



Music in contemporary literature: Nick Hornby's *High Fidelity*

Nick Hornby is an English novelist, essayist, lyricist, and screenwriter. He is popular for his books *High Fidelity* and *About a Boy*, which have also been adapted into films. His works frequently refer to music and sport, and are centred on the obsessive natures of his protagonists. He has been named the 29th most influential person in British culture.

In *High Fidelity* (1995), Rob Fleming is the owner of a record shop in London. He is in his mid-thirties and he has just been left by his ex girlfriend, Laura. In the novel Rob remembers five young women who broke up with him. He understands that his desire to pursue new women is due to his fear of commitment and his tendency to act on emotion. In this monologue, Rob, a music maniac, speculates about the role music plays in his life.



Music and Love

"What came first – the music or the misery? Did I listen to music because I was miserable? Or was I miserable because I listened to music? Do all those records turn you into a melancholy person? People worry about kids playing with guns, and teenagers watching violent videos; we are scared that some sort of culture or violence will take them over.¹ Nobody worries about kids listening to thousands – literally thousands – of songs about broken hearts and rejection² and pain and misery and loss. The unhappiest people I know, romantically speaking, are the ones who like pop music the most; and I don't know whether pop music has caused this unhappiness, but I do know that they've been listening to the sad songs longer than they've been living the unhappy lives." [...]

"It seems to me that if you place music (and books, probably, and films, and plays, and anything that makes you feel) at the center of your being, then you can't afford³ to sort out⁴ your love life, start to think of it as the finished product. You've got to pick at⁵ it, keep it alive and in turmoil,⁶ you've got to pick at it and unravel⁷ it until it all comes apart and you're compelled to start all over again. Maybe we all live life at too high a pitch,⁸ those of us who absorb emotional things all day, and as a consequence we can never feel merely⁹ content: we have to be unhappy, or ecstatically, head-over-heels¹⁰ happy, and those states are difficult to achieve within a stable, solid relationship."

GLOSSARY

1 take their control – 2 refusal – 3 have the opportunity – 4 evaluate, examine – 5 torment – 6 convulsion, trouble – 7 solve – 8 position – 9 simply – 10 completely

ACTIVITIES

1 Do you agree with the author's opinion? Why/why not?

