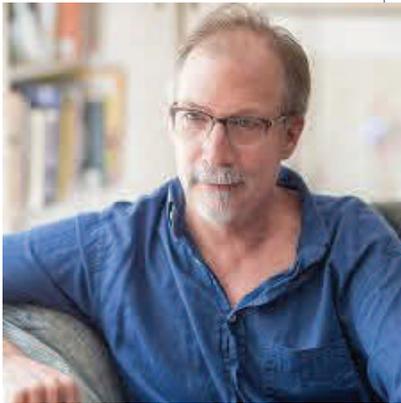


Author Spotlight

DANIEL WALLACE



Daniel Wallace is the author of six novels, including *Big Fish* (1998), *Ray in Reverse* (2000), *The Watermelon King* (2003), *Mr. Sebastian and the Negro Magician* (2007), *The Kings and Queens of Roam* (2013), and most recently *Extraordinary Adventures* (May 2017). His children's book, published in 2014, and for which he did both the words and the pictures, is called *The Cat's Pajamas*. Wallace is the J. Ross MacDonald Distinguished Professor of English at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, his alma mater, where he directs the Creative Writing Program. His essays and stories have been widely published and anthologized. Raised in Birmingham, Alabama, Daniel Wallace now lives with his family in Chapel Hill, North Carolina.

Wallace is the recipient of several humanities grants and awards including the PEN Syndicated Fiction Award as well as a North Carolina Arts Fellowship. Before *Big Fish*, Wallace had written four or five novels that didn't make it through the long and arduous submission process. At least fifteen different publishers passed on *Big Fish* before Algonquin (NYC and Chapel Hill) decided to publish it and change Wallace's life.

Big Fish is a novel of tall tales, mythology and relationships. William Bloom is at the deathbed of his father, Edward, trying to reconcile his memories of his dad with the person he really is. Edward Bloom was an extraordinary man. He could outrun anybody. He never missed a day of school. He saved lives and tamed giants. Animals loved him, people loved him, and women loved him. He knew more jokes than any man alive. At least that's what he told his son, William. William wants desperately to know the truth about his elusive father—this indefatigable teller of tall tales—before it's too late. So, using the few facts he knows, William recreates Edward's life in a series of legends and myths, through which he begins to understand his father's greatest feats, and his greatest failings. The result is hilarious and wrenching, tender and outrageous.

Big Fish deals with a son's unanswerable question: How do you know your own father? "Everything in it is made up," Wallace says. "But I couldn't have written it without my father," a larger-than-life salesman who died shortly after the novel was finished. E.D. Wallace also gave his son the title: "He used to say he never wanted to be a big fish in a small pond." (USA Today interview, 2004)

Directed by Tim Burton and starring Ewan McGregor, Albert Finney and Billy Crudup, the film adaptation of *Big Fish* debuted in 2003. Daniel Wallace had a cameo appearance as a professor in the film. *Big Fish* premiered on Broadway at the Neil Simon Theatre in 2013.

Prepared by Maureen Socha

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Source: danielwallace.org and www.workman.com



Discussion Questions for *Big Fish*

1. William tells the story of his father through a series of tall tales. Why might tales that challenge the truth be a more effective way of getting to the heart of William's father?
2. Mythical heroes usually undertake a quest for an object or knowledge. What is Edward's quest? What is William's?
3. How does Edward react to the role of becoming a father?
4. How would you contrast William and Edward, especially in their understanding of storytelling?
5. How would you characterize Edward and William's relationship? In what ways does it change throughout the course of the book?
6. Is there a specific tale here that seems to veer from the tone of the others? If so, in what way does that tale tell us more of what really happened? Does it matter what really happened? Why or why not?
7. The final scene between Edward and William takes place four times (or is played out in four different ways). What is the effect of each one, and why does the author create so many alternate versions of only that one scene? What might they say about William's role as a spinner of tales?
8. How does the element of water figure into the imagery and ideas of the story?
9. What is the meaning of the big fish? What are we to make of this final transformation?
10. The narrative style here is minimalist and segmented. What does this say about memory? What does it say about how completely we can ever know someone?
11. If someone were to ask you what *really* happened in Edward's life, how would you describe it? Do you think he is self-centered or unselfish? What leads you to that conclusion?

Enhance Your Book Club Experience

- In addition to reading the book, watch the movie and discuss the two different endings. How do you think that that changed the message of the book, or the perspectives on Edward?
- The movie version of *Big Fish* departs from the plot of the book in a number of ways, from adding in a character to changing the second half of the book. Why do you think each of these things were changed for the film? What does this tell us about the audience for a book and the audience for a movie?

Source: www.algonquin.com

