

A Supposedly Funny Thing I'll Never Do Again

David Foster Wallace

As I read "A Supposedly Funny Thing I'll Never Do Again" I did a search to find what David Foster Wallace was up to now. When it returned 1962 – 2008 I knew exactly what happened.

Wallace analyzed every detail of the cruiseship experience. He described the personalities, but from a distance. He didn't get involved with them, except in a superficial way. He spent much of his time in his cabin, explaining it as agoraphobia, in which he minutely examined and considered the plumbing, the porthole, the construction materials, the towels and every bit of minutia.

He had a keen eye for the social structure, the hierarchy of the boat's crew, from the Greeks who ran it down through the myriad of second and third world minions who dwelt under a constant regime of fear lest any passenger feel less than totally happy. His characterization of his fellow passengers is thinner. He simply didn't get to know many besides those who shared his assigned table at dinner.

I read this in the pre-Amazon days in which it first appeared, and reread it to refresh my memory in order to write a humorous speech about my own cruiseship experience as a recently divorced retiree on a singles cruise. There was almost no overlap. I saw people, Wallace saw structures, things, and the ultimate despair of the human condition. His reportage was from inside himself.

It didn't help me much with my speech, but it is an interesting perspective.