



Demonology: Stories

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Rick Moody's novels have earned him a reputation as a "breathtaking" writer (The New York Times) and "a writer of immense gifts" (The San Francisco Examiner). His remarkable short stories have led both the New Yorker and Harpers to single him out as one of the most original and admired voices in a generation.

These stories are abundant proof of Rick Moody's grace as a stylist and a shaper of interior lives. He writes with equal force about the blithe energies of youth ("Boys") and the rueful onset of middle age ("Hawaiian Night"), about Midwestern optimists ("Double Zero") and West coast strategists ("Baggage Carousel"), about visionary exhilaration ("Forecast from the Retail Desk") and delusional catharsis ("Surplus Value Books: Catalog Number 13.") The astounding title story, which has already been reprinted in four different anthologies, is a masterpiece of remembrance and thwarted love. Full of deep feeling and stunningly beautiful language, the stories in Demonology offer the deepest pleasures that fiction can afford.

Demonology: Stories Details

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From Reader Review Demonology: Stories for online ebook

Mike Ingram says

Damn the tyranny of the GoodReads star system. As if the most appropriate response to literature is to become little Eberts?

I liked most of the stories here. A few of them made me all tingly in my nether regions. A couple were lame. Such is life.

Christy says

Finally finished this book and all I can say is it certainly brought out the demon in me, because I strongly disliked it.

While some of the short stories were interesting, many of them were so jumbled and inconsistent that I was unable to make heads of tails of their purpose.

Some of the ways in which the stories were written were interesting; for instance one story was written as a track list of songs through years and each list had a column to the left explaining why certain songs were chosen. But the interesting points of view did not make up for the extreme slowness of this book.

Michelle says

Let me say how happy I was to come across this collection while browsing at my local library. Both The Ice Storm & Garden State are on my Favorite Movie list, and I am a fan of short stories in general so I opened this book excited to delve into Mr. Moody's written word. Then it became what I like to refer to as adult homework, when I have to assign myself a number of pages or set amount of time to read and push myself to complete the book. Not because I have to, mind you, but because I wanted to love what I was reading. Much of the writing was pretentious, stuffy and overreaching in scope. I can appreciate Moody's efforts to be a unique voice, but he puts off a little too much of what I like to refer to as White People's Problems, meaning extreme narcissism and making a huge deal out of things in life that really aren't that important in the whole human experience. "Willie Fahnstock: The Boxed Set" was a creative idea, and I could identify with different songs and music set to different eras of your life, but all I really ended up thinking about was whether I had the songs I liked from it in my collection. I DID LOVE three stories: "Boys", "Demonology" and "Ineluctable Modality of the Vaginal". The spoke to me because they were insightful, emotive and felt like stories that Moody actually cared about writing. I won't spoil them here, and if you can find those stories or get this book on loan, they are worth reading. But if I had to pay for this book, I wouldn't waste my money. I am not giving up hope and will try one of his novels. I think it's really a matter of topic, because Moody CAN write well, especially when he's not trying to hard to impress anyone.

Jacob says

Fucking terrible. And I thought *Chuck Palahniuk* was a bad writer. Sorry, dude.

Brandon says

Some books you read and they just stick with you always. This is one of those books. It serves as a representative sample of the worst excesses of postmodernism and snobbery. Demonology is a chronicle of pretentiousness, full of words and sentences constructed to look insightful but which have little, if any, real meaning. If you're interested in the lives of pathetic, prep school twits, this is your book. Want a deeper truth? Look somewhere else. To paraphrase movie critic Roger Ebert: "I hated, hated, hated, hated this book."

Trevor Polak says

Okay, so admittedly I read pieces of this for less than ten minutes, but I didn't want to read any more. Moody didn't give off a good vibe here. I feel like he was trying to write an imitation of *Brief Interview With Hideous Men* but failing at it. Moody tries to use DFW's style but he fails to capture the sense of disorder Wallace does. Basically, when DFW writes some long rambly sentence in, say, "The Depressed Person", there's a reason. It's almost free indirect speech except he always writes like that. Moody, on the other hand, uses a similar rambling, vocabulary-saturated style but without the reasoning behind it. I can't speak to the stories themselves, but I do know I don't like the feel I get of Moody here.

Nicole says

I picked this up on impulse from the library's shelves because Dale Peck savaged it. (And also because it was there, which it wasn't like a month ago. I heart you, English language collections guy.)

I have no idea if it's any good, but I'm more than prepared to read it out of spite. Take that, Dale.

So, the shorter pieces are definitely uneven: I am much more into the experiments where he tries to shove one type of narrative into a different form (liner notes, book catalog) than the brief sketches of dysfunctional families and grief. All in all, though, I had the sense of somebody trying stuff out, a sort of engagement with forms and styles which I, personally, prefer to the polished emptiness that I see more and more of in contemporary fiction. All the same, nothing wrong with it, no real reason to read it, a starbuck's novel on every corner, reliable, homogeneous, convenient.

The two longer pieces, saved for the last, were better; enough to make me think that his novels might be worth a look. *The Four Fingers of Death* looks interesting.

Justin says

I haven't always been a big a fan of short story collections.

My main criticisms is that it's hard to form a coherence among the pieces. A short story is something that needs to be able to exist outside of a collection.

When you gather a group of them together in a single book, it's like that first day of kindergarten class: some are going to mesh, some are going to clash and a scarce percentage are going to grow up to realize that they were conceived in the wrong time and use that as an excuse to wreak havoc on their friends/family/whatever city they may happen to be living in.

I read this after Purple America and all of the shortcomings that pulled that book down (inconveniently lengthy descriptions, a main character that just gave you a slimy feeling) are just bit-players in a grander symphony. Varying styles and lengths in his stories, Moody is able to impart a pathos for his characters that just can't seem to break free from their past beings.

Rachel says

I feel I was meant to read this book because of two coincidences: One, I had just finished Eggers' *A Heartbreaking Work of Staggering Genius* and had no idea about the connection between the two authors when I began the book. (Eggers is even thanked by Moody at the end of the book.) Two, I was eating a bowl of lentil soup when I read the sentence in "The Carnival Tradition" about the girl buying lentil soup. I don't take these things lightly.

I checked out this book because it was referenced in the *New Media Reader* as an example of literature that explores (post-)modern life and the often paralyzing wealth of possibilities we are now confronted with. Not all of the stories really dealt with that theme, but several did, including the "title track" *Demonology*.

"Demonology" was one of my favorites, because it was short, but potent, and reminded me of Dave Eggers' *A Heartbreaking Work of Staggering Genius* but distilled into a short story. The idea of dealing with death, through literature, and acknowledging that to write about it from only one point of view would be lying. So many conflicting emotions surround the death of someone close, and about writing about that death, that it becomes impossible to fake omniscience or even consistency.

My other favorite was "Ineluctable Modality of the Vaginal," which I especially enjoyed for its discussion of femininity as well as overeducated grad students (of which I am one). Back again to the idea of having so much knowledge, too much information, TMI! to the point where taking a position on anything seems impossible. When you can not only see both sides of an argument but also trace the roots of said argument back to obscure philosophical treatises, how do you even argue anymore? Even if you know you are right?

Anyway, this collection didn't pull me in right away but I'm glad I kept reading. There are some real gems here.

stew says

Like all of Moody's worst writing, these are more concept than story, which makes for flat, impersonal reading. Sort of like all the "art" that ArtForum covers these days, but rendered in word.

Kendall says

Rick Moody is an excellent writer. No doubt about that. I liked Garden State- The Ice Storm- and Purple America even though they were all gloomy. Which brings me to an important point about Rick Moody's writing: don't read it if you're the slightest bit depressed because you'll be suicidal by the time you're finished. That's one of the problems I had with Demonology. I'd just lost my job- my grandmother died recently- my estranged father had a stroke and major heart surgery over the last few weeks- and life pretty much sucks. So- reading Demonology was a bad idea given my current frame of mind. My other major problem with the book is the intellectual level Moody operates on. I have no reason to believe he's a poser- and I have no reason to doubt that he really is as intelligent as he sounds. But half the time I feel like I'm missing some inside joke. Ok. You're smart. You're an intellectual. But lighten up. Christ- it must be painful being that smart all the time. Us reg'lar folk just don't get what y'all's trying to tell us sometimes. Ah shit. I like Moody's writing a lot- but he comes off like a freaking pain in the ass sometimes- like Tom Wolfe. He gets lost in his intellectualizing and I haven't the foggiest notion what the hell he's talking about. It's like when the Grateful Dead played space for a half hour and I'd be ignoring it just waiting- hoping and praying- they'd pull this shit back together and start grooving again. One last thought on Demonology. A couple of the stories just plain sucked. Like Surplus Value Books: Catalogue Number 13. I'm sorry. That piece embodied everything that's annoying about Rick Moody's writing for me: overly intellectual- making me feel like an outsider to an inside joke- and generally annoying the shit out of me. Unless of course these were Moody's objectives for the story. In that case- well done. I stand in awe.Demonology Stories

Trixie B says

Oh man, I HATED this book. In this short story collection, Rick Moody artfully applies all of the worst elements of fiction to create saccharine, predictable stories about character that are flat and unsympathetic. I was thrilled when bad stuff happened to them. This is one book I didn't even bother to finish - I got through the 100+ story right in the middle and then threw the book across the room, resolving to flip this guy off if I ever meet him. I think Rick Moody has singlehandedly soured me on fiction. Thanks, pal.

Drew Barth says

A Pack of Smarties for the Salinger

Moody, Rick. Demonology. Back Bay Books, Boston: 2001.

“The Chicken Mask was sorrowful, Sis,” (3). This first line, the first sentence for “The Mansion on the Hill” the first story from Rick Moody’s short fiction collection Demonology, creates a tone that the rest of the book follows: madcap mourning. It’s the class clown, who, even after the death of a parent, still cracks a few jokes in the middle of a lecture.

Every story, ranging from the aforementioned “The Mansion on the Hill” to “Forecasts from the Retail Desk,” all have this undercurrent of intense sadness, of desperation to deal with the emotions that flow through the human mind in the worst of times, but presents them all with a veneer of the absurd. Taking another story, “On the Carousel,” deals with a woman in Los Angeles, someone in the television industry,

driving her daughter to a McDonald's for some juice. While floating around in her private fantasies of non-existent fame and waiting in the drive-thru, the side of her car becomes the stage for a gang shooting; a kid walks up and begins to open fire on a group the next parking lot over. The woman is in shock of the event and tries to bury her daughter as far as she can into the car's floor, but the entire time the battle rages above, she only has a single train of thought: "It could be optioned—the story of the attractive professional woman caught in the crossfire at a local McDonald's," (61). This event will become, for her, the stepping stone into her screen-writing career, how one woman protects her child from vicious gang crimes in LA; her career blossoms in the back seat.

But this is just his normal fiction, the vanilla stuff that nearly any writer of short fiction—albeit not as well—could possibly craft in a few months. No, where Moody really gets lively is his more experimental pieces, pieces like "Wilkie Fahnstock, The Boxed Set" and "Surplus Value Books: Catalogue Number 13." The former tells the story of the titular Wilkie Fahnstock, a failure and utter despot in every facet of living, through the one thing that better reflects the human condition than nigh any force imaginable, through a series of mixtapes. The story is split into two columns: the right side contains the playlist while the left commentates on Wilkie's life and times as the music rolls by. Then the former, a story that plays out in minor sentences among the sale listings for various rare books. It's a piece about obsession, not about the books, but about the "beautiful young bibliographer of the greatest of expectations," obsessing over Anna Feldman, a woman who has a restraining order against the unnamed bibliographer, (284). His infatuation piles into nearly every listing, talking more and more of Anna as the pages flip by.

In all honesty, this collection was a piece of liberation to me as a writer, I saw explicitly what a writer could do if they no longer cared about the formatting and just wanted to get a story out. The latter two stories I wrote about were just odd enough to grab the attention in such a way that a reader couldn't help but go on, just out of curiosity, just to see where this thing would lead. I want nothing more than to be capable of that, to have something stand out in such a way that it draws the eyes in and lets them dance about the page at the oddity that unfolds.

Ellice says

Rick Moody has a very distinct writing style. He likes extremely lengthy sentences, and *italics for no particular reason*. This made these stories fairly exhausting to read. Some of them seemed worth this effort and some did not.

Charlotte says

Enjoyed most of the short stories in this book. I did a class report on "Boys", and actually got Rick Moody to comment on the story:

Hey Charlotte,

Thanks for your note, and for reading "Boys."

The story came in this way: at the time of its composition there was a vogue in writing circles for "short short" stories. That is, stories under 1500 words or so. I had not written a piece this short before, really, but I was eager to try. I was at a reading one night, and I heard an older writer read a very conventional story that

had in it the sentence: "Then the boys entered the house." I decided I'd just use that sentence for my story. It could have been any sentence, really, or that was my feeling at the time. I liked that one. I wrote it on my hand. I decided the story would consist almost entirely of repetitions of that sentence.

All best,

Rick M.

Alejandro says

So it finally happened, I finally got hold of a book I just couldn't finish. I liked the first story, though I felt it was slightly dragged out, but the stories beyond that felt like watching a beautiful shade of paint dry. Or putting up pretty wall paper up. After nearly 85 pages I felt like I'd been punched by a baby like 100 times.

Theking Ofalltacos says

Steven says

His use of *italics* gets really *annoying* after *awhile*. In an interview he said it was one of the hallmarks of his style, although he didn't say why he did it. It must mean something to him, but I have to say that most of the time (the only exception being when he uses it to indicate dialogue) I don't see what that emphasis accomplishes for him, especially when he overuses it so much. Not sure, but—with the possible exception of the novellas—I don't think there's a single story in this collection that one could label "traditional." In fact,

several of these stories break the very rules that creative writing books and teachers—as well as editors of literary journals—say a writer shouldn't. Of course, those rules always get broken by a few determined to prove a point, and Moody is definitely one such writer. Many of these stories are interesting because he flaunts the form and the rules. He's strutting his stuff for all to see and, for the most part, pulling it off. I can admire that. But I didn't find much that resonated emotionally (even "Demonology" the heavily anthologized prize winner seemed too telegraphed to me, and that weakened the affect.) I was always too aware of technique, too aware that artifice was in my hand. He never made me forget that I was reading. Ok, so that's the point.

Jon Weidler says

I picked this up because I'd read the titular story in college and remembered liking it (then again, that was a decade ago). I also thought Moody's "The Diviners" was a solid novel. Just over 100 pages in, I made an executive decision to abandon "Demonology," because 1) it's like a bad edition of David Foster Wallace karaoke; 2) the stories I read mistook verbosity for depth; 3) I didn't give a damn about a single character or event; and 4) life is too short for bad books. Moody writes in a mad rush of run-on sentences, and while other authors (Wallace and Bret Easton Ellis, for instance) can convincingly sell that sort of stylistic bullshit and spin it into endearing art, its usage here smacks of stream-of-consciousness desperation. The beginnings and endings are mostly arbitrary, and the stories I read fumbled through countless themes and events without ever really settling on a true "point." Bereft of authentic emotion, "Demonology" bubbles over with teeth-gritting pretension.

Ffiamma says

ci sono racconti molto belli (maschietti, demonologia, la villa sulla collina e doppio zero), ma il resto non è decisamente il mio genere. forse, in questo periodo, non ho un buon rapporto con i racconti.
