

3

This is the first of many beautiful lists in this book. They are always a delight, so be on the lookout for them!

5

The impossibility of saying just what you mean is one of Nordan's favorite motifs. Sometimes it takes a literal miracle to get the words right.

21

The terror of becoming what once hurt you, & the inevitability of it.

15

Nordan will often go on these imaginative flights of empathy for his characters, never what is happening but what might be happening.

23

"Your trouble is the geography." You will see this idea again & again.

27

Is death what makes love possible?

33

I find this scene to be unbearable & unbearably ~~true~~ true. The need to tear down the beautiful thing is one of the most shameful aspects of humanity & how hideous of us to just stand there gawking.

37

Why does Sugar's mother correct his grammar here? What is she implicitly saying about language & class & everything else?

41

I can't handle this.
I have to put the book down now.

43

Watch Sugar's Story become all of their stories, & watch the three boys tell it together, each part of it their own bit of truth.

45

"I suppose there is one more thing to tell."

The great refrain of the book.

49

"... the joy of secret things in secret places."

My whole childhood.

57

Again with the blame, fathers & geography.

46

Why the need to tell it as it didn't happen, but as it should have? And why keep reminding us that the better thing never happened? Why not just let us believe it? What is Nordan saying about dreams & truth & hope?

51

What is Gilbert trying to say, & why can't he say it? What is this fight about really?

65

Maybe my favorite
list of them
all.

69

What is the dead woman's
terrible life-giving secret?
With death comes love,
yes, but also the
hopelessness of love
too?

74

The moment of imagining
other possibilities for
yourself. To escape the
curse of your parents
& your geography.

This is the part of the book⁸³
I most struggle with. I think it's
Sugar realizing that escaping the
inherited evil of his (white) lineage
& his (Southern) geography will
be much more difficult than
he ever imagined. He must pluck
every last strand of that evil
from his heart & this work
will take his whole lifetime &
even longer.

88

The inherited evil of our
fathers, what we were
born into. How do we
rise from the curse of our
parents & our geography?
Is it even possible? As Sugar
says, What about me?

90

I love Douglas
so much.

95

"I understood that there is
something about seeing a
wounded man that makes you
want to hurt him."

This line has ~~haunted~~
haunted me for years.

96

The imagination as a
vehicle for empathy, &
in turn empathy as a
vehicle for mercy.

99

The mysterious
swamp-elves.

111

One of the great miracles
of this book is how quickly
creatures like rats can become
mythical beasts, a source of
awe & wonder. Let the
imaginative works reveal
the secret truth.

113

Each time with the
story about the ice pick
we get a little more
detail. And the rain is
always there to wash
what we have hidden out
into the open.

114

YES YES
YES!

128

Love is monstrous &
it doesn't work &
who even knows
anyway?

134

In college I had a friend
who loved this book almost
as much as I did, & any
time we went on a road
trip together, ~~at~~ the
second we hit Highway 7 he'd
roll his window down &
holler, "Get on down the
damn road! Yeah!"

136

His mom bought him the
gun, not his father. Her
effort breaks my heart.

139

"Get to know him,
you hardly know the
child."

150

Part of Nordan's genius
is how an old man's
overdose is the set up
for a joke but a child's
ruined birthday party
can break your
heart.

134

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151

It might not have been a hunting trip but they sure did manage to kill something.

152

This whole choking smothering southern manhood thing just about ruined us all, didn't it?

159

Nordan's son committed suicide several years before Nordan wrote *Music of the Swamp*. Without leaning too heavily on autobiography, I suppose it is in keeping with the themes of the book that, in this aspect, the father & son are switched here.

166

Telling a story in an attempt to say what you mean, & feeling horribly. The impossibility of saying just what you mean.

171

"And for that blindness to the future I will always be grateful."

176

This is my favorite description of a tornado ever.

181

The great revelation: in a book so obsessed with fathers, finally a moment of true empathy & understanding with Sugar's mother.

184a

There is one more thing left to tell.

Once, at the Oxford Conference for the Book - I forget what year - Lewis Nordan read this epilogue, a short piece called "Owls." I'd never

184b

seen Mr. Nordan in person before, though he'd long been my favorite writer. Tom Franklin stood on stage & introduced him. Mr. Nordan walked to the podium & sort of hovered there, frail & shaking, & I was a bit afraid for him. Jack

184c
Pendavis & Theresa Starkey sat to the right of me, & Michael Bibe was on my left. In that room were so many writers I loved & looked up to, M.O. Walsh & Jacob Rubin & a dozen others. I couldn't believe how lucky I felt, being in that room with all of my heroes, those magic

people who wrote actual 184d
books & stories, who were
living the very life I wanted
so badly for myself. And we
were all there to watch Lewis
Nordan read his best story,
'Owls.' He cleared his throat
& began, his ^{voice} quavering a little,
but then sounding out so strong
& brave, all that magic
happening right there in the

room with us. I could hardly 184e
hardly believe it. When he
finished I was crying, Jack
& Theresa were crying, even
Tom Franklin on stage was
crying.

It was perfect.

184f

This is my favorite story
anybody ever wrote ever.
I love it so much I can
hardly stand it. I do
hope you love it too.
Thank you so much for
reading.

159

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