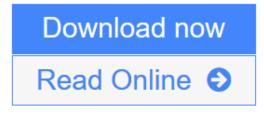


# The Wrong Boy

Willy Russell



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#### The Wrong Boy Willy Russell

The Dewsbury Desperadoes are on their way to Pontefract for a gig at the Allied Butchers' & Architects' Club. The Girl with the Chestnut Eyes is on her way to somewhere. And Raymond is heading for Gulag Grimshy.

Raymond Marks is a normal boy, from a normal family, in a normal northern town. His dad left home after falling in love with a five-string banjo; his fun-hating grandma believes she should have married Jean-Paul Sartre: '1 could never read his books, but y' could tell from his picture, there was nothing frivolous about John-Paul Sartre.' Felonious Uncle Jason and Appalling Aunty Paula are lusting after the satellite dish; frogs are flattened on Failsworth Boulevard; and Sickening Sonia's being sick in the majestic cathedral of words.

Raymond Marks is a normal boy, from a normal family, in a normal northern town. Until, on the banks of the Rochdale Canal, the Flytrapping craze begins and, for Raymond and his mam, nothing is ever quite so normal again.

In Raymond, prize-winning and internationally acclaimed playwright Willy Russell has created an unforgettable character to rival his Shirley Valentine and educated Rita. *The Wrong Boy* is his extraordinary first novel.

# The Wrong Boy Details

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Author : Willy Russell

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# From Reader Review The Wrong Boy for online ebook

# Jaga says

Dear Morrissey,

I know you don't check sites for reviews of books somehow connected to you, still, I mean to tell you I really enjoyed this book. It painfully proves how people create us and one coincidence can change one's life. I also loved the praise of deliberate misery and melancholy.

Yours sincerely,

J

# JK says

I first read *The Wrong Boy* when I was in my early teens, and I remember loving it. I remember thinking I'd never read a book so grown-up, yet so funny, in all my time. Picking this up again has brought rushes of nostalgia, and a realisation that maybe, just maybe, your ability to appreciate a really good book is something that can't be learned.

The novel is comprised of letters written by Raymond to his hero, Morrissey. The letters detail his life so far, in a completely disjointed yet perfectly flowing narrative. Raymond's utter honesty, and his feelings surrounding the unfortunate circumstances of his life, are so heart-rending that the reader is drawn to him immediately. I'm sure in my younger days I could see myself being his friend; now, I just wanted to be his protector.

Recounting the quandaries he's found himself in since the mere age of eleven, Raymond weaves a witty, open, and hilarious tale whilst still impressing the seriousness of themes such as mental health, family disputes, and remaining true to yourself. His words encapsulate his manic life incredibly well, as he describes everything with an entirely unique view, making us laugh hysterically along the way.

Russell's intricate descriptions of Raymond create a difficulty in understanding that our protagonist isn't a real person, and he didn't write this book. I think that's one of the most heartbreaking things about coming to the end of the novel; turning to the back cover page, seeing Russell's author picture, and realising Raymond is only a figment of the imagination. This is a mirror of some of things Raymond experienced throughout the pages, so Russell really has done a wonderful thing here.

Although Raymond's characterisation was complex in its own right, each and every other character were given exactly the right amount of depth. Raymond wasn't shy in plastering his opinions of others across the pages of his notebook, and this worked wonders to help us understand their personalities, motives, and prejudices. Special mentions go to Gran, who was so amazingly unlike a standard old person, and a true beam of light amongst a cast of awful players, and Twinky and Norman who were the type of real best friends everyone needs - ones who support and encourage you, but who aren't perfect, and depend on the same treatment from you.

It's difficult to describe exactly how and why this story is so wonderful, but it truly is something remarkable, and I don't feel this review does the story justice. I'm glad I decided to pick this up again after something like twelve years, and I know already it's a novel I'll come to back to many more times in life.

#### **Fran says**

"The boy with the thorn in his side Behind the hatred there lies A murderous desire for love How can they look into my eyes And still they don't believe me?"

Sabe aquele tipo de livro que a gente não consegue falar porque dói? Além de trazer um dos meus cantores favoritos, traz tantos temas importantes, tantos assuntos delicados. Aquela leitura que mexe tanto que fica até difícil pegar novamente. Quatro anos depois me vi com o livro em mãos e os mesmos sentimentos da primeira leitura.

Embarcar nessa aventura com Raymond é inquietante, você vai torcer por ele, sofrer, se indignar com as escolhas e se surpreender em muitos momentos. A vida levou Raymond por um caminho não tão legal e os estereótipos, as fofocas, o *disse-que-me-disse* foram cruciais no desenvolvimento da personagem. O jovem poderia ter tido um destino diferente se as pessoas pensassem mais antes de falar e acho que essa é a lição principal que o livro passa.

Adorei a forma como a estória se desenvolveu por meio de cartas do garoto ao ídolo e também toda trama que foi colocada ao redor dele, o pai, a banda, as músicas, os cenários, as viagens pedindo carona. A escrita te faz imergir completamente na cena que está sendo descrita.

"Mas eu vou ser forte, Morrissey. "

#### Dardenitaaa says

Have you ever read a book that made you howl in laughter? Have your eyes nearly popped wide open because of a clever plot twist? Have you ever decided to pause halfway through the chapters because you're in denial that the book is nearing its end? Have you ever finished a story and immediately wished you could hug the fictional protagonist after the last page?

I say yes to all of the above, thanks to Willy Russell's stunning first novel—The Wrong Boy—which is in every way, unforgettable. Written in the form of confessional letters and journal entries by 19-year old Raymond James Marks to his idol, Morrissey, this novel is in equal parts hilarious and heartbreaking; It's sad, sweet, shocking and satisfying, which basically means it easily made its way to my lists of all-time favourite books ever and, well—straight inside my dorky reader-heart.

The Wrong Boy's plot is engaging enough to keep a reader leafing like mad through its witty and dark dialogue: it is a comic, coming-of age odyssey of a misunderstood teenage intellectual and die-hard Smiths fan, his painfully erratic past and his troublesome present state. Raymond, the book's hero, chronicles his alternating (and almost never-ending) dilemmas with lots of heart and humour, evident in his laugh-out-loud

narrative both in prose and poetry.

Like an intelligent teenage sitcom gone haywire, the book is filled with crazy turn of events which unsurprisingly heaved greater havoc in Raymond's life. We get unusual ones, like the Transvestite Nativity Play Scandal in his early school years, to his accidental discovery of the flytrapping craze and his eventual expulsion. But we also get dark, disturbing themes like his having linked with the rape of a neighbourhood girl, his parent's weird love affairs, and his admission to a mental facility. And he oh-so-beautifully captured each of these life-altering changes with such profound reflections and child-like honesty that you can't help but love him so. The book is a screaming testament that a painful childhood is indeed the best preparation in the making of a wonderful writer.

Aside from the extraordinary detail given in Raymond's persona, the other characters also shined with their individual oddities. From his always-anxious mother Shelagh, his cool grandmother aptly named Winnie, his best friends Twinky and Norman, and well, the Girl with the Chestnut Eyes. Raymond never met Morrissey but he was omnipresent in all of his stories that it's impossible not to mention him. There's a sad bit towards the end that just wrenched my heart open, I felt so strongly the need to quote it:

"Morrissey, I'm all right on my own. I don't even mind being on my own. But I never wanted to be on my own. That was just how it turned out. And I tried to make the best out of it. You helped me with that, Morrissey. You made it seem all right, feeling lonely. And it was, in a way, it was all right being lonely and misunderstood, because I had my love of you and everything that went with that, all the records and posters and videos and all the mementoes and memorabilia. I had all of that.

But sometimes I find myself thinking about the future, Morrissey. And that's when I'd get frightened. Because it's all right being a bit lonely when you're only nineteen and you can wear all that loneliness like it's cool and defiant and a bit mysterious; like it's something you've chosen. But when you're not nineteen anymore, Morrissey, when you've ended up older and you're still sitting there in your room, on your own, with a brilliant collection of Smiths and Morrissey memorabilia, what then? I've seen them, Morrissey, when I've been at conventions and all the fans have been gathered to wallow in all the wonderfulness of you and the Smiths, I've seen them, the older fans, the ones who were probably fans right back at the beginning.....

And do you know what occurred to me, Morrissey? What occurred to me is that you must despise them—fans like that. Fans so devoted that they became trapped inside their devotion, imprisoned by their idolatry; those who clung onto worship because they were afraid to let go; in case they discovered that outside of you, Morrissey, and beyond the bedrooms of their own minds, they didn't exist. Which is why they are still there, at all the concerts and conventions, with all the right books and rare records and attitudes, all the right facts, dates and figures, discographies, bios and trivia and Morrissey-lore.; those who adore you for just a little too long, Morrissey; those whose love is so needy that it blinds them to that look in your eyes, Morrissey; that look of pained contempt.

And that's why you have to understand, Morrissey, that I've not done all this just for myself; I'm doing it for you as well, Morrissey. Because I promised that I would never ever do that to you; never grow into the sort of fan whom you would have to despise. So it's for both of us, Morrissey, me and you."

Imagine all this goodness in every page, and it's likely you can perceive a better picture of how precious this book is for me. The Wrong Boy is unflinchingly one of the most moving novels you will ever read, and this is all due to Willy Russell's genius, a writer I now look up to with such great respect and gratitude.

Honestly, I feel stuttering just like Raymond, because there are simply no words enough to articulate how

much of an experience reading this book have been for me—I love, love, love the Wrong Boy for all the right reasons! ♥

# **Margaret Bamford says**

I found this book unusual and quite funny in places. Very different from the plays he has written.

#### **Tracey-Lee says**

How did I like this book? I just finished it...an old, rather ratty, paperback copy I stumbled upon in my favourite used book store, a place called Nuggets, in Chilliwack BC Canada. A bookstore which is very aptly named as The Wrong Boy is definitely a golden nugget of a book if ever there was such a thing.

The moment I finished The Wrong Boy, I went to Abebooks and ordered a brand new, signed by the author, hardcover copy. Something I've never felt the need to do before with any other book I've read, but this time, I just had to. I admit, I am a hopeless bibliophile and as this is without a doubt one of the most incredible novels I've ever read, I simply had to have a new, hardcover copy. Having it signed; well, that's the icing on the cake of perfection.

Willy Russell is a playwright, Educating Rita & Shirley Valentine are just two of his fantastic works. Enough said right there really, the man is an absolute genius. Russell is also an author, musician, poet, artist...he's a savant. Sadly, with that much talent being expressed in that many directions, The Wrong Boy is the only novel Willy has published, and as it took him 10 years to write it, and that was 10 years ago, I hold out little hope that we will see another novel from the pen of Mr Russell for a long time; if ever. How sad! :"-(

And yes, The Wrong Boy is also sad. It is truly heartbreaking in places, but never did I feel hopeless, and while Willy did take me to the edge of what my heart could bear, he never pushed me over that edge. In my mind, Raymond had to make it; didn't he? He just had to! He had too because, I loved him so much! Russell holds nothing back but he cares enough to pull his reader back from the pain, at least long enough to allow them to breathe. And lest you think this book is too sad to read, wait a moment, and you will LAUGH, and laugh. Oh how I laughed while reading this incredible book. Laughing with tears rolling down my cheeks. The dialogue in TWB is so rich, so funny, and so utterly real there were times that I felt I was a fly on the wall of Raymond's life; a bit disconcerting; considering "flytrapping" rules of engagement.

Russel always creates characters that are unforgettable. I absolutely adored Gran. Hell, I wanted to adopt Gran! I wanted Gran to be my Gran! Apart from Raymond, Gran was hands down the most beloved character in this story, for me,...followed closely by Norman, and Tink. Uncle Bastard Jason was a royal arse, as were his wife and kids. I detested them! Nobody can create characters like Willy Russell can. Lovable, or heinously rotten, the whole "cast" was/is phenomenal, and now that I've finished the book, I miss them all. I'll never forget Raymond. I simply adore him.

It's so rare that I find a book that completely fills my heart. A book that makes me laugh, and cry, and stay up all night (despite the fact that my 4 young children will be up soon, and then damn it, I'll be exhausted, AND a grouch for the whole darn day! "Hey, Blame Mr. Russell kids; not me. It's all his fault!").

It's so rare that I read a book that causes me to have to write a soppy, gushy, over the top review about it! But I have too. And YOU; well, you have to find, beg, borrow, or steal a copy of The Wrong Boy. You have to get a copy somehow, and then, you have to read it for yourself.

It's so rare to find a book that makes me curse myself for rushing through it because it's just so darn good, and I have to know what happens RIGHT NOW! And how on earth will it all end?

And then...

It's over...

Oh NO! Yah...Now, I'm kicking myself. Kicking myself for not taking my time. For not being patient enough to savour every single word. Come to think of it, it's a bit like losing your virginity! Only reading The Wrong Boy is a bit more fun, and way less risky. Don't laugh, it's true. You can only read a MASTERPIECE of a STORY for the first time, once.

"Willy, Mr. Russell, ...why didn't you warn me? I would've taken my time!" Nah...I wouldn't have...who am I kidding...that would've been impossible.

So, did I like the book? I adored it. I loved it. I loved it so much I bought myself a brand new, hardcover, signed addition, and I'm paying to have the sucker shipped all the way from the UK to Canada! Yup, this one; it's a keeper. This one, is going into my personal library. I'm not even gonna lend it out...I'll get paperback copies for that.

Oh, and when my book arrives; I'm going to run my fingertips over the real ink in Mr. Russell's signature, and I'm gonna feel a supernaturally close connection with that genius of a man. The author who made me fall in love with a group of characters he created, in a story he wrote, that I adored. A story I will never forget.

I know that Raymond, and Gran; they would understand and appreciate my sentiment 100%. Hey, the way I see it, Raymond had Morrissey; I have Mr. Willy Russell. Raymond and me, we "get it". We understand completely.

Thank you Mr. Russel. From your most devoted fan, for life. (Holy cow, now where did that come from? Did I write that? Words I never thought I'D ever "say", to anyone!) Yours Truly, Tracey Lee

PS. Ummm, yes...could someone please CLONE Mr. Russell. I could read the hell out of a sequel. Actually, I could read the hell out of ANYTHING this man writes.

# Sarah says

Read this for book club last month. The writing style was interesting, each chapter is a letter to Morrisey written by the protagonist in his lyric book as he makes a rather circuitous journey from Manchester to Grimsby. Through these letters, Raymond tells the story of his life up until now (he's late teenage, give or

take) and how its events have lead him on this journey to Grimsby.

The story-telling is stream-of-conciousness, interrupted by Raymond needing to change train, coach or hitchhiking stops and interspersed with descriptions of how his journey is progressing, so the past events are not retold in chronological order. This makes their telling more interesting as details are revealed at choice tantalising opportunities.

Russell does a great job of capturing that childhood and teenage feeling of being misunderstood by adults and how innocent, childish actions can be misconstrued as something altogether more sinister.

The first half or so of the book was interesting but not a page turner, then suddenly the story started started to come together and I ended up finishing the last half to third of the book staying up late on two consecutive nights. The conclusion was very unexepected, I really didn't see it coming at all, and it was a really brilliant ending to a story far more touching and enjoyable than I'd expected.

#### Silvanna says

The Wrong Boy started out fine. However, it became frustratingly repetitive after the first 100 pages. And that section about the Cowboy was so long-winded. Perhaps it was simply too Lincolnshire for me to enjoy, me being a Californian girl.

#### **Emma says**

shoplifters of the world unite!

#### Giò says

#### The boy with a thorn in his side

Mi dispiace tantissimo che si tratti di un libro praticamente sconosciuto in Italia. Willy Russell non ha niente da invidiare a Doyle e Hornby, autori cui viene paragonato nella quarta di copertina. Anzi, personalmente, ho preferito questo libro a "Paddy Clark ah, ah" e a "Un ragazzo". Tristissimo, ma esilarante in molti tratti, questo romanzo racconta le disavventure di un ragazzo, bollato dalla società come "sbagliato", costretto a vivere e a comportarsi come malato, un pericoloso caso clinico. Devo ringraziare soltanto\_Claudia, l'anobiiana che come me ha amato molto questo libro e mi ha ricordato, grazie al suo commento (e a un messaggio in bacheca :)), quanto sia importante far conoscere agli altri un gioiellino come questo, letto nel 2005 e mai commentato dalla sottoscritta. Ecco l'incipit: "Caro Morissey\*, sono orribilmente depresso e giù di corda, Come un lampione senza lampadina o come un tacchino quando arriva Natale. Comunque sia, ho deciso di scrivere due righe a qualcuno che mi può capire. So che probabilmente non mi risponderai, non so neanche se riceverai la lettera. In ogni caso, anche se mi rispondessi, cosa alquanto improbabile, la tua lettera non mi arriverebbe mai, perché io non sarò più qui. L'indirizzo scritto sopra è solo una stazione di servizio dove mi sono fermato."

\*Steven Patrick Morrisey, musicista, meglio conosciuto come cantante dei fantastici e unici Smiths

#### KimberlyRose says

While listing specifics of what I liked and what I didn't like about this book (sure to have been a snoozer review), I realized it was all the same thing, all had the same overarching problem: an imbalance of scenes.

There's your action, your dialogue, your think-y introspection, all the varying types of scenes that crafty authors order with care and thought to pacing. Add in understandable (doesn't need to be perfect) language structure; fresh, likeable, real people who grow and change, who experience a gamut of emotions, who struggle through conflict and crisis and resolution? You have yourself an affecting story!

This tale had too damn many "victim" scenes. So much so that I started to think Raymond was an unreliable narrator. Was he THAT surrounded by horrible, closed-minded, judgey, cruel people? If not them, then his mother, who was hurtful despite her love for him, because of her own weak identity, her borderline personality.

I felt as if I were reading a book set in stereotyped 1950s, what with the rampant ignorance and the hell of living death in social suburbia, rather than the reasonably progressive and moderately human rights-aware 1990s.

So scenes. I kept reading, because when the scenes with redeemable, likeable people came, such as his first headmaster, his gran, his two young friends, Twinky and Norman, they were delightful. There were even a few introspection scenes with Raymond alone, no horridly behaving people, that were touching, if still sorrowful. But they were all thin beams of fleeting sun in a monsterous, thunderous, black sky, peeking out and then slammed behind another cloud moving in.

Despite the hopeful ending, where still-difficult-to-empathize-with victimized Raymond finally finds a place for himself, a place where he doesn't have to change into something he doesn't want to be ("normal"), I didn't feel as if it were a happy ending.

When the solution to his lack of direction, introduced in such a late scene, with such jarring brevity in comparison to the repeated scenes of anxiety through this long novel, I didn't even care anymore. I was absolutely bogged downed, saturated by the storm of woe; instead of joy, all I felt was, "It's about fucking time, sun beam, and hell if I'll trust you to stick around."

# **Julie Bennett says**

This is a great novel. It is written from the perspective of a misunderstood boy. Explores adolescent thoughts / the way that adults misunderstand kids. Its a wonderful book - extremely funny.Not for the prudish!

#### Matthew says

Utterly superb, one of the best books I've read in some time. Utterly heart wrenching, hilarious and thought provoking on who really is to blame for Raymonds screwed up life.

#### Schmacko says

Willy Russell is a recognized name in theatre; he wrote Blood Brothers, Shirley Valentine, and One for the Road. This is his first novel, an amiable and funny if not totally brilliant foray into fiction. It's a solid promise from an already credible writer.

The Wrong Boy is basically the memoirs of Robert Marks, a young British man who's had a rough go. Almost all of his entries into his diary are also letters to Morrissey, the lead singer of The Smiths. This is funny; Morrissey is known for his moping lyrics and sardonic humor. It's a nice choice for a troubled boy, and the irony and dark humor sets up the rest of the novel.

Robert Marks has a colorful history. His mom kicked out his sweet dreamer father when the boy was too young to remember. Consequently, Robert was raised by his apologetic mom and his irascible, fiery grandmother (the woman who lovingly hates anything cheery and loves anything gloomy; she's one of the great characters of the book.) When Marks was young, he and several other school boys got caught doing a childish thing with their private parts – a "sick" thing that Marks got blamed for and marked as a pervert for the rest of his life. That starts a life of depression, misaligned fantasy, musical obsession, madness, delinquency, shoplifting and general social maladjustment.

It's very fun and funny stuff, even if it's a smidge aimless. Russell does a good job tying up all the loose ends, but he doesn't make anything mean anything more than a pleasant read. If there is a larger comment, it's how youth can be labeled their entire lives by one wrong or misinterpreted act. It's also how those unfairly pigeonholed youth have to escape those vicious labels through independence, self-volition and determination.

It would be easier to take if we felt that Robert Marks, the "Wrong Boy," had gained a little insight and perspective in his life than he does by the end. He's stilla bit duplicitous and a bit mopey. He tends to label others the same way he was labeled. He's not very empathetic of almost all his mother's generation, seeing them all as weak, stupid, lying, cheating, and soulless.

Russell said more of youths and their "mental illnesses" in Blood Brothers. He has a chance to mention diagnosing and overmedicating what essentially is adolescence. He doesn't. Russell could also say something of someone who learns sympathy even when he is shown none, but Russell missed that opportunity also. In fact, though Robert Marks changes, his changes are small and a little hard to buy as permanent.

Still, the book has some very funny bits. The gothy and whiney humor throughout The Wrong Boy is actually wonderful; misery can be very entertaining (as Morrissey has proved again and again), especially if it's shallow, sarcastic and self-induced. Russell has a great ear for dialogue and character, and he has a love of wit; this dark, depressed boy is a good and diverting read.

# Jennifer Bagazin says

Its sad how you get all hyped up and excited about reading a certain book - and judging from the commentaries at the back & front covers it is "one of the funniest & most moving novels you will ever read". But yet, I didn't enjoy the book as much as I expected. I dont know what happened, but I figured the setting was in the 1980s because the main character mentioned names like Morrissey and the Smiths (and yes I watch *the Carrie Diaries* so I know what I'm talking about). It just wasn't appealing to me. Although why I bought the book in the first place is beyond me. This is just utterly disappointing. Maybe someday I'd get to pick up this book again and read it for real. But for now, I think I'll pass.

And damn look at all those positive reviews. I promise I'll get back to this book soon and find out what the fuss is all about.

# Sophie says

This one came recommended to me by two colleagues. I have to admit, after the first two hundred pages or so I was so upset I found it hard to see why they liked it so much. It's told from the perspective of a 19-year-old boy named Raymond who's on his way to Grimsby, where he's supposed to start a proper job. On his way, he's writing a diary/ letters to Morrissey describing his journey so far, i.e. the story of his life. And for much of that life, nothing good ever seems to happen.

I found it horribly depressing to a point where I almost couldn't read on, but in the end I'm glad I did. It does have a lot of comic moments, and it's really well written, and the resolution is quite good. It's a - not quite celebration of the outsider status, a book about how it's okay to be different. And it's definitely one of the better of its kind, if only because it has the Smiths ;)

# **Geologe says**

Raymond Marks wäre gern ein "normaler" Teenager – oder doch nicht....

Auf dem Weg zu seinem ersten Arbeitsplatz schreibt er an Morrissey, zitiert Oscar Wilde und berichtet von seiner bisherigen Jugend.

Das ist oft ausgesprochen witzig, meist tieftragisch und nie übertrieben resp. langweilig.

Ein kluges Buch, das die Gefühle und Gedanken des unglücklichen Protagonisten ganz grossartig zum Ausdruck bringt.

"Meistens bin ich ganz glücklich damit, unglücklich in meinem Zimmer zu hocken."

Raymond will das Richtige und ihm widerfährt immer wieder das Falsche - habe mit ihm gelacht, geliebt

(seine Oma ist grandios) und gelitten.

Kluge Einsprengsel (wobei wie erwähnt das ganze Buch klug ist!): "Ich wollte mich nicht amüsieren. Ich wollte mich freuen!" "..... ihr Herz sei zu müde gewesen, um zu brechen,....."

Tolles Buch - volle Punktzahl

#### Gina P says

Written in the voice of an adolescent boy's diary (which he addresses to his hero Morrissey), this book is a heartwarming (and sad) tale of misfit youth, with moments of pure hilarity.

#### **Mark Speed says**

I believe I'm right in saying that this was the author's first novel. He was an acclaimed dramatist by this stage of his career, so it must have been quite a risky thing to have done.

The novel is narrated in the form of letters to the 19-year-old protagonist's hero: the singer Morrissey. Far from being an unreliable narrator, he proves to be embarrassingly honest. We discover more and more dreadful, cringe-worthy facts about his background, and explain why he's run away.

It's over-long, which is a bit of a surprise given that the writer had spent his entire career within the bounds of scripts limited to a couple of hours' duration. Maybe he found the novel format liberating? I think I'm also right in saying that this is his only novel so far - I doubt the time he invested earned his usual returns.

#### Anna says

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