

book

My mom was so beautiful

like downpours of bk. rain drops

migraine

Solar flares

Some SSRIs

Concentric rings of the past.

Dull plot summaries

all about my disbelief, my uncertainty.

I've been taking some notes, somewhere around here. There are all kinds of notes.

111 CLEAR

m807

APOCALYPSE NOW

IN HIS LATEST STORY COLLECTION, BROOKLYN WRITER RICK MOODY ENVISIONS A TERRIFYING LANDSCAPE WHERE NEW YORK IS ANNIHILATED AND A NEW DRUG TAKES OVER WHAT'S LEFT. IT'S A BRAVE NEW WORLD THAT ONLY MOODY COULD SPIN

In this future, Manhattan doesn't exist. The city is pure, smoking oblivion, where fifty downtown blocks suddenly look like "a NASA photo of Mars." The journalist narrator of Rick Moody's novella "The Albertine Notes" picks up his reporting shortly after the blast. He lives with the zombie citizens of Brooklyn and is hot on the trail of a new street drug called Albertine, the effects of which cause the user to drift into the land of beautiful memories and the physical addiction of which creates a vacancy that makes heroin seem like chewable aspirin. "The Albertine Notes" is the last of three stories that make up his latest release, *Right Livelihoods: Three Novellas*. All deal with the rickety plank walk off the vessel of rationality, but it is "Albertine Notes" that is hereby nominated as the best short story to date written after 9/11. Such terrifying

sci-fi visions are not the usual material of the 45-year-old writer, who came into his fame in the '90s writing razor-honest portraits of suburbia in *Garden State* and *The Ice Storm*. But Moody, like many of the experimental literary upstarts of his generation, seems to be taking leaps and sharp turns on paper; fast humor looks to have been traded for darker material. "The Albertine Notes" may be a one-off for Moody, but it still captures the brilliant speed of his sentences and the philosophical land mines in consciousness. The problem with shooting up Albertine to remember the sweet times of life before the blast is that it causes you to forget more when you come back down. But Moody's characters learn that the past can be changed when brought into this semi-delusional remembering, creating a race between fixing the past while eating through the present and future. "If you're wondering what the future looks like, if you're one of the citizens from the past, wondering, let me tell you what it's like..." That kind of story takes serious courage, serious experimental risk, and Moody's one of the few out there who can make it work. "Memory's the groove," he writes. "It's the all-stars laying down their groove, and it's you dancing, chasing the desperations of the heart, chasing something that's so gone, so ephemeral you know it only by its traces." So we don't forget, we write it down. **Christopher Bollen**

CHRISTOPHER BOLLEN You're on your way to Germany to promote *The Diviners*. Like indie bands, are you hyperaware of what foreign countries you are most popular in?

RICK MOODY I never count. I'm not a guy who checks sales figures. But you can't escape it when a book does particularly well. I do well in France.

CB It seems like a lot of the darker and experimental American fiction finds its fans in France.

RM They really read more than we do here. I don't think the literary fiction audience is the same here as it is abroad. We're missing some of the intellectual quotient. We did have it in the '60s and early '70s.

CB You can blame the publishers as easily as the readers. It's a tricky market for writers.

RM Yes, and it's even different than when I first published. In the

'90s there was a prevailing wind in fiction that was permissive. And that was true for culture as a whole. I think the culture shifts on political leadership and I feel like the Clinton years were the go-go years and that meant go-go fiction—McSweeney's, Dave Eggers, David Foster Wallace. I started publishing in that period. I was lucky, because the attitude was very pro-experimental. That's not the case now.

CB There was a boom of original young voices in that generation. The generation now has smart writers but not so many groundbreakers.

RM It's much more realistic. I think most editors would claim to still like fanciful and unusual work. But editorial boards, not people, are making the decisions. They are inclined to make the safer bet. The longer that's the case, the worse it is for readers coming up. Kids who are 15 to 25 don't know about weirdo creative fiction.

CB Were you a big teen reader?

RM Yes.

CB What did you read? And don't just name the impressive stuff.

RM I had a science fiction period. I was a polyglot, so I was reading *Walden* and *Moby-Dick* at the same time I was reading Kurt Vonnegut and John Irving.

CB "The Albertine Notes" is straight-out sci-fi. What made you want to tackle a post-nuked Manhattan world?

RM Dave [Eggers] and Michael [Chabon] were creating an issue of McSweeney's that was supposed to focus on genre fiction. They put out a casting call, and I had long had the idea to try my hand at the science fiction stuff I had liked as a kid. So I wrote to Michael that I'd do a science fiction story. They said go for it. The requirement for me was that it had to be written in a short time to be true to genre fiction. In other words, I wasn't allowed to take my time. I gave myself the deadline of three weeks. I came up with the story line really fast.

CB What happened to the sci-fi genre? It's lost some of its potency.

RM The genre got dull and formulaic, I think. But I'm not a sci-fi writer. "The Albertine Notes" is nothing like anything else I've ever done.

CB Drugs are a main subject of the short story. They also come up a lot in your memoir, *The Black Veil*. Why are so many writers alcoholics and drug addicts anyway? Are they? Or is it that they're just the ones who get to tell their stories and everyone else's too?

RM I think it's more that addicts are naturally inclined to writing and writers are naturally inclined to addiction. Addicts are yackers. They are vulnerable and self-conscious and they can't shut up. They're always grabbing you by the lapels to tell their stories.

CB Were your own addictions hard to write about?

RM Horrible. Never again. I had six months in the middle of it where I was blocked. That had never happened to me before. When I was trying to write about my hospital experience I stopped working for a while.

CB All three stories in *Right Livelihoods* focus on paranoia. In this way they all are very post-9/11 in theme.

RM I thought of them in relationship to the Nabokov story "Signs and Symbols." It's a Nabokovian piece against psychoanalysis, which involves a crazy Russian character. He invents a disease for himself, a mental illness, called "referential mania." The salient etiology of referential mania is that he imputes motivation to inanimate objects—he reads into everything and makes connections.

CB You also play in a folk band called the Wingdale Community Singers.

RM We are trying to make a new record in June.

CB It seems all of the guys from your generation—and I mean guys mostly—all actively pursue these alternate interests beyond writing. Music seems high on everyone's list.

RM I always have a lot of stuff going on. I had a band in college, and I was also trying to paint, which was a big mistake. But all of that stuff made the writing better. I was thinking about Robert Motherwell and Anselm Kiefer and Sam Shepard, and not just Raymond fucking Carver.

CB What are you working on now?

RM A new novel. It has Mars in it.

CB Aha! So you haven't given up on sci-fi.

RM It's set a couple of decades in advance. It doesn't go well. It's about the future, but I'm doing it in a realistic writer way. It's not a *Blade Runner* book. It's futurism where people hang around a lot; there's a gas shortage.

CB But everyone's not wearing some crazy Lycra body glove with a removable chemical mask?

RM No, all that shit's backfired. Technology has backfired.

CB So it's a sci-fi Amish story.

RM A little bit, yeah.

Artwork Mat O'Brien

Right Livelihoods: Three Novellas is out in June 2007 from Little, Brown and Company