David Foster Wallace: Brief Bio

• Born in 1962 to a professor in Philosophy and a teacher in English
• Graduated *summa cum laude* in English and Philosophy from Amherst in 1985 and with an MFA in Creative Writing from University of Arizona in 1987
• Published several novels and short story collections, most notably *Infinite Jest* in 1996
• Committed suicide in 2008 at the age of 46

Girl With Curious Hair

- Collection of stories published in 1989
- Features nine short stories and one novella
- Deals with themes of celebrity, advertising, and ‘postmodern’ fiction
- Featured Stories: *Little Expressionless Animals, John Billy, Westward the Course of Empire Takes Its Way*
Little Expressionless Animals

- One of the more ‘straightforward’ stories in the collection
- Studies the relationship between two women, Faye Goddard and Julie Smith, who meet and fall in love on Jeopardy!
- Wallace uses this love story as a vehicle to deliver stinging satire on the predatory commercial nature of television
John Billy

- Written as a tall tale in rural Oklahoma
- Concerns a small-town ‘demigod’’s attempt to seek revenge against a man that wronged him
- Filled with exuberant language and characters: Chuck Nunn Junior, Simple Ranger, T. Rex Minogue, Glory Joy duBoise
Westward the Course of Empire Takes Its Way

- The longest and (in my humble opinion) most involved of the stories in *Girl With Curious Hair*
- Details the travel of a group of radically different characters: Mark Nechtr, D.L. Eberhardt, Tom Sternberg, J.D. Steelritter, DeHaven Steelritter, and Magda Ambrose-Gatz, to a reunion for McDonalds’ commercial actors
- Is very long and makes numerous references to itself and its length: grand example of ‘metafiction’
Common Themes

• Language: highly cerebral and inventive, Wallace’s strengths
• Complex, realistic characters (often middle-to-upper class) that tend to have middle-to-upper class problems
• Strong sense of place
• 3rd person view in *Little Expressionless Animals* and *Westward*, 1st person in *John Billy*
• Rich, character-building dialogue, almost to the point of theatricality