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Sommario/riassunto	Comic in tone and serious in intent, this book gives a vivid portrait of academic life in the nineties. With campus populations and critical perspectives changing rapidly, academic debate needs to look beyond the old ideal of common purposes and communal agreement. How can we learn from people we won't end up agreeing with? This question is explored by four very different scholars, who meet and argue at a series of comparative literature conferences: David Damrosch, liberal humanist and organizer of the group; Vic Addams, an independent scholar of aesthetic leanings (and author of The Utility of Futility); Marsha Doddvic, a feminist film theorist; and the Israeli semiotician Dov Midrash. Throughout the 1990's, in four cities, they meet and

debate the problems of disciplinary definition and survival, the relation of literary theory to society, the politics of cultural studies, and the virtues and vices of autobiographical criticism. As their partly antagonistic, increasingly serious, surprisingly fond, and always funny relationship develops, Damrosch seeks common ground with his friends despite the fundamental differences among them. Can a self-parodying deconstructionist and a Proust aficionado appreciate and improve each other's work? Can a wealthy, windsurfing medievalist and a champion of Chicana lesbian memoir find friendship? Hilarious exchanges and comic moments, as well as cameo appearances by well-known theorists, will entertain all literary-minded readers. Academic insiders will also be reminded of the foibles and quirks of their own disciplines and departments. At the same time, this exploration of the uses and abuses of literary and cultural criticism offers a running commentary on identity politics and poses serious questions about the state and future of the academy.
