


"Born October 18, 1961, in N.Y.C. Childhood pretty uneventful. We moved to the suburbs. I always read a lot. I did some kid stuff, but mostly I read. So this sketchy and selective bibliography—this list of some of the books I have around the house now—is really an autobiography.

"Art instructor at St. Paul's School when I was there (1975-79). Abbe was an older, forgetful guy when I met him. He was in his late sixties, probably. He lived alone in an apartment above the infirmary at S.P.S. His studio had burned down years before, taking a lot of his paintings, and I believe this accounted for the halo of sadness around him. He could be infectiously happy, though. His house was full of juleboxes, dolls, and electrical toys. Games of every kind.

One time I showed him my "Sgt. Pepper" picture disk—remember those collector's gimmicks which revolutionized the LP for a few minutes in the seventies? The famous jacket art was painted on the vinyl. Abbe laughed for a good long time over that. He sat in the old armchair in my room, the one with the stuffing coming out of it, and laughed. He loved that kind of thing. He had a lot of Elvis on his juleboxes.

"Lester's last published piece, in the Voice, appeared in my senior year of college. I moved back to N.Y.C. a little later, after six months in California, where it was too relaxed. By the time I got to New York, the East Village galleries were already disappearing. Lester was dead. The Gap had moved in on the northwest corner of St. Mark's and Second Avenue.

"In 1978, back at S.P.S., I took six hits of "blotter" acid and had a pretty wrenching bad trip. Eternal damnation, shame, humiliation, and an endless line of men in clown costumes chanting my name and laughing. That kind of thing. I turned myself in, confessed to a master I liked, the Reverend Aiden B. Flanders. Somewhere in the middle of the five or six hours it took to talk me down, I asked him if he thought I would remember this moment for the rest of my life.

"The necessity for this book is to be found in the following consideration: that the lover's discourse is today of an extreme solitude... Once a discourse is thus exiled from all gregarity, it has no recourse but to become the site, however exiguous, of an affirmation.

"I didn't get baptized until I was fifteen. The minister, who had buried my grandparents and my uncle and performed my father's remarriage, couldn't remember my name. Right then, the church seemed like the only thing that would get me through adolescence. I was going to get confirmed later, too, but instead I started drinking.

"Cf. "Eco, Umberto," and also n. 9, below.

"The band I played in, in college, was called Forty-five Houses. We got our name from the first Surrealist manifest: 'Q. 'What is your name?' A. 'Forty-five houses.' (Gasser syndrome, or beside-the-point replies.)' Our drummer preferred women to men, but I sort of fell in love with her anyway. After we graduated, she gave me a ride on her motorcycle. It was the first time I ever rode one. I held tight around her waist.

"See n. 20, below.

"The first day of Angela's workshop in college, a guy asked her what her work was like. She said, "My work cuts like a steel blade at the base of a man's penis."

Second semester, there was a science-fiction writer in our class who sometimes slept through the proceedings—and there were only eight or nine of us there. One day I brought a copy of "Light in August" to Angela's office hours and she said, "I wish I were reading that"—Paul A. instead of this (pointing to a stack of student work).

"As a gift for graduating from boarding school, my dad gave me a short trip to Europe. Two weeks. I was a little bit afraid of travel, though, as I still am, and in London I spent much of the time in Hyde Park, in a chair I rented for 15p a day. The sticker that served as my lease still adorns my copy of "The Stories of John Cheever," also given to me by my dad. I haven't been back to the U.K. since.

"We moved a lot when I was a kid. In eighth grade I had a calendar on which I marked off the days until I'd be leaving Connecticut forever. My attachments weren't too deep. I spent a lot of time with Iron Man, the Incredible Hulk, and the Avengers. I also liked self-help books and Elton John records.

"Picard and the crew of the Enterprise attempt to make contact with a race of aliens, the Children of Tama, who speak entirely in an allegorical language. Picard doesn't figure out the language until the captain of the Tamarlans is already dead. A big episode for those who realize how hard communicating really is.

"One guy I knew in college actually threw this book out a window. Here are some excerpts from my own marginalia: "Function of art is supplementalism though devalorization of weighted side of oppositions"; Attendance as performance: more absence creates more real presence. I'm not sure what I meant, but I loved Derrida's overworked analogies: "Writing in the common sense is the dead letter; it is the carrier of death. It exhausts life. On the other hand, on the other face of the same proposition, writing in the metaphoric sense, natural, divine, and living writing, is generated" [page 17].

"The WELL—has a really good "Star Trek" conference, too. This private conference is about sex. I started messing with computers in junior high, when my grades got me out of study hall. Which was good because people used to threaten me if I didn't let them copy my homework. It was on the WELL that I learned both the address for a mail-order catalogue called Leather Toys and how to affix clothespins.

"My drinking got really bad in graduate school. In the mid-eighties, I was in love with a woman who was living in Paris, and I took the opportunity to get mixed up at the same time with a friend in New York. Kate, the second of these women, first played this record for me. The snap of the snare drum that begins "The Good Earth" has a real tenderness to it, for me. I was playing this record when I was really ashamed of myself and also afterward, when I was hoping for forgiveness.

At the end of my drinking, when I was first living in Hoboken, I started writing my first novel, "Garden State." Later, through a chain of kindnesses, someone managed to slip a copy of it to William Gaddis, the writer I most admired, then and now. Much later, after all this, I came to know Gaddis's son Matthew a little bit, and he said that the book had probably got covered up with papers, because that's the way his dad's desk is. But maybe there was one afternoon when it was on top of a stack."
18 The last day of class with Jack Hawkes, we were standing out on one of those Victorian porches in Providence—a bunch of us, because there was always a crowd of people trying to get into Jack’s classes (and they were usually really talented)—drinking corks from champagne bottles out into the street. A couple made it halfway across. Hawkes was mumbling something about how sad it was that so many writers were so afflicted by drink. In less than a week, I was going to graduate.

19 Another clergyman in New England, Mr. Joseph Moody, of York, Maine, who died about eighty years since, made himself remarkable by the same eccentricity that is here related of the Reverend Mr. Hooper. In his case, however, the symbol had a different import. In early life he had accidentally killed a beloved friend; and from that day till the hour of his own death, he hid his face from men.

20 See n. 7, above.

21 During the period when I was finishing my first novel, I had an office job in publishing, from which I was later fired. I judged everything against the books I loved when I was a teen-ager: “The Crying of Lot 49,” Beckett’s “Murphy,” “One Hundred Years of Solitude,” etc. Besides Lester Bangs (see above), Marcus’s “Lipstick Traces” was one of the few recently published books I liked. Another was “Responses: On Paul de Man’s Wartime Journalism” (University of Nebraska Press).

22 In 1987, I institutionalized myself. At that moment, Thurber and Groucho Marx and anthologies of low comedy seemed like the best that literature had to offer. I thought I was going to abandon writing—something had to have—but I didn’t. I felt better later.

23 The accusation that the gnostics invented what they wrote contains some truth. Certain gnostics openly acknowledged that they derived their gnostis from their own experience. The gnostic Christians assumed that had gone far beyond the apostles’ original teaching.

24 And Cage’s book “Silence”; and “Music for Airports”; and La Monte Young’s “The Second Dream of the High-Tension Line Step-down Transformer from the Four Dreams of China”; and Ezra Pound after St. Elizabeth’s; and “Be Here Now”; and Mark Rothko.

25 The back cover of this issue consists of a newspaper photo of a man in a wedding gown slumped over on a toilet, his skin ribbed with gigantic blisters. He’s really destroyed, this guy. I’d been given to believe the photo was from the Daily News. And since my grandfather worked for the News the luridness of this horror struck close. This, I learned, was an act of pleasure.

26 Angela Carter assigned this book to us in sophomore year. I was taking a lot of quaaludes that spring. One night, I stayed up all night on quaaludes and wrote a story, cribbed from Bruno Schulz, about a guy who lives in a house that is actually his grandmother. Later, when I told Angela that I’d written the story high, she said, cryptically, “Quaaludes, the aardvark of the drug world.”

27 All these empty urges must be satisfied.”

28 “Sick as I am/confused in the head/mean I have/endured this April/so far/visiting friends” (pages 427–8). “Garden State” was published in the spring of 1992. I was already pretty far into my second book, “The Ice Storm.” I left Hoboken for good.