



Right Livelihoods: Three Novellas

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From the author of *The Ice Storm*, who has been lauded as the gutsiest writer of his generation (*Atlanta Journal-Constitution*), comes three sublime novellas about yearning.

Right Livelihoods: Three Novellas Details

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From Reader Review Right Livelihoods: Three Novellas for online ebook

Sarah says

Stiff, forced, annoying, and trite. The last novella, The Albertine Notes, was much more interesting than the first two, but not enough that I'd recommend reading this.

John says

"Right Livelihoods: Three Novellas" demonstrates that Rick Moody remains at the peak of his literary craft, drawing successfully on post-9/11 paranoia in these three elegant examinations of technologically-obsessed paranoia. Included in this terse volume is the amazing "The Albertine Notes", the last of the three novellas in "Right Livelihoods", which deserves ample recognition and praise of its own (To which I shall return later.). The dysfunctional suburban families so eloquently depicted by Moody in his classic 1990s novel "The Ice Storm" and the recent short story collection "Demonology" are brilliantly transmuted into three engrossing portraits of three vivid characters each lost in their own peculiar set of technologically-oriented phobias. In short, at least two of these tales should be regarded as among Moody's best efforts in short fiction.

"The Omega Force" is a spellbinding examination of how one person's twisted notions of reality and fiction lead inexorably to an irrational speculation that unexpectedly disrupts the placid existence of his friends and neighbors in a bucolic North Shore Long Island community. Dr. Van Deusen, retired from some secret government agency, conflates fact with the "mind-twisting" fiction gleaned from the pages of the thriller "Omega Force", and his deep-seated fears about the arrival of "dark-complected" emigrants to his community. Convinced that he has uncovered the "truth", Dr. Van Deusen believes he's become a contemporary Paul Revere, fearful of some vague terrorist plot against the Plum Island animal research center, which, if successful, will unleash untold numbers of virulent diseases and plagues upon his community. In his typically riveting, expansive prose, Moody leads us on a personal trek through Dr. Van Deusen's swift descent into madness, in a compelling tale that many will regard as among his best, which concludes on a surprising, most unexpected, note. "The Omega Force" is written in a literary style which I find surprisingly similar to some of cyberpunk science fiction writer Bruce Sterling's work, most recently his post-9/11 novel, "The Zenith Angle".

"K&K", the second and shortest, of the three novellas, follows one Ellie Knight-Cameron, an administrative manager at Kolodny and Kolodny ("K&K"), a small insurance brokerage firm, as she deals with the unexpected arrivals of bizarre messages meant for her in the suggestion box she manages. She undergoes her own descent into madness, trying to cope not only with the arrival of these messages and their meanings, but also becoming obsessed into attempting to discover the identities of their senders. This is a fine tale in its own right, but one which may leave readers a bit unsatisfied, since it does end on a rather abrupt note.

With the last, and longest, of the three novellas, "The Albertine Notes", Rick Moody has boldly gone - with no pun intended, invoking a famous split infinitive whose artistic source some readers of this review may recognize - where few major mainstream fiction writers have gone before, writing what must be regarded as his most remarkable, most impressive work of short fiction to date. Relying once more on his characteristic expansive prose, Rick Moody's "The Albertine Notes" is not just a fine short story, but a fine work of science fiction too, whose vivid imagery easily conjurs up references to Philip K. Dick and J. G. Ballard, and, I would argue too, paying homage to such classic American science fiction writers as Samuel Delany and Octavia Butler in his intelligent depiction of race relations set in a dystopian near-future New York City; or

rather, its surviving remnant, following a "suitcase nuke" nuclear detonation which has obliterated most of Manhattan south of 53rd Street, and exterminated four million of its residents. In "The Albertine Notes", Kevin Lee, a young Chinese-American journalist, searches for Albertine drug cartel chieftain Eduardo Cortez and traces the history of the drug "Albertine", an addictive mind-altering drug which appeared suddenly soon after "the blast", which allows its users to remember their past vividly, with ample clarity. Lee wrestles with his addiction and his vivid remembrance of things past, leading to a poignant, closing scene, which seems lifted straight from Greek mythology, as though Lee is Orpheus accompanying Charon, the ferryman, on a one-way trip to the Hades that is the nuclear wasteland of Manhattan. Lee takes us on a nocturnal, nightmarish trek across Brooklyn and Queens which is quite reminiscent of Delany's classic 1960s extraterrestrial urban dystopias like "Dhalgren" and "Nova", meeting prostitutes and bikers resembling those in Butler's novels and, in some respects, William Gibson's early classic cyberpunk novels too. "The Albertine Notes" is a most notable, memorable departure for Moody - and one that was recognized by its publication in a 2004 anthology of that year's best science fiction - which demonstrates his longstanding familiarity with and appreciation of science fiction - but one that is also a logical extension of his interest in dysfunctional suburban families as I have noted previously.

Paddythemis says

wtf?

they'll publish anything these days won't they?

the blurb about the book is the best part - then, blammo, nothing.

David says

I'm rounding up to 4 stars from 3.5. As my tags show, I heard about this book on NPR. In the radio interview, I believe they talked mainly about the third story: The Albertine Notes. I actually liked the first two better, although once I started understanding what was going on, I enjoyed 'Albertine' too.

The Albertine Notes is about a drug where the 'high' is memory. It gives you extremely detailed, vivid recollections of your memories. Some people are able to shoot up and then change things in their memories, affecting 'real' life. It's all about drugs, consciousness, reality/memory, and time travel in a not-too-distant futuristic setting.

The first few pages were kind of confusing, and I wasn't that interested initially, especially since it seemed to launch into a history of the drug, and I wasn't sure why I should care. But then once I 'got' the world of the story, it became exciting. The story has a futuristic feel a la Bourne Identity or Fight Club, or other similar stories.

The second story, K & K, involves the office politics and drama in a small insurance company. The "office manager" aka secretary aka go-fer discovers some disturbing notes in the suggestion box and tries to figure out who could have written them. Moody's writing is hilarious in a subtle understated sort of way where if the reader gets the jokes, he gets the feeling that the characters in the story don't.

The first story, The Omega Force, was my favorite. The main character is a wealthy-ish retiree on a small island who does his darnedest to figure out the mysterious conspiracy of the Omega Force. He's delightfully

eccentric, and Moody is hilarious as he slowly unfolds the story, leading the reader to understand the depths of Dr. Van Deusen's dementia. My favorite moment: the dance of the stick.

Each of the three stories has a central character that is largely unaware of the truth about his/her situation. It's "The Unreliable Narrator." The humour and suspense comes from this disconnect: you first see things the way the character sees them, then you begin to piece together another perspective. The Omega force does this best, and is the strongest of the stories, although they are all enjoyable and worth reading.

Recommended. Occasional swearing and/or sexual references.

Joslyn says

i guess i just need to stop reading rick moody. i always feel like he's joking or winking or being tongue-in-cheek and will switch tones or perspectives or characters soon, but then it lasts the duration. i can't say what it is that strikes me as so insincere, even dishonest, about his narratives but it leaves me cold even when the 'facts' of the story interest me.

Brian says

In reading a review of another science fiction book, an Amazon commenter suggested this book as an example of excellent reading, in particular the third novella contained within this collection, entitled "Albertine Notes."

Moody describes a post-disaster New York in which typical Gothamite characters find a new way to deal with their grief: a drug called Albertine. One dose sends you on a vacation into your memories, and as a side effect, makes it harder for you to recall events without the drug. This is a play on the actual effects of heroin, and would have been an immensely clever trick on the part of the author had he not mentioned it outright. While our protagonist suffers to differentiate the real from the drug-induced memories, so too does the reader. I must give Moody credit for recreating the drug experience, but it makes for an unpleasant read. Without giving away anything, expect characters to appear from nowhere, change their name mid-paragraph, and then disappear just as rapidly. Seriously, one of the major characters goes by up to four different names on the same page.

The prose is reminiscent of Edith Wharton, which is to say, wholly inappropriate for this setting. Perhaps only the most pretentious of the posthumans would indulge in french idioms in casual conversation, and even then, not REPEATEDLY. The Albertine Notes delivers a somewhat satisfying ending, and as mentioned previously, is told with some measure of skill. Because of this, I cannot dismiss it out-of-hand, however, it is a labor to finish, and I'm not sure it was worth it.

All that said, I started reading the first novella, something cloyingly titled "Omega Force." I couldn't get past twenty pages. The self-indulgent prose is offensive, and the banter of the protagonist (Jay Gatsby minus the charm or the money) is hard to swallow. I might try the last remaining novella in the book, K&K, but the dolorous chore that was reading Albertine, compounded by the slap in the face at the onset of Omega, the chances that I'll get through the rest of the book are slim.

Toby says

This applies to the novella, "K&K" in this book.

Disappointment wouldn't really describe it. It was confusing to read, and the ending was inexplicable.

It was as though I were walking a dog, but instead of walking down the road, the dog moved according to a random movement algorithm. And then, after 3 hours of this, a scorching blue flame suddenly fired out of the dog's backsides, firing the dog heavenward in a cloud of singed butt-fur. As I said, disappointment wouldn't really describe it. Rather, I would be standing there wondering what in tarnation just happened. That's how this story leaves you feeling.

Helia Rethmann says

Superbly written, but not to my taste. These three stories about paranoia and conspiracy theories are too intricate and complicated to be enjoyed by this leisure reader. If you enjoy solving complex Math problems during your time 'off', this book may be for you. If you're super-smart and not prone to dull your senses with alcoholic beverages as soon as you're home safe, this book may be for you. Dr Van Deusen, the protagonist of the first story, is certainly a memorable character - compelled to perform a 'dance with sticks' when he sees stay sticks bobbing in the ocean, he is also a protective father to his mentally handicapped son and a 'communist'-sniffing racist. 'Nough said.It's all lovely if you have the mind for it.Good for you.

Bookmarks Magazine says

The expression "right livelihood" refers to a Buddhist's duty to reject any occupation that causes harm to other living beings; Moody uses it as a satirical reference to the paranoia and confusion perpetuated by the main characters in *Right Livelihoods*. Critics found the novellas uneven, pronouncing the predictable, unconvincing "K&K" the least successful of the three, while claiming that the acerbic political parody in "The Omega Force" compensated for the unlikable Dr. Van Deusen. However, they agreed that "The Albertine Notes," a dark and imaginative tour de force, more than made up for any earlier shortcomings. By turns humorous and chilling, Rick Moody has crafted a disturbing picture of contemporary America in what the *Chicago Tribune* calls "his subtlest and most darkly comical performance yet."

This is an excerpt from a review published in Bookmarks magazine.

Krok Zero says

I wrote a review of this on my Tumblr instead of here. It's a little different from the kind of reviews I tend to write here. You'll see what I mean: <http://outlaw.tumblr.com/post/7965304...>

Christopher says

2/3 stories truly shine, with "The Albertine Notes" being worth the price of admission alone; a twisting looping memory trip.

Simone Subliminalpop says

L'ultimo racconto è molto bello, il primo non è niente male, quello centrale invece non mi è piaciuto, soprattutto per la brutta e frettolosa chiusura. Moody, seppur ancora distante dalle sue prove migliori, con questo libro prosegue abbastanza bene il tentativo fatto con il romanzo precedente a questa sua ultima raccolta, descrivere l'America in un momento particolare di paure confusionarie e spesso fobiche.

Nathan Helgren says

Not one of Moody's best. The stories took a while to get in to, once you got into the first and the third and saw where it was going it got easier to stick with. The second seemed to have no real point at all in context with the others and I felt it was just a waste. As usual his writing style is great, just the subject matter didn't have me clamouring for more.

Joshua Nomen-Mutatio says

I started reading the first novella and became bored with it.

I moved on to the third and final one which was worthy of a three star rating. Moody's only attempt at working within the (loosely defined version of the) sci-fi genre. In fact, the whole reason the story came about was that McSweeney's asked him to write a sci-fi story.

NYC has been decimated in a nuclear attack, the city is gripped by desperation and chaos and millions of people seeking to forget themselves or at least their selves of the present. A fictional chemical compound begins to proliferate throughout the city's illegal drug trade/consumption networks. This substance causes the user to vividly relive past memories, like, *really* relive them, with no ability to differentiate the artificially induced memory from "real life."

Many confusing and interesting social, psychological and philosophical implications follow. It reminded me a little bit of the mostly cheesy but conceptually great ("on paper" so to speak) film *Strange Days* featuring Ralph Fiennes in which he peddles other people's recorded experiences which you can pop into a minidisc looking thing strapped to your head and vividly relive as if you *are* that person having that experience.

I went back to the first novella and finished it. I liked the basic underlying ideas that seemed to bubble under the surface and the drunken, elderly and increasingly delusional central character has some hilarious moments (like in the way that senility can sometimes be funny) but I continued to get the feeling that something else should happen and was merely met with more mundane descriptions of mundane things.

Moody tends to do this to me: I get the feeling something revelatory is just around the corner but it rarely

ever emerges. I find myself rereading the last paragraphs of his stories over and over, squinting my eyes for something I may have missed, something redemptive or interesting or meaningful—even in an "anti-sentimentalist" kind of way—and I rarely every see it. Consequently I can't even remember how most of his stories end even a day or two after finishing them.

I didn't start the second/middle "novella" before returning it to the library.

I will $\frac{3}{4}$ -heartedly recommend the last one.

Ben Babcock says

Sad to say that this book was almost painful to read. Rick Moody's character sketches are confusing and unnecessarily complicated. When I eventually manage to figure out what's going on, I usually don't like it, and I don't feel any reason to identify with the protagonist. None of the three novellas left me yearning for more. Worse still, none left me with the vaguest impression that I'd absorbed some sort of narrative. They mostly gave me a headache.

In "The Omega Force," the protagonist is a retired doctor who may-or-may-not be senile and who may-or-may-not be in the middle of a government/foreign conspiracy that may-or-may-not exist. As he spirals deeper into megalomania, only the reader is around to watch him give into his basest urges--to conduct an invisible orchestra via the "Dance of the Stick."

My trouble with "The Omega Force" stems from the lack of a focal point of conflict. Should I feel sorry for Dr. Van Deusen because he's delusional, and this is causing trouble for his marriage and his relationship with his son? Should I feel tense because no one will believe him about the convoluted conspiracy only he thinks he has discovered?

The second novella, "K & K", is the only one told from a third person perspective. It's third person limited, though, so we're still treated to the thoughts of the deranged main character. I actually liked the story at the beginning; I thought it would be a delightful descent into officeplace humour--who's stuffing the suggestion box?! Ultimately, however, Moody treats us to a postmodernist ending that takes all of the delight out of deduction (not that he had put much in there in the first place).

"The Albertine Notes" was perhaps the best novella of the three, but I won't go so far as to say it was good or even great. The concept of a memory recall-enhancing drug that actually allows one to change the past through quantum indeterminacy is intriguing, for sure. Unfortunately, the use of the first person perspective meant we experienced everything from a drug addict's point of view. While that was interesting, it was also confusing. Time travel and quantum theory is confusing enough when you don't have drugs involved. And while I realize I'm disregarding the fact that "The Albertine Notes" has, buried deep within it, the skeleton of a profound theme, that's only because the narrative was confusing enough that I lost the thread of the theme every time it surfaced for air.

I'm not going to apologize if it turns out that these were incredibly simple and their points just managed to fly over my head. It's not that I dislike having to work to comprehend a story's point. I trudged through *The Name of the Rose* one page at a time--and I loved it. On the other hand, *Right Livelihoods* was not enjoyable. The book's cover copy says, "Only Rick Moody could lead us to feel affection for the misguided, earnestly striving characters in this alternately unsettling and warm, always remarkable trio of novellas." I don't feel that affection? In fact, looking back at many of my reviews, a lack of sympathy for the main character seems

to be one of my most common complaints. Am I actually a sociopath? If so, and it's this book that finally made me realize it, what does that mean?

If I ever write a long, confusingly-narrated novella about it, I'll let you know....
