

David Foster Wallace

In Which David Foster Wallace Experiences Several More or Less Embarrassing Posthumous Revelations, To Tell You the Truth

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And but so the desk lamp spotlight on the Long Thing manuscript, perfectly stacked by his untrembling fingers, was a pre-echo of his own rope-induced interdimensional spotlight which siphoned him atom for atom into the saline Hereafter. Thus birthed, David Foster Wallace said, “*This is water.*”¹ And when he spoke the water filled his mouth as the over-familiar air of his former life, so salty, too salty, more like briny, and he wondered if it wasn’t water after all, but some hellish circle of Dante’s anti-imagination in which David was forced to swim, breathe, live in his own sweat, collected from his hyper-clammy body from womb to now just for this cruel and unusual purpose. Was he perspiring at this moment, or was it solely his past sweat that he was feeling? He sort of instinctively put a palm over his bandana-less forehead, it was moist, then continuing with the fixed action pattern he inserted his fingertips into the cave of his right armpit, it was sticky, one could almost say vaginal. He tried to wipe it away—on his shoulder, his chest, his knee, his sock—but everything was dank, damp, humid, muggy. David Foster Wallace said, “*This is hell.*”²

1. “Birthed” being an arguable way to put it, as one usually thinks of it in reverse to the just-described situation: first nonexistence then birth as the segue-process *into* existence. Whereas eliminating one’s own map for keeps, or death in general, is a return to the prior nonexistent state, if you are of an atheistic mind, that is. But, with his epiphanic, “*This is water,*” David Foster Wallace has shorn all doubt for wondrous certainty. In many ways, it is in fact, a birth.

2. A confirmation of his previous speculation but also the conventionally hyperbolic phrase spoken by someone who isn’t surrounded by brimstone while afloat in a lake of fire but still feels pretty much that way, like all the days David sat slumped in one of those cramped public school desks focused both on not sweating and if his inevitable, feedback loop diaphoresis was noticeable to others, particularly the pretty girl with the ugly feet who sat directly behind him and probably scrutinized him as one does a homunculus beneath a microscope. If he didn’t know any better he’d say the origin of his sweat was really the girl’s eyeballs’ limacine wetness, but that was a sort of weird pseudo-fantasy on his end, one which occupied his dreams with an almost circadian predictability and sometimes gave him the howling fantods. Plus it was also sometimes her—the girl’s—

While he had been feeling the other parts of his body that were most notorious for being oceanic (i.e., his scalp, his groin, his soles [he couldn't help it]), he stumbled on his John Hancock'd bicep (exactly as it was when he was alive). More precisely, his Mary Karr'd bicep, the tattoo crossed out and with a footnote further down that displayed his newly widowed wife's name. Mary, not exactly a mistake in David's life, was, to put it simply, his unrequited-but-pretty-much-requited-since-they-had-been-engaged-even-though-it-was-briefly former love. With a penchant for drugs and alcohol at that time in their—David and Mary's—lives, it was all just too volatile. One wants to blame the teenage instinct for self-destruction, some embarrassing Thanatos that takes n years to escape the brain through maturation, but who really knows, they weren't that young anyway. (At least he wasn't in love with his mother like that guy David Lipsky from way back.³) Spotting the self-edited tattoo, David guessed 'mistakes' and ills followed one into the Hereafter, saline or otherwise, and that insight in a way answered his life-long question of whether a paraplegic-turned-ghost a) gets their very own apparitional wheelchair b) has to crawl around wherever they go, perhaps with long fingers that grow really muscular over purgatorial time, or c) is spiritually healed and thus handicapped no more, not only able but insisting to do and then doing a dance like that of Charlie's grandpa in *Willy Wonka and the Chocolate Factory*, jumping over the spectral moon with ecstasy.

The smell of this saline hell, David just noticed, was like the toilet bowl dog mouths he loved with all of his aching heart. The texture, too, was reminiscent of the canine tongues that belonged to the septic mouths, a soggy sandpaper that was somehow as soft as velvet. Smiling, David Foster Wallace said, "This is *heaven*."⁴ In a moment of syrupy belief, David asked himself the question of dogs going to heaven, specifically his fur-children Jeeves and The Drone, but even if it were the case, he could never bring himself to

tongue's wetness that became his body's sweat's source, and to be awkwardly honest that version of the dream was wet in more ways than one.

3. This Freudian factoid was the only thing David gleaned or remembered from other David's teeny-tiny novel *The Art House*, or whatever it was entitled.

4. This was not a contradiction in terms or phrases, but an addition to his turmoil of feelings regarding being birthed, or deathed. You see, one aspect of a situation can seem like heaven (the smell and texture of the Hereafter's air, if you can call it "air"), while another aspect can seem like hell (the air [again, if you can call it that] having a briny taste and feeling* damp and dank like the sweat of his whole life).

bring them with him. Early on, he had considered a suicide pact, informing them of the burning-building situation of his life-mind in all its hysteric detail, flames fueled by sickness which itself—the sickness—was fueled by the flames and it was a cycle that could only end by him leaping through the blazing loop and into nothing or everything, and he held his palm out (in the absence of treats or encouragement or even pleading eyes as wet as twin oceans)⁵, and when they—the dogs—with their lolling tongues and canine breathing placed their paws on his palm to accept the pact, it still all seemed one-sided, cognition-wise, and he just couldn't do it, not with them, mind you. And but so he only hoped they would join him when their time came, which he also hoped would never come for obvious reasons. It was one of the paradoxes that couldn't be avoided, and so it was rarely thought about by David on any truly conscious level.

To avoid thinking the thought now, which was at times more difficult than not thinking about elephants when commanded to do so, David went for a walk, that is, he went for a swim in the Hereafter's sweat-dog-slobber ether, and but it was all shades of blue delineated with swirls of multitudinous bubbles, stacked upon-slash-within each other in a fractal infinity. It made him slightly nauseated but luckily they all disappeared into a darker hue⁶. After a while of the same old shades, the foamy wind, etc., David felt bored. But he knew all about boredom, he spent n number of years researching it, writing it, living it like everyone else besides. One piece of research for the Long Thing that he never shared with anyone in order to avoid being thought truly and malignantly crazy, was watching paint dry. (Yes, you read that right.) First, he went to his local home improvement supply store to acquire said paint.⁷ The

5. David once read how the makeup of tears was similar to sweat, yet tears, whether shed or poised by the tension's equilibrium, have unique structures corresponding to the nature of emotions. In this situation, if David had had tears, and he did, although he kept them shut in their ducts for the purpose of verisimilitude as already mentioned, then they—the tears—would microscopically exhibit a mixture of the tears of ending and beginning's mica texture and the tears of grief's spare-slash-disconnected circuitry with a modicum of spark stains.

6. The phrase 'denim maw' came to David's mind but he decided that made no sense.

7. He knew he could get a small and cheap bottle of paint at an arts and craft store but for some reason that he couldn't put into words he had the feeling that there was something inherently different between that kind of canvas paint and the paint one uses for walls, that when people say "watch paint dry" they have wall paint specifically in mind, something closer to industrial rather than daycare, something you lather on with big felt rollers rather than a child's chubby boogery fingertips.

squares of colors and their corresponding shades on bookmark-like samples were delightful to him, but they also invoked anxiety in their multiplicity, and he spent hours poring over them—the opaque windows—as though he were a medieval scholar brandishing a wax-dripping candle amid a darkness informed by global ignorance, or some such intellectual pursuit. The names: banana split, taxi cab, burnt orange, tangerine, orchid, lilac, amethyst, purple heart, fuchsia, cranberry, ghost gray, silver smoke, Midas gold, bees wax [sic], guacamole, rain forest, island lagoon, blue suede, etc., etc. And so he even scratched and subsequently attempted to sniff several of them (merlot not once, not twice, but thrice), and he swore that he could smell some of them, even though he knew it was all in his head.⁸ He eventually settled on a desert camo color for no real reason other than he liked the way it smelled, even though it didn't really smell. Strangely enough, the up-down motion of his gnawed fingernail against the paper opaque window had summoned a post-fireworks⁹ scent.

Hunched over like Rodin's thinker, David Foster Wallace watched the stripe of paint dry for literally hours¹⁰, which was the essence of not only boredom but also madness, or else a sliver of some truly diagnosable neurosis teetering on the precipice of all-out psychopathy, and but yet from David's point of view it wasn't like that at all, not really, because after an indeterminate amount of time he began to see—actually see with his own two eyeballs—the solvent begin to evaporate from the paint, invisibly shimmery like asphalt exhaling heat, but not exactly, less substantial, one could almost say quantum, whatever that really meant, and he wasn't sure if he was smelling the paint as a whole or the departing solvent, but there was a shift-change-whatever in the smell, an incredibly *bon voyage* sadness to it and at the same time it made David a little giddy in his neurons, but only a little, barely registrable. And but as all

8. David Foster Wallace would like it emphasized that he absolutely *knew* it was all in his head, for your info...yet he did it anyway.**

9. A more prosaic or matter-of-fact person would simply say 'smoke' but it was so much more than just that. There were vague colors in the shape of skeletal flowers somewhere in one of his brain's crevice's wrinkles, small, so small but there, and but so in addition there was an ancient Chinese flavor, all of which could not be explained, but if David was going to be bored while watching paint dry it might as well have been desert camo.

10. Approximately 3 ft. in length and 6 in. in width, the paint-stripe.

of this was happening,¹¹ the paint's desert camo pigment's particles were closing ranks, circular soldiers following orders handed down from the laws of physics (if not some long-white-bearded sky Father), and David found himself entertained by the show of force, if that was indeed the right analogous phrase. *Left...left...left, right, left.* This revelation vis-à-vis paint-drying both disturbed and exhilarated David. If boredom could be entertaining, then up could be down, black could be white, dark light, hot cold, loud silent, shallow deep, old young, republican democrat, evil good, etc. Ergo, the world was completely and utterly nonsensical. Why would one want to live in it?¹²

To address the quite unique case of boredom here in the Hereafter, David decided to meditate, something he only ever tried facetiously, merely thinking strings of thoughts with his lids shut but not *not* hearing or feeling or simply being all-around conscious of both internal and external stimuli. He could float well enough in the sweat-dog-slobber ether, and so he crossed his legs, soles upward, and made a pair of weird-slash-esoteric but ultimately meaningless formations with his fingers. A part of David had always wanted to try meditation on a regular basis, some semblance of a serious regimen (like his almost daily trips to the local gym, a symptom of his being overly self-conscious of his weight), having heard that it was truly good for you on various levels related to both flesh and not (the soul, some would say), so why not give it a go now? In position, he released the mystical note *Om* and with it a series of bubbles that glistened like albino boils and floated upward into the limitless denim maw. *Om.* David shivered from scalp to heels, not from coldness, but in the way of shedding layers, peeling them like the unwanted, weighing-down rinds they were. *Om.* Thus he floated higher.¹³

11. If you could say "happening." The way it 'happened' was on such a submental level that the experience was as welcoming to the mind, or else as easy to access, as a needle's eye. Perhaps the paint's fumes had opened up that hole a little bit, caused it to dilate.

12. Why would one *not* want to live in it?

13. *Om.* And higher, and higher, and higher...***

*“Feeling” being different from “texture” in a way that is merely philosophical, if not related to some esoteric endnote in the literature of the physics of H₂O (or maybe something to do with the nature of the Afterlife). In short, it was still not a contradiction in terms or phrases.

**That’s the bit that David Foster Wallace would *not* like to be emphasized, if it has to be shared at all.

***Until David became a footnote of a footnote of a footnote, etc.¹

1. Having rid himself of anxiety and self-doubt and gnawing loneliness and depression most of all, he discovered peace.