

*“I’m leaving.
It’s too infinite for me.”*

Taylor Mead
A Simple Country Girl

Introduction by Gary Indiana

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Taylor Mead, A Simple Country Girl at Heart, Trapped in the Mind of a Genius

by Gary Indiana

When I was still an unruly high school miss, I frequently came by myself to New York on three-day weekends and school holidays, allegedly to visit my stepbrother, who, back in the 60s, was a floor trader at the Stock Exchange. My family assumed I'd stay with him in Queens, though he expected no such thing. I hitchhiked, saving the cash they gave me for the round trip train ticket. On arrival, I checked into a fleapit Times Square hotel, took the subway to Wall Street and popped into the Exchange to say hi to my semi-sibling (when I could find him). Then I immediately headed for the Andy Warhol Garrick Theater to see the latest Factory-made movie.

I knew who Taylor Mead was from those films, and from the already frequent, at that time, freak show novelty items about Warhol and his familiars in magazines. Years underage, unfamous me could get into Max's or past the door of The Factory, I spotted Taylor "live" a few

times in the streets outside. I think he was the first movie star I ever saw in real life.

But I didn't really meet Taylor until a summer break from Berkeley in the early '70s, when I went to a reading he gave in a Boston nightclub. I don't recall how we happened to spend the entire next day and evening rambling around Boston together, but years later, after Berkeley and Los Angeles and Boston again and Chicago for a time, I moved to New York and almost immediately became friends with him. I'm not sure he remembered me when Viva, Jackie Curtis, Taylor, and I officiated at the Mudd Club Rock and Roll Funeral Party in 1978, but soon after we were acting in Michel Auder's videos together (*A Couple of White Faggots Sitting Around Talking*, among others) and often performing at the same events.

Around that time I directed him in several of my plays, including *The Roman Polanski Story* and *Phantoms of Louisiana*. (In *Polanski*, Taylor played Polanski's craven uncle who sells him to gypsies; the head of the Cannes Film Festival Jury; Charlie Manson; the Judge at Polanski's statutory rape trial; Shelly Winters; and Klaus Kinski—Taylor was ingeniously, hilariously mimetic in each incarnation.) A few years later, in San Francisco, we performed the entirety of Hans Magnus Enzensberger's *The Sinking of the Titanic* as two passengers sharing a table in the first-class lounge of the sinking liner, the stage floor slowly disappearing under swirling clouds of dry ice fog. We reprised it in a more elaborate production, with a greatly expanded cast, at Fez in New York, where Taylor also participated in the similarly extravagant *Evening of Prose Works by John Lennon*. Taylor collaborated in another caprice I concocted on the occasion of the Lincoln Center "anti-fatwa on Salman Rushdie"

reading event, where the hoi polloi of the literary world read from banned works of the past, which, I learned, were all banned *religious* books of the past.

I felt it important for us freedom of speech kamikazis below 23rd Street, who'd forever had an undeclared fatwa on us from the same jumped-up literati reading at Lincoln Center, to present an anti-anti-fatwa-anti-fatwa alternative, and invited Richard Hell, Clarissa Dalrymple, Glenn O'Brien, Max Blagg, Lynne Tillman, Cookie Mueller, and a richly variegated group of other "downtown" people to read selections from the Marquis de Sade's *The Hundred and Twenty-Days of Sodom* at Simon Watson's gallery on Lafayette Street, with the very British Gothic novelist Patrick McGrath summarizing passages between the parts people chose to read, in the manner of Alistair Cooke introducing episodes of a *Masterpiece Theater* series: "In our last episode, the Duc de Blangis blinded and then sodomized his daughter with several spiked instruments, while himself being friggged with the massive engine of his valet, whose fingers were busy inside the twat of the Duc's wife, by now close to death from the elaborate tortures inflicted on her by all the company, while, nearby. . . ." I recall Taylor reading at this event, glasses perched on his nose with scholarly earnestness, a very touching account of a twelve-year-old's forced penetration, in every orifice, by all four of de Sade's libertines.

Taylor has said (in private, in public, onstage) and written (in little notebooks, on napkins) uncountable indelible aphorisms and witticisms and spontaneous poems during the thirty years I've known him. I don't have to remember them because they're always flashing in front of my eyes, like a sequence of billboards. When living in New York City was still a pretty opaque skill to me,