



The Soul is Not a Smithy (Electric Literature's Recommended Reading Book 91)

David Foster Wallace

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“[The Soul is Not a Smithy]’ has a special place in my editor’s heart, I won’t deny it,” writes Sven Birkerts, editor of AGNI (where this story originally appeared), in his introduction to this issue of Recommended Reading. “[David Foster] Wallace sent it to us as a way of wishing Godspeed—it was an act of kindness, one that we have since done everything we could to try to deserve. There is no flash summary possible, no shortcut I can offer through the bramble of it. I can only testify, as so many others have, that it is vintage Wallace, breaking expectation, compelling devoted attention, repaying in the way that the best art does: by letting us feel at the end that something has been rearranged and at a deep level.”

About the author:

David Foster Wallace was born in Ithaca, New York, in 1962 and raised in Illinois, where he was a regionally ranked junior tennis player. He received bachelor of arts degrees in philosophy and English from Amherst College and wrote what would become his first novel, *The Broom of the System*, as his senior English thesis. He received a masters of fine arts from University of Arizona in 1987 and briefly pursued graduate work in philosophy at Harvard University. His second novel, *Infinite Jest*, was published in 1996. Wallace taught creative writing at Emerson College, Illinois State University, and Pomona College, and published the story collections *Girl with Curious Hair*, *Brief Interviews with Hideous Men*, *Oblivion*, the essay collections *A Supposedly Fun Thing I'll Never Do Again*, and *Consider the Lobster*. He was awarded the MacArthur Fellowship, a Lannan Literary Award, and a Whiting Writers' Award, and was appointed to the Usage Panel for The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language. He died in 2008. His last novel, *The Pale King*, was published in 2011.

About the Guest Editor:

Like so many other ventures that first saw light in the counter-culture era, AGNI (founded in 1972 by Askold Melnyczuk) set itself up as an alternative to the status quo, a fly in whatever was the going ointment. Though much has changed and evolved, and though captains and crews have grown a bit older, we like to think that the founding spirit survives. Not so much as a politics, more as a feisty eclecticism, a welcoming of spirits from all parts of the world (we prize fine translation), and as an insistent celebration of the literature that represents the thorny complexity, the complex thorniness, of making a self in a world become “hyper” in so many respects. We look for language that gets our moment, that achieves excellence through the integration of perspectives, that strikes the note of the new. Our avatar is the Vedic god of fire, our goal is literary combustion.

About the Publisher:

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