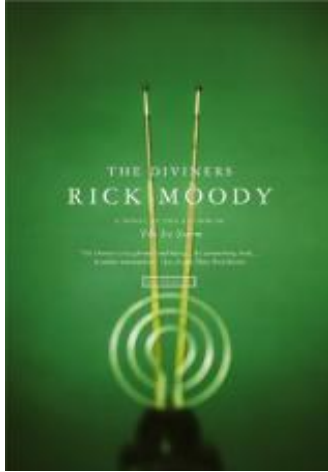


# The Diviners

by Rick Moody

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## About the Book

In his first novel in seven years, Rick Moody gives us a generous, hilarious, and brilliant look at contemporary America, from coast to coast. In the month after Election Day 2000, scores of movie-business strivers are focused on one goal: getting in on an elusive production that seems sure to be the Next Big Thing. It is an epic about dowsers, those miracle workers who bring water to perpetually thirsty (and hungry and love-starved) humankind. The movie-or TV miniseries, as it eventually becomes-opens with Huns sweeping through Mongolia and closes with a Mormon diviner finding water in the Las Vegas desert. A rumor-driven industry is sure that it will be the please-everyone, multigenerational, multiethnic hit of all their dreams.

Among the wannabes in pursuit of this ephemeral project: Vanessa Meandro, hot-tempered head of Means of Production, a hip New York indie film company; her harried and varied staff, including a Sikh cabdriver promoted to the office of "theory and practice of TV" and the daughter of an LA media big shot, who is hired to fetch Vanessa's Krispy Kremes and more; a bipolar bicycle messenger who makes a fateful misdelivery; two celebrity publicists, the Vanderbilt girls; a thriller writer who gives Botox parties; a word man who coined the phrase "inspired by a true story"; and a Supreme Court justice who wants to write the script. A few real artists surface in the course of Moody's rollicking and intricately woven tale, and real emotion will eventually blossom for most of Vanessa's staff at Means of Production-even for Vanessa herself.

**The Diviners** is a richly detailed look at the interlocking worlds of entertainment, money, politics, addiction, sex, work, and family in modern America. In this affectionate but unflinching cautionary tale about vanity, ambition, and life's unlikely paths, Rick Moody delivers a masterpiece of comedy that will bring him to a still higher level of appreciation.

## Discussion Guide

1. **The Diviners** takes place during the 2000 presidential election and its aftermath. What does **The Diviners** tell us about the America of that time? Do you think the characters would have behaved differently had the novel taken place one year after, rather than one year before, September 11, 2001?
2. How does Vanessa Meandro's relationship with her mother contribute to your opinion of Vanessa? Do you think Vanessa is starving for love or unable to love at the beginning of **The Diviners**?
3. Do you think Ranjeet Singh, the Sikh cab driver, merited the opportunity to join an industry in which he had no previous experience? Was his enthusiasm for American movies sufficient qualification?
4. What aspects of modern America did **The Diviners** help you to know better than you did? Independent filmmaking? Botox parties? Environmental extremists? Yoga classes? Office politics?
5. Rick Moody has said that he loves Tyrone. Who was the most appealing or interesting character to you? Why?
6. How do Samantha Lee and Tyrone and Annabel Duffy illuminate the challenges facing artists in contemporary society? How has the writer become, like Len Wilkinson, a mere "word man" or, as in the case of the author of the script for the miniseries of **The Diviners**, nonexistent?
7. Both Dante's *Purgatorio* and **The Diviners** comprise thirtythree chapters. Do you think that this has something to do with the movement of Rick Moody's novel from hellish latitudes to more hopeful circumstances for the various characters?
8. What do the various audience reactions to the TV serial *The Werewolves of Fairfield County* tell us about the variety of responses one story can elicit?
9. In what ways is **The Diviners** an epic rather than a domestic novel?
10. When Vanessa decides to help the illegal Mexican migrants in the desert, were you surprised? What personal transformations ? either in Vanessa's life or in the lives of the other characters ? meant the most to you?
11. In the interview with Rick Moody that is included in this reading group guide, he says that "much of the novel is about various kinds of thirst." Which of his characters do you think are most able to quench their thirsts, satisfy their needs, in the end?

## Author Bio

Rick Moody is the author of two memoirs --- THE LONG ACCOMPLISHMENT and the award-winning THE BLACK VEIL --- the novels HOTELS OF NORTH AMERICA, THE FOUR FINGERS OF DEATH, THE DIVINERS, PURPLE AMERICA, THE ICE STORM and GARDEN STATE, and multiple collections of short fiction. Moody is the recipient of a Guggenheim Fellowship, and his work has been anthologized in *Best American Stories*, *Best American Essays*

and the Pushcart Prize anthology. He lives in Rhode Island.

## Critical Praise

"Rick Moody is that rare writer who can make the language do tricks and still suffuse his narrative with soul."

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