir. Eggers blurs the line between reality and fiction, so the reader is likely to also question his motives and authenticity. Eggers' relentless self-referentiality, tries to prove that "the success of a memoir—any book really—has a lot to do with how appealing the narrator is" (Eggers preface)--not necessarily, as Pascual states, how *trustworthy* the narrator may appear.

Stein and Eggers may not be trustworthy authors because they create non-traditional autobiographies that use fictional rhetorical devices, but they do so in order to convey a depiction of their issues and lives that traditional autobiography cannot satisfy. Because she cannot find that conventional autobiography is able to accurately portraying her life or the subjects that mattered, Stein uses fictional narrative techniques, like changing who narrates an autobiography, as a means to illustrate important issues like the marginalization of women. After the influence of such *avant-garde* writing like Stein's *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*, Eggers' memoir *A Heartbreaking Work of Staggering Genius* employs "complex structures, intertextual networks, and metabiographical self-conscious" throughout his memoir (Nunning 196) in order to express an experience that he cannot convey within conventional autobiography: the tragic experience of losing both parents and having to raise his younger brother. For Stein, and Eggers who followed after, it is necessary to venture outside of the traditional genre and find a manner of conveying experiences, so these authors employ fictional rhetorical devices in non-fictional work as an attempt at finding a more accurate portrayal of their lives.

IV. Internal Conflict Versus Traditional Plot: How William S. Burroughs' *Junky* and Dave Eggers' *A Heartbreaking Work of Staggering Genius* Try to Render Their Unimaginable Experiences

Provoking feelings of impending doom in American culture, the dropping of the atomic bomb, the Cold War, and subsequent anti-Communist sentiments influenced American literature, music, and art of 1940's and 1950's (Charters xvi). After both World Wars, writers were inspired by the political and social repercussions of the destructive, chaotic, and desperate state of those involved with the wars and affected by their damage. Moreover, writers began to mimic the loss and aimlessness of such destruction and desperation. In New York, writers like Jack Kerouac, Alan Ginsberg, and William S. Burroughs were creating a writing movement that began to define part of the 1950's 'Lost Generation' when they began to using words randomly to express inner emotions. The new way of expression became integrated to what came to be known as the 'Beat Movement'. According to Kerouac, the word beat "possessed deeper allusive qualities and meant something mysterious and spiritual" (Kerouac qtd. in Charters xviii). The Beats experimented with rhyme, syntax, sentence structure, questioning exactly what constitutes poetry or prose. They searched to render the 'deeper allusive qualities' of a lost generation that knew what destruction of the H-bomb could cause and feared their own life might disappear so senselessly.

Burroughs is grouped in the same category as Jack Kerouac and Alan Ginsberg; he is perceived a confessional Beat. However similarly confessional, raw, and imaginative Burroughs' later works are to the works of the Beats, like his most famous novel *Naked Lunch* (1959), Burroughs' first novel *Junky: The definitive text of 'Junk'*

(1953) is hard to define as a strictly a Beat venture, or even strictly as a novel. Unlike other Beat novels, *Junky* exhibited “nothing of Kerouac’s flighty vagabond romanticism” (Campbell 125). *Junky* combines arguably real stories of drug use and abuse with fictional characters, places, and events. The main character and narrator in *Junky* is named after Burroughs’ mother’s maiden name, and when the book was originally published, it served as a “pseudonym” chosen to conceal his real life drug abuse (Harris xxii). It is hard not to wonder what aspects of *Junky* are autobiographical and which are fictional. Alan Ginsberg states in the 1952 introduction to *Junky*, “its title is *Junk*, and its subject is drugs and the drug world; it is not in any case a complete autobiography, though many personal details relating to the main subject have been included” (148). Burroughs portrays the seedy underbelly of New York City where junkies are both alienated and forgotten by most of society. The narrator, William Lee, goes from bored, middle-class citizen to a desperate junkie. Burroughs depicts Lee’s spiral into the realm of junk: from his first hit to the desperate search for a cap of junk to his quest for rehabilitation.

Eggers also dodges traditional categories by writing a memoir that is confessional, but only through unconventional fictional means. Eggers’ *A Heartbreaking Work* is an autobiographical memoir about Eggers’ parents’ deaths, and although it exhibits the same rhetorical techniques and even some fictitious exaggeration as a novel would, it is still based on actual events contrary to Burroughs’ *Junky* which is supposed to be a novel and has autobiographical elements. Striving to portray a story that conventional, linear autobiography has failed to render, Burroughs and Eggers must render their seemingly unimaginable experiences in an imaginable manner. Therefore, Burroughs and Eggers

present with seemingly plotless narratives focusing on internal conflicts in an effort to articulate their unique, individual experiences. In the same way Burroughs, through Lee, utilizes internal dialogue and characterization to depict the junky underworld and expose the thoughts of a junky, Eggers uses the same rhetorical devices in his memoir to illustrate the struggle of losing both parents, raising his brother, and coming to terms with young adulthood.

By making New York and New Orleans actual and metaphorical destinations for Lee, Burroughs comes close to rendering an accurate picture of the life of a drug addict, of whom most Americans in the 1950s had no real conception. By using these destinations as metaphors, Burroughs emphasizes how the typical plot-filled novel or linear autobiographical text cannot provide the complete picture of the junky lifestyle he desires to illustrate. In order to give the audience an idea of how the drug world functions in relation with the junkies, Burroughs, through Lee, characterizes the seedy underbelly of New York where crime is the only means of a score. Lee describes “working the hole” in the New York subway:

We [Lee’s friend, Roy, and Lee] would ride along, each looking out one side of the subway car until we spotted a ‘flop’ sleeping on a bench. Then we would get off the train. I stood in front of the train with a newspaper and covered Roy while we went through the lush’s pockets (Burroughs 28).

The whole chapter is centered on the stealing some money from these luses and flops on the subway. The subway becomes the focal point of scoring, nothing more, nothing less; only the junkies and the location, in this case the New York subway, where they can score more junk, more drugs, truly matter in the novel. Burroughs fixates on the one-track mind of a junky, rendering what it is like for a junkie in everyday life so that “junk

territory is the modern city as Waste Land—the ruins of civilization ruined by its subhuman products” (Skerl 26). When Lee arrives in New Orleans, he describes the city as a “stratified series of ruins” which parallels the physical and emotional state of an addict and of the novel as a whole (57). Lee goes on to depict the people in the city as they “wander around, unrelated, purposeless, most of them looking vaguely sullen and hostile” (57). New Orleans is a characterization of the junkies themselves. In Burroughs’ portrayal, New Orleans, like New York, is a city of ruin, aimlessness, and desertion, mimicking the junky lifestyle.

By also portraying cities as representations of emotions that he cannot render completely in traditional autobiography, Eggers illustrates his escape from the cold, snowy suburb of Lake Forest and his journey to the refuge of sunny San Francisco, and it is through this characterization, this metaphorical move from cold to warm, from death to life, that Eggers conveys his internal struggle with his parents death. Like Burroughs, Eggers attempts to render his life experiences by characterizing the two cities he lives in, the Chicago suburb of Lake Forest, and the city of San Francisco. In Lake Forest, Eggers is bogged down by the memories of his parents when they were alive. Life in Lake Forest was often bleak for Eggers as it is reflected in the manner he describes and characterizes the dismal, gloomy family room where his family spent most of their time:

The ceiling in one room of the living room is stained in the concentric circles of yellow and brown, a souvenir from the heavy rains the spring before. The door to the foyer hangs by one of its three hinges. The carpet, off-white wall-to-wall, is worn to its core and has not been vacuumed in months. [...] The family room is usually dark (Eggers 8).

Eggers characterizes his family room as dark and worn, symbolizing the dark side of his family life, which includes his father’s alcoholism. When Eggers’ parents die, he

flees not only Lake Forest but also the family room, the darkness, the memories of the tragic deaths, and then he attempts to start anew with Toph. When driving to San Francisco from Lake Forest, Eggers feels like Toph and he have been “chosen, and have been given this, it being owed to us, earned by us, all of this—the sky is blue for us, the sun makes passing cars twinkle like toys for us, the ocean undulates and churns for us, murmurs, and cools for us” (Eggers 51). There is an apparent change in Eggers’ tone when he goes from speaking about memories in Lake Forest to describing San Francisco. Sunny, blue San Francisco becomes a romantic escape for Eggers and Toph, a gift that is owed to Eggers and his brother for enduring tragedy: “We are owed, see, this is ours, see. We are California [...] and the sky is bigger here than we have ever seen—it goes on forever, is visible from every other hilltop—hilltops!” (51).

Not only do both authors characterize places, but they also create characters who symbolize the experiences they are attempting to render. In order to depict the real world of drug abuse that most of his 1950’s audience had no idea about, Burroughs concocts fictional caricatures who embody the grittiness and despair of the junky underworld. Burroughs creates a world of junk, a world of cynicism, despair, and ugliness that is inescapable. The junkies Burroughs creates are junk; they are the excess of earth. Not many people outside of the circle of druggies know or care of the junkies’ existence; however, through Burroughs’ fictionalization, these misfits become characters, and their stories can be explored. By creating characters that *are* their addictions, Burroughs articulates the devastation of drug abuse to the outside world even more so, as these characters stop being three-dimensional and start living only for their drugs. Minor characters like Subway Slim, who is described as “tall and bony, and his ugly face had a

curiously inanimate look, as if made out of wood,” (10) and Joe the Mex, who had “ a thin face with long, sharp, twitchy nose, and a down-curving, toothless mouth,” (25) begin to embody the world they live in: sad, ugly, deformed. Burroughs’ characters are overcome by the addiction, so they become a “a distort[ion] and simplify[cation] of both mind and body [...] that fixes [their] limited identity” (Skerl 23). The fictional characters that Burroughs creates embody the characteristics of the underworld he is attempting to render. An audience that might never actually encounter junkies is thrust into the world of addiction, thievery, and desperation. Burroughs finds that only through characterizing the addicts in his narrative, rather than establishing straight autobiographical account he can better render “a true picture, given for the first time in America, of the vast underground life which has been so publicized” (Ginsberg 348).

Within traditional memoir, Eggers would have to tell the reader how he feels about his parents’ deaths, but instead, like Burroughs who uses characters to portray the junky world, Eggers displays his feelings through illustrating his experiences coping with the near-death of his friend Shalini, who was gravely injured in a freak accident. When Shalini is injured, Eggers is forced to deal with death, the very subject that drives him out of Illinois. Eggers describes his solemn hospital visit when he goes to see Shalini: “We are to stay. And we are not to ask questions of the parents. If we are to ask questions, we are to ask a cousin or a friend. We are not to smile, not to laugh, at anything, unless the family smiles or laughs first” (Eggers 329). Because of Shalini’s accident, Eggers is forced to grieve although he keeps attempting to avoid his feelings of woe.

Just as Eggers avoided dealing with the loss of his father by having sex with his girlfriend the day of his father’s funeral, Eggers also tries to have sex with Marny when

Shalini is in the hospital. Eggers seeks to have sex with Marny to avoid feeling any intense emotion of bereavement, and even states, “Sex is the right thing” (Eggers 343). Moreover, Eggers admits that he wishes to have sex with Marny because they both “have not been killed and have not fallen from a bridge or balcony or rickety deck” (343). The character of Shalini thus becomes a reminder of the inescapability of death, and sex becomes a means of escaping that reminder of death. However, when Marny rejects his sexual advances, Eggers must face the possibility of death. Shalini’s accident, her stay at the hospital, and his reaction towards the whole tragic situation reminds him of death, and he once again defers a genuine reaction. Through the characterization of Shalini and her tragic accident, Eggers reflects his past reaction at his father’s demise, further revealing Eggers’ failure to render his emotions about his parents’ deaths.

While trying to portray the world of drugs and despair, Burroughs’ character Lee maintains an unaffected narrative voice in order to focus on the internal conflicts of a junky, rather than develop an action-filled plot. Through Lee, Burroughs divulges elements of socially unacceptable and for most, unimaginable, junky world. Lee observes the effects of drugs casually, never looking for an ultimate meaning in what he is doing. When Lee feels the first hit of morphine take control over him, he describes the high dispassionately:

Morphine hits the backs of the legs first, then the back of the neck, a spreading wave of relaxation slackening the muscles away from the bones so that you seem to float without outlines, like lying in warm salt water. As this relaxing wave spread through my tissues, I experienced a strong feeling of fear. I had a feeling that some horrible image was just beyond the field of vision, moving, as I turned my head, so that I never quite saw it. I felt nauseous; I lay down and closed my eyes. A series of pictures passed like a watching movie: A huge, neon-lighted cocktail bar that got larger and larger until street repairs were included in it; a waitress carrying

a skull on a tray; stars in a clear sky. The physical impact of the fear of death; the shutting off of breath; the stopping of blood (Burroughs 6).

Even when Lee sees images: death, a waitress carrying a skull, a cocktail bar, he shows no emotions towards what he experiences. Burroughs wants to render a complete observation of the junky experience and nothing more, for everything available before about drugs has been “romanticized and hyped up or distorted for mass commercial purposes” (Ginsberg 149). *Junky* subverts the genre of the novel by having no plot because everything occurs within the confines of Lee’s observations. Burroughs desires to focus on the psyche of the addict and the characteristics of addiction; he has no intention of wanting to develop a plot. A plot would be irrelevant because what is important to Burroughs is developing an accurate rendering that “us[es] the known facts as a starting point in an attempt to reach facts that are unknown” (Burroughs 143). By having Lee observe only what is unknown to the public (i.e. the seediness of the junky neighborhoods, the junky vernacular, the feel of the high, and the desperation of withdrawals), Burroughs portrays a genuine portrait of a junky’s life that is neither an autobiography nor a novel—a narrative that is free from traditional plot.

Like Burroughs, Eggers’ memoir appears plotless because it reflects Eggers’ interior instead of focusing on any outer conflict. A key moment of the memoir occurs when he fakes a *Real World* interview, attempting to provide the reader with the real emotional sense of his unreal situation. *The Real World* is an MTV reality TV show about seven strangers who are chosen to live in a house and have their everyday lives taped. It is only through the artifice of *The Real World*, a produced television program and through his mock interview that Eggers reveals his emotions. Similar to *Junky*, *A*

Heartbreaking Work focuses on the notion that the important ideas to render are those which are unknown to the reader and his or her experience. Eggers fakes the interview to expose tidbits about his youth, his family, and himself—anecdotes he finds important to the rendering to his life: “Well, the point of the stuff about Lake Forest should be fairly obvious. It grounds us in a certain world, a world that will be familiar to many people. . .” (Eggers 197). Since the reader already knows what has occurred in Eggers’ life (the death of his parents, raising Toph, moving to San Francisco, etc.), it is only when Eggers divulges these childhood stories that he can finally portray “the latent and richest material of his life” (Larson 93). Because Eggers’ major conflict and hardest struggle is dealing with his parents’ death, Eggers’ *A Heartbreaking Work* focuses on a portrayal of his internal conflict, his interior, rather than an illustration of external conflict: a timeline events.

Through challenging the notions of real and fake in his *Real World* interview, Eggers conveys his concerns for his memoir’s inability to accurately render his experiences. Ironically, in the *Real World* interview where everything is staged, manufactured, and produced, Eggers starts informing the interviewer that “these things, details, stories, whatever, are like the skin shed by snakes, who leave theirs for anyone to see” (Eggers 215). Like a snake slowly shedding its skin for all to see, Eggers slowly begins disclosing the ‘real,’ and his ‘real’ confessional begins with the fake interview. Eggers’ interview states how he feels about his father’s alcoholism, his mother’s death, and his raising of Toph. Eggers starts reveling in his own confessional:

We feel that to reveal embarrassing or private things, like, say, masturbatory habits (for me, about once a day, usually in the shower), we have given someone something, that like a primitive person fearing the

photographer will steal his soul, we identify our secrets, our past and their blotches, with our identity, that revealing our habits or losses or deeds somehow makes us one less of oneself. But it's just the opposite, more is more—more bleeding, more giving (Eggers 215).

For the first time, the reader can see the memoir become “the irrepressible kind in which you begin to utter truths, truths that have been growing weedlike” (Larson 93). Eggers admits before the interview that the reason a show like *The Real World*, that is so staged, produced, and shaped is so accepted and watched as authentic is because “watching the show is like listening to one's own voice on a tape: it's real of course, but however mellifluous and articulate you hear your own words, once they're sent through this machine, their high-pitched, nasal, horrifying” (Eggers 167). *The Real World* is real because it can reproduce and record the actions of those on the show which mirrors the act of a memoir. The memoir attempts to represent Eggers' life because its objective is to capture authenticity and reality.

However, once Eggers views the memoir it becomes like watching one's self on TV, and the end product seems ‘high-pitched, nasal, horrifying’—an unrecognizable version of himself. Eggers wants to be able to perceive himself accurately, but like *The Real World*, his memoir is only able to reproduce clips that are small fragments of who he is. By juxtaposing the ideas of real and fake, Eggers' interview stresses the notion that “to come across as ‘real’ to readers, one's potentially true story must be understood—and dramatized—as one's potentially faked story” (Larson 94). For instance, he tells the interviewer:

So, I can be the average white suburban person, Midwestern, knowing of worlds both wealthy and central Illinoisan, whose looks are not intimidating, who's self-effacing but principled, and—and this is the big

part—one whose tragic recent past touches everyone’s heart, whose struggles become universal and inspiring (Eggers 205).

Eggers categorizes himself in an ironic manner in order to be appealing to a potential *Real World* audience, but he is simultaneously revealing how he truly perceives himself. In satirizing the ‘realness’ of the *Real World*, Eggers efforts a rendering of his actually self—one that can be ‘universal and inspiring.’ By juxtaposing the ideas of real and fake, Eggers manufactures a *Real World* interview in order to convey his real concerns about conveying authenticity and reality in his memoir, for he does want a portrayal that matches his own self-perception.

Eggers even ironically refers to himself as the perfect candidate for “the tragic person” (Eggers 204) on the show which further reveals how he perceives himself. While revealing how he embodies a tragic figure, Eggers also ironically diminishes the perception of himself as a tragic person. As Eggers goes on to explain to the interviewer, the reason he confesses to so many emotions is to expose his story because “by sharing this [his story] I will dilute it [the suffering]” (210). By stereotyping himself as the tragic guy, Eggers actually conveys how he feels about his life and himself. Eggers is both serious and ironic about his stereotype, and irony serves as a mechanism to portray the purpose of the mock interview. Eggers wants to reach everyone when he reveals his life story via the lattice. He defines the lattice as, “everyone else, the lattice is my people, collective youth, people like me, hearts ripe, brains aglow. The lattice is everyone I have ever known, mostly those my age or thereabouts—I know little else [. . .]” (Eggers 211). The lattice groups people together, and Eggers wants to be connected to his audience, to his lattice in order to convey his emotions. Therefore, the only element Eggers can render

to the reader becomes his internal outpouring of emotions, his interview, and his confessional that he reveals in order to alleviate the pain and suffering of the tragic events. After he has disclosed all of the stories about having sex at his dad's funeral, watching his mother dying of cancer, cooking meals for Toph, and his friend's father's suicide, Eggers feels as though "in the end what have I given you? It seems like you know something, but you still don't know nothing. It tell you and it evaporates" (Eggers 214, 215). *The Real World* rejects Eggers, so he cannot be presented as the tragic guy and cannot let go his suffering. Therefore, Eggers finishes the interview without the prospect of being "heal[ed]" (237) and comically states, "Fuck it. Stupid show" (239), illustrating that the catharsis is incomplete and the show is irrelevant. At the same time, Eggers' sore loser response hides and reveals a real disappointment.

Although the *Real World* interview initiates Eggers' process of emotional exploration and expression, that process of exploration and the book itself climaxes when he returns to Lake Forest to recover his mother's ashes and spread them in Lake Michigan. When Eggers first arrives in his hometown, it is the dead of winter, and he forgets his coat, representing the sad, cold distance he feels for his childhood in Last Forest and foreshadows the alienation he feels from past family and friends: "Its only use [his lost coat] is as a forced and obvious metaphor, as foreshadowing" (Eggers 354). Eggers is welcomed by the bitter cold, and in the Chicago dry, harsh, desolate winter weather he must find his mother's ashes. Lake Forest embodies remnants, death, decay; it is "mothy and sad" (361). Eggers longs to cry, to feel something for his past, but instead he states, "I feel nothing" (361).

When Eggers finally locates his mother's ashes, the box becomes a haunting reminder of his inability to deal with her death thus far, so things only become worse when he tries, once again to ignore her ashes in his car. When Eggers picks up his mother's ashes he is dismayed and questions, "The box is my mother only smaller. The box is not my mother. Is this box my mother?" (382). Eggers still cannot come to terms with her death; thus, he disregards her remains in his car in order to not deal with her death. When he first sees his old friends Grant and Eric after he has the ashes in his possession, Eggers can only think of the ashes and of what others might think of his incomplete task: "I have not and will not tell Eric and Grant about the box, and, fearing that someone, perhaps one of them, might pass by in a car and see the box and know what it is and be horrified and think me a monster, I have covered it with a towel" (383). Eggers is ashamed of how he has reacted to his mother's ashes, and now, he cannot get the ashes out of his mind. No matter what Eggers does he feels estranged from the life he once knew and the friends that wouldn't understand his situation. Now, he can only think about the box as it sits under a seat in his rental car.

Eggers contacts his old friend Sarah Mulhern for the comfort, distraction, and sex, hoping frivolity will help him forget about the box, his past, and his somber experience, but unlike his previous attempts with Marny and sex with his ex-girlfriend at his father's funeral, Eggers' sexual experience with Marny further alienates him from Lake Forest and helps him remember, rather than forget, his parents. When Eggers reunites with Sarah, he feels as though it is meant to happen. Sarah's father is also deceased and "in the dark, the light through her large windows, the weak yellow light from the street lamp brings her father into her face" and then, Sarah begins "smoking like my [Eggers'] dead

father” (Eggers 389). Eggers cannot escape the memory of his father, even when he looks at the face of the woman he is about to have sex with. Whether Sarah’s father or his own, Eggers is consumed by death and can only think about the subject. In fact, Eggers cannot help but to think that Sarah’s nervousness is a result of somehow knowing about Eggers’ mother’s ashes: “Maybe *she*’s unsettled. She is. I know why. She knows I have my mother’s box in the rental car” (390). Every moment of sexual intimacy is shadowed with bereavement. Now, with the ashes in his possession, Eggers cannot focus on anything other than commemorating his mother’s death. Because of his lack of concentration, the act ends horribly and awkwardly with Sarah saying something like, “‘Well, now that you that you’ve gotten what you wanted. . .’ or was it: ‘Was that what you wanted?’ It was something like that” (393). Eggers longs for a connection to his old town and life that he has left behind, but the sexual encounter proves to be an empty venture. Eggers must confront his mother’s ashes, the remnants of her memory.

In the climactic scene where he throws his mother’s ashes in Lake Michigan, Eggers finally confronts his parents’ deaths, conveying a sincere moment of emotional release. Eggers feels that spreading the ashes “makes sense. This is the right thing,” but his overactive imagination leads him to ruin the moment as he makes comparisons between the tin and the Ark of the Covenant in *Indiana Jones: The Raiders of the Lost Ark* (1981) stating, “all the bad things happen to the men who tinkered with the Ark who disturbed its contents...” (Eggers 394). His overactive mind leads Eggers to overthink the whole process, so he feels as though he has ruined the moment. When Eggers throws the ashes into the lake, he feels pathetic, he feels like a “fucking, sick dickhead” (Eggers 401) because he cannot help but think of other things, anything, other than about just his

mother's death. However, it is the first time Eggers dedicated so many pages of his memoir to just talking about his mother. Eggers longs to give his mother a proper memorial, describing the moment as "how lame is this, how small, terrible" (399).

Even though Eggers fails to give his mother the ceremony he wishes he could give her, coming back to Lake Forest signals a return to his family, to his memories, to quite literally what remains of his past. Lake Forest contains Eggers' childhood and his tragic history, and it is only when he goes back to his hometown that he is able to address issues in the memoir he has not before. Eggers creates a funeral for his mother which allows him, for the first time, to confront his mother's passing. Eggers ends the climactic ashes scene wishing he could have given his mother more, and reclaiming, "Where are you motherfucking assholes?" (406). Eggers is angered by the lack of audience at her funeral, but his same angry outcry displays that he has finally, symbolically and literally, let go of his mother's remnants although others were not there to share the experience.

Like Burroughs, Eggers cannot find the accurate means of expression within the confines of traditional autobiography. Following in the footsteps of Burroughs, Eggers expresses himself through creating internal dialogue rather than outlining a plot. Burroughs desires to convey the world of a junky, one that most have no idea about. The only way to render a more realistic picture of the junky world is to illustrate the internal thoughts of an addict; thus, Burroughs creates a junky world where drugs and its characters and settings are the only focus. Because Eggers has the similarly difficult task of portraying a very abstract situation, his life as an adult orphan having to raise his younger brother, he also focuses on creating an internal world, a world inside his own mind. Eggers' thoughts and *non-sequiturs* display his attempt to representing his life, his

emotions, and most importantly, his experience with death. Both Burroughs and Eggers travel outside of conventional genre and form seemingly plotless narratives, for both authors desire a precise portrayal of their unique experiences that can only be explain through the expression of their characters and their own psyches.

V. Conclusion and Negation: How Eggers Employs Joycesque Stream of Consciousness in an Attempt to Render Meaning

Throughout all three chapters of the thesis, it is evident that Dave Eggers' memoir explores and attempts to portray his inner turmoil and struggle. By looking at Eggers through a post structuralist lens, I was able to convey how Eggers mocks the metaphysical traditional autobiography: one that assumes the author holds supreme power over the text. Eggers introduction displayed his ability to be both a memoir and a memoir able to talk about the inability to give the text a Meaning. When I compared Eggers' *A Heartbreaking Work* to Stein's *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*, I conveyed how he was able to employ some of the same rhetorical techniques as Stein. Eggers, like Stein, subverts the nonfiction genre using ironic titles, characterization, and humorous narration; all elements usually found in fictional texts. While Stein used these devices to mock the celebrity culture of the Modernist era and portray how women were being marginalized, Eggers utilized the same techniques as an attempt at portraying what it was like to lose both parents.

By comparing Eggers' *A Heartbreaking Work* to William Burroughs' *Junky*, I conveyed how both authors' texts plots revolved around internal conflicts, rather than traditional linear plot. Both authors attempt to portray events that few experience. Burroughs creates Lee, a semi-autobiographical character that only lives for junk and only responds to getting high, in order to render a close depiction of Fifties drug underground, but in the process focuses more on Lee's internal dialogue, making the novel seem virtually plot-less. Like Burroughs, Eggers crafts a memoir that focuses on confessing fears and insecurities rather than outlining any plot points. However, at the

end of his memoir, Eggers is not satisfied with the end result, and he longs to find better words that can render his experiences more accurately.

In the final three pages, Eggers employs the modernist technique of stream of consciousness wherein lies the only authentic rendering he can offer: a confessional of emotions that has no defined Truth. When Eggers concludes *A Heartbreaking Work* with a series of incomplete thoughts and repetitions that negate the possibility of ever accomplishing a complete depiction, he parallels the end of James Joyce's *Ulysses* (1934) where Molly Bloom's inner monologue affirms life and the possibilities of language obtaining an authentic meaning.

Joyce and Eggers explore their feelings using stream of consciousness. The term stream of consciousness was coined by psychologist William James in his book *Principles of Psychology* where he defined the conscious mind as “nothing jointed; it flows. A ‘river’ or a ‘stream’ by which it is most naturally described” (James qtd in Bailey 142). Thoughts flow out of a person's mind like a river flows through a valley—without restriction. If applied to writing, Joyce and Eggers must appear as though they leave their thoughts untouched by editing, while participating in the “conscious activity [stream of consciousness] that intervenes without break between one thought and the next” (Bailey 142). Therefore, when using stream of consciousness, both Joyce and Eggers attempt to convey the unbroken chain of thought of their narrators.

In *Ulysses*, Joyce applies the technique of stream of consciousness to reveal a half-asleep Molly Bloom's free flow of thoughts about her sexual endeavors. Joyce collides thoughts together without punctuation, illustrating the fumbling thoughts of a half-asleep woman remembering her love affairs:

[...] I lifted them a bit and touched his trousers outside the way I used to Gardner after with my ring hand to keep him from doing worse where it was too public I was dying to find out was he circumcised he was shaking like a jelly all over they want to do everything too quick take all the pleasure out of it and father waiting all the time for his dinner he told me to say I left my purse in the butchers and had to go back for it what a Deceiver then he wrote me a letter with all those words in it [...] (Joyce 746, 747).

Molly tells of her sexual adventures and of every little detail she remembers—even of the man wanting to ‘take all of the pleasure out of it.’ Her thoughts are flowing from one event to the next, never stopping to edit her thoughts. Joyce longs to portray her sexual desires ‘as is.’ As she Molly falls asleep, she cannot be fully conscious of her words, of the language she uses, nor of its structure. Thus, Joyce’s writing mimics Molly’s mind’s ramblings instead of following traditional rhetorical structure, causing for Joyce’s language to be described as having a certain “un-natural-ness” which “confronts readers and forces them into a certain relationship to the words” (Levine 106). Although it may be harder to read than traditional narrative, the stream of consciousness in Molly’s monologue conveys her sexuality and inner thoughts as they are ebbing and flowing in and out of her mind. Molly Bloom escapes consciousness and dreamingly recalls her lovers. Joyce longs for a different means of illustrating that moment, so he dives into Molly’s sleepy and sometimes incoherent, psyche. Because Joyce longs for the reader to experience the consciousness of his characters to his or her uttermost ability, Joyce employs stream of consciousness in hopes he will accurately convey Molly’s interconnecting ideas.

In the conclusion of *A Heartbreaking Work*, Eggers follows in Joyce’s footsteps and uses stream of consciousness to convey his impetus for writing a memoir. Although

Eggers' stream of conscious rant is not as long as Molly's dialogue, it also concludes the memoir and indicates very important statement about Eggers' purpose for writing. Eggers is at the beach with Toph when he starts wavering between the frisbee game at the beach and his consciousness, revealing some extreme emotions:

And it's coming down and the sky is all white with the sun and the frisbee is all white too but I can't see a thing, I can see that fucker I can make it out and I can run under it I know where that fucking thing is, I will run under and outrun that fucker [...] I am there. I was there. Don't you know that I am connected to you? Don't you know that I am trying to pump blood to you, that this is for you, that I hate you people, so many of you, motherfuckers—[...] (Eggers 436, 437).

Eggers fluctuates between being involved in his frisbee game and explaining his motives for writing. By using stream of consciousness, Eggers strives to render what he is feeling as an author. Egger desires to portray an authentic depiction of his life to his audience, for he offers the reader the sentiment that 'this [the memoir] is for you.' Wanting to get to a Truth, a Meaning, that can be rendered, Eggers employs stream of consciousness as a method of reaching the 'you,' the audience, the reader, he longs to connect to.

Through her dialogue Molly Bloom affirms the possibilities of life and ultimately, a Truth in language. Molly welcomes the memories of her lovers, relishing and delighting in each tryst: "[...] I shall wear red yes and he kissed me under the Moorish wall and I thought well as well him as another and then I asked him with my eyes to ask again yes [...]" (Joyce 783). The further Molly Bloom drifts asleep, the easier it becomes for her to surrender to passion; she becomes engulfed by yeses, by affirmations of what she could have, what has had, and what life promises her. Molly oozes sexuality but more than that, she declares 'yes,' determined that she has reached a destined Meaning, a Truth, that Molly has reached and acceptance of her own sexuality. Joyce utilizes Molly's sexual

acceptance to highlight the power of language itself. With each linguistic jolt of a ‘yes,’ Molly gets closer to Meaning until she finally arrives: [...] I yes to say yes my mountain flower and first I put my arms around him yes and drew him down to me so he could feel my breasts all perfume yes and his heart was going like mad and yes I said yes I will Yes” (Joyce 783). Although Molly never shares with reader what Meaning she finds, it is clear from her orgasmic confessional, she arrives at Meaning. Joyce affirms that there is a Meaning to grasp even though the rendering might not be complete. Through the lens of Molly’s stream of consciousness, Joyce takes the reader on a journey through her psyche, and within the confines of Molly’s mind, Joyce finds her Truth and Meaning—a variety of possibilities and positivity. Although the reader might not feel the same feelings as Molly, stream of consciousness allows for a small window into the mind of the character and into the possibility of a better rendering of the character’s mind. The novel’s last word ‘yes’ conveys the potential of a Meaning to be rendered: one that can be accessed through the mind and portrayed by implementing the rhetorical tactic stream of consciousness.

Although using the same approach of stream of consciousness, Eggers’ conclusion negates that there can ever be a supreme Truth rendering. As mentioned before, Eggers wants to be the lattice, the voice of his generation, but he gets frustrated because he cannot give a Truth to his audience. Instead, in an angry tirade, Eggers offers the readers the only thing he can—his memoir as just another text to be read—one without one authorial Meaning:

What the fuck does it take to show you motherfuckers, what does it fucking take what do you want how much do you want because I am willing and I’ll stand before you and I’ll raise my arms and give you my

chest and throat and wait, and I've been so old for so long, for you, for you, I want it fast and right through me [...] (Eggers 437)

Eggers as the subject and author of his memoir offers everything to his readers, and now, he must 'wait' for his readers to interpret his words. No matter how hard Eggers struggles to convey a Meaning, he cannot, so inevitably, his readers will re-read and interpret his words, his life, his meaning. Because the reader will never be able to understand what it is like to experience what the author has endured, Eggers can only leave the reader with the possibility of reinterpretation and the impossibility of absolute meaning. Contrary to Molly's stream of consciousness where she affirms a Meaning, Eggers yells in frustration stating, "Oh do it, do it, you motherfuckers, do it do it you fuckers, finally, finally, finally" (Eggers 437). Angrily referring to them as 'motherfuckers' and begging the readers to 'do it,' Eggers wants readers to interpret his memoir because he has already given all he can, exhausted every option, confessed every sentiment and cannot render anything more or achieve a definitive depiction of his life.

Eggers feels as though even with all the tactics he has applied, including the stream of consciousness, readers still do not know his struggle, his pain, his outlook, and they probably never will. Thus, he pleads for the readers to just do with his words what they can. Eggers concludes with a repetition of the word 'finally'—a word that ends, finishes, closes the possibility of conveying anymore. Thus, Eggers presents the reader with *A Heartbreaking Work* as the *closest* he can get to portray his life. The memoir is done, and unlike Molly Bloom's uplifting 'yes' that opens up to the possibility of her realizing a Meaning, Eggers' 'finally' negates the option of finding one rendering.

Although the memoir concludes with Eggers revealing his inner feelings of authorial disappointment, he also expresses some personal relief in the final scene when he portrays two separate endings for his outside persona and his inner narrator. After he returns from Lake Forest, Eggers concludes with a positive scene, displaying that everything on the outside is better, optimistic. Eggers plays frisbee in the sun and feels connected to Toph, to nature, and to life: “And of course people stop and watch us [Toph and Eggers], we’re so fucking good [. . .]We’re just good, so good— We throw it [the frisbee] high and far” (Eggers 434). The scene in the park indicates a resolve and calmness that has not been present in the memoir until this point. Eggers conveys that people perceive Toph and himself as wonderful frisbee players. More importantly, “people young and old, whole families, gather to ooh and ahh, thousands of people” seemingly no longer view Toph and Eggers as outcast orphans or weird misfits (434). Finally, to the outside world, Eggers has obtained closure.

However, Eggers as narrator, starts to feel unsatisfied with the memoir, feeling disconnected from his readers and from the memoir’s rendering, so he begins the stream of consciousness rant that reflects his inner conflict. Eggers believes his narration cannot convey any real moments in his life; furthermore, even his participation in moments like when he spreads his mother's ashes and when Shalini was in a coma, he considers inadequate. Thus, Eggers the narrator compares himself to a failed Christ figure—one who has given everything but cannot complete the redemption process:

I eat you to save you. I drink you to make you new. I gorge myself on all of you, and I stand dripping, with fists, with heaving shoulders—I will look stupid, I will crawl, drenched in blood and shit, I will— [. . .] There is nowhere I stop and you begin (Eggers 436).

Eggers attempts to relieve himself of grief, but the incomplete rendering of his story, his tragedy, remains his constant cross to bear. Eggers longs to be *the lattice*, making him connected to everyone who reads his story. He wants to write for his readers, “to pump his blood to [them]” (436). Although I do believe his sentiment is sincere, his final words reveal that he cannot let go of that grief in a way that satisfies him, nor can he express that grief in a way that fulfills him.

The frisbee scene, the last scene, is optimistic in that it gives the reader a sense that everything in the outside world is alright, but the scene simultaneously contrasts the previous sentiment by displaying how Eggers’ ultimate goal of being a connecting force, a Christ figure, a lattice cannot be achieved because he cannot render a full depiction of his life. Therefore, the memoir leaves the readers feeling that Eggers has only exposed a fragment of his innermost self, but he still does not and cannot find the ultimate means of expression. Eggers can never truly bear his cross, if you will, in a way that satisfies him. Instead, Eggers waits for the reader to ‘do it,’ to interpret his meaning, leaving the meaning of his life up to the readers. Hence, the last scene where Toph and he are happy playing frisbee coincides with his frustrations about not being able to express himself accurately. Concluding the memoir with these contradictory feelings leaves the reader with a sort of sad, unsatisfying, and somber conclusion: Eggers can never render the representation of his life that he wishes to portray but can only offer his incomplete, sacrificial text to the reader.

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