

## Transcript with Audio Description – ‘He Draws Himself a Bath’ by David Turner

Voice, recording and editing all by David Turner.

Audio description written by Lizzy Turner.

[00:00:01]

[Audio begins with sounds of a plug being pushed into a plughole and a bath being run. Sounds of the plug chain rattling, taps being turned on and water running into the bath can be heard. Sound is recorded with microphones above the bath as well as contact mics attached inside it; audio alternates between, and overlaps, a clearer ‘splashy’ track and a more muffled, bubbly ‘underwater’ track. Occasionally one of these tracks cuts out to create an intermittent ‘glitching’ effect. Sequence continues until 00:03:27 when it fades in volume to a ‘bed’ beneath the voice. The sound bed continues throughout, altering in volume around the spoken sequences.]

[Voice throughout is of an English male, deep, with a London accent. Variations in tone and expression are noted throughout. All text in brackets has an audio effect applied when spoken; the voice is ‘doubled up’ (though made via separate recordings) and staggered, sounding like two people speaking at once. The staggering distance, volume and panning of these parts alters increasingly as the audio progresses.]

[00:00:58]

### He Draws Himself a Bath

[00:03:27]

[Voice panned to the right. Voices of text in brackets are similar in tone here, though in the second occurrence they are more staggered.]

The Old Man is always in the bath when I ring. My step-mum or sister would answer his phone and there’d be an immediate understanding that they’d take a message. I’d wait for him to call me back. He’s never been the type of man to get angry about being disturbed, but the immediate family are all too aware of just how piss-poor his attempts at relaxation are. Once a day though, he fills the tub (hot tap only) and retreats with a book / meditation podcast / the gift of peace and quiet from the rest of the household, and soaks (par-boils).

[Sound bed of bath running crossfades between its two different tracks, before the taps are turned off and water stops running. Several large, resonant drips into the water can be heard. There is then the sound of someone climbing into the bath, accompanied by light splashes, knocks and bubbling. Occasional drips and splashes can be heard beneath voice sequences from this point.]

[00:05:03]

[Voice panned to the left]

Bathrooms in TV adverts are always so spacious, so flooded with natural light. No mildew lining the edge of the bathtub or creeping along the grout between tiles. No mould blooming at the intersection of wall and ceiling. No emulsion paint blistering and bursting under the pressure of pooling condensation. No Crittall window sash held open by brittle stay in an effort to stop the walls sweating. No plumes of steam rising and escaping through the open window into the crisp November air.

It's all just gleaming surfaces, piles of bubbles, endless bottles of jollop and the Lady of the House reclining, clearly not boiling-hot below the surface of the water, simultaneously freezing-cold above it. All framed by an unspoken acknowledgement that she won't be leaving the bath water in for a family member to reuse.

[Sounds of the person shifting in the bath can be heard; splashes, squeaks and light thuds against the bath.]

As a child I would use any excuse to get into the bathroom to chat to him as he bathed. It always felt like an excuse was necessary for entry. Looking back this could not have been the case. He has twenty-three years on me, and so far I've remained far too British to ask, as I imagine, as we get older, do we become more buoyant? I'd always hoped I'd become less dense. Just lighten up.

[00:06:38]

[Voice with central panning. Voice has a narrowed-frequency effect applied, sounding as though it is coming 'thinly' through a telephone speaker, without resonance. Tone is more neutral. Voice of the text in brackets here is not doubled, but has more bass resonance applied.]

I've been on the internet searching 'lucian freud bath portrait', because when I think back to being in the bathroom while my dad lay in the bath, I have a very distinct image of a painting come into my head. (It seems the image I'm searching for does not exist.)

[Voice panned right. Voices in first occurrence of text in brackets differ; the 'secondary' voice is fainter, almost exhausted, with some of the words becoming inaudible. In the second occurrence the secondary voice is very faint.]

I would sit on the toilet as he lay, part submerged, in the hottest water our old copper immersion heater could produce (I remember a red/brown tint to the water when it had been overheated, a sign you'd gone too far). The tideline delineated by the contrast of pink and white skin. Turning this immersion heater on was a daily event, with someone shouting, hopefully, up the stairs to anyone that would respond, to "turn the water on".

The marvel of (almost) instant hot water still bounced around our small family home. Two working-class parents with memories of bathing with siblings. The water becoming steadily colder and dirtier as the younger children eventually got their turn in the tub. Living memories of washing as observed functionality. The first generation on either side of the family to experience such a truly indulgent or decadent act as laying in a warm bath. Alone.

[Squeaking sounds can be heard, as the person shifts their weight on the bottom of the bath.]

[00:08:17]

[Voice panned left. Firsts three occurrences of text in brackets use wider staggering of the voices. Secondary voice in fourth occurrence sounds flatter and almost morose in tone.]

Until I moved to Norway (summer 2008) every bathroom, everywhere I'd lived (England) had been the least comfortable room in the place. I have, for context, lived in some very uncomfortable gaffs (every room). The novelty of, and my amazement at, domestic underfloor heating has never left me.

While I still exclusively lived in small apartments in Kristiansand (with equally small and utilitarian bathrooms), it was wild to me that such ordinary bathrooms could be both welcoming and comfortable for the users of these spaces, and with even the most basic consideration for avoiding health-threatening mould growing on every surface. Caveat: I do need to acknowledge here that while I lived in Kristiansand I never lived in the equivalent of social housing, so it's possible my (very) good wages kept me shielded from a grimmer reality.

[00:09:21]

[Voice panned right. Overall expression is more melancholic.]

We would be alone (together) and talk. I've done a sterling job of blacking-out most of my childhood from my memory, but these chats (or was it only ever one chat?) have held fast. Because of the intimacy? Because it was just the men of the house spending time together? Because he felt safer enclosed in liquid and could now talk to me without a predetermined idea of how a father should talk to his son?

[Further sounds of movement and squeaking can be heard.]

[00:10:00]

[Narrow-frequency voice with central panning. For text in brackets, the primary voice says 'to force a point', and the secondary voice, more muffled, says 'to reinforce a point'; the voices are staggered enough that they barely overlap here.]

I've misremembered this image. Or confused Freud's work with someone else's. Or I've just mashed together fragmented images in my brain to (rein)force a point. Or I've tried to appear clever. Again.

[There are a couple of light knocks on the bath, as if from an object.]

[00:10:18]

[Voice panned right. Voices of text in brackets match in tone again, and are almost identical, with only slight staggering.]

As I write I'm struck by the thought that these conversations were the only ones that ever occurred at length with me looking down on him (not just shouted observations from the top of a slide). All supine like. Looking down at him through the distorting, refracting effects of the water. His flesh shimmering with every squeaky adjustment on the surface of the tub. Skeleton vaporising and reforming with every flinch and settle.

[Squeaks on the bath, drips and trickling of water can be heard.]

[00:10:51]

[Voice panned left. Voices of text in brackets are similar in tone, though the secondary voice fades out to a distance and back in over the course of the longer sentence.]

The Grand Designs-set are obsessed with this imagined Scandi-Anglo architectural fusion of underfloor heating, natural stone surfaces and freestanding, rolltop bathtubs. (Copper-lined? Copper-lined! Just imagine yourself in a Tom & Jerry cartoon, wondering why the cat has been so kind and drawn you a bath, and why all the bath bombs look like root vegetables.)

This aspirational view of a life in which the bathroom is an escape is anathema to so many; to the dad worried about paying the utility bill for heating enough water for the whole family, to the student concerned with spending too much time in the only room of their shared house with a toilet, to the young mum who just dreams of taking a shit alone.

[Light splashes and bangs against the bath can be heard.]

[00:11:40]

[Narrow-frequency voice with central panning. Neutral expression.]

It was obviously Freud's reclining nudes that I'd originally had in my mind. While a lot of these poses could have been held in a bathtub, most require the arm of a sofa or flat expanse of a mattress for support. The slippery-squeak-enamelled surface of a bathtub would be of no use here.

[There is a pause, with 6 seconds of little or no noise.]

[Voice panned right. For the text in brackets, the staggering of the voices widens again, and the parts are panned strongly in opposite directions, with the left sounding much 'closer'; each asks 'does there need to be?' without overlap. There is very little sound beneath the voice in this section.]

May 8<sup>th</sup>, 2022. We lost my step-mum Claire to cancer. My dad's wife of 24 years and partner-in-everything for even longer. Bath time (is there a less juvenile term? does there need to be?) for him was no longer a sanctuary, but a time to consider this new, terrible reality. A time to be alone and contemplate having lost the person he has loved more than anyone that isn't a blood relative.

In the immediate aftermath of her relatively sudden death, The Old Man told me how he would be with and talk to both his wife and mum while in the bath. Talk to them about how he was feeling. How much he misses them. My dad isn't unusual in carrying a lot of guilt relating to his wife's death. People change when they have a poison growing in and around their brain. People in that situation say things they don't mean. More painfully still, they say things they do mean. Loved ones are left to process these comments on top of their own grief. A heavy burden. Enough to drag you under.

[The quiet period in the sound bed continues.]

[00:13:29]

[Voice panned left. Occasional trickles of water and light splashes can be heard beneath.]

My wife and I now caveat every conversation about our living arrangements with how lucky we feel to be renting a relatively secure flat from a housing association. A flat in a new build development which only leaks occasionally, is cheap to heat in the winter and impossible to cool in the summer. Like all new builds in the UK though, the bathrooms are thrown up in a column in the middle of the block as some sort of begrudging afterthought.

Tiny, enclosed boxes with no natural light, reliant on a mechanical solution for ventilation. I've tried filming in our bathroom and the result was less Radox-commercial, even less aspirational self-build centre page spread, and more hostage-ransom-VHS.

[00:14:16]

[Voice panned right. Tone is sombre but has clarity, with very little background sound. Voices of text in brackets are almost synchronised.]

As a result of the traumatic period leading up to the death, he has been left feeling like he could and should have done more. He confessed to me at the funeral that he felt he hadn't done much good for anyone. While you can continue to reassure, all you can ever hope for is that, over time, and when alone, they will allow themselves to believe you.

He's done a lot of his crying, apologising, and making amends to Claire (and his mum?) in the bath. Perhaps the simultaneous vulnerability and security of being held by that hot water offers him the perfect setting for saying sorry (whether he needs to or not). It seems cliché to speak of the need and desire for purification of body and soul but here I am reading the words, and they seem suitable in this moment.

[00:15:15]

[Narrow-frequency voice with central panning. Neutral expression. For text in brackets the voice is not doubled, but has more bass applied, though it still has the 'thin' effect.]

I remember a TV documentary (though not well enough to remember what it was called) in which the narrator speculated about the reasoning behind Freud's unique POV when painting his reclining subjects (unnaturally high and at times almost above them), and I remember thinking, 'have you never looked up at your own distorted reflection in a half-chrome lightbulb?' (Or sat up on the toilet above your Old Man in the bath?) Perhaps art critics simply aren't the type to have grown up in a world without light shades?

[00:15:46]

[Sound of the person in the bath washing themselves fades in to the sound bed. Sounds of soap lathering up and being rubbed over their body can be heard, accompanied by squeaks and creaks on the bath, and splashing of water. There are sounds of items being picked up and put down on the side of the bath.]

[00:16:34]

[Voice panned right. For text in brackets, voices are slightly staggered again, with the secondary voice louder this time.]

I've inherited a love of scalding baths from him. Unfortunately (for me, though, not the environment), our boiler at home has an issue with its element, causing a chemical reaction which leaves my hair and bath towel smelling of garlic after the water has dried. This and not needing to prewarm the boiler has left me with a deep distrust of the plumbing in our flat. I would, given the chance, cook myself in the bath.

[Squeaks, splashes and drips continue as the person sits back down in the bath.]

[00:17:05]

[Voice panned left. Splashes and drips continue beneath this section.]

There's a huge amount of ethical guilt pedalled in the media here; rooted in a place of concern for the planet and humanity, and an utter necessity, it is unfortunately completely devoid of any understanding for the varying living circumstances / standards of so many people in this country. Initiatives and advice to cut plastic consumption often revolve around alternative modes of shopping which are financially prohibitive, or are logistically impractical for anyone not living in an affluent area of a large city or a well-to-do market town.

[The sound bed is almost silent beneath the following passage.]

[00:17:44]

[Voice panned right. This section is spoken in a clear, matter-of-fact tone.]

Lying in water has, luckily, never been part of my suicidal ideation. I'm terrified of drowning. Though, it is while bathing that I often have my darkest thoughts. Something to do with the starkness of white ceramic tiles and grimy mirrors that are ubiquitous in cheap rental accommodation. It's just you and your reflection and all too often the mould of a badly ventilated and rarely heated London bathroom. A filthy combination.

[00:18:22]

[Voice panned left. Consistent sounds of the person shifting on the surface of the bath can be heard beneath this passage, along with splashes and drips, and the sound of something being put down on the side of the bath.]

A water saving tip I've seen several times: shower while standing in a bucket and reuse the captured water in your garden. I consider myself able-bodied and fairly agile but even I wouldn't risk the near-certain injuries from standing all soapy and wet in a plastic bucket. Not to mention the fact that fewer than (approximately) 20% of my family have a garden in which to reuse waste shower water. Not all our living spaces extend to an outside. Not all of us have the space or time to grow 'cut and come again' salads to supplement our healthy and environmentally friendly diet.

[Drips, splashes and sounds of movement in the bath continue for a few moments.]

[00:19:07]

[Voice panned right. For text in brackets the voices become more staggered again, with the secondary voice speaking both sentences more quickly; both voices remain panned to the right. The expression is slightly sombre, yet with clarity.]

Like my dad, I also do most of my crying while in the bath (and into my breakfast too, for some reason. And into my notebook for more obvious reasons). I find it an uncomfortable but necessary process to put myself in the position of lying isolated in water. I'm too often running from myself and my thoughts and in this way, bathing helps root me in a moment, allowing me no escape from myself. Not my happy place. Like peeing into the sea seems perversely constructive, letting my tears fall into the bath water feels a natural act.

[Sound bed is quiet.]

[00:19:46]

[Narrow-frequency voice with central panning]

I've always felt there's a filter between the viewer and the nude subject of a Freud painting. As through water. You'll no doubt be thinking, 'Yeah, yeah, yeah,' but I've always sensed a buoyancy in the flesh of his later nude sitters. A shimmer of refraction.

[Movement in the bath can be heard again, with a few light squeaks and knocks.]

[00:20:09]

[Voice panned left. For text with brackets, primary voice says 'a narrow slice of society'; secondary voice says 'an ever narrowing'. Voices are staggered as per the written text, and both are panned left.]

Another tip is to time the duration of your showers: aim for sixty seconds. What about those of us who get dirty at work? What about those of us that can't move quickly

enough? There are very few days I get home from work not covered in dust, sweat and with any exposed skin dotted and splashed with paint and dried wood glue; sixty-seconds literally won't wash it. There are so many reasons that a person may not be able to get through showering quickly enough.

While it is vital that we engage in conversations about preserving natural resources, these tips, this advice only highlights how the British media is so overwhelmingly populated by people from a(n) (ever) narrow(ing) slice of society. Affluent. Able-bodied. Sedentary. Comfortable. Clean.

[Several knocks against the bath can be heard.]

[00:21:06]

[Voice panned right. Expression is mildly apathetic.]

In Norway I never lived in an apartment with a bathtub. Norwegians were, and are, quick to state how disgusted they are by the British obsession with bathing, opting for showers. I found it hard to adjust there. I just never got used to showering every day, though I think it was being told what to do at every turn that wound me up. I simply wanted to lie in the bloody bath and then get out complaining that it was too hot, know what I mean?

[There is a pause, with 5 seconds of little or no noise.]

[00:21:40]

[Narrow-frequency voice with central panning. Expression is neutral, almost flat, with the questions spoken more like statements.]

There's all that speculation that Monet painted the way he did because of the effects of cataracts. Perhaps Freud, like me, simply made what he felt compelled to make, with tears in his eyes? Perhaps it's all a question of focus?

[Light squeaking and knocking can be heard beneath the following passage.]

[00:22:02]

[Voice panned right. Tone gradually returns to melancholic.]

I do agree that showers are cleaner than bathtubs. I have previously tried the Japanese tradition of showering before simply soaking in a hot bath. None of this has addressed my need for comfort and nostalgia. I just like lying in my own filth once in a while. A David-bouillon. Sure, I leave the shower feeling cleaner but it's all over far too quickly. With no time for reflection. Sometimes you need to face up to the scum and detritus on the surface, rather than washing it down the plug hole in an instant.

[00:22:41]

[Sound from contact microphone track can be heard, of the bath plug being removed and water beginning to rush down the plughole. Occasional creaks and knocks, and steady gurgling can



be heard. After almost 2 minutes of these sounds the final bit of water drains out of the bath with a loud, long spluttering gurgle, which slows gradually to the end of the audio.]

[00:25:08]

**End of audio description.**