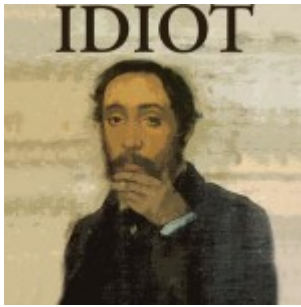


# My Favorite World #8



## I Like Big Books and I Cannot Lie

The astute follower of this blog<sup><fn></sup>The use of 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. Purely used book vendors are a different breed, and awesome on their own terms, but not what I'm talking about here. Sure, there was a Borders (now gone) and a B&N and a Books-A-Million. In my snark, renamed Books a Dozen and a bunch of other crap. But these are not especially appealing places for the book browser. 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. 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*, Hubris is never pretty. 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.

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## My Favorite World #6



From fashion to futbol to absurdist political horror stories to fabulist fiction to the happiness to be found in an unspotted foot...it's My Favorite World.

## Fashion Statement(?)

Guys, there's something about putting on a blazer. Amirite? You stand a little straighter, you carry a little more air. It's not that it's hard to slouch or slump with a blazer on, it's just that it's easier not to. I hold this truth to be self-evident: that all men being created equal, a blazer will elevate one over the other. It's one of article of clothing guaranteed to confer *gravitas*. Or so I thought.

Imagine my surprise when I discovered Michael Davies and Roger Bennett – otherwise known as Men in Blazers – while I was lying ill on the sofa. I was watching a Detroit- Boston NHL game<fn>Original 6 represent!</fn>, and when it was over the remote was too far away to flip over to Wolf Blitzer's beard ejaculating speculation about another airline tragedy. So.

Here comes Michael and Rog, a couple of balding Brits in tragically ill fitting blazers, holding forth from what looks a janitorial supply closet and offering up, well, best let them tell:

*We discuss football. And wear blazers. Usually at the same time. Men in Blazers is driven by the belief that Soccer is America's Sport of the Future. As it has been since 1972.*

And just that fast, I was laughing so hard I nearly rolled off

the couch.

On Chile's Alexis Sanchez, who likes to pull his jersey off after a goal:

*His back is made out of Braille, and you know what it says if you run your fingers across it? It says....sexy!*

And how does this 5'4 runt score leap over the 6"1 goalie to score?

*"His Drakkar Noir is like a trail of chloroform."*

Later, talking about – and showing hilarious examples of – the alarming decline of Mario Balotelli's once prodigious skills:

*His transformation from being an elite footballer to an avant garde slapstick comedian..."*

...which apparently was caused in some wise by too much time cavorting in hot tub advertisements with super models...

*He's clearly suffering some shrinkage from that hot tub, Rog.*

One of them later describe the owner of Man U (I think) as looking like a Muppet with too much starch.

I know next to nothing about British Premier League Football,<fn>FWIW, I like women's soccer better than the men's game – much less whining and flopping. Though I admit that saying that around "real soccer fans" makes me feel like I'm defending the layup/set shot laden WNBA.</fn>but if these guys are part of the broadcast squad, I'll be watching more than I had ever imagined. Even though my philosophy of the Supremacy of the Blazer has been shattered evermore. Here's a nice dose to give you an idea. Think Skip Carey and Pete van Wieren with posh British accents.

[http://www.nbcsports.com/show/men-blazers?guid=nbc\\_bpl\\_mib\\_top10characters\\_141229](http://www.nbcsports.com/show/men-blazers?guid=nbc_bpl_mib_top10characters_141229)

Also, too, they have a posh posh Latin motto:

*viri recte vestiti*

Men who are clothed. They qualify, but only just.

Posh. MFW.

## The Never Ending Reading Challenge

I've finally finished Perlstein's *The Invisible Bridge*, a surrealist drama about the so-called rise of the ever comical penis in a suit, Ronald Reagan. Fortunately, the story has a happy ending, where Reagan is denied his shot at the 1976 Republican presidential nomination at the last minute. The last line is a quote from one of the Wise Men Pundits of Washington, who notes that at age 65, Reagan is far too old to consider another run for the Presidency.

What a relief that was! The whole book long I feared that nothing could stop the Sainted Ronaldus Maximus. Can you imagine how catastrophic a Reagan presidency would have been for this country? We dodged a bullet there, for sure ya betcha.

Now after that chilling ride of absurdist horror, I turn my attention to something more down to earth and believable: *Don Quixote*. But not until I finish up the Italo Calvino collection of *CosmiComics*. Calvino introduces protagonists who have existed and evolved since the beginning of time, with generally unpronounceable names (Qfwfq is the main "guy"), and who are not human – in fact, what they are beyond pure existence or unicellular *being* is usually uncertain. Though Qfwfq's romantic interest is called Priscilla, and it appears she evolves into a camel over the eons. – but who embody

more humanity and insight into the human condition than most so-called flesh and blood co-called characters in 98.43% of so-called fiction. That a work of such playful, meta style evokes such heartbreak and yearning is testimony to a writing style that is learned, witty, tender, and above all, light. I cannot recommend this one more highly.

So many books. So little time.

## Happy Feet

Main reason this is My Favorite World? This:



Petechial Rash – Very Nasty

That's my ankle/foot almost exactly six months ago. The rest of my pitiful corpus looked pretty much the same. Somehow I've made it to the end of 2014, and there were a couple of times I wasn't so confident I'd get here. So, yeah pretty much good that I didn't die.<fn>YMMV</fn>

My New Year's Resolution for 2015 is simple and concise: stay the fk out of the hospital. I wish the same for all of you. Thanks for sharing My. Favorite. World.

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## **I Decked the Halls and the Halls Decked Me**

The holidays are nearly through. I have enjoyed a sufficiency of great food, good cheer, spiked nog, family, wrapping paper, tinsel, and close quarters. And I got the new John Cleese memoir, a most perfect gift.

I have also endured a scarcity of time alone to think, to walk, to sit, to stare aimlessly. In short, the time to do the things necessary to write something that doesn't suck.

All this a long way around admission that this week, I got nothing. I offer a full refund for any inconvenience this has caused.

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## **My Favorite World #2**



carefully arranged bookshelf designed to project an image of erudition and good taste. This is naked, unmediated, belle-lettristic ambition.<fn>Unless the list maker fabricated the list and left it in the street “accidentally” so as to disarm the culture spy and make him (me) believe that this represents the unguarded Truth about someone (but who?) when in fact it is a fabrication on par with the carefully arranged bookshelf that displays Foucault and Joyce and Schopenhauer while the dogeared copy of *50 Shades of Grey* lies hidden away under the bed pillow. But only a hopeless paranoid or manipulator would even entertain the possibility of such subterfuge, so let’s just move ahead as though nothing happened.</fn>

It’s quite a list, every bit as intriguing as any of those “you must have read these books or you are a Philistine” listicles on Buzzfeed. How many have you read? I’ve read eight. Strikethroughs are from the original list; my reads are marked by \*. Spelling and capitalization as it appears on the card.

- Anaïs Nin, *Delta of Venus*
- William Trevor, *The story of Lucy Gault*
- Vann Martel, *Life of Pi* \*
- Philip Roth, *The human stain* \*
- ~~EL Doctorow, *City of God*~~
- Michel Faber, *Under the skin*
- Paulo Coelho, *The Devil + Miss Prym*
- ~~Chuck Palahniuk, *Choke*~~ \*
- Jamie O’Neill, *At swim, two boys*
- Rushdie, *Fury* \*
- ~~Jonathan Franzen, *The corrections*~~ \*
- Michel Houellebecq, *Platform*
- Hanif Kureishi, *Gabriel’s Gift*
- Aleksander Hemon, *Nowhere Man*
- JM Coetzee, *Slow Man*
- Padget Powell, *Typical*
- ~~Bret Easton Ellis, *American Psycho*~~

- Esther Freud, *Hideous Kinky*
- Joyce Carol Oates, *Black Water*
- JM Coetzee, *The Master of Petersburg* —> *Disgrace*
- Rushdie, *The Moors last sigh* \*
- ~~Margaret Atwood, *Alias Grace*~~
- JG Ballard, *Crash* \*
- Pauline Reage, *Story of O*
- Georges Bataille, *Story of the eye*

A couple of things caught my eye.<fn>Clues to our friend's personality?</fn> Capitalization is haphazard.<fn>Or perhaps this seeming inattention to detail is in fact a cleverly constructed detail of the aforementioned fabrication, a subtle ruse of informality that is itself a misdirection, and possibly proof of the list maker's devious nature. But that's crazy talk.</fn> Rushdie is the only author listed without a first name. Our friend misspelled Padgett with only one 't', but faithfully included the umlat for Anaïs Nin. I like that Rushdie and Coetzee appear twice in the list, the result of one of those "AHA" moments. Also, the second Coetzee item bears an arrow up and to the right to add *Disgrace* to the list; an aha atop an aha. These are the only authors listed more than once. And the almost after-thoughtish inclusion of both *The Story of O* and *Story of the Eye* indicates someone who either has a taste for the salacious or is in for a very big surprise.<fn>Or this is just another part of the subterfuge, an elaborate forgery to make me think that our friend goes in for the belle-lettristic strain of smut, not the 50 shades nonsense that sparked a brunch conversation between my mother and mother-in-law as to what the word 'fisting' could possibly mean, but never mind that, who would you like to see as Mr Grey, I thought of that nice George Clooney right away, &c., and really, I'm not sure my son has recovered from that episode and may never.</fn>

I hate to think of my unknown friend pining for this carefully curated catalog. If anyone in the neighborhood has any idea

who belongs to this list, let them know that I am keeping it safe for return (and adding most of it to my own list) and that I'd love to meet her/him. Even if it's all a big put-on.

## **The Invisible Bridge**

Before I get into the list, Rick Perlstein's *The Invisible Bridge: The Fall of Nixon and The Rise of Reagan* sits at the top of my reading pile. Along with his first two books, *Before the Storm: Barry Goldwater and the Unmaking of the American Consensus* and *Nixonland: The Rise of a President and the Fracturing of America* – Perlstein chronicles the history of the conservative movement in the post-WWII era as a means of examining the polar split that has come to characterize political thinking.

*There were two tribes of Americans now...One comprised the suspicious circles, which had once been small, but now were exceptionally broad, who considered the self-evident lesson of the 1960s and the low, dishonest war that defined the decade to be the imperative to question authority, unsettle ossified norms, and expose dissembling leaders—a new, higher patriotism for the 1970s.*

In his introduction, Perlstein writes of asking one of his colleagues, a member of the 'suspicious circle', to review the manuscript.

*She told me I'd best not send it; she couldn't think straight about Reagan for her rage. Her beef, and that of millions others, was simple: that all that turbulence in the 1960s and '70s had given the nation a chance to finally reflect critically on its power, to shed its arrogance, to become a more humble and better citizen of the world – to grow up – but Reagan's rise nipped that imperative in the bud. Immanuel Kant defined the Enlightenment, the sweeping eighteenth-century intellectual-cum-political movement that saw all*

*settled conceptions of society thrown up in the air, which introduced radical new notions of liberty and dignity, dethroned God, and made human reason the new measure of moral worth – a little like the 1960s and '70s – as “man’s emergence from his self-incurred immaturity.” For these citizens, what Reagan achieved foreclosed that imperative: that Americans might learn to question leaders ruthlessly, throw aside the silly notion that American power was always innocent, and think like grown-ups. They had been proposing a new definition of patriotism, one built upon questioning authority and unsettling ossified norms. Then along came Ronald Reagan, encouraging citizens to think like children, waiting for a man on horseback to rescue them: a tragedy.*

All three books are long reads at around 800 pages each, but well worth the effort. If spending 800 pages with Reagan’s happy, sunny, optimistic bullshit seems too much to bear, here’s a more concise history.<fn>Ain’t really a life; ain’t nothing but a movie. Yet it remains My. Favorite. World.</fn>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sLtRHN7fsgY>