Through a Zoomscreen, Darkly (300 words)

*For my friends in recovery*

While quarantined due to COVID-19, I’ve been writing a novel based on a rehab scam known as “The Florida Shuffle.” Consisting of defrauding insurance coverage and incentivized recruitment of rock-bottom addicts, this practice has become increasingly prevalent since the passing of the Affordable Care Act and the tragic rise of the tri-wave opioid epidemic (pharmaceuticals, heroin, fentanyl). In my research, I have read myriad accounts of the struggles and travails of recovery, redeemed by the singular blessing of clarity, and the initiation into seeing the world anew. It is of them I wish to speak.

The novel’s epilogue, as is, comes from Denis Johnson’s [“Looking out the Window Poem”](https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/48128/looking-out-the-window-poem) and reads “If I am alive now,/it is only/to be in all this/ making all possible.” Johnson, renowned for his 1992 collection *Jesus’ Son,* describes the glory of recovery, praising quotidian details (the sounds of traffic, of neighbor’s voices, his breath) with an appreciation that only arises from one deprived. Recovery is indeed a gift, we learn, a robust gratitude that turns every sky into a miracle:

Look out our astounding

clear windows before evening.

It is almost as if

the world were blue

with some lubricant,

it shines so.

I worry about my friends, as I call them, people I merely know from their handles on Reddit, Whisper, Twitter, SMART Recovery. Looking through Zoom screens for AA, looking out windows at the world denuded and gray, the world they lost and recovered. What must it be like to spend 30 days, or 3 months, doing the hardest thing a person can do, which is to grow into a different brain, only to have that world recede?I don't know, but I hope the new sober world continues to “shine so” for my friends.