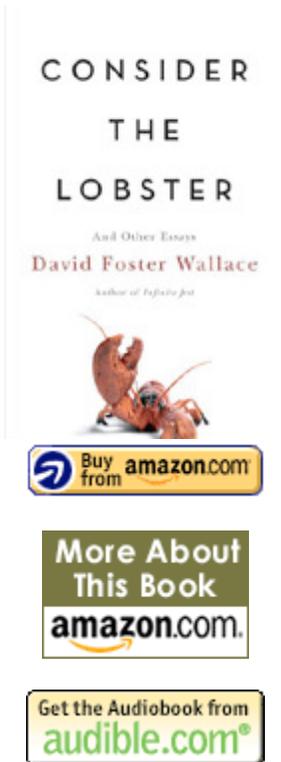


Review



CONSIDER THE LOBSTER: And Other Essays

David Foster Wallace
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Essays
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David Foster Wallace's latest offering is a smorgasbord of expository essays on seemingly randomly tied-together subject matters with little or no connection, aside from the fact that Wallace wrote them, either for previous publication elsewhere (*Rolling Stone*, *Gourmet*) or for possible publication in a future collection such as this one. The essays vary in both length and strength, and while some sections exemplify Wallace's signature razor-sharp intellect and knack for digging down deep in order to answer probing philosophical questions, others just seem to ramble on to the point of tedium. There is a point at which even the best of writers are in need of editing, and in many of these essays a bit more slashing, cutting and honing in on the point might have proven beneficial. Nonetheless, CONSIDER THE LOBSTER showcases Wallace's talent for weighing facts with opinions and reporting it like he sees it, giving readers cause to pause --- and think --- about everything from life on the road of a national political campaign to how lobsters might feel about being boiled alive before being eaten.

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Books by David Foster Wallace

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In "Up, Simba" and "Consider the Lobster," Wallace uses his credentials from *Rolling Stone* and *Gourmet*, respectively, to wax on about the behind-the-scenes goings on of two celebrated public events, mainly the 2000 GOP race and the Maine Lobster Festival. "Up, Simba" is a 78-page rundown of the day-in and day-out of John McCain's campaign from February 7th though the 13th, as seen through the eyes of a member of McCain's traveling press corps. Dispelling all illusions of grandeur, Wallace drones on about how un-glamorous it all is, from the nightmarish bleary-eyed hours the press keeps to the inequity of privileges bestowed upon the higher (read: "more respected and high-brow") and lower (read: "piddly publications, *Rolling Stone* being one of them)

members of the corps. Throughout all the description (possibly *too* much), he manages to throw in a question or two about "what terms like 'service' and 'sacrifice' and 'honor' might really refer to, like whether the words actually *stand* for something," and this line of questioning --- in relation not only to John McCain's campaign but to politics as a whole --- is a worthwhile topic to ponder, if only the reader didn't have to wade through 78 pages to do it.

"Consider the Lobster" begins as a crustacean's eye view of the touted Maine Lobster Festival and ends as a commentary on lobster rights, for the likes of which PETA would be proud. Again, Wallace dedicates the first few pages to describing the chaotic atmosphere of the festival, but then skips right to the point of his essay. He argues on behalf of lobsters everywhere that they do, in fact, feel pain after being thrust into boiling water, and furthermore we (the eaters of these critters) should think twice about what actually happens after we throw them into the pot. At the conclusion of the essay, the reader, who previously might have enjoyed eating such delicacies as lobster, veal or lamb, is faced with a slightly amusing yet quite legitimate conundrum: "Do you think much about the (possible) moral status and (probable) suffering of the animals involved? If you do, what ethical convictions have you worked out that permit you not just to eat but to savor and enjoy flesh-based viands (since of course *refined enjoyment*, rather than mere ingestion, is the whole point of gastronomy)?"

"The View from Mrs. Thompson's" deserves mention both for its subject matter and for its presentation --- standing out as one of the best packages in the collection. In just a few short pages, Wallace explains his experience on September 11th in such a way so as to shed light on how the event was perceived in small town Middle America (specifically, where he lived in Bloomington, Illinois, where the pressure to display flags on lawns was certainly felt) in comparison to how it was perceived in Washington and New York. This is an interesting commentary with contemporary relevance that will certainly have readers confirming or re-thinking their opinions about what happened on 9/11 as well as what's going on in the world today.

The rest of the collection consists of seven other essays, ranging from book reviews on Kafka and Dostoyevsky, to another behind-the-scenes look at an adult porn convention, to an extremely long-winded examination of "the seamy underbelly of US lexicography." (gasp!) Admittedly, Wallace's tendency to drone on in some of these selections is frustrating, and his extensive usage of footnotes is downright maddening (and often unnecessary) throughout the entire book. There is no doubt that Wallace has earned his reputation as a "writer of virtuosic talents" (*New York Times*), but it is this reviewer's assertion that this anthology, while sometimes illuminating and often entertaining, is not his finest.

--- Reviewed by Alexis Burling

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