



Shakespeare Wrote for Money

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With an affectionate introduction by Sarah Vowell, this is the third and final collection of columns by celebrated novelist Nick Hornby from *The Believer* magazine. Hornby's monthly reading diary is unlike any arts column in any other publication; it discusses cultural artifacts the way they actually exist in people's lives. Hornby is a voracious and unapologetic reader, and his notes on books — highbrow and otherwise — are always accessible and hilarious.

Shakespeare Wrote for Money Details

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From Reader Review Shakespeare Wrote for Money for online ebook

Lobstergirl says

The only thing you can conclude from this book and others like it (this is the third and last compilation of Hornby's bookreviewing columns from the *Believer*) is that writers are a lot less critical of other writers than us regular people are. Hornby finds most of the books he reads wondrous, brilliant, smashing, absorbing, astounding, beautiful, haunting, visceral, inspirational, or "superbly realized."

I suppose this is because writers know just how difficult churning out novels is, whereas readers are merely consumers who haven't gone through the process. If we'd birthed some novels ourselves, we'd probably be a lot more sympathetic and forgiving. I hated Ken Kalfus's *A Disorder Peculiar to the Country*; Hornby decided it was "wonderful," a "sophisticated piece of adult entertainment that took "narrative risks." I found Ian McEwen's *Saturday* painfully, egregiously pretentious and had to force myself to the end as if swimming through a sea of mud and shit; Hornby liked it (all critics seem to be in agreement that McEwen is a brilliant writer) but found it "uneven." Both of us loved *The Road*.

So I was thrilled when Hornby actually found a novel that he loathed - so much so that he coyly, annoyingly refused to name it. (He provides a quote, so by googling you are able to figure out it's *Light Years* by James Salter.) Hornby listens to an excerpt from the murdered journalist Anna Politkovskaya's "A Russian Diary" on the radio one morning and it makes him think of *Light Years*. "A perfect day begins in death, in the semblance of death, in deep surrender," wrote Salter. Really? questions Hornby, who finds this deliberately imprecise and obfuscatory. Is that the same "death" of Politkovskaya's diaries? He wonders "whether the complication of language is in inverse proportion to the size of the subject under discussion," given that she is writing about the agonies of Russian lawlessness and despotism, and Salter is writing about rich people languidly musing about wine and Sartre.

Scott S. says

Hornby begins each column with 'books bought' and 'books read' listing. I can relate that the 'bought' usually outnumbers the 'read' nearly every month. My favorite passage was about browsing the section of a bookstore reserved for the genre he calls "the 'misery memoir' . . . these books . . . seem to deal exclusively with childhood hardship and abuse, and have titles like *Please Daddy*, *Put It Away*." That gave me one of the biggest laughs this summer.

Lisa Vegan says

I loved the first two of these books: *The Polysyllabic Spree* and *Housekeeping vs. The Dirt*. Unfortunately, this third essay book is Nick Hornby's last collection of *Believer* monthly columns. I always find more books to read as I read Hornby's essays, although nowhere near as many as I find at Goodreads.

I have a few of Sarah Vowell's 's books on my to-read shelf. I've seen her on Jon Stewart's *The Daily Show*, and I think she is so funny. She wrote a hilarious introduction to this book.

I did appreciate that in many of the columns he included a young adult book., and he chose excellent ya books, and I was interested in what he wrote about them. Because of his writings about the young adult books he read, this book was not so disappointing, and it's probably why I decided to give this book 4 and not 3 stars.

Also, there was one month where he wrote about what he watched, and movies, not books, were the subject.

I didn't enjoy this book as much as the first two collections, but I'm glad I read it and I'm sorry that there will be no more of these books. I didn't laugh as much as I did when reading the previous books, but I did laugh and smile at times, and I found most of the contents fascinating. From what Hornby wrote, it seemed that five years of these columns were enough for him; he seemed content to be done with the project. He came across as a tad burned out actually.

Suzanne says

This is the third and final collection of Nick Hornby's reading columns that were originally published in *The Believer* (the first two being *The Polysyllabic Spree* and *Housekeeping v. The Dirt*.) If you're a book junkie, the format will certainly appeal to you. Each column begins with two lists, Books Bought and Books Read. Very often there is no overlap.

I remember liking *The Polysyllabic Spree* a lot. I liked *Housekeeping v. The Dirt*, but not quite as much as *Spree*. After the first couple essays in *Shakespeare Wrote for Money*, I thought this might get a rating of "just okay," but by the end, it crept up to at least match the enjoyment level of the second book. I felt like he was meandering a bit, talking too much about the World Cup and what he was doing instead of reading. That's his prerogative, I suppose, and Hornby is pretty entertaining in that mode, as well, but I remember coming out of the first two collections with a much expanded To Read list. I wasn't getting quite as much out of this installment.

Things got better about halfway through when Hornby, after writing a YA book himself, connected with other YA authors and essentially discovered the YA genre, and how great some of those books are. He says:

"They've been very disorienting, these last few weeks. I see now that dismissing YA books because you're not a young adult is a little bit like refusing to watch thrillers on the grounds that you're not a policeman or a dangerous criminal, and as a consequence, I've discovered a previously ignored room at the back of the bookstore that's filled with masterpieces I've never heard of, the YA equivalents of The Maltese Falcon and Strangers on a Train. Weirdly, then, reading YA stuff now is a little like being a young adult way back then: Is this Vonnegut guy any good? What about Albert Camus? The world suddenly seems a larger place."

It was fun to see him go on and pick up some of my favorite YA books (like Louis Sachar's *Holes*).

Even though it wasn't the strongest bunch of essays, I still loved the format and ended up adding several books to my reading list. I wish Hornby were still producing these articles in some format, blog or otherwise. I wonder if we could somehow convince him to join Goodreads!

Michael says

Took a wee break from Bolano's compulsively-readable-though-simultaneously-deeply-unsettling magnum opus to breeze through this, Hornby's third and final collection of "What I've Been Reading" columns from *The Believer*. There is something diligently inspiring about Hornby's musings on literature of all kinds. His lack of pretension in what he chooses to read reminds us that what we read is often dictated by what pleases us, and not because something is supposed to be good for us.

Plus, he's damn funny. Discussing Thomas Hardy's reliable dour view of life and the world, Hornby dryly notes: "When Hardy's friend Henry Rider Haggard loses his ten-year-old son, Hardy wrote to console him thus: 'I think the death of a child is never truly to be regretted, when one reflects on what he has escaped.' Every cloud, and all that."

Hoo!

MsAprilVincent says

Nick Hornby has discovered YA literature, which is why this is my favorite of his "What I'm Reading" collections.

In addition to declaring that (some) YA lit is as good as--if not better than--"grown up" books, Hornby also makes fun of high-brow critics who think that the only books worth reading are those in which everybody dies. He admits to reading and enjoying lightweight fare that doesn't make him want to kill himself, even if it makes him a literary dunce.

Even if this whole book had been a write-up of the Danielle Steele oeuvre, I would love it anyway, for the simple fact that Hornby says, straight-up, that there is validity in not wanting to read *The Road*. Good, because I don't wanna, no matter what Oprah says.

Hornby discusses a wide variety of books, from nonfiction to fiction, from happily-ever-afters to nuclear holocausts. He writes about how the books make him feel afterwards, what he admires about the writing in particular, and what he likes in a good book. His reviews are detailed enough to interest potential readers but don't give away important plot points. He doesn't use big words or grab metaphors out of the blue or try to make me feel stupid if I don't want to read 800 pages of despair.

His writing implies that he's the kind of person who would enjoy a great discussion over margaritas and chips (HEY, I TOTALLY WANT NICK HORNBY IN MY BOOK BOOK CLUB!!!), and who wouldn't get all mad if the conversation wandered into politics or sex or nail polish or whatever.

Hornby's stopped writing for *The Believer* (sad face), but I think he should, at the very least, publish a yearly What I'm Reading List, so I can get some good recommendations from someone I like and trust.

Rick says

This is the third and final collection of Hornby's *Believer* columns on book reading. As in the second volume

the jokes about the Polysyllabic Spree (the mob of intolerantly kind and priggish editorial police at the *Believer*) are too inside cute instead of clever, and at times Hornby's glib self-deprecation comes across as practiced, as opposed to sincere. Still I gulped my way through this slim collection of essays despite telling myself that reading them in a rush would accentuate the book's faults and make it less enjoyable than reading an essay or two a week might. But in the end, and beginning and middle, Hornby is just good company, chatting about books, cracking jokes, exercising common sense, and perhaps sometimes being a little too generous (he's a big fan of Richard Russo).

And the real virtue of the anthology of essays is that I always come away with a couple of books I'd never heard of that I'm eager to read now (*What Sport Tells Us About Life*, by Ed Smith, for example) and a couple I was planning on passing on but Hornby convinces me that they're worth the read (*The Abstinence Teacher*, by Tom Perrota and *The Darling*, by Russell Banks). And, after three years of kind words about his brother-in-law, I think I'll try one of Robert Harris's novels. *Shakespeare Wrote for Money* just goes to show that humor, intelligence, compassion, and kindness to in-laws and colleagues can be the right mix of virtues and flaws. But importantly, the best thing is that good recommendations comes reliably to the reader. I'll miss the near annual appearance of these collections.

Kirsti says

Here is a conversation I had while riding on an airport shuttle bus in San Diego:

DRIVER: What are you reading?

ME: It's called *Shakespeare Wrote for Money*.

DRIVER: Yeah, but what is it?

ME: It's a book of book reviews.

DRIVER: [pause] Really?

ME: It's really good!

I like that Hornby begins each review with a list of books he's bought and a list of books he's read. These two lists rarely match up.

The recommendation that I'm most likely to pursue is for *Sharp Teeth*, a blank-verse novel about werewolves in Los Angeles. Because who doesn't want to read about that?

Also, I was delighted to find out about the ALEX Awards, which are literary prizes for books that aren't aimed at young adults but are so fascinating that young adults actually want to read them. Here's a list of them: <https://www.goodreads.com/award/show/...>

Alison says

How you can tell I really like all three collections of Nick Hornby's columns about books from The Believer magazine: I bought all three books without reading them first. Usually I borrow books (from the library or from my mom) and then if I know I'm going to reread it, I'll buy it. But after I read the first volume, The Polysyllabic Spree, I was hooked. I've found lots of books to enjoy through Hornby's reviews, but even when he was talking about books I'm unlikely to read, I couldn't get enough of his wry, engaging tone and

the point he makes quite convincingly: that you should read, sure, but you should also ignore pretentious people who proclaim that you should only read Certain Books. Reading leads to reading, he says, and it's true. From here on, I'm ignoring all those lists of 1,001 books you have to read before you die. Since I can't possibly read everything, or even all the "good" books, I should focus on reading what interests me. Thanks, Nick Hornby.

David says

What did I learn from this book? That even Nick Hornby, an author I generally quite like, is capable of PHONING IT IN, in truly shameless fashion.

If, like me, you chose this book because you really enjoyed its predecessor, "The Polysyllabic Spree", prepare to be disappointed. If I didn't like Hornby so much, this would be a candidate for the "intellectual con artist at work" shelf. Though the real culprits might be the McSweeneys/Believer posse. Who apparently see no problem in subtitling this volume "two years of reading begat by more reading, presented in easily digestible, utterly hysterical monthly installments". Naively, one might expect somewhere around two dozen such installments. What they fail to mention is that there are actually only 15, two of which have nothing to do with books. It appears that Hornby's relationship with his employers at "The Believer" was in more or less consistent decline over the period in question, so much so that he was suspended on several occasions, resulting in one 5-month hiatus, and several briefer one-month suspensions (these resulted in combined March/April type installments, the standard 7 pages long).

The material that is included is interesting enough, though there is a much higher proportion of general 'the dog ate my homework' kind of waffling, with correspondingly less space devoted to Hornby's thoughts and insights about books he actually read. Personally, I didn't find the seven-page justification of why he read no books at all during the month of the World Cup particularly interesting; just as his views on The Simpsons Movie left me cold. It would have been interesting to hear the gory details of his rift with "The Believer", but these are not forthcoming, though he does mutter obliquely about ongoing censorship and repeated exhortations to be nicer about the books he discusses. There are occasional titillating references to the byzantine hierarchy of relationships within the McSweeneys fortress, and of being forbidden to write about certain books based on who was currently boffing whom, but the juicy details are disappointingly absent.

The time gaps and his obviously waning interest in the project take their toll. There is very little continuity, and most of the books featured in the "books bought" columns are never discussed at all.

With fewer than 100 pages of material actually devoted to books, the \$14 price tag and misleading representation of the book's content seem like an impudence on McSweeneys' part. Hornby surely deserves some of the blame as well.

A real disappointment.

Kim says

Hi!!!!!! I'm back. Yep. Thought I might have given up on you, right? No way "We're stuck together like paper to glue / Like a me to a you / Like honey to Pooh / Like the sky is to blue." You complete me. I can't

quit you. I love thee to the depth and breadth and height my soul can reach. Don't forget I'm just a girl, standing in front of a boy, asking him to love her. I'm very discreet but... I will haunt your dreams.

Get it? I will not be daunted by a horse head in the bed... by a boiled bunny... by giving me free cable... nope. I am strong in my conviction. I love you, Nick Hornby. In Icelandic, that would be: Ég elska þig, Nick Hornby. (it sounds like I'm insulting you, maybe that's what makes Icelanders so hip now.—maybe I'm just studying the culture so when I show up at your door with a wheelbarrow and a potato sack and some duck tape you'll sort of know what my plans might be.)

Shakespeare Wrote for Money is another collection of Nick's columns from his Believer days. More books bought, books read, DVDs bought, movies watched... more of the essential Nick Hornby. This alone should be enough, right? Oh no no no... **with an Introduction by Sarah Vowell** Sarah! My BFF, my blood sister, the Bridget Fonda to my Jennifer Jason Leigh. Hell yeah! Enough, you say? Where's the Thorazine to shut this bitch up already you ask?

Wait... there's more. Nick has discovered YA during these years. I'm sure it has to do with his publishing of *Slam* and all that goes along with toting it, but get this... HE REVIEWS WEETZIE BAT! My all-time-no-holds-barred-carry-me-to-the-grave FAVORITE book.

"Weetzie Bat is, I suppose, about single mothers and AIDS and homosexuality and loneliness, but that's like saying that "Desolation Row is about Cinderella and Einstein and Bette Davis. And actually, when I was trying to recall the last time I was exposed to a mind this singular, it was Dylan's book Chronicles that I thought of—not because Block thinks or writes in a similar way, and she certainly doesn't write or think about similar things, but because this kind of originality in prose is very rare indeed."

This is an erotic dream that culminates in an emission of ejaculatory fluid come true.

"Reading begets reading" Nick says.

"I like liking things. It's just that there are more books to like than anyone can ever read. Which, granted, is an uptown problem, but a problem nonetheless." Sarah remarks.

My peeps, may I welcome you to my warm bosom...

Nick knocks out these columns between 2006 and 2008. Some of the books that he has reviewed are *Fun Home*, by Alison Bechdel, *Ironweed* by William Kennedy, *On Chesil Beach*, by Ian McEwan, *Poppy Shakespeare*, by Clare Allan, *The Abstinence Teacher* by Tom Perrotta, *Feed* by M.T. Anderson--just to name a few. He jumps from sports to biographies to the movie industry (Dr. Doolittle in particular) to musical history to dystopian YA lit and do I need an 'and'? He's just so awesome.

He read a biography: Thomas Hardy: *The Time Torn Man* by Claire Tomalin:

"Hardy's prose is best consumed when you're young, and your endless craving for misery is left unsatisfied by a diet of the Smiths and incessant parental misunderstanding. When I was seventeen, the scene in Jude the Obscure where Jude's children hang themselves "becos they are meny" provided much-needed confirmation that adult life was going to be thrillingly, unimaginatively, deliciously awful."

His review of *The Road* (compared to mine: a pitiful 12 words: “Cormac McCarthy is a ray of friggin’ sunshine on an apocalyptic day...” piece of crap) gives us just enough self centered ‘we are fucked’ attitude to make us want to devour it... even a second time, just to know that Nick is right there beside you.

“The man spends much of the book wondering whether he should shoot his son with their last remaining bullet, just to spare him further pain.... Sometimes you feel like begging the man to use his last bullet on you, rather than the boy. The boy is a fictional creation, after all, but you’re not. You’re really suffering. Reading The Road is rather like attending the beautiful funeral of someone you love who has died young. You’re happy that the ceremony seems to be going so well, and you know you’ll remember the experience for the rest of your life, but the truth is that you’d rather not be there at all.”

This time around, I was lucky to have read a good dozen of the same books---and then proceeded to add another twenty or so to my To-Read list. Thank you Nick... thank you for letting me have these essays. Reading Hornby is extremely pleasurable event.

And to all you non-Believers out there...

Pú mega hafa a loka fundur með geðveikur tannlæknir!

Brian says

A few years behind on this one, but it was excellent, just like his others.

Greg says

After reading this I feel a little sad that I'm just not that interested in reading other books of Nick Hornby. Yeah I liked *High Fidelity*, and *How to be Good* was ok, but generally when I see his books I just don't feel a need to read them. I feel disappointed because I like these essays so much and want to like the other books of his more (or maybe I would like them, but rather just feel a motivation to want to read them).

I don't necessarily agree with Nick Hornby, and my reading tastes are quite different from his. He has an interest in popular fiction that I don't share, and he has an aversion to 'serious' literature / difficult and kind of 'boring' books that I actually probably revel in, but the way that he presents the books he does read, the humor, warmth and humility he puts into each months column make them very enjoyable to read. It also makes me feel better about myself seeing that he almost every months buys lots of books that he never gets around to reading. I know it's a common thing some people do, but I still like knowing that there are others out there who buy up books in a pretty irrational way, since they could always just be bought when you want to read them, and not just to have.

My only complaint about these essays is that I wish that there was a way to know which books he gives up on and dislikes. Anything really negative is excised from the column, I'm not sure if this is really the

Believers policy, or if it's Hornby just being nice, but I'd still like to know which books he finds unbearable.

Kate says

Shakespeare Wrote For Money wasn't quite as good as *Housekeeping* v. *The Dirt* which wasn't quite as good as *The Polysyllabic Spree*. All collections of Nick Hornby's "Stuff I'm Reading" columns from the *Believer* magazine, the later ones don't have the same energy as the earlier ones, so perhaps he made the right choice in giving up the column after five years. Nevertheless, I got a lot of pleasure out of all three of these books and I felt sad when I reached the end of *Shakespeare Wrote For Money* that there would be no more. Each month, Hornby listed the books he'd bought as well as the books he'd read before riffing for several paragraphs on the latter, and there were quite a few "books bought" that never made it into "books read" column that I would very much like to know Hornby's opinion on. Alas, it's not to be. In any event, he piqued my interest in a number of books that I'd not heard of before, cemented my resolve to read a few more that I had heard of, and got me thinking a little differently about some I'd already read. Plus he made me laugh.

Teresa says

I read a column a night, which was perfect for the amount of reading time I have these days. I laughed both aloud and within, which was most appreciated.

A highlight of this collection is Hornby's discovery of YA lit for the very first time and he loves it, discussing those YA books that he calls 'modern classics.'

In one column he reviews movies instead of books (very entertaining) and in his final column he reviews some books related to movies. (Thought of you, Judy!)

In his final column, he gave a few 'shout-outs' to books he read and greatly enjoyed since 2003 (which is when he started writing the "Stuff I've Been Reading" column) and one was to *How to Breathe Underwater*. His praise of this Orringer collection was the reason it was first suggested by me (and another) for a Yahoo reading group. For that review alone (which was in *The Polysyllabic Spree: A Hilarious and True Account of One Man's Struggle With the Monthly Tide of the Books He's Bought and the Books He's Been Meaning to Read*), I thank him.
