

that are contemporary. That isn't what I would have expected. I'm a little saddened that Flann O'Brien or Jane Bowles didn't come up at all in that moment. Or Cervantes, really. I think I would have taken *Don Quixote*, had I been packing in the other room instead.

In fact, I think these two books are among the only two contemporary books that I really enjoy! I mean I like *2666* and I like *Hard-Boiled Wonderland*, but they don't quite melt me away like *Frances Johnson* does. And I definitely don't enjoy McSweeney's books or Neal Stephenson or, I know this is terrible, David Foster Wallace. I'm supposed to like these books, but I just don't.

Strangely enough, I have trouble with them because their author's personalities are so strong, above their characters, something which is a major problem with what I am writing to you right now! It seems like the only appeal of these words would be to get inside the mind of its author, is that true for you?

And this is something I struggled with immensely when reading Neil Gaiman. I stopped reading *American Gods*, because it was hard to read without feeling that Gaiman was whispering in all of the characters' ears. With *Frances Johnson*, I have such a hard time separating Frances from Stacey Levine, that I can't help but picture that it is a dressed-up, exaggerated Stacey that is wandering around Little Munson. Similarly, with Ishiguro, I feel like Ishiguro is the pianist, wandering around, oblivious to what happens next to him.

These are ridiculous criticisms of any of these books, though. To criticize that a book's author is present in one way but not the way you like? Even to bring up these criticisms is more than a bit pathetic, do I want to take up precious time in this candid biographical scene by complaining about what popular books have failed to bring me full enjoyment?