

# PREFACE



Does the world need yet another book about Modigliani? The answer is yes.

This tuberculosis-plagued, alcohol-abusing painter, sculptor, and philandering bad boy's life has been examined from many angles, but a critical view of the interplay between his illnesses, his environment, and the social fabric of early twentieth-century Paris is lacking.

Assertions have been made so repeatedly by Modi's biographers accentuating the salacious aspects of his existence, his flaws, womanizing, and addictions, that those very assertions became a myth. Unfortunately, too frequently, myths repeated - and unquestioned - eventually become the truth. In *Becoming Modigliani*, my objective is to examine some of these assertions and question the romanticized Modigliani myth-making machine.

Art sells. But art with a story attached to its maker, the life of an artist involved in sex, alcohol, and drugs who succumbed to an early death – sells even better. Trumped-up reputation-making stories by those who could benefit from Modi's work, and others, are not unusual, as evidenced by the blood-in-water churning excitement at auction houses where Modi's paintings garner tens of millions of dollars.

By no means am I lessening the importance of many informative and well-written histories of this complicated, tortured, and highly gifted young man. Nor do I dispute his perceived life of recklessness. I wish only to bring a new light on the emotional, psychological,

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physical, and physiological burdens Amedeo Modigliani bore during his life.\*

This book takes readers on a journey through Modigliani's brief existence, from his illness-filled beginnings in Livorno, Italy, to his death, presumably from tuberculous meningitis, in a paupers' hospital in Paris three decades later. Looking at Modi through a different lens, a more sympathetic and science-based lens, we can see Modi not as an out-of-control artist, but as a victim and life-long prisoner of the life-threatening infectious disease of his time; mycobacterial tuberculosis.

As a lung specialist, I cared for patients suffering from terminal illnesses, advanced cancers, the debilitating effects of tuberculosis, and the almost inevitably fatal HIV/AIDS epidemic of the 1980s.

As a fellow art lover, I am well-acquainted with this artist's playgrounds, having wandered myself through Livorno, Venice, and Florence, lived in Paris and on the French Riviera, devoured writings by Lautréamont, Nietzsche and Dante, fallen in love in Montmartre and strolled through the Luxembourg Gardens reading poetry with my beloved.

As a writer, in *Becoming Modigliani*, I hope to broaden your empathic understanding of this young man.

Imagine the huge weight thrust upon a boy suffering from illness, struggling to breathe, fearing death, and equally significant, facing the shame of his times in the early 1900s – when the mere mention of a highly contagious respiratory disease such as tuberculosis, could render you homeless, jobless, and ostracized from all.

As if that were not enough, imagine him sexually active, battling drug and alcohol addiction during an epidemic of sexually transmitted illnesses (e.g., syphilis), needing to survive amid the deprivations of war, and burning to excel creatively while remaining true to his uniqueness among many rising stars in the visual arts.

Consider for a moment how haunted Modi must have been by the burden of chronic symptoms and the inescapable knowledge he was

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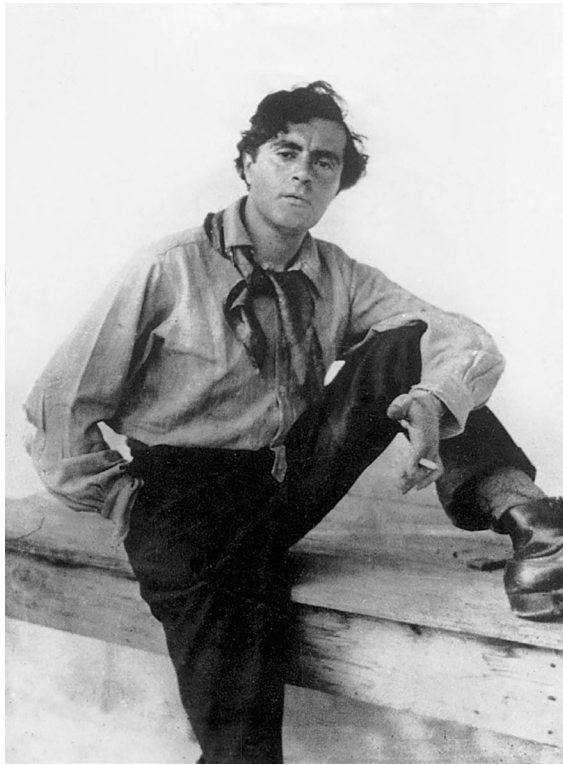
\* Pronounced a-meh-day-o mow-duh-lee-aa-nee (the g before the l is silent in Italian).

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destined for an early death, what this must have done to his psychological well-being, and how influential this would have been on how he chose to live. It is easy to understand why this knowledge would also have been the catalyst for the frenzied and prolific work Modi accomplished from his arrival in Paris in 1906 to his death on January 24, 1920, at only thirty-five.

Amedeo Modigliani was young, handsome, absurdly talented, charismatic, resilient...and troubled. Some said he was “maudit,” which in French means accursed and is a play on words with his name.

He was.



Amedeo Modigliani (1918)