

A close-up photograph of a wooden surface, showing the natural grain and texture of the wood. The lighting is warm and directional, coming from the upper left, which creates a soft glow and highlights the ridges and valleys of the wood grain. The overall color palette is a range of browns, from light tan to deep, dark chocolate tones. In the center of the image, the words "BREATHE IN." are written in a clean, white, sans-serif font. The text is centered horizontally and vertically, standing out clearly against the textured background.

BREATHE IN.

I heard that blogging isn't cool anymore¹
which means now I can blog all the time
again and say whatever I want and oh
yeah I'll still have the longest post titles in
Litblogtown because I've got *game*, son,
even when I'm not playing

Thumb Drives and Oven Clocks — August 26, 2011, Sometime Near Midnight

● LATE LAST YEAR, I DECIDED³ THE ONLY WAY I COULD EVER WORK THROUGH MY EVER-GROWING TBR PILE WOULD BE TO TACKLE IT IN STRICT CHUNKS. Like, line 'em up, knock 'em down piles, projects, whatever you want to call them. Looking at my stacks of books, both physical and virtual, I realized there were a lot of long books on there, both physically and spiritually. Books I wanted to read or re-read but which I knew could easily get put off for months or years at a time, which fact I knew because it was exactly what I had done with most of them.

Flash forward almost eight months⁴, and I've just begun reading the last book on that pile. Like Callie Miller, who has spent the last I don't know how long re-reading all of Haruki Murakami's novels, I'm:

...floundering a bit on many fronts. I don't really want it to end. I very much want it to end. I probably should have written about each book as I completed it. I should have taken

*academic-style notes. I'm glad I didn't do anything of the sort.*⁵

There is so much to say about all of these books I've read this year. And I kick myself a little bit for not saying more about them, until I give myself an actual break and realize that, hey, I've been working a day job and going to school⁶ and starting to develop these like professional-level design career plans⁷ and, oh yeah, taking on a freelance-

type project here and there. If I haven't been as active a blogger in the last few years, it's *not* because I haven't *wanted* to write more about books.⁸ I have. Badly.⁹ But at the end of the day, the day has to end, whether or not you've accomplished the thousand items on your to-do list for the entire year.

So here we are, with about 900 pages between me and the end of both *Against the Day* and my big crazy stupid ambitious reading project¹⁰ for the

If I could blog like this all the time, I would. But then I think of the reading that's left to do, and I get nervous. There's a very real fear of death at the core of a reading life, one that can be simultaneously alluded to and masked by silly self-referential blog posts and imaginary pull-quotes from alternate-universe versions of the essays in which they are found.

year, and me wondering if the question about a project like this is, what exactly from it did you learn, are you learning?

And I *think* one of my stated or unstated goals was to learn to be more wholly focused on the book I'm reading right now and spend less time looking forward to the book that follows.¹¹ Frankly, it's a lesson I'm still grappling with, knowing how much I both want to continue enjoying a book like *Against the Day* for years at a time¹² while also hurrying up through it right now today¹³ to finish it so I can get to the short short *short* and also hopefully fast books that I have lined up after it.¹⁴ It's a pseudopainful paradox, the dual calls placed by literature to our eyes and minds, one call from the page in front of us, one from the pages that follow. But lining up all these sorts of books in a row does serve as a refreshing sort

of antidote¹⁵ to that latter call, a recognition that, for someone with some role¹⁶ to play in the modern world of books, really, it's okay to just check out for a while and actually go read some other stuff, whatever the current buzz¹⁷ might be.¹⁸

What an exercise like this does not teach is the patience to get through a terrible book for the sake of saying you got through a terrible book. It does teach patience with books that aren't easy going; I had put *The Recognitions* on this reading list for the year because I knew I needed to

read it at least once,¹⁹ but now, having read it, having pushed through it, having understood *maybe* a quarter of it,²⁰ I can safely say it's going back onto some re-read project list down the line in a couple years maybe, because, *hub wait what the hub wha wha wha?* Parts of it were insanely awesome and parts of it might have been awesome if I knew what was going on and other parts were words on pages that went in one eyeball and out the other, but at least I read it, essentially, and saw enough in it to know I want to go back to it someday,

armed with more coffee and a willingness to tackle something complex and difficult in a meaningfully focused quasi-academic way. Unlike *Giles Goat-Boy*, which I am not ashamed to admit I gave up on after about a hundred fifty pages, because I hate allegory.²¹ There are books you push through because they feel worth it, like exercise, which is horrible but good for you, I guess, and then books you just say no to, because, let's face it, flabbo,²² you're just no marathon runner, and your time on this earth is brief.²³

On a more specific note, one nice surprise to come from this project was that I learned that it is possible to enjoy *War and Peace* completely, without reservation, as a novel of ideas and characters, story and mood, and that most all of the baggage associated with the title "War and Peace" is bullshit, and worth ignoring, but that, you know, if you don't make it through the book, that's okay, too, so long as you do or do not make it through the book with clear eyes and full hearts.²⁴

Before this project

began, the idea of re-reading books seemed silly, optimistic at best, what, again, with all the new stuff and un-read old stuff that has yet to be tackled. As I come to the end of this project I realize now that I could spend the rest of my life reading only the books I've read up to this point in my life because it's not really re-reading when you're a completely different person than you were when you first read the book.²⁵

Which about sums up my experience with *Infinite Jest*, a book I am so very glad I have finally re-read, and which about I can mainly say that it is, in fact, well worth re-reading, and that, surprisingly, and despite what certain recent Internet debates might have you think, style is the least interesting thing about the book we could be talking about,²⁶ and that if you haven't read the book since sometime before September 12, 2008, you'll probably want to make sure

you're in a healthy enough place mentally before you pick it up again.²⁷ Which you should do, someday, whenever is right for you because, really, it's still an awesome book.

Following up *Infinite Jest* was probably a fool's task for any book on the list, which may have helped contribute to the re-downfall of *Giles Goat-Boy*, but the next full book I read, the one I just finished last week, was probably one of the other most pleasant surprises on the list.

I put *Warlock* on here not because it was absurdly long but because I sort of worried it would feel like it would feel absurdly long. I am no genre snob, I grew up on the stuff and I look forward to reading more of it,²⁸ but something about the idea of reading a *western* sort of chafed the wrong way. Like, I don't know, I've never read or watched any westerns ever, I think; I guess the closest I've ever come would be the gunslinging action in Stephen King's *Dark Tower* series, which, I know, come on, right? But I mean the book's a NYRB book and those guys and gals consistently put out awesome books and plus

it got the nod from Grace Krilanovich²⁹ and Thomas Pynchon so why not right? Turns out it's one of the best books. Engaging and enjoyable and the style is perfect and there's a good reason why the back cover copy drops casual mention of the fact that it was published at the height of the McCarthy era in America; ah social paranoia, yes! Good times. All of which is still perfectly relevant to our modern society.³⁰ And plus gun fights and a lot of whisky and also whoring and honor and cold-blooded murder and references to the yellowness of bellies, which, all, basically, are, like, the ingredients of anything that is awesome at all, right? Which is to say: go, go read this book, because I loved it and I want you to love it too.

It timed out well for me, too, the spot it took in the year. One of my favorite things when reading a stack of seemingly unrelated books is when one book talks to the book that preceded it, when a theme gets picked up and mutated in some new way, when some weird connective thread lays across their separate pages

like some bit of spider silk. When immersed in these long books that kind of connectivity is both there and not there. I mean, obviously, reading *Life and Fate* right after *War and Peace*, connections out the ears, but without sitting down with the pencil and the notes and the time by the bucketload, hard to really lay it all out, because there's so much. But then what of connections between the other books I read this year? Hard to say; so much gets lost when pulling one author's all-eclipsing sky down and replacing it with another. And plus all the other nonsense going on in life. But then here I am about to lift back up

out of these cross-country treks and it's like Thomas Pynchon and Oakley Hall got together one day and decided to work together³¹ to remind me that it's all the same journey, which, okay, cheesy, but, still, you know? What I'm saying is *Against the Day*, in its way, picks up almost exactly where *Warlock* left off. It's spooky and weird and not impossible that it was planned that way. And also mostly just exciting and awesome and weird and it raises more questions than can be answered or even asked in one blog post.³²

•
And so what then? Long books are long, right? And sometimes they're

awesome and it's worth reading a bunch now and then because you get this flow going and you get an author doing things to your head for a while or maybe for a week if you're reading particular fast or are on vacation or just unusually focused; nothing too deep. But, oh, there is depth, depth of experience that can never really translate to a discussion or an explanation, which fact is what we all dance wildly around in our blog posts and our reviews,³³ the fact that reading a book isn't like how we say it is but exactly how we feel it is. All of this imperfection serves to amplify and confuse and enlighten and strengthen the experience,

sure, but. It goes back around in a somewhat forced and self-aware-ly circular way to what Callie said in my quote up top: academic notes are fine, but this time, I'm glad I didn't take them. But, you know, maybe, after all, we can still talk about it, a little bit, at least. Maybe. Sort of. Kind of.



Reading a book
isn't like how we say it is
but is exactly how we *feel* it is.

Endnotes

1 Which, okay, may or may not technically be true. But it kind of makes sense. I mean, I shouldn't make grand pronouncements about the blogging scene, seeing as I've been so distracted from it for so long, but. Which, well, in any case, it's sad, if it's true, that blogging is sort of a dead art, already.^a Because, and this is still despite my active absence from doing it so much, I still believe in it, the fundamental potential of it, as a creative and artistic and argumentative and discursive form of writing and work and discourse and humanity-being of its own—like, treated fairly, blogging really should be the new essay form, putting that whole original “to try” meaning back into

a. At which point I know already a thousand people will jump out of the woodwork and shake their fists at me and ask me how I can say such things, and, well, thank you. Sincerely. I mean, what do I know, right? I'll admit I have a particular comment made over on Google+ in mind here, which, being too lazy to look up whether the comment in question was share-friendly, I'm not going to attribute or quote; I'll leave it to the speaker to decide to promote or unpromote his or her own commentary. I should also note this is all within the content of the book reviewing and book discussion community, if that makes the case any better or worse to stomach or not stomach.

the thing, you know? When it's like you do it and if you're wrong, no harm, no foul. It's *trying* more so than *being*. Which is, what, not more valuable than polished work, executed ideals? Or something? Point being, if blogging is dead, why, exactly, did we murder it? Are we so insecure in our insecurity?^b

2 See <http://tdaoc.org/>.

3 At least, for now; chaos beckons at every turn.

4 Which puts me at about two months behind my original^c timetable.

5 Via <http://www.litlifela.com/counterbalance/2011/08/lit-bits-and-a-bit-about-lingo.html>.

6 My summer class that just ended about a month ago was four nights a week, right after my day at my day job, for three hours a night, for eight straight weeks.

b. I guess I know I am. It's probably part of the reason it's been so hard to “do” it anymore. But that's something I need to work out for myself.

c. And, in hindsight, highly—yet, surprisingly, not too horribly—optimistic.

This was my Drawing II class,^d during which class I was officially diagnosed with dyshidrosis, this beyond annoying sort of eczema that attacks the hands,^e leaving them, untreated and abused, looking like ground beef. “And so you are in a class working with powder media,” my teacher said, when I told him the news. I lost three weeks of experience with pastels in favor of one week of agony in which not much at all happened and two weeks of work with watercolors,^f until I’d healed well enough I could at least fit my hands into cotton gloves in order to hold pastel sticks again without feeling like I was going to require a trip to the emergency room afterward. And while I’m doing a lot better these days^g it’s still not uncommon to find me with a band aid covering some bit of split or cracked skin, somewhere on my fingers.

- 7 Which kind of completely freaks me out in ways it’s really hard to explain.^h
- 8 This year I’ve (somehow!) written one book reviewⁱ and I’ve participated in a super cool roundtable discussion about a really good book,^j which last activity I think spoiled me, what with all the give and take and deadline-y-ness of it. There just hasn’t been time for much else. Which is a shame. Maybe as I begin to phase out of school over the next few months and maybe as I get some other professional-

-
- d. Introducing color to the process, via pastels, which are wicked fun to work with, if, personally, a bit dangerous, as shall be discussed below in the following clauses.
 - e. And I guess the feet, too, possibly, but, not *my* feet, thank goodness, knock on wood. Seriously, knock on some wood.
 - f. Which I love, even if I still feel completely clueless how to make them look more awesome than just, like, spills of color, which, themselves, are often awesome. But I digress.
 - g. And managed to pull through in the end to finish the class with one of the best pieces of art I’ve ever made, even if it is a self portrait, not that I ought to rest on the laurels of my pretty face.
 - h. Well, I mean, it’s imposter syndrome, you know? Who am I? I am nobody. Nobody at all.
 - i. Which should be coming out soon and which I can’t really wait to share links to because, spoiler alert, I really want everyone to read the subject of the review.
 - j. See <http://www.edrants.com/stone-arabia-roundtable-part-one/>.

life ducks in a row, I’ll find the time again, or, perhaps, I will not. So be it.

- 9 Oh and plus and this may only be of interest to me but whatever, as I tackle more design-type work in my day-to-day job life, as the imposter syndrome feeling slowly gives way to some creeping sense of actual bona-fide possibility, as I less and less identify myself as someone whose only identifiable professional skill is “writes good,”^k I find the world-weariness that began to accompany the thought of ever putting words on a page whether for art or for profit slowly lifting, like some abstract black cloud, which said lifting begins to let in some light, by which some things begin to seem both more clear and more shiny and attractive, once again, which may or may not result in more critical writing or, once again, some vague attempt to write actual fiction that the world in no way “needs” but which could be as pleasant a method as any other of passing the time, should there come to be some surfeit of time that begs for being passed.
 - 10 Which pales completely in comparison to a project like Ed Champion’s reading of the Modern Library series,^l which said project inspires in me simultaneous feelings of dread and terror and lust and envy until I realize the guy’s reading and actively Tumblring about *Finnegans Wake*^m and my feeling shift more toward the “You just keep on keeping on with that, pal” end of the spectrum.ⁿ
 - 11 It’s a silly lesson, I suppose, which makes it a very human lesson. It’s one I’ve felt worth the time and consideration, in any case, I think, speaking, as I am, from a very flesh-and-blood human being on a planet full of melting ice caps and freezing economies perspective, knowing, as I do, the tremendous pressure a book recommendation engine such as the entire Internet can have on one’s desire for new books—how can you enjoy the book you’re reading right now when there’s someone on Twitter telling you about another book you have to immediately go read
-
- k. Joke.
 - l. See <http://www.edrants.com/the-modern-library-reading-challenge/>.
 - m. See <http://finneganswakenotes.tumblr.com/>.
 - n. And also envy. And...envy.

immediately right now *oh my god?* I suppose this would be less a problem in a pre-Internet age, when you had to actually interact with other people in the same physical space as you to get ideas for books you might want to read, or walk into a bookstore and look at things on a shelf, but.

- 12 Which, a book that long, one could, easily.
- 13 Which, obviously, is not about to happen, seeing as my attention span, here, about 36 hours^o before I'm slated to hop on a plane and a five day vacation in Maine, is increasingly of the nonexistent variety, which is either an improvement or not from my state earlier in the week, when mostly every single thing that passed in front of my eyes was a new shiny thing to be played with and almost immediately discarded.
- 14 Which really is just a function of, you know, wow, way to plant at least^p the *fourth* thousand-plus page book of the year at the end of the list, Darby, good work on that one.
- 15 Well, maybe it's more like an Aleve or two, even if which Aleve may be accompanied by the sort of morning-after post-binge never-again type lamentations accompanied by furtive glances at the Proust box set gathering guilt-ridden specks of dust by the hour.
- 16 (absurdly marginal)
- 17 Which, you know, the buzz? I don't know. It's hard. The problem with taking on "some role to play in the modern world of books"^q means you start to see it a little bit less as this eternal passion of the mind with deep roots in childish escapist fantasies and wonder and magic and eyes-wide-open acceptance of the way the world might and could work and a little bit more as a business in which people have to do things in order to move product across counters or through the mail. And okay I get it it's part of growing up but honestly I wouldn't mind knowing a little bit less about the way things are; I suspect I'd be happier for it, and maybe a little more willing to try writing my own fiction again, if I didn't know that the odds of

o. Closer to 16 at the time of this footnote.
p. Math, right now, being not my strong suit.
q. (absurdly marginal)

anybody actually ever reading anything I ever write again from this day forward are somewhere between roughly "zero" and "good fucking luck with that, guy." I don't know. I don't know.^f

- 18 Though I really do still plan on reading *The Passage* and *Skippy Dies* and books that have generated absurd amounts of buzz in my Twitter- and life-feeds and which I suspect^g nobody actually reads or thinks much about any more, maybe, which sort of thing, this buzz-and-boom literary cycle, might be a topic for some more broad discussion, if anybody is interested. Or also might not be.^h
- 19 It's possible this book was really one of the reasons I did this list; I'd read the opening page a couple hundred times but at some point, you know, you gotta put the barrel to your head and pull the trigger, right?
- 20 Optimistically.
- 21 I gave up on it at about the same point the first time I read it, a couple years back, sometime after I read *The Sot-Weed Factor*. In the years since I honestly forgot why I gave up on it, and remembering only that I had decided early on that I love John Barth and want to read everything he's ever written, I added it back to this list, thinking, this is the year, right?^u And plus a tale of Cold War relationships ought to be right up my alley, since I mean, the Cold War, that was some crazy business, right? But I think I'm taking a permanent break from this book and moving on to *Lost in the Funhouse* sometime in the next year.^v I said as much, when I looked up at my girlfriend, right around my breaking point, as she was in the process of finishing off *Against the Day* for her first

r. *Blah blah blah, get a blog, you whiny asshole.* - *The Editors*
s. Probably falsely, yes.
t. But really though, are books, years in the writing, written for the weeks after publication, or for the ages between now and the end of time? Do I really have to read these books right now or would it be okay if I read them, say, next year? Or even, gasp, the year after that? I don't know. I'm interested.
u. Gun, head, trigger, etc.
v. Or just a re-read of *Sot-Weed*, which is what I really want to do.

time, which I really really wanted to get to sooner rather than later for my second time, and I said “This book is allegory and I forgot it was allegory and I really hate allegory and I don’t think I want to read this anymore ever,” and she said, “You should write yourself a note for the next time you think you want to read that book,” and so I did.^w Which should not in any way misrepresent Barth as being less than awesome or *Sot-Weed* as being less than completely so worth it and which I hope I re-read again sometime in the next decade, for real.

22 Me.

23 And allegory is shit.^x

24 See <http://tdaoc.org/2011/05/01/because-i-needed-a-way-to-make-the-instructions-feel-like-a-short-beach-read-i-went-ahead-and-read-war-and-peace-and-it-was-good/>. Also note when I say “completely” I do not mean that in a page-count quantitative fashion, in so far as I basically skimmed the closing essays, because, seriously, whatever, things to do, places to be seen. Also I do not know what the *Friday Night Lights* reference is doing there, other than that, like *War and Peace*, *Friday Night Lights* is also awesome and enjoyable on multiple levels, at least through the three seasons I’ve seen so far, and I really can’t wait to watch the last two, so please don’t spoil anything for me just yet, okay?

w.



x. Which is not to say that something *allegorical* can’t be really awesome. Big difference. See *Warlock*, by Oakley Hall, as allegorical-ish a novel as there is, but only in vaguely allusive ways, to the best of my knowledge.

- 25 Not to mention the fact that a book itself might in some Foucault-ish^y way literally not be the same book it was the last time you read it.^z
- 26 Which, see, the footnote that follows, I’d begun drafting it a couple weeks ago, and then Maud Newton wrote this article in the *New York Times*,^{aa} and that got a lot of buzz, and then this last week, Ed Champion responded with a take-down of as much Maud Newton as her essay,^{ab} and I kind of want both of them to just shut up, because, really? In light of my own re-read, style is so beside the point. And I say this as a self-proclaimed aesthete, one who feels style usually gets short shrift in our discourse about literature, when it is in fact often the most interesting thing about prose fiction,^{ac} even if it is factually the most difficult thing to discuss. I like and respect both Maud and Ed quite a bit, they being litblog OGs since like before the dawn of OG-dom, but, it’s like, come on, people tried to write like DFW because *of course we did* and they weren’t as good as DFW because *of course we weren’t* and Ed wrote

-
- y. Check out mister cool Foucault reference guy here. Right. - The Editors
- z. Not to mention the fact that I’m just essentially terrible at remembering books. The more I read the more I realize I read for the here-and-now, not the long term, which, is that awful? I don’t know. There’s another book here that I haven’t mentioned yet because I wrote a review of it and I’m waiting for the review to come out but let’s say it involved extensive re-reading and I was shocked to see how much I’d just lost, in the time since I’d first read the book and before I re-read it for the review; I knew I loved the book and yet I was going back to find out why, for myself, and anybody who happens to read my review of it. Which isn’t so unlike what happened with *Infinite Jest*, as I say up there in the increasingly distant body of the essay, albeit in a less-risk fashion, I guess. All of which further serves to annoy me by realizing how much extra work there is to get done here before, like, death, or senility. I try not to think about it more than I have to, but, damn, the clock is ticking every damn day, isn’t it?
- aa. See <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/08/21/magazine/another-thing-to-sort-of-pin-on-david-foster-wallace.html>.
- ab. See <http://www.edrants.com/when-the-flock-changed-david-foster-wallace-maud-newton/>.
- ac. In so far as it’s something painting and music can’t do and I guess drama can do but only sort of, and not really in the same way.

his take-down because *of course he did*. This is all Fark-tag [OBVIOUS] level stuff here,^{ad} it's like, pre-postulate stuff. None of which is really relevant to the far more interesting questions literally about life and death and how we live and how we die that are raised on nearly every single page of *Infinite Jest*, a book which remains excellent today albeit for some far more upsetting reasons, and which is all well worth renewed focus.^{ae}

- 27 I was 23 when I read *Infinite Jest* for the first time. I loved it, and went on to read most everything else that David Foster Wallace had published in book form^{af} and let my own writing, at least my blog-style writing, be influenced by his writing.^{ag} And still to this day I use footnotes,^{ah} though not because I'm trying to "be" DFW, but because he was *right*, in some interview clip I have long since internalized and have lost the link to; endnotes and footnotes are just sort of like a little more related to the way we actually think and work through ideas. And plus are generally fun when handled well.^{ai} That was 10 years ago. I'm 33 now, and I've just re-read^{aj} *Infinite Jest* for the first time^{ak} and looking at the book today, in a world in which it seems like everything but the text itself has changed, I couldn't help but feel like I was actually reading it for the first time.^{al} It was amazing

ad. See <http://www.fark.com/topic/obvious>.

ae. And no of course I'm not really suggesting these style questions and discussions aren't of interest but they're like footnotes to footnotes at this point.

af. Though I still have some stories left from *Girl with the Curious Hair* to get back to. And while I "kept up" with his output in the years that followed I haven't been able to read *The Pale King* yet because frankly I haven't been the least bit ready for it yet, because of things that will be made more clear in the course of the main text of this endnote.

ag. At least in terms of style, maybe (definitely) not in terms of intelligence—I mean, come on.

ah. [OBVIOUS]. And I was going to link to a book review in which I used footnotes but then it started to feel a little gratuitously self-referential, which, okay, I'm writing a footnote to an endnote to a blog post, so, yeah, but. But.

ai. I hope.

aj. Which doesn't at all feel like the right term.

ak. Ignoring an aborted re-read sometime between 2001 and DFW's death.

al. Though it's probably more fair to say I was reading it a

how much I had completely forgotten about^{am} and how much sub-level stuff held more impact this time through^{an} and how much stuff there was that would only be found on a re-read^{ao} and how much I'd actually made up in my own head since I'd last read the book^{ap} and yet how much of all of that somehow remains secondary to the fact that this time through, for all sorts of reasons,^{aq} the book simply read as so much more darker than I ever remembered it being? When I say everything changed since I last read this book, I mean, like, *everything*.^{ar} I was 23 and clueless a year out of college and I had a corporate-type job that I was coming to realize wasn't going to be very entertaining and I was single^{as} and I was going to be^{at} a big writer someday. September 11 hadn't happened yet. The Internet was still sort of not really the Internet yet, as much as it felt like it at the time;

different time, in a different way, than I had, that summer, ten years previous. And plus okay I'm not who I was back then. Foucault-ish. Whatever.

am. Like, how did the role of John Wayne with regards to The Moms slip out of my mind? How did I forget about the broom-death of the Antitoi? Crazy.

an. All those side characters, coursing through the novel on parallel paths of sadness, surfacing and dipping back below in their own rhythmic dances with this life we've built for ourselves.

ao. Like the fact that Don Gately's final relationship to a tide in one of the most brilliant (in terms of light and beauty) closing phrases of a book ever is actually a direct call back to a water reference about midway through the book which, just, oh. Oh.

ap. Why did I think the Tucson outcropping plot line ended with gunplay and a helicopter? I think I subconsciously wrote my own *Infinite Jest* fan fiction, or something.

aq. The most obvious one being, of course, the most relevant. Of course.

ar. Exaggeration.

as. I'm not, anymore. For which I'd like to thank my girlfriend once again for putting up with my recent diversification of interests and even for encouraging them in the right ways (if I ever sell a single screen print it's because you gave me a book about it and said "Go") and furthermore for really high-level tolerating my strange tendency to once in a while go shut myself up in the office and write long-windedly to the Internet. Thank you. You're the best.

at. Like, knew it. Knew it.

I had^{au} done a sort of experimental blog^{av} in which I wrote little pseudo-essay-story-type things. I hadn't even started my LiveJournal yet, let alone played my tiny^{aw} part in the great^{ax} litblog revolution of the 00's,^{ay} never mind Facebook, never mind Goodreads, never mind Twitter. The world was still a quieter, more pleasant-seeming kind of place, and even though I didn't have a (true) lick of understanding of my place in it, it was easier to feel like a place was mine for the taking. In that more optimistic^{az} time the book read almost like a cell-shaded, black-lined comic of a novel. Canada^{ba} and its terrorist blocks were, you know, funny; a game simulating nuclear war seemed sort of quaint^{bb}; tennis. And the sentences and the end notes and the audacity of the style of it and

au. Or had not, the timing is all blurry now.

av. Called *A Letter to Elise*, after the Cure song, which I am fairly certain you can no longer find anywhere online. Which means, it's possible, for even things on the Internet to evaporate, fully.

aw. (tiny, tiny)

ax. Quote-unquote.

ay. Which I hear tell officially died in the last year, which, to be fair, I can't say, I've had a hard time keeping up with or keeping engaged with most any blogs, even my own, in quite some time, for various personal reasons, some parts boredom, some parts business, some parts distraction, some parts, just, you know, time, it goes on, in its way, and I got older, and...

az. Which sounds horrible, but I mean more optimistic in a "nostalgia for a thing I know wasn't actually as good as it might seem now" sort of way, a fascinating sort of longing for something mostly because it got rosy-colored over time, and things that seem so bad about today are well offset by what really is good right here right now what someday I'll feel nostalgia for, etc.

ba. Which is one of the threads of the book that just screams out with so much more understanding in a way-things-could-have-been-and-yet-still-might-be way today, like, not in a personal-to-the-DFW-suicide way, but in a...the world got really screwed up this last decade, and yet, if it hadn't, weren't we sort of going to find a way to screw it up anyway? Not that it's all bad, of course. Not that it's all good. Just. Conflicted. Difficult. Worse than it should be, I mean.

bb. Which just in the last week since I drafted the early portion of this piece of this essay was released as a Decemberists music video which I have yet to watch but which I assure you you can likely find easily enough on YouTube (another thing that did not exist when I first read *Infinite Jest*, the summer of 2001.)

everything just swelled up inside me and: this. This, this, this. This was it, to me, this was something... new and exciting and awesome. I guess I try not to engage in hero worship,^{bc} but it would not be unfair to say that over the course of the 00's DFW was really a literary hero^{bd} of mine. And in my own writing^{be} I had to do that sort of hero-worship-but-killing thing, that, trying to write like him without writing like him^{bf} and while I can't say I thought about him every step of the way^{bg} I also wouldn't say it's unfair to suggest my own literary aspirations died a bit with him, when he died.^{bh} Which death I was left not a bit flummoxed

-
- bc. Once upon a time, I avoided the practice almost accidentally, in a sort of "check out the brass balls on that kid" way. These days it's in a more conscious way, in a way that has lead me to see that if someone has done something I'd like to have done I could just figure out how to do it myself or shut up about it. None of which is to indicate I don't have people who I wish I could just *be*, a little bit.
- bd. If not a plain and simple human hero. I didn't really know him at all, of course.
- be. The kind I did at night in coffee shops after work with the intent of one day publishing, not the kind I spew out online without editors keeping an eye on my worst impulses, for which, personal thank you's to those who have had the patience to edit book reviews I've submitted. Your effort and good cheer means a lot.
- bf. Like, no: I couldn't use footnotes in my stories, because, hero alert! But though, yes, I could try to write really long stories, because, hero alert! All of which is a little confused and weird but it was a weird and confusing first four-fifths of the decade. Which seems so long ago. But it wasn't, was it?
- bg. I had to make room for things like thoughts about *The Corrections*, as guilty of any book as being one I basically tried and failed to copy, and Stephen King and lots of other literary elephants in the room.
- bh. Which, okay! Not in the least suggesting a severely factual causal relationship here. There was a lot going on with regards to my own attempts to write fiction. In short, I choked, hard. In less-short, I'd written a novel and I'd written a bunch of short stories and I'd written a pile of 300,000 words toward a second novel and I was working on a draft of a third novel and I was honestly running myself into the ground with failure, with my inability to get a story published in a single lit magazine after more than a hundred attempts or to make tracks on getting an agent for the first novel, which I pushed out on sooner than I should have, to be fair, and I could go back in time and strangle myself for that, and but also I was having subject matter issues,

by, upset, distressed; depressed, even. Here was a guy and then he was gone. And I was angry about it.^{bi} And life went on and I could never really speak to it, to what his death meant to me^{bj} and, really, there was no need to, no reason to, not at the time; nothing I could have said could have really helped me or anybody else in any way. And *The Pale King* came out, and I couldn't read it, certain emotions too raw, and then this year came, in which I set up an ambitious reading list of long books, and it was time, time to go back. I hadn't read anything of his since his death and but not being able to resist the call of a ten-year anniversary read, I knew I had to make it make the list. And here we are today, and above everything else that changed around the book since, it's the darkness and *personal-ness* of the text that alarms me and moves me more than anything else, right here, right now. Once a book written by a hero made of light, now it is a book written by a man

running my head into the wall of possible stories I could write, and the expansion of recognition of the available works of literature to me via the litblog world was blowing my mind, and it seemed harder and harder to feel compelled by any one thread of what I could do to say there was something I must do—and also with regard to the litblog world I was seeing just how unlikely anything approaching “success” was for an author in this day and age, a situation I'm afraid has only grown worse since, and the reality and my outsized desires were clashing, and really beating me down; I let myself get beat down, and all around I had lost my first job and started a second job and had long since been rejected by just about every grad school I'd applied to for creative writing programs, and I was frustrated with my lack of career direction and having to be a “writer” in a corporate sense leaving less and less energy and/or desire to combat the writing issues that were by this point slaying me at night, and all around I was well-poised and in desperate need of a hard left, like, a hard, hard left turn, for a bit there, one which I took, hard, the fall of 2008, just before (before, before, before) news of DFW's death reached me (via Twitter), which news I can lay no blame on, but which was nonetheless completely and utterly discouraging to someone who still even then thought of the guy as a hero whose head the sun and stars and moon rotated about and who gave off light of an artistic nature so intense it blinded me a little to how little I was informed about who and what he actually was. And in self-pity, I failed to rise above.

bi. I really had no idea.

bj. However outmoded or outsized that “meaning” may be.

made of meat.^{bk} I made it about 70 pages before the thought of suicide^{bl} struck me; never again, despite my early best intentions, did it leave my mind, for the remainder of the book, which, today, for me^{bm} read as a book not just about entertainment but very much about its flip side, about the extremity of emotions and the points where they collided. This is a book in which there is both great hope and no hope at all. ^{bn}

- 28 My next project, which is looser and looser the closer I get to it, being one of diving into a huge gigantic pile of popular and genre-type books. Send your recommendations in now. I want books that are awesome and easy and great. And short. And fast. And with zombies or murderous things in them.
- 29 Which, okay, see <http://www.dzancbooks.org/the-collagist/2010/9/14/the-orange-eats-creeps-by-grace.html>.
- 30 How modern are we, really, after all?
- 31 Albeit apart by about 60 years.
- 32 Not that we're confined to a single blog post in our search for literary excellence and personal truth, thank goodness.
- 33 See http://www.pw.org/content/back_from_the_dead_the_state_of_book_reviewing_0.

bk. Synapses misfiring.

bl. As a concept relevant to the book and to the author of the book, not as a thing I might do.

bm. And it's likely this book read this way to others well before now, that I just read the book I needed to read at the time I read it.

bn. ...which is not where or how I intended for this endnote to end. I'm not sure where I intended to end this note. And while it's tempting to say its endless quality is a tribute to DFW and his magnificent book, it's not. The fact is this: this is, to the best of my knowledge, the first time I've really tried to write about DFW and what he and his books have meant to me since he died, and it's hard, in this, once again, really human, painful, honest, sincere way, manipulatively represented through a self-aware blog post or not, to find a way to say anything less weak sounding than: *damn it, damn it, damn it.*