**The Joy and Enthusiasm of Reading by Rick Moody**

I believe in the absolute and unlimited liberty of reading. I believe in wandering through the stacks and picking out the first thing that strikes me. I believe in choosing books based on the dust jacket. I believe in reading books because others dislike them or find them dangerous. I believe in choosing the hardest book imaginable. I believe in reading up on what others have to say about this difficult book, and then making up my own mind.

Part of this has to do with Mr. Buxton, who taught me Shakespeare in 10th grade. We were reading Macbeth. Mr. Buxton, who probably had better things to do, nonetheless agreed to meet one night to go over the text line by line. The first thing he did was point out the repetition of motifs. For example, the reversals of things ("fair is foul and foul is fair"). Then there was the unsexing of Lady Macbeth and the association in the play of masculinity with violence.

What Mr. Buxton didn't tell me was what the play meant. He left the conclusions to me. The situation was much the same with my religious studies teacher in 11th grade, Mr. Flanders, who encouraged me to have my own relationship with the Gospels, and perhaps he quoted Jesus of Nazareth in the process. "Therefore speak I to them in parables: Because they seeing, see not; and hearing they hear not, neither do they understand."

High school was followed by college, where I read Umberto Eco's Role of the Reader, in which it is said that the reader completes the text, that the text is never finished until it meets this voracious and engaged reader. The open texts, Eco calls them. In college, I read some of the great Europeans and Latin Americans: Borges and Kafka, Genet and Beckett, Artaud, Proust — open texts all. I may not have known why Kafka's Metamorphosis is about a guy who turns into a bug, but I knew that some said cockroach, and others, European dung beetle.

There are those critics, of course, who insist that there are right ways and wrong ways to read every book. No doubt they arrived at these beliefs through their own adventures in the stacks. And these are important questions for philosophers of every stripe. And yet I know only what joy and enthusiasm about reading have taught me, in bookstores new and used.

I believe there is not now and never will be an authority who can tell me how to interpret, how to read, how to find the pearl of literary meaning in all cases. Nietzsche says, "Supposing truth is a woman – what then?" Supposing the truth is not hard, fast, masculine, simple, direct? You could spend a lifetime thinking about this sentence, and making it your own. In just this way, I believe in the freedom to see literature, history, truth, unfolding ahead of me like a book whose spine has just now been cracked.