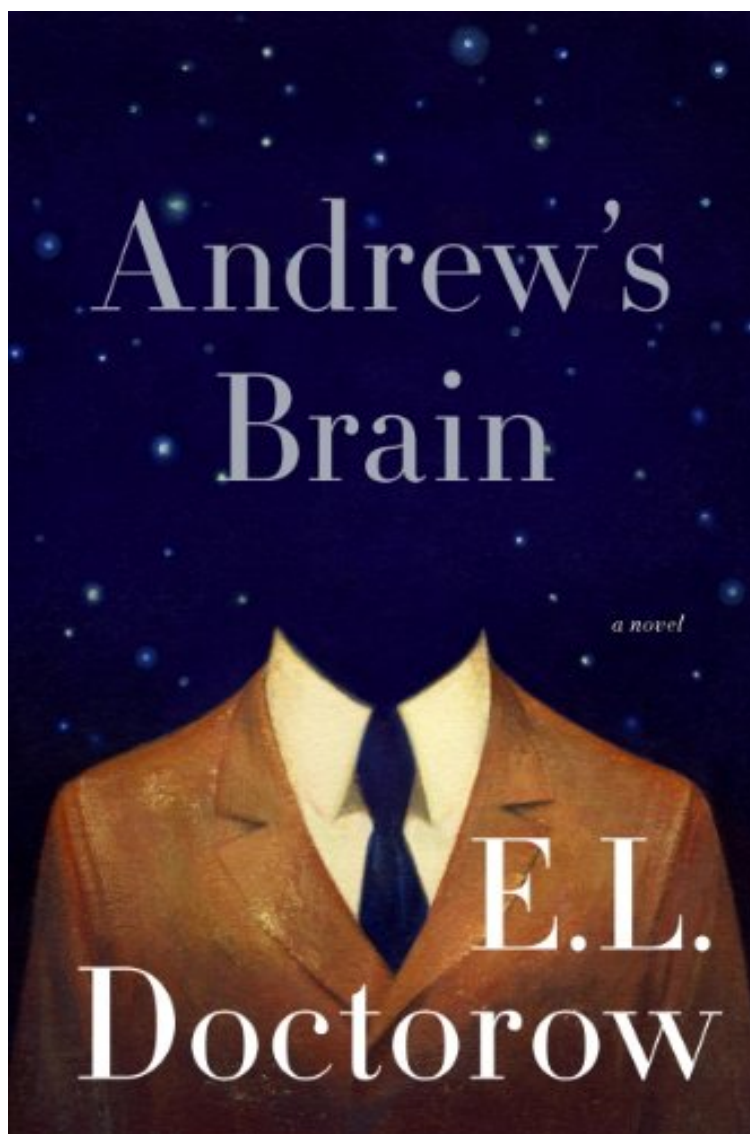


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## Andrew's Brain: A Novel



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### Description :

Prsentation de l'diteurThis brilliant novel by an American master, the author ofRagtime, The Book of Daniel, Billy Bathgate,andThe March,takes us on a radical trip into the mind of a man who, more than once in his life, has been the inadvertent agent of disaster.NAMED ONE OF THE BEST BOOKS OF THE YEAR BY ST. LOUIS POST-DISPATCH, SLATE, AND THE TELEGRAPHSpeaking from an unknown place and to an unknown interlocutor, Andrew is thinking, Andrew is talking, Andrew is telling the story of his life, his loves, and the tragedies that have led him to this place and point in time. And as he confesses, peeling back the layers of his strange story, we are led to question what we know about truth and memory, brain and mind, personality and fate, about one another and ourselves. Written with psychological depth and great lyrical precision, this suspenseful and groundbreaking novel delivers a voice for our timesfunny, probing,

skeptical, mischievous, profound. Andrews Brain is a surprising turn and a singular achievement in the canon of a writer whose prose has the power to create its own landscape, and whose great topic, in the words of Don DeLillo, is the reach of American possibility, in which plain lives take on the cadences of history. Praise for Andrews Brain Too compelling to put down . . . fascinating, sometimes funny, often profound . . . Andrew is a provocatively interesting and even sympathetic character. . . . The novel seamlessly combines Doctorow's remarkable prowess as a literary stylist with deep psychological storytelling pitting truth against delusion, memory and perception, consciousness and craziness. . . . [Doctorow] takes huge creative risks the best kind. USA Today Cunning [and] sly . . . This babbling Andrew is a casualty of his times, binding his wounds with thick wrappings of words, ideas, bits of story, whatever his spinning mind can unspool for him. One of the things that makes [Andrew] such a terrific comic creation is that he's both maddeningly self-delusive and scarily self-aware: He's a fool, but he's no innocent. The New York Times Book A tantalising tour de force . . . a journey worth taking . . . With exhilarating brio, the book plays off . . . two contrasting takes on mind and brain. . . . [Andrews Brain encompasses] an astonishing range of modes: vaudeville humour, tragic romance, philosophical speculation. . . . It fizzles with intellectual energy, verbal pyrotechnics and satiric flair. The Sunday Times (London) Dramatic . . . cunning and beautiful . . . strange and oddly fascinating, this book: a musing, a conjecture, a frivolity, a deep interrogatory, a hymn. San Francisco Chronicle Provocative . . . a story as swirl in a whirlpool of neuroscience, human relations, loss, guilt and recent American history . . . Doctorow reveals his mastery in the sheen of a text that is both window and mirror. Reading his work is akin to soaring in a glider. Buoyed by invisible breath, readers encounter stunning vistas stretching to horizons they've never imagined. The Plain Dealer Andrews' ruminations can be funny, and his descriptions gorgeous. Associated Press [An] evocative, suspenseful novel about the deceptive nature of human consciousness. More A quick and acutely intelligent read. Entertainment Weekly Extrait II can tell you about my friend Andrew, the cognitive scientist. But it's not pretty. One evening he appeared with an infant in his arms at the door of his ex-wife, Martha. Because Briony, his lovely young wife after Martha, had died. Of what? Well, get to that. I can't do this alone, Andrew said, as Martha stared at him from the open doorway. It happened to have been snowing that night, and Martha was transfixed by the soft creature-like snowflakes alighting on Andrew's NY Yankees hat brim. Martha was like that, enrapt by the peripheral things as if setting them to music. Even in ordinary times, she was slow to respond, looking at you with her large dark rolling protuberant eyes. Then the smile would come, or the nod, or the shake of the head. Meanwhile the heat from her home drifted through the open door and fogged up Andrew's eyeglasses. He stood there behind his foggy lenses like a blind man in the snowfall and was without volition when at last she reached out, gently took the swaddled infant from him, stepped back, and closed the door in his face. This was where? Martha lived then in New Rochelle, a suburb of New York, in a neighborhood of large homes of different styles Tudor, Dutch Colonial, Greek Revival most of them built in the 1920s and 30s, houses set back from the street with tall old Norway maples the predominant trees. Andrew ran to his car and came back with a baby carrier, a valise, two plastic bags filled with baby needs. He banged on the door: Martha, Martha! She is six months old, she has a name, she has a birth certificate. I have it here, open the door please, Martha, I am not abandoning my daughter, I just need some help, I need help! The door opened and Martha's husband, a large man, stood there. Put those things down, Andrew, he said. Andrew did as he was told and Martha's large husband thrust the baby back into his arms. You've always been a fuck-up, Martha's large husband said. I'm sorry your young wife has died but I expect that she's dead of some stupid mistake on your part, some untimely negligence, one of your thought experiments, or famous intellectual distractions, but in any event something to remind us all of that gift you have of leaving disaster in your wake. Andrew put the baby in the baby carrier that lay on the ground, lifted the carrier with the baby, and walked slowly back to his car, nearly losing his balance on the slick path. He fastened a seat belt around the carrier in the backseat, returned to the house, picked up the plastic bags and the valise and carried them to the car. When everything was secured, he closed the car door, drew himself up, turned, and found Martha standing there with a shawl around her shoulders. All right, she said. [thinking] Go on. . . . No, I'm just thinking of something I read about the pathogenesis of schizophrenia and bipolar disease. The brain biologists are going to get to that with their gene sequencing, finding the variations in the genome those protein suckers attached to the teleology. They'll give them numbers and letters, snipping away a letter here, adding a number there, and behold the disease will be no more. So, Doc, you're in trouble with your talking cure. Don't be too sure. Trust me, you'll be on unemployment. What else can we do as eaters of the fruit of the tree of knowledge but biologize ourselves? Expunge the pain, extend the life. You want another eye, say, in

the back of your head? That can be arranged. Put your rectum in your knee? Not a problem. Even give you wings if you want, though the result would not be flying aloft but more like giant skips, floating megastrides as on those tracks that are like flattened escalators moving along the long airport corridors. And how do we know God would not want this, perfecting his fucked-up imperfect idea of life as an irremediable condition?

Were his backup plan, his fail-safe. God works through Darwin. So Martha took the baby after all? I think also of how we decay in our rotting coffins, and how we reincarnate, the little microgenetic fragments of us sucked into the gut of a blind worm that rises it knows not why to wiggle in the rain-soaked soil only to die on the sharp beak of a house wren. Hey, that's my living genome-fragged ID shot from the sky and landing with a plop on the branch of a tree and dripping over the branch like a wet bandage. And lo! I am become a nutrient of a tree fighting for its life. That's true, you know, how those immobile standing-fast vascular creatures silently struggle for their existence as do we with one another, trees fighting for the same sun, the same soil in which they root themselves, and strewing the seeds that will become their forest enemies, like the princes to their king fathers in the ancient empires. But they're not completely motionless. In a high wind they do their dance of despair, the trees in heavy leaf swaying this way and that, throwing their arms up in their helpless fury of being what they are. . . . Well, it's a short step from anthropomorphism to hearing voices. You hear voices? Ah, I knew that would get your attention. Usually as I'm falling asleep. In fact I know I'm falling asleep when I hear them. And that wakes me up. I didn't want to tell you this and here I am telling you. What do they say? I don't know. Weird things. But I don't really hear them. I mean, they are definitely voices but at the same time they're soundless. Soundless voices. Yes. It's as if I hear the meanings of the words that are spoken without the sound. I hear the meanings but I know they are words that are spoken. Usually by different people. Who are these people? I don't know any of them. One girl asked me to sleep with her. Well, that's normal a man would dream that. It's more than a dream. And I didn't know her. A girl in a long summer frock down to her ankles. And she wore running shoes. She had delicate freckles under her eyes, and her face seemed pale with sunlight even as she stood in the shade. Pretty enough to break your heart! She took my hand. Well, that's more than a voice, certainly more than a soundless voice. I think what happens is that I hear the meaning and provide an illustration in my mind. . . . So, might we get back to Andrew the cognitive scientist? I find myself reluctant to tell you that I hear the soundless voices too when I'm up and about in my daily life. But why shouldn't I? There was a morning on my way to work, for instance, when I had picked up my coffee and newspaper from the deli and was waiting at a stoplight. Watching the red seconds run down. And a voice said: As long as you're standing there, why don't you fix the screen door. It was so real, so close to an actual sounded voice, that I turned around to see who was in back of me. But there was no one, I was alone on that corner. And what was the illustration you provided when you heard that remark? It was an older woman. I put myself in her kitchen doorway. It was some sort of broken-down farm. I thought it might be in western Pennsylvania. There was an old flatbed truck in the yard. The woman wore a faded housedress. She looked up from the sink, totally unsurprised, and said that. At the kitchen table a small girl was drawing with a crayon. Was she the woman's granddaughter? I didn't know. She looked at me and turned back to her drawing and suddenly violently scribbled all over it with her crayon whatever she had drawn she was now destroying. Are you in fact the man you call your friend Andrew, the cognitive scientist who brought an infant child to the home of his ex-wife? Yes. And are you telling me that you dreamt you ran away and found yourself standing at the screen door of some broken-down farmhouse somewhere? Well, it was not a dream, it was a voice. Try to pay attention. This voice brought back to me how it was when I needed to get away after my baby with Martha had died and my life with Martha with it. I didn't care where I went. I got on the first bus I saw at the Port Authority. I fell asleep on the bus, and when I woke it was winding its way through the hills of western Pennsylvania. We stopped at a small travel agency in one of these towns and I got off to walk around the town square: It was two or three in the morning, everything was closed of what there was, a drugstore, a five-and-ten, a picture framer, a movie theater, and taking up all one side of the square a sort of Romanesque courthouse. In the square of dead brown grass was a greenish-black Civil War statue of a man on a horse. By the time I got back to the travel agency, the bus was gone. So I walked out of town, over the railroad tracks, past some warehouses, and about a mile or two away it was dawn now I came upon this broken-down scabbly-looking farm. I was hungry. I walked into the yard. No sign of life there so I walked around to the back of the house and found myself standing at a screen door. And there were these two just as I'd made them up or thought I had, the child and the old woman. And the old woman was the one who'd made that remark the morning I stood with my coffee and paper in Washington, D.C., waiting for the light to change. So what you're saying is that you ran away and found

yourself at the actual screen door of some broken-down farmhouse somewhere in Pennsylvania that you'd previously imagined? No, dammit. That's not what I'm claiming. I did get on that bus and the trip was exactly as I've said. The shabby little town, the dirt farm. And when I got to the house it's true that those two people were in the kitchen, the old woman and the child with her crayons. There was also a roll of flypaper hanging under the ceiling light, and it was black with flies sticking to it. So it was all very real. But nobody asked me to fix the screen door. No? I'm the one who suggested that I fix it. I was tired and hungry. I didn't see a man anywhere. I thought if I offered some sort of handyman's help, they'd let me wash up, give me something to eat. I didn't want charity. So I smiled and said: Good morning. I'm a bit lost, but I see your screen door needs mending and I think I can fix it if you will offer me a cup of coffee. I'd noticed the door couldn't close properly, the upper hinge had pulled away from the frame, the mesh was slack. As a screen door it was quite useless, which is why they had hung flypaper from the ceiling light cord. So you see, it was not a preternatural vision that drew me to that place. I had taken that bus ride and seen that farm and those two people and then blanked them out of my mind until the morning in Washington when I was standing on the corner waiting for the red seconds to wind down and heard "You were then working in Washington?" yes, as a government consultant, though I can't tell you doing what and heard the voice of the old woman saying more or less what I had said when I appeared outside her screen door. Except in her voice the words had a judgmental tone as if I had given her an insight into my hapless existence, to the effect of: As long as you're standing there why don't you for once make yourself useful and fix the screen door. There's a term for this kind of experience in your manual, is there not? Yes. But I'm not sure we're talking about the same kind of experience. We have our manual too, you know. Your field is the mind, mine is the brain. Will the twain ever meet? What's important about that bus trip is that I had reached the point where I felt anything I did would bring harm to anyone I loved. Can you know what that's like, Mr. Analyst sitting in his ergonomic chair? I couldn't know in advance how to avoid disaster, as if no matter what I did something terrible would follow. So I got on that bus, just to get away, I didn't care. I wanted to tamp down my life, devote myself to mindless daily minutiae. Not that I had succeeded. What he said made that clear. What who said? Martha's large husband. When Andrew stepped inside the front door he saw Martha's large husband putting on his coat and hat and Martha walking up the stairs with the baby in her arms while turning back the little hood, unzipping the snowsuit. Andrew took note of a large well-appointed house, much grander than the house he and Martha had lived in as man and wife. The entrance hall had a dark parquet floor. Out of the corner of his eye he saw to his left a comfortable living room with stuffed furniture, and a fireplace with a fire going, and on the wall over the mantel the portrait of what he took to be some Russian czar in a long robe with an Orthodox cross on a chain and a crown that looked like an embroidered cap. To the right was a book-lined study with Martha's black Steinway. The staircase, carpeted in dark red with brass rods at the bottoms of the risers, was elegantly curved with a mahogany banister that Martha was not holding as she mounted the stairs with the baby in her arms. Martha wore slacks. Andrew noticed that she had maintained her figure and he found himself considering, as he hadn't for many years, the shape and tensile strength of her behind. The coat of Martha's large husband was of the round-shouldered style with a caped collar and sleeves that flared out. Nobody wore coats like that anymore. The hat, a sporty crushproof number, was too small for Martha's large husband's head. *Revue de presse* Praise for Andrew's Brain Too compelling to put down . . . fascinating, sometimes funny, often profound . . . Andrew is a provocatively interesting and even sympathetic character. . . . The novel seamlessly combines Doctorow's remarkable prowess as a literary stylist with deep psychological storytelling pitting truth against delusion, memory and perception, consciousness and craziness. . . . [Doctorow] takes huge creative risks the best kind. *USA Today* Andrew's Brain is cunning. . . . [A] sly book . . . This babbling Andrew is a casualty of his times, binding his wounds with thick wrappings of words, ideas, bits of story, whatever his spinning mind can unspool for him. . . . One of the things that makes [Andrew] such a terrific comic creation is that he's both maddeningly self-delusive and scarily self-aware: He's a fool, but he's no innocent. . . . Andrew may not be able to enjoy his brain, but Doctorow, freely choosing to inhabit this character's whirling consciousness, can. *The New York Times Book* A tantalising tour de force . . . a journey worth taking . . . With exhilarating brio, the book plays off . . . two contrasting takes on mind and brain. . . . [Andrew's Brain encompasses] an astonishing range of modes: vaudeville humour, tragic romance, philosophical speculation. . . . It fizzles with intellectual energy, verbal pyrotechnics and satiric flair. *The Sunday Times* (London) Dramatic . . . cunning and beautiful . . . strange and oddly fascinating, this book: a musing, a conjecture, a frivolity, a deep interrogatory, a hymn. *San Francisco Chronicle* Provocative . . . a story as swirl in a whirlpool of neuroscience, human relations, loss, guilt and

recent American history . . . Doctorow reveals his mastery in the sheen of a text that is both window and mirror. Reading his work is akin to soaring in a glider. Buoyed by invisible breath, readers encounter stunning vistas stretching to horizons they've never imagined. The Plain Dealer Andrews' ruminations can be funny, and his descriptions gorgeous. Associated Press [An] evocative, suspenseful novel about the deceptive nature of human consciousness. More A quick and acutely intelligent read. Entertainment Weekly Mind-bending . . . a fascinating and perplexing examination of a human being, invented by Doctorow but very real, who has suffered great trauma and desperately needs to believe he is not a monster. St. Louis Post-Dispatch Absorbing . . . In Doctorow's capable hands, Andrew is revealed to be a unique and sympathetic character you're just never sure whether he's a redeemed lout or criminally insane. . . . Besides the wonderful prose, the book has humor and warmth and entertaining twists of plot. Houston Chronicle This is a brief book and, like many of the author's recent offerings, a seemingly simple pleasure. But Doctorow cannot do anything simply, and he can't help but write well. His lines in passing are the sort that other writers might work for years to perfect. And his insights, beautifully embedded in an irresistible story, are worthy of the best sort of big book. Minneapolis Star Tribune [Doctorow] locates and amplifies the human emotions that lend poignancy to particular moments in individual lives. . . . He illuminates these concepts by taking us inside the mind of a fully formed figure—a man whose pain, fear, desire and suffering we come to know and identify with. The journey from this novel's unsettling, parabolical beginning to its ambiguous end is frequently disorienting, but it's worth the trip. Pittsburgh Post-Gazette In stunning command of every aspect of this taut, unnerving, riddling tale, virtuoso Doctorow confronts the persistent mysteries of the mind—trauma and memory, denial and culpability—as he brings us back to one deeply scarring time of shock and lies, war and crime. Writing in concert with Twain, Poe, and Kafka, Doctorow distills his mastery of language, droll humor, well-primed imagination, and political outrage into an exquisitely disturbing, morally complex, tragic, yet darkly funny novel of the collective American unconscious and human nature in all its perplexing contrariness. Word will travel quickly about this intense and provocative novel by best-selling literary giant Doctorow. Booklist (starred review) Through this dialectic narrative, Doctorow connects to the common theme seen throughout his work: one's history is often a battle between memory and self-struggle to maintain an image of morality and adequacy. Doctorow deftly captures the complex but beautiful vagaries of life in clean, simple language. Library Journal (starred review) Praise for E. L. Doctorow On every level, [Doctorow's] work is powerful. . . . His sensitivity to language is perfectly balanced, and complemented by a gigantic vision. Jennifer Egan E. L. Doctorow is a national treasure, and I mean this in a very specific sense: He has rewarded us, these forty-five years, with a vision of ourselves, as a people, a vision possessed of what I might call aspirational verve—he sees us clearly and tenderly, just as we are, but also sees past that to what we might, at our best, become. George Saunders [His great topic is] the reach of American possibility, in which plain lives take on the cadences of history. . . . Doctorow's prose tends to create its own landscape, and to become a force that works in opposition to the power of social reality. Don DeLillo A writer of dazzling gifts and boundless imaginative energy. Joyce Carol Oates, The New Yorker One of our greatest living writers . . . a virtuosic storyteller with enormous range. People Doctorow is a magician. . . . His prose is dazzling. Vogue