

PRIMARY SOURCES¹

BY RICK MOODY

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BORN October 18, 1961, in N.Y.C. Childhood pretty uneventful. We moved to the suburbs. I always read a lot. I did some kid stuff, but mostly I read. So this sketchy and selective bibliography—this list of some of the books I have around the house now—is really an autobiography.

²Art instructor at St. Paul's School when I was there (1975-79). Abbé was an older, forgetful guy when I met him. He was in his late sixties, probably. He lived alone in an apartment above the infirmary at S.P.S. His studio had burned down years before, taking a lot of his paintings, and I believe this accounted for the halo of sadness around him. He could be infectiously happy, though. His house was full of jukeboxes, dolls, and electrical toys. Games of every kind.

One time I showed him my "Sgt. Pepper" picture disk—remember those collector's gimmicks which revolution-

ized the LP for a few minutes in the seventies? The famous jacket art was printed on the vinyl. Abbé laughed for a good long time over that. He sat in the old armchair in my room, the one with the stuffing coming out of it, and laughed. He loved that kind of thing. He had a lot of Elvis on his jukeboxes.

³Lester's last published piece, in the *Voice*, appeared in my senior year of college. I moved back to N.Y.C. a little later, after six months in California, where it was too relaxed. By the time I got to New York, the East Village galleries were already disappearing. Lester was dead. The Gap had moved in on the northwest corner of St. Mark's and Second Avenue.

⁴In 1978, back at S.P.S., I took six hits of "blotter" acid and had a pretty wrenching bad trip. Eternal damnation, shame, humiliation, and an endless line of men in clown costumes chanting my name and laughing. That kind of thing. I turned myself in, confessed to a master I liked, the Reverend Alden B. Flanders. Somewhere in the middle of

the five or six hours it took to talk me down, I asked him if he thought I would remember this moment for the rest of my life.

⁵"The necessity for this book is to be found in the following consideration: that the lover's discourse is today of an *extreme solitude*. . . . Once a discourse is thus . . . exiled from all gregariness, it has no recourse but to become the site, however exiguous, of an *affirmation*."

⁶I didn't get baptized until I was fifteen. The minister, who had buried my grandparents and my uncle and performed my mother's remarriage, couldn't remember my name. Right then, the church seemed like the only thing that would get me through adolescence. I was going to get confirmed later, too, but instead I started drinking.

⁷Cf. "Eco, Umberto," and also n. 9, below.

⁸The band I played in, in college, was called Forty-five Houses. We got our name from the first Surrealist manifesto: "Q. 'What is your name?' A. 'Forty-five houses.'" (*Ganser syndrome*, or

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- Schulz, Bruno. "Sanatorium Under the Sign of the Hourglass."²⁶ Translated by Celina Wieniewska. New York: Penguin, 1979.
- Sebadoh. "Sebadoh III."²⁷ Homestead Records, HMS 168-4, 1991.
- Thomas à Kempis. "The Imitation of Christ." New York: Penguin, 1952.
- Williams, William Carlos. "The Collected Poems of William Carlos Williams."²⁸ Volume II: 1939-62. New York: New Directions, 1988.
- Zappa, Frank. With Captain Beefheart and the Mothers of Invention. "Bongo Fury" (1975).²⁹ Barking Pumpkin Records, D4-74220, 1989.

beside-the-point replies.)” Our drummer preferred women to men, but I sort of fell in love with her anyway. After we graduated, she gave me a ride on her motorcycle. It was the first time I ever rode one. I held tight around her waist.

⁹See n. 20, below.

¹⁰The first day of Angela’s workshop in college, a guy asked her what her work was like. She said, “My work cuts like a steel blade at the base of a man’s penis.” Second semester, there was a science-fiction writer in our class who sometimes slept through the proceedings—and there were only eight or nine of us there. One day I brought a copy of “Light in August” to Angela’s office hours and she said, “I wish I were reading *that*”—Faulkner—“instead of *this*” (pointing to a stack of student work).

¹¹As a gift for graduating from boarding school, my dad gave me a short trip to Europe. Two weeks. I was a little bit afraid of travel, though, as I still am, and in London I spent much of the time in Hyde Park, in a chair I rented for 15p a day. The sticker that served as my lease

still adorns my copy of “The Stories of John Cheever,” also given to me by my dad. I haven’t been back to the U.K. since.

¹²We moved a lot when I was a kid. In eighth grade I had a calendar on which I marked off the days until I’d be leaving Connecticut forever. My attachments weren’t too deep. I spent a lot of time with Iron Man, the Incredible Hulk, and the Avengers. I also liked self-help books and Elton John records.

¹³Picard and the crew of the Enterprise attempt to make contact with a race of aliens, the Children of Tama, who speak entirely in an allegorical language. Picard doesn’t figure out the language until the captain of the Tamarians is already dead. A big episode for those who realize how hard communicating really is.

¹⁴One guy I knew in college actually threw this book out a window. Here are some excerpts from my own marginalia: “Function of art is supplementalism though devalorization of weighted side of oppositions”; “Attendance as performance: more absence creates more real presence.” I’m not sure what I meant,

but I loved Derrida’s overheated analogies: “Writing in the common sense is the dead letter, it is the carrier of death. It exhausts life. On the other hand, on the other face of the same proposition, writing in the metaphoric sense, natural, divine, and living writing, is venerated” (page 17).

¹⁵The WELL—as it is abbreviated—has a really good “Star Trek” conference, too. This private conference is about sex. I started messing with computers in junior high, when my grades got me out of study hall. Which was good because people used to threaten me if I didn’t let them copy my homework. It was on the WELL that I learned both the address for a mail-order catalogue called Leather Toys and how to affix clothespins.

¹⁶My drinking got really bad in graduate school. In the mid-eighties, I was in love with a woman who was living in Paris, and I took the opportunity to get mixed up at the same time with a friend in New York. Kate, the second of these women, first played this record for me. The snap of the snare drum that be-