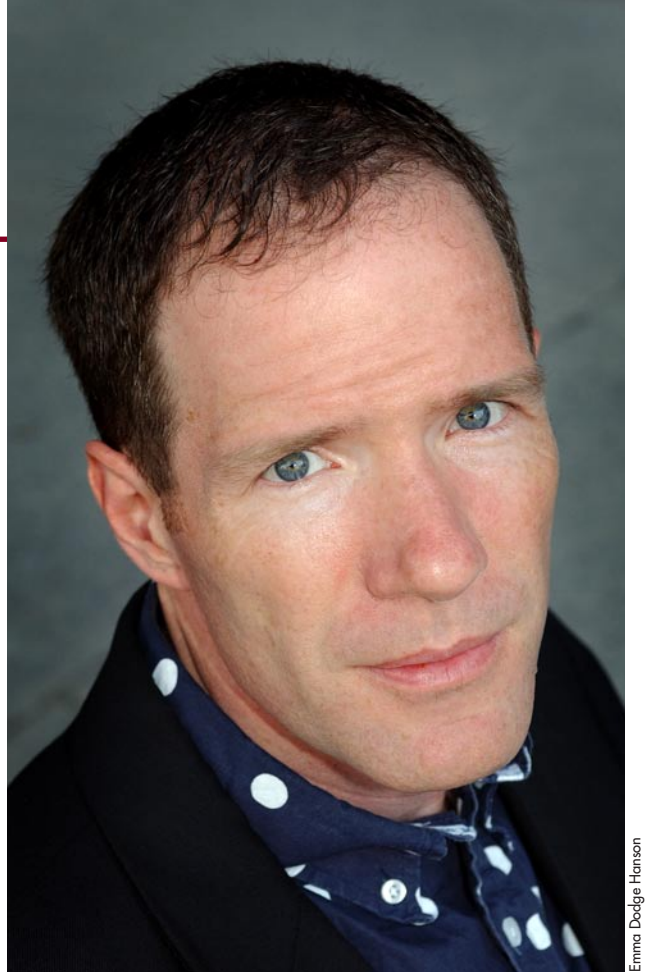


How I Write

Rick Moody

Rick Moody, novelist, short-story writer and memoirist, would rather not be labeled. His work explores the unpleasant realities of intimate relationships, sexuality and mortality. He is interested in interior and emotional states, putting his tangled, layered sentences to work exploring all that goes on beneath the surface of everyday exchanges. His most recent novel, *The Diviners*, a commentary on the film industry, television, current politics and culture, is set in New York City and explores the lives of characters as diverse as the city. In *The Black Veil*, a memoir, Moody searches out his literary family tree and explores his own recovery from alcoholism and addiction. The multi-faceted book was praised for creating a new form—another of Moody's talents.

Credits: His other fiction includes *Demonology*, *Purple America*, *The Ice Storm* and *Garden State*.



Emma Dodge-Hanson

Why: While there are other things I would like to have done (be a psychoanalyst, be a minister, be a social worker), writing is one of the few things that improves me as a person. In the following way: I am a somewhat uncomfortable and very shy person, a sort of miserable talker. Writing, however, affords me the opportunity to rectify this situation, to get language right. In writing, I can make the ungovernable sentences, the ones that don't do what I want them to do, more perfect. Since I am forever waking up thinking, "I should have said something else entirely," I am now in the fortunate position wherein I can do exactly that. My books, I guess, are what I should have said.

Inspiration: I don't really plan for inspiration at all. It's about waiting and accepting, not planning, at least for me. I have been lucky in that I am not hamstrung for ideas for things. I probably have a surplus. Accordingly, I don't think of specific books as being an inspiration. Nor are there books on my desk, per se. But if you're asking about my reading life, it is vigorous and quixotic. There

are piles of books everywhere *except* on my desk (because otherwise I could not find my laptop). There's a new-books pile of things that I want to get to, but that is the most neglected, alas, because the pile of old things, unread and reread classics, is closer to my heart.

Typical writing day: Get rid of the fiendish and destructive accumulation of e-mail and non-writing-related business tasks by 11:30 or so. Go out to lunch if it must be done. Write in the afternoon until 6:30 or 7. I like to revise on the subway sometimes [in New York City]. I find the subway enormously conducive to correcting drafts of things.

Ideas: How an idea comes to me is an unanswerable question, or at least that's what I have found over the years of attempting to answer it. Ideas are everywhere, and the generation thereof is not an issue. Developing an idea is another matter entirely, and this seems to require time, patience and rumination. I'm not good at explaining the evolution of ideas or where they come from for the simple reason that I forget

about ideas because I spend so much time with them.

Finding the details to create character:

I think the important way to approach the accumulation of detail is with rewriting and renewed attention. That is: Take your time. There's a tendency to rush through descriptive writing. I have done it myself, particularly in my early work. But if you slow down the process and constantly inquire of yourself whether you have done everything you can do in the matter of observation and an honest recitation of the facts, then you will likely include that you have *not* yet done everything.

Advice: Tenacity and talent are important in equal measure. I have seen truly great aspiring writers lose heart along the way, and that's to the detriment of literature as a whole. So stick to it, do the work, and make the practice of the craft your goal. The practice of it will never disappoint you, though the market may come and go.

Interview by Sarah Anne Johnson