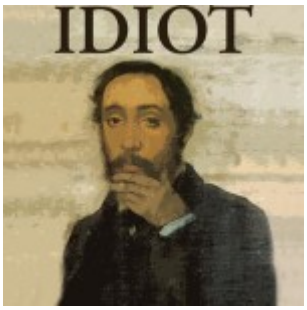
My Favorite World #8



I Like Big Books and I Cannot Lie

The astute follower of this blog<fn>The use if the definite article is pessimistically intentional.</fn> will have noticed that your Narrator loves books. Almost daily I add three or four titles to my “must read” list. It’s great to look at the list in anticipation of great reads to come. It is also to despair: so many books, so little time. We do what we can.

One of my favorite places of any kind is a good bookstore. When we lived on the other side of Lake Pontchartrain, the nearest bookstore was a Barnes and Nobles about 35 miles away. The family would sojourn there for a Friday night’s outing, and as soon as we opened the door, the smell of paper and glue and coffee would turn me into a ravenous book beast. Everybody went their separate way, and we would meet back at the cafe about 30 minutes later. Because the store was so far from home, I would turn up with an armload of books, because who knew how long it might be before I returned. Better safe than stuck without a book.

Occasionally we would travel and find ourselves in a town with a great, independent bookstore. In Asheville there was Malaprops, a truly magical place. Here, my frenzy was even more pronounced. Because who knew how long it would be until I found myself in a great, *indie* bookstore? Two armloads, minimum. Beach trips to the Forgotten Coast always begin with a trip to Sundog Books where everybody picks out their reads

for the vacation.

You get the idea.

When we moved to our current humble burg, no indie local store of this sort existed.<fn>Purely used book vendors are a different breed, and awesome on their own terms, but not what I'm talking about here.</fn> Sure, there was a Borders (now gone) and a B&N and a Books-A-Million.<fn>In my snark, renamed Books a Dozen and a bunch of other crap.</fn> But these are not especially appealing places for the book browser.<fn>B&N was at one time a terrific chain for book lovers, but the tchotchke-to-book ratio has taken a decided turn for the worse in recent years.</fn> For the book lover, the best option is the local library.

Our library is one of the things that makes this My Favorite World. The selection is terrific, the online reserving system easy and efficient. The place is well-laid out and well lighted. The staff, many of them volunteers, is helpful and cheerful. And if they don't have what you want, they will move mountains to find it through another library system. I've had books borrowed from libraries as far away as Miami and Houston, University of Chicago and Chapel Hill. Seriously, our library rocks.

But I miss the bookstore experience. I miss the feeling of finishing a book and placing it on my shelf – maybe to be read again, maybe not – and the conundrum of where to put a particular book. Did I like it so much it might displace a cherished hero volume? Does this belong in the philosophy section or science? Burning questions that fall to the wayside, because now when I finish a book I dump it, unceremoniously, into a slot in the wall at the library.

So while books, and the pursuit of books, and the dogged determination that *I will read every book in the world worth reading before I die*,<fn>Hubris is never pretty.</fn> are a

major element of MFW, I find myself in recent days wondering:

Why doesn’t our community have a great local bookstore?

Does our community really need one? Is it supportable?

Who has the stones/insanity/vision to create such a place? A place where people linger over the printed word and exchange ideas about what makes a book great; argue passionately about whether Oprah picks have ruined reading or saved it; quibble over whether the Booker Prize has gone soft by considering non-Brits; &c. Even more, a place that serves as a fulcrum for a vital community that values the inspirational and aspirational cocktail that comes from that luxe mixture of books and magazines and music and really excellent coffee.

Whoever that person is, s/he will be creating a vital component of My Favorite World. I’ll be waiting.

> ***V:****What’ll we do?*
>
> ***E:****If he came yesterday and we weren’t here you may be sure he won’t come again today.*
>
> ***V:****But you say we were here yesterday.*
>
> ***E:****I may be mistaken. (Pause.) Let’s stop talking for a minute, do you mind?*

MFW.