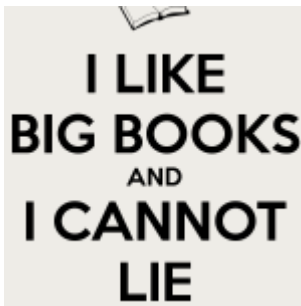


I Like Big Books



A quick update to my pining legions.

The Reader is on a roll. Seventeen books read since Christmas, and almost every one of them a real corker. Two more underway, plus a fourth sojourn through *Infinite Jest*.
Somebody come pull me out if you don't hear from me for a while. I've tied a rope around my waist just in case.
Here's a quick consumer guide to fuel your bibliophilistic indulgence.

I've already told you about Jane Mayer's superb *Dark Money: The Hidden History of the Billionaires Behind the Rise of the Radical Right*. I'll say this again: if you hope to understand the current political divide in the U.S., you have to read this book. For example: if someone introduces himself as the Distinguished Professor of Prosperity and Individual Freedom
Which I actually experienced recently.
and your Koch-radar doesn't start ringing alarm bells, you need this book. Desperately. Just read it already.

Alert fans of the blog have also "enjoyed" my take on the latest Don DeLillo, *Zero K*. His best since *Underworld*.

Given the drought of original thoughts in my head, you'll get a chance to "enjoy" my musings about many of these books in the coming weeks. Here are the potential victims of analytical spasm:

Brief History of Seven Killings, Marlon James

All the King's Men, Robert Penn Warren

Down and Out in Paris and London, George Orwell

The Orphan Master's Son, Adam Johnson

The Dream of Perpetual Motion, Dexter

The Invisible Knight, Italo Calvino

The Sellout and *Tuff*, Paul Beatty

If Beale Street Could Talk, James Baldwin

Wind Up Bird Chronicles, Haruki Murakami

Essays, Wallace Shawn

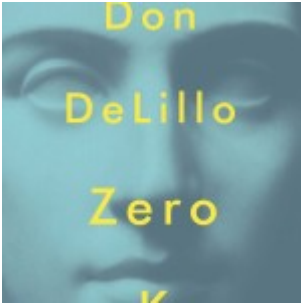
Creative Clash/Rise of the Creative Class: These were homework for my super-secret work as a double-naught. Provocative, but who cares about neo-urbanism?

Sense of Ending, Julian Barnes

First up will be *On Immunity: An Inoculation*, by Eula Biss. I just finished this one, and it sent me scurrying back to the shelf to pull down and re-read Woolf's *On Being Sick* and Sontag's *Illness as Metaphor*. Biss's meditation begins in the vax/anti-vax conflict and moves outward into broader ruminations on how the ways we think about disease – and the language we use to describe it – have implications that go beyond physical health itself. It fits in well in the long lineage of which Woolf and Sontag are a part. Look for this one later this week.

And yeah, sure, a nagging concern about illness and disease is probably also connected to Your Narrator's incessant propulsion towards decrepitude, disintegration, and senescence. Get off my lawn.

Zero K



*Do not go gentle into that good night,
Old age should burn and rave at close of day;
Rage, rage against the dying of the light.*

We've been on a roll here in the vineyard. So far this year, the Writer has read 18 books<fn>Perhaps explaining the paucity of postings here!</fn>, many of them worthy of considered comment. But you're stuck with me. Alas. Here's the first of a series of chin-strokers inspired by the readings.

Let's start with the last one first. Don DeLillo's 16th novel hit the stores yesterday, but diligent groveling put a copy in my hands on Friday. This makes me almost as timely and important as Kakutani.<fn>No. But I am more trustworthy.</fn>

Opinion: This is the best DeLillo since *Underworld* in 1997. It ranks right up there with *White Noise* from 1985. At the age of 79, DeLillo continues to produce some of our most vital fiction.

He's always had a penchant for pondering mortality – and notions of immortality – and with *Zero K* he pretty much goes all in. Our hero, Jeffrey, is the semi-aimless son of a billionaire father who abandoned him at age 10 in the middle of a math homework problem. More or less reconciled as adults, Jeffrey steadfastly avoids any life choices that might fix him

as “like” his father, who he only calls by his first name, Ross. The relationship is not without a certain level of affection and admiration – and approbation.

Ross has invested billions into creating a cryogenic preservation facility in the vast wilds of the mid-Asian desert, a place where the very rich can go to suspend themselves in hopes of being revived in a world where there is a cure for their ailment, which really mostly comes down to reversing the aging process. And where a select few choose to go to suspend themselves while still perfectly healthy with the idea that they will be revived in a world that is better, more rational, more complete.

The compound is claustrophobic and hallucinatory and really smacks of certain culti-ish mind control techniques. (The Heaven’s Gate crew comes to mind.) It also doubles as an all-encompassing art installation, with every detail carefully programmed by the Stenmark twins, who I visualized as Kraftwerk-ish euro hipsters, very thin, translucent, and dressed in all-black skin tights. Even when their clothing is described otherwise, they always look like Dieter to me.



Welcome to Sprockets

There are multitudes of semi-lifelike mannequins stationed throughout. Days can pass without seeing another human. Video screens appear from nowhere with images of global devastation, poverty, war, plagues; the Earth, it seems, is no longer fit

for living; better to suspend and come back at a happier moment.

Food, a bland gruel designed, it seems, to relieve one's affection for life's simple pleasures, is generally taken in isolation, though occasionally another person appears at Jeffrey's mealtime, presumably at the behest of those running the show. Jeffrey's conversations with various residents and staff resemble the kinds of exchange you might endure with someone handing out Jack Chick cartoons or Scientology pamphlets. The lights are on, but it's unclear whether there is anybody home.

And then there are the endless hallways of doors leading – perhaps – to nowhere. Jeffrey decides to test the theory by knocking.

I did this six times and told myself one more door and this time the door opened and a man stood there in suit, tie and turban. I looked at him considering what I might say.

"I must have the wrong door," I said.

He gave me a hard look.

"They're all the wrong door," he said.

Much of this material reminded me of David Foster Wallace crossed with Philip K. Dick: funny, somewhat terrifying, with construction of language that somehow manages to evoke both feelings at once. Nobody builds a sentence with as much style and impact as DeLillo; in some of his books, the sheer scale of the language makes it seem as if "plot" is purely incidental. But not here.

Jeffrey is called to this secret compound to witness the suspension of his step-mother, who is dying. As the moment approaches, perfectly healthy father Ross decides he can't go on without her, declaring, "I'm going with her." What follows

is examination of conceptions of life and death, what it means to be a human being, what our responsibilities are to ourselves, our loved ones, to others. And as we wait to discover whether Ross goes gently into that dark night, Jeffrey finds ample time to examine himself, his choices and non-choices, his affable passivity, all of which adds up to "...the soporifics of normalcy, my days in middling drift."

Jeffrey suspects that his refusal to commit to, well, anything really, is his reaction against the standards of his father. He's perfectly "happy" with his drift, yet too smart to accept that contentment at face value. Maybe he should be doing something more. Maybe he is squandering...something.

"The long soft life is what I feel I'm settling into and the only question is how deadly it will turn out to be.

"But do I believe this or am I searching for effect, a way to balance the ease of my everydayness?"

And yet, he is fierce in his opposition to his healthy Father choosing to suspend himself while he still has much life to live. The idea that one could just choose to check out for a while repels him.

Jeffrey is fairly obsessed with language, with naming, with defining. "Cherish the language," he says. It is his shield:

This is what I do to defend myself against some spectacle of nature. Think of a word.

The question of who, or what, will revive in the distant future is unclear. Will consciousness maintain itself? Will the suspended brain experience thought, loneliness? If there is a soul, and it ascends to heaven, what happens when the body is revived? Who are we?

Am I someone or is it just the words that make me think I'm

someone?

And so: the plot has its grip on you. Will he or won't he whatever? But the heart of this is the way the two protagonists draw you into their point of view, leading the reader to wonder about his own beliefs and fears. What is this life for? Am I giving it all I can? What is success and failure? Is there an absolute standard for either, a simple test that can tell us whether we are living up to our potential, or casting it away by "suspending" ourselves or settling into the long, soft life?

We witness Jeffrey's struggle with these questions through his constant interrogation of meaning and definition. And even though he sometimes uses that way of thinking to avoid grappling with his emotions, in the end his obsessions circle back on him to force him to examine the uncomfortable.

Why was I doing this to myself?

Because the mind keeps working, uncontrollably.

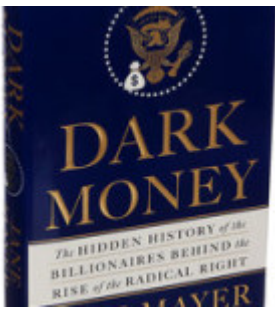
The unceasing drive of mind, and what happens in the mind after going (gently or not) into the good night, creates one of the most awe-ful scenes in the book.

There's plenty here to make the reader uncomfortable, and plenty of very funny moments. The plot moves you along with more pace than most DeLillo novels.

But my favorite moment is the ending, which takes place on a crosstown bus in Manhattan. I held my breath for the last several paragraphs and sat motionless for several minutes after.<fn>Same thing happened to me at the climax of *Underworld*.</fn> There is no neatly wrapped payoff here, no tied-in-a-bow resolution. But the ending is glorious, the simplest pleasure expressed nearly incoherently, but with meaning crystal clear to anyone paying attention. Sunlight

does not shine in any underworld. Rage, rage against the dying of the light.

It's Darker Than You Think



*You've got to be taught
From year to year,
It's got to be drummed
In your dear little ear
You've got to be carefully taught.
– Rogers/Hammerstein*

It's not dark yet, but it's getting there. – Bob Dylan

I recently ordered the book pictured above, a in-depth investigation of how the radical right has gained power over the past 30 years. Alongside the essential trilogy by Rick Perlstein (reviewed favorably by an obscure blogger here), Jane Mayer's *Dark Money: The Hidden History of the Billionaires Behind the Rise of the Radical Right* fill in the blanks on one of the pressing questions of our time:

How in sulphuric hell did an utterly discredited economic and social philosophy come to have such a dedicated cadre of fanatical devotees, even though it works directly against the interests of many of its more fanatical followers?

The hell happened?

Set aside the flimsy tissue of melodramatic horseshit that is the scribbling of Ayn Rand. For better or worse (better), not many impressionable youngsters are going to slog through her horrible writing and plotting to have their brains turned to mush and their hearts to stone. And for better or worse (worse), a certain type of bookish youth is always on the lookout for a book that sets them apart as some kind of forward-thinking intellectual.<fn>Someone who looks like me resembles that remark.</fn> And if Rand is the *prop du jour*, bad tidings inevitably ensue.

There are two novels that can change a bookish fourteen-year old's life: The Lord of the Rings and Atlas Shrugged. One is a childish fantasy that often engenders a lifelong obsession with its unbelievable heroes, leading to an emotionally stunted, socially crippled adulthood, unable to deal with the real world. The other, of course, involves orcs. – John Rogers<fn>fwiiw, Rogers was also the creator/showrunner of the under-appreciated teevee show Leverage, which is well worth your binge-investment.</fn>

But Rand alone is not enough to explain the spread of the “greed is good” mantra that is driving policy debates over things like health care, taxation, income inequality, campaign finance, &c. Too many people who wouldn't know Salma Hayek from Friedrich Hayek are parroting the Randian gospel. An Irish pal of mine told me about a great Old Country turn of phrase re: child rearing: “Well, she didn't pick that up off the floor.”

Nope, they've got to be carefully taught. And that's where *Dark Money* comes in. Perlstein did a great job of describing who the behind-the-scenes architects of the radical right were, and what they were trying to achieve politically. Mayer digs into the funding and the strategies, which boil down to a long-term effort to re-package ideas from the lunatic fringe and move them into the realm of 'of-course-

that's-true' assumptions.

Lunatic fringe? A tad over the top, you say? Nope. Any resemblance between the current radical right movement and the John Birch Society is strictly intentional.

The Koch Brothers are front and center here, but it's not just those toffs ponying up millions of dollars to change the way America thinks. They have a lot of filthy rich friends, too. But the Kochs are the prime movers, and they have for at least 30 years pursued a strategy of re-branding their policy preferences as something benevolent and compassionate, despite the fact that they are at root a grab bag of fuck-the-poor depravity.

Over the years, the Kochtopus¹ has funneled hundreds of millions of dollars into not just political campaigns, but into issue advocacy, junk research institutes, think tanks, and, crucially, buying what they can of the higher education infrastructure. Here in my little hometown, the Kochs have funneled millions into buying off the Economics Department and large parts of the business and law schools. Their money comes, not with strings, but with ropes attached. Any deviation from the neo-Libertarian doctrine is punished with cessation of funding. You can be sure that faculty hires are carefully assessed to ensure that no offense is given to these "generous" benefactors. It is hardly necessary for Charles Koch to denounce a specific faculty or administration candidate; any shrewd dean or financial officer understands all too well how their bread gets buttered and the consequences of biting that hand.² A mixed metaphor. Mea culpa.³ And this desperation of universities to secure outside funding is a direct result of conservative efforts to defund education, thus making it reliant on the highest bidder. It's a clever little chicken and egg game they play.



Nice university you got there; be a real shame if something happened to it.

Here at FSU, the introductory economics course now teaches that “...Keynes was bad, the free market was better, that sweatshop labor wasn’t so bad, and that the hands off regulations in China were better than those in the U.S.”
p. 365
Never mind that the ascendancy of free-market fanaticism that took root under Reagan – and that has rampaged to this day – has been proved a failure in almost every way. (See for example, the financial health of Kansas, Louisiana, Wyoming, and North Carolina under extremist governors and legislatures.) The dogma that Keynes “failed” is an article of faith that is being taught as fact to college freshmen, despite the fact that most serious economists believe the opposite to be true.

Some of these tender minds embrace the ideas. Here at last, a way to learn the greed-is-good ethos without slogging through interminable monologues about railroads and steel production that Rand uses the way Barbara Cartland panders heaving breasts and glory-of-his-manhood fantasies. Nope, this is served up in tasty morsels under such names as Well-Being Studies and Economic Liberty. Who could be against well-being? Stupid liberals, that’s who!

Some of these tender minds progress to graduate programs, where they can receive generous financial aid...so long as they understand the bread-buttering equation. And then, the school will teach you how to write op-ed pieces extolling the virtues of greed well-being and liberty, which they will help you place in the local fishwrapper, thereby building your resume as an intellectual on a par with Jonah Goldberg and George Will. But only if you got your mind right.



You got your mind right, Luke?

Ah hell, they don't need the Captain to beat 'em with a stick. Being a water-carrier for the .01% can be a pretty lucrative gig. And I truly believe these propagandists to be sincere in their arguments.

It is difficult to get a man to understand something, when his salary depends on his not understanding it. – Upton Sinclair

The most effective chains are the ones we choose to wear.

I wish I could echo the Captain and say that we've witnessed a

failure to communicate. But the assembly line has been extremely effective in setting the terms of debate. The puzzle of why Americans vote against their own interests so often isn't much of a challenge: we've been carefully taught, over the years, to believe that lowering taxes on the wealthy benefits the common wealth (it doesn't); we've been taught that environmental regulation is unnecessary, that businesses will preserve the environment out of the goodness of their hearts (they won't); we've learned that the minimum wage and labor solidarity destroy ambition and make people into slaves (ffs). And so on.

Worst: we've been taught that if we are not wealthy yet, we could be if only we work hard and bootstrap ourselves into prosperity. The stench of bullshit becomes overwhelming.

Bernie Sanders has been instrumental in bringing this con into focus. The game is indeed rigged, and good on him (and the Occupy Movement) for generating broader awareness of this fundamental truth. Why we have to re-learn this obvious lesson remains a puzzlement. Sinclair nailed this con as early as 1917.

"...the priests of all these cults, the singers, shouters, prayers and exhorters of Bootstrap-lifting have as their distinguishing characteristic that they do very little lifting at their own bootstraps, and less at any other man's. Now and then you may see one bend and give a delicate tug, of a purely symbolical character: as when the Supreme Pontiff of the Roman Bootstrap-lifters comes once a year to wash the feet of the poor; or when the Sunday-school Superintendent of the Baptist Bootstrap-lifters shakes the hand of one of his Colorado mine-slaves. But for the most part the priests and preachers of Bootstrap-lifting walk haughtily erect, many of them being so swollen with prosperity that they could not reach their bootstraps if they wanted to. Their role in life is to exhort other men to more vigorous efforts at self-elevation, that the agents of the Wholesale Pickpockets'

Association may ply their immemorial role with less chance of interference.” – The Profits of Religion: An Essay in Economic Interpretation

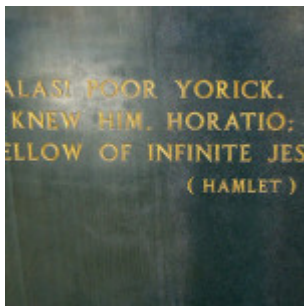
In Sinclair’s day, bootstrapping was touted by peddlers of faith-based redemption; even if you did not rise, you were earning god’s blessing. These days, celestial faith is boiled down to a simpler equation: win at all costs, because if you are poor, it’s proof that you have failed to earn god’s favor. The poor deserve their lot. Losers.



A true expression of Libertarian belief would state clearly that it’s every man for himself, maybe a woman here and there, and that if you are dog food it’s because you deserve it. That would be a pretty tough sell, especially in a country where most people are struggling to survive. Better to wrap it up in a pleasing fairy tale, something that rubes and suckers will eat with a spoon. If you need to add a dollop of race hatred and sexism, well, whatevs, broken eggs and omelets, amirite?

Bottom line<fn>Since that’s all the really matters any more, apparently.</fn>: Read this book. I bought it out of a sense of obligation. I expected it to be a castor oil read, something that would go down rough but would be good for me in the end. In fact, *Dark Money* is a straight-up page turner. Mayer’s writes clearly and compellingly, and her research is thorough and even-handed. As the pro critics love to say...destined to be a classic.

Infinite Quest



Sept 12 – David Foster Wallace died 7 years ago today. Maybe died isn't the right word, though it's at least partly true. He killed himself; took his own life. This fact still makes me sad and angry and scared all at once.

The best way to counter these feelings is to read some of his work. If for no other reason than that his work is the only part of him that we have any legitimate claim to. Angry at the guy? Shit. I owe *him*. His essay from the January, 1996, issue of *Harper's*, which became the title piece from his collection *A Supposedly Fun Thing I'll Never Do Again*, is the single funniest and most "readable" Readable here connoting 'something not too weird or difficult'. In fact, everything I've read by DFW – which is pretty much everything that's been published plus a glimpse of a few of his notebooks at the Whitney Biennial – is terrifically readable and worth every second it takes to look up unusual words, refer to yet another footnote, or just to re-read certain sentences over and over because they are just too wonderful to take in at once. piece in his entire output. I've just finished it for the eleventieth time and it's got me hungry for more. "*E Unibus Pluram: Television and U.S. Fiction*" is up next, and it's sort of an essential piece for anyone interested in culture and the challenge of retaining our humanity amidst a dazzling array of shiny objects.

I find it by turns amusing and annoying that DFW is characterized as a fetish object of a hipster crowd way younger than me, that he somehow is the prototypical voice

of 'this' generation. This is bullshit: DFW is of my generation. Our lives tracked more or less the same time span, though mine has endured a tad longer. In *Infinite Jest*, he wrote of a future that is more or less now; really, though, he was writing about a *present-then* that was the product of the culture of our childhoods.

It also pisses me royally that *Infinite Jest* is known as *that* book that everybody bought and nobody ever really read, save for a few precious bookish beardos. This tired trope likely arose from critics and other malcontents who felt the need to have/express an opinion but were too lazy to bother reading the actual book – thus inoculating themselves from accusations of laziness, because duuuuude, it's like *Finnegan's Wake*, knowwhatimean? Pass the Bret Easton Ellis and the McInerney. It's easier to chew. I grant the first 60-80 pages are little disorienting, but after that, it's a roller coaster thrill machine that is every bit as addictive as *The Entertainment* that serves as the book's macguffin. A book about addiction that is thoroughly addicting? Even better, a book that has its characters agonizing over and within their addictions while you, the reader, begin to wonder if maybe you ought to put the book down and eat or shower or go to work or something, but no, screw that, keep reading. That's some badass legerdemain right there, people.

DFW is enjoying something of a mass(ish) cultural *moment* right now. There's that movie with Jason Segal as Wallace, based on an interview transcript from the mid-90s, that has DFW's surviving family suffering their own case of the fantods, suggesting with no small amount of justification that this kind of filmifaction of DFW is exactly the kind of mediated nonsense that he, DFW, would have hated and mocked with relentless passion. But no matter: it is, as the DC punditocracy like to say about every fabricated scandal, "out there", and it thus seems to have generated a strange Strange because he died only 7 years ago, though it

feels much longer, likely because he had been mostly silent for so long.</fn> *renaissance* in DFW fandomry and scholarship.<fn>Which, if you've read any of the scholarly work to emerge so far, is barely distinguishable from the fandomry, save a certain highly recognizable tone of pedantry apparently essential for academic publication.</fn>

Curiously coincident with the movie was the publication this year of an enormous brick – suitable for a guy who wrote the epically brick-like *Infinite Jest* and *The Pale King* – called *The David Foster Wallace Reader*, which presents around 1000 pages of essays, articles, short stories, and novel excerpts, and, most importantly, a few hundred pages of previously unreleased and obscurely published early works. My favorite part of the book are the notes and class syllabi he used for teaching. But mostly, I think, the people who bought it were, like me, yearning to place another DFW brick on their shelf, knowing full well that this was the closest we were going to get ever again.

I know there are other writers out there who deserve as much attention as I give Wallace. In fact, there are several who actually do get even more because of the relatively small output Wallace left behind.<fn>Rushdie, Moseley, Delillo to name a few. When do these guys ever sleep?</fn> But there is something about Wallace that drills right into my core.

Years ago, long before his death, someone asked me why I liked DFW's writing so much. I said it was because reading him was like hearing my own voice inside my head if I had a better vocabulary and were much smarter. We were roughly the same age, grew up with the same general atmosphere of teevee, consumption, weird conformist culture, and tennis. Reading him felt like reading myself.

That was a pretty comforting thing, having someone out there grappling with the same kinds of angsty, middle-class, white boy problems, taking things on from a somewhat nerdly

perspective but also bringing that weird Carlinesque outlook to the absurdities that our cossetted upbringing seemed to cultivate like mushrooms. Well, it was comforting right up until the day he killed himself. Then it became fucking terrifying.

Because here was the crux: here's this guy, representing my mutant tribe of people who grew up inside the privilege and the comfort and the sheer whiteness of it all and *knew* that there was something amiss, that this incessant anomie was no accident, was actually not just a product *but was actually a feature of* the environment. And he saw it and got it and reported on it in a way that let us hold our deformity up for inspection and find some kind of strategy for dealing with the back-and-forth of we-have-no-right-to-complain-but-jesuschrist-things-sure-are-a-bundle-of-fuck. And in doing so, he won accolades, received a Guggenheim and a truck full of other awards. Had a fucking endowed Roy Edward Disney Chair in Creative Writing created just for him at Pomona College – dude looked like he had the world on a string.

And so one hears the news and goes, damn, that guy had it going on and I'm barely stringing a decent sentence or two together outside of my little whore gigs where I'm crafting allegedly pithy messages that are making the world a safer place for insurance adjusters or some such. And we're the same age and have to wonder, his voice sounded just like my voice (if I were smarter &c.), and my shit's nowhere near as together as his shit (the imagination at this point has its own engine and power source), but he took a look at it all and decided, nope, too much to bear, and took lights out. How do I measure into this equation?

Add to this that so far in that year two of my friends had taken the same way out, and that less than two months later *another* friend – all of us around the same damn age, mind you – made the same choice, and I gotta tell you: I was terrified.

We pretty quickly started hearing about how his was the end battle of a long life struggling with clinical depression, and that his family were not all that surprised by the event. I re-read *Infinite Jest* that fall and was struck by how much sadness was there. It was just bone-breakingly sad to read, so I read it again to see if I had been insane to recall the book as so wickedly funny. Turns out it was both – both incredibly funny and horribly sad and filled with almost too much truth about how we try to deal with a world that serves up both sad and funny in such apparently random and heaping servings. And that – crucially – that the only apparent strategy that made any sense was to find some way of connecting, really, with someone else. And then, to accurately describe how fucking hard that can be, to make that connection, not matter how much you know you should.

And so what does he – or at any rate, his thoughts that made it to a page – what do these ideas do for me *now*? I mean, crafty fking christ, if the guy who wrote the way you thought you'd like to write ends it all so gruesomely, what's left?

Well, first I was left confused and scared and, frankly, pretty depressed. <fn>His death was not the cause of my depression, per se, but that this should have come along at a time when life was what h/we would refer to as *fraught* made things even more, well, fraught.</fn> But later – and especially after *The Pale King* came out, unfinished warts and all – I saw something else. Instead of thinking I might write that way if I were a “real” writer – and not just some ho for hire – I started to think about maybe, sort of, maybe actually being a real writer, maybe doing the hard work required to figure out if you have anything to say and the ability to say it.<fn>The jury remains forever out on this question.</fn> But then time passed and nothing came of it and I ignored this kind of insistently annoying Epiphany-like thing that refused to be ignored. Which of course, the trying to ignore that which

refuses to be ignored, only engenders more angsty fraughtness, &c.

And then, I endured My Apocalypse, and a couple of weeks after I left hospital, I was lying on the sofa in a dark room when – and I shit you not – when an entire written piece started to appear full-blown on the ceiling.<fn>And yes, there were footnotes on the ceiling, and complete sentences, too.</fn> And I rushed to the computer for like the first time in 4 months and sat down and wrote *The Chronicle* in its entirety and started “publishing” it in pieces on the Facebook machine. And lo, it was rough and sloppy and funny and tender, and my Epiphany-like thing just smiled quietly to itself.<fn>Some of you have read *The Chronicle*. It is under revision, but you got the bloggy first draft blast. You’ll tell your grandkids someday.</fn>

And here we sit, faithful denizens of this here bloggy vineyard – which by no coincidence whatsoever takes its title and *raison d’ecrir* from *The Pale King* – the words tumbling down like a poorly constructed simile on a shifting foundation of soft metaphors. And I thank DFW for his words – his Work, for it was truly some audacious labor – and for his ability to stave off his demons for as long as he did. He gave us what he had. I can miss him and wish he were still writing for us, but I can’t be angry at him for checking out. Just sad. And, oddly and thankfully, a little inspired.

So today, hot on the heels of National Suicide Prevention Week<fn>Which irony would not be lost on D.</fn>, I’ll thank all of you to remember, also, too: shit’s never as dark as it may seem. When the imagination creates it’s own dark engine and gloomy source of power, reach out. Keep going. The quest, it is infinite.