David Foster Wallace:

An Inventory of His Papers at the Harry Ransom Center

Descriptive Summary

Creator: Wallace, David Foster (1962-2008)

Title: David Foster Wallace Papers

Dates: 1971-2008

Extent: 46 document boxes, 8 oversize folders (19.32 linear feet), and 433

electronic files (947 MB)

Abstract: The David Foster Wallace Papers document all but one of Wallace's

major works, and many of his shorter works.

Call Number: Manuscript Collection MS-5155

Language: English

Access: Open for research. Researchers must create an online Research

Account and agree to the Materials Use Policy before using archival

materials. To request access to electronic files, please email

Reference.

Restrictions on

Use:

Certain restrictions apply to the use of electronic files. Researchers must agree to the Materials Use Policy for Electronic Files before

accessing them. Original computer disks and forensic disk images are

restricted. Copying electronic files, including screenshots and

printouts, is not permitted.

Administrative Information

Acquisition: Purchase, 2009 (09-11-011-P, 12-03-010-P, 12-10-005-P)

Processed by: Stephen Cooper, 2010; Jenn Shapland, 2012 Born digital materials

processed, arranged, and described by Chance Adams and Brenna

Edwards, 2015-2023.

Repository: Harry Ransom Center, The University of Texas at Austin

Biographical Sketch

David Foster Wallace was born February 21, 1962, in Ithaca, New York. His father, James Wallace, is a philosophy professor at the University of Illinois, and his mother, Sally Foster Wallace, is an instructor in English at Parkland College, a community college in Champaign, Illinois. Amy Wallace Havens, Wallace's younger sister, practices law in Tucson, Arizona. Wallace married artist Karen Green in 2004.

As an adolescent, Wallace played football and was a regionally ranked tennis player, but his interest in writing and language was influenced by his parents, who read *Ulysses* out loud to each other. His father read *Moby-Dick* to Wallace and his sister when they were only eight and six years old, and his mother would playfully pretend to have a coughing fit if one of the children made a usage error during supper conversation.

Wallace graduated *summa cum laude* from Amherst College in 1985 with a double major in Philosophy and English. His philosophy senior thesis dealt with semantics and modal logic concerning Aristotle's sea battle. His English senior thesis, around 700 pages and written in five months, turned into Wallace's first novel, *The Broom of the System* (1987), which attracted positive attention and comparisons to the work of Jorge Luis Borges and Thomas Pynchon. At Amherst, Wallace served for a time as managing editor of *Sabrina, The Humor Magazine of Amherst College*, and upon graduation he accepted a fellowship in the writing program at the University of Arizona, where he graduated with an M.F.A. in 1987. While a graduate student, Wallace met Bonnie Nadell, a literary agent in San Francisco, who read an excerpt of *The Broom of the System* that Wallace had submitted to her agency. Nadell took on Wallace as a client, establishing a professional and personal relationship that lasted the rest of his life.

Wallace followed *The Broom of the System* with the collection of short stories *Girl With Curious Hair* (1988), and he next published a nonfiction work with co-author Mark Costello titled *Signifying Rappers: Rap and Race in the Urban Present* (1990), which received a Pulitzer Prize nomination in 1991. *Infinite Jest* (1996), a massive 1,079 page novel, cemented his reputation as a formidable literary figure. His other major works include *A Supposedly Fun Thing I'll Never Do Again: Essays and Arguments* (1997), *Brief Interviews with Hideous Men* (1999), *Up, Simba!* (2000), *Everything and More: A Compact History of Infinity* (2003), *Oblivion* (2004), and *Consider the Lobster: And Other Essays* (2005). *Brief Interviews with Hideous Men* was adapted for film in 2009.

In addition to the shorter pieces in his collected works, Wallace authored dozens of stories, non-fiction articles, and book reviews for, among others, the *Amherst Review*, the *Atlantic Monthly*, *Harper's Magazine*, the *New Yorker*, the *New York Times*, the *Paris Review*, *Poetry in Review*, *Rolling Stone*, *Salon.com*, the *Village Voice*, the *Washington Post*, and numerous anthologies. He was the recipient of a Whiting Writers' Award in 1987; a Yaddo residency fellowship in 1987 and 1989; a John Traine Humor Prize in 1988 for "Little Expressionless Animals"; a National Endowment for the Arts fellowship in 1989; an Illinois Arts Council Award for Nonfiction in 1989 for "Fictional Futures and the Conspicuously Young"; a Quality Paperback Book Club's New Voices Award in Fiction in 1991 for *Girl with Curious Hair*; a National Magazine Award

finalist in 1995 for "Ticket to the Fair" and in 1997 for "David Lynch Keeps His Head"; a Lannan Foundation Award for Literature in 1996 and 2000; and a MacArthur Foundation fellowship in 1997-2002. He was named Outstanding University Researcher, Illinois State University, in 1998 and 1999.

Having suffered from anxiety attacks since his late teens, Wallace was diagnosed with clinical depression during his sophomore year at Amherst. He struggled with the condition for the rest of his life, and after a particularly rough period during which his usual medication was no longer effective, Wallace died by suicide on September 12, 2008, at his home in California. His final novel, *The Pale King*, which remained unfinished at the time of his death, was published in 2011 by Little, Brown and Company under the guidance of his long-time editor Michael Pietsch. Wallace worked at the Internal Revenue Service and took accounting classes in preparation for the novel, which focuses on the employees of an IRS office.

Sources:

Contemporary Authors Online, http://galenet.galegroup.com (accessed 6 September 2010).

Flood, Alison. "Unfinished Foster Wallace novel finds UK publisher." *The Guardian*. http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2009/may/07/david-foster-wallace-uk-publisher (accessed 15 December 2009).

Katovsky, Bill. "David Foster Wallace: A Profile." *McSweeney's*. http://www.mcsweeneys.net/2008/11/7katovsky.html (accessed 18 March 2010).

Lipsky, David. "The Lost Years & Last Days of David Foster Wallace." *Rolling Stone Magazine*, 30 October 2008.

Neyfakh, Leon. "Remembering David Foster Wallace: 'David Would Never Stop Caring' Says Lifelong Agent." *The New York Observer*,

http://www.observer.com/2008/arts-culture/david-foster-wallaces-agent (accessed 18 March 2010).

Scope and Contents

The David Foster Wallace Papers document all but one of Wallace's major works and many of his shorter works. The major works represented are: *Brief Interviews with Hideous Men* (1999); *The Broom of the System* (1987); *Consider the Lobster, And Other Essays* (2005); *Everything and More: A Compact History of Infinity* (2003); *Girl with Curious Hair* (1989); *Infinite Jest* (1996); *Oblivion: Stories* (2004); *The Pale King* (2011); and *A Supposedly Fun Thing I'll Never Do Again: Essays and Arguments* (1997). *McCain's Promise: Aboard the Straight Talk Express* (2008) is documented with two previously published short versions titled "The Weasel, Twelve Monkeys, and the

Shrub," and "Up, Simba." *Signifying Rappers: Rap and Race in the Urban Present* (1990), coauthored by Wallace and Mark Costello, is Wallace's only major work without representation. See the Index of Works for a complete listing of all titles in the papers.

The papers are organized into four series: I. Works, 1984-2006, undated; II. Personal and Career-related, 1971-2008, undated; III. Copies of Works by Don DeLillo, undated; and IV. 2012 Additional *Pale King* Materials (1990-2007, undated). Series I. has been subdivided into two subseries: A. Novels and Collections, 1987-2006, undated and B. Short Works, 1984-2006, undated. All of the materials are in English.

Series I. makes up the bulk of the collection and includes handwritten notes and drafts, notebooks, interview notes, research materials, typescript drafts, proofs, and promotional materials. Some works are represented by as little as a single uncorrected typescript, but other works, such as *Everything and More*, provide comprehensive documentation of Wallace's full creative process with research materials, notebooks, handwritten drafts, original and revised typescript drafts, annotated and corrected 1st, 2nd, and 3rd pass copyedited drafts, and related correspondence. The majority of the typewritten drafts contain significant annotations and corrections by Wallace, often in different color inks for subsequent passes through a particular draft. Also present are Wallace's many comments, frequently humorous and often written on sticky notes attached to the transcripts, written to the people involved in the various stages of editing.

Series II. contains personal and professional records including teaching materials, childhood schoolwork, and college awards, essays, and exams. Also present are some personal journal pages, research materials such as handwritten entomology notes, and an "evidence" notebook containing freewriting, descriptive phrases, figures of speech, and story ideas.

Series III. consists solely of photocopy typescripts of three works by Don DeLillo, one of which, *Underworld*, contains extensive handwritten annotations by Wallace.

Series IV. includes materials related to *The Pale King*. The series comprises handwritten and typescript drafts, outlines, and characters lists; research print outs and visual aids; and a set of notebooks that contain reading notes, names, snippets of dialogue, definitions, quotations, and clippings. Manuscript materials have been organized according to batch and log numbers taken from a spreadsheet provided by Wallace's editor Michael Pietsch. These numbers are indicated on the folders and correspond to the spreadsheet page(s) included in each corresponding folder. A copy of the full spreadsheet is available in the front of Box 1. Where possible, the finding aid indicates the source location for each manuscript batch (e.g. "from his desk" or from a particular disk).

A relatively small amount of correspondence is in the papers, and what is present is almost entirely work-related between Wallace and his editors, fact-checkers, etc. All incoming letters are listed in an Index of Correspondents. The majority of Wallace's papers are in excellent condition, with only a few items requiring preservation restrictions, photocopying, and/or special housings.

Related Material

Additional Wallace materials are located at the Ransom Center in the David Foster Wallace Collection, the Bonnie Nadell Collection of David Foster Wallace, the Steven Moore Collection of David Foster Wallace, the Don DeLillo Papers, and the James Linville *Paris Review* Collection.

Separated Material

320 books arrived at the Ransom Center with the David Foster Wallace Papers, all a part of Wallace's personal library gathered from his home. These volumes are housed in the Ransom Center Library and are listed in the University of Texas <u>Library Catalog</u>. 11 books in the collection are restricted from access at the request of the estate.

One author-marked copy of *Infinite Jest*, the contents of thirteen folders, several author-marked pages of typescripts from additional folders, and one notebook with loose sheets have been removed from the papers and housed separately due to preservation restrictions. Photocopy or digital scan printouts of the separated materials are available in their place. The original materials may be viewed only with curatorial approval.

Index Terms

Subjects

American literature -- 20th century

Authors, American -- 20th century

DeLillo, Don

Modernism (Literature) -- United States

Document Types

Galley proofs

Electronic documents.

Juvenilia

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"Borges: A Life" book review (The New York Times Book Review, 2004)

"Deciderization 2007 – A Special Report," *The Best American Essays* 2007 introduction. 1 electronic file: Microsoft Word, April 2007 Disk-ID-No. 1203010P_003

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Manuscript Collection MS-5155

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Series II. Personal and Career-Related, 1971-2008, undated

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