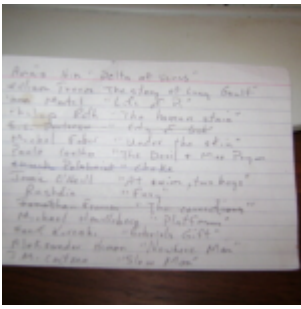


My Favorite World #2



Welcome back to My Favorite World, a weekly feature that highlights some things that make this my favorite world. These are the things that make me do the happy dance, only that's just inside my head because my dancing is surely terrifying.

The List

The things that make this My Favorite World can pop up anywhere. Last week I was walking Maggie, The Wonder Dog of Wonderment (who herself makes this MFW), and came across this note card crumpled in the middle of the street. It's a list of 26 authors/books, with five of them struck through in different colored ink or pencil. An aspirational list with dispatched works struck? I love to think that one of my neighbors has such ambition on the literary front.

One of my favorite games is to sneak a peek at the bookshelves when I visit a new friend's home or office to pull back the curtains on the friend's tastes and psyche. Fully aware of the possibility that you may have carefully arranged your books and cds for maximum effect on the nosy nellie who believes himself to be a cagey spy. Of course, the surveillor may anticipate your caginess and add or subtract style points accordingly. The whole thing is fraught, but it is still one of my favorite games. I once walked into a work mate's home and saw a shelf with the collected works of O'Reilly and Hannity (all hardback!!) displayed with great pride, and not a single other book in sight. I figured he was either fucking with me or a chowderhead. Ensuing conversation confirmed the

latter.</fn> This is something like that, except i) I have no idea who the person might be, and ii) this list is not a 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>