

High Fidelity Study Guide

High Fidelity by Nick Hornby

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Contents

High Fidelity Study Guide.....	1
Contents.....	2
Plot Summary.....	3
Chapters 1-4.....	5
Chapters 5-9.....	7
Chapters 10-14.....	10
Chapters 15-19.....	13
Chapters 20-24.....	15
Chapters 25-29.....	17
Chapters 30-35.....	20
Characters.....	22
Objects/Places.....	26
Themes.....	28
Style.....	30
Quotes.....	33
Topics for Discussion.....	35



Plot Summary

High Fidelity is a novel written in 1992 by the British author Nick Hornby. The story detail's Rob Fleming's struggles to cope from the break up of his relationship with Laura and his failing record shop. A major part of Rob's problem is his habit of replacing his real opinions and feelings for a series of lists. When he breaks up with Laura he makes a list of his top five relationships and goes on a mission to discover where he has gone wrong.

The book opens with Rob's top five break ups. The list includes Charlie Nicholson, Allison Ashworth, Sarah Kendrew, Jackie Allen, and Penny Hardwick. He has written the list because his girlfriend Laura has just broken up with him. He claims the breakup lacks any real tension, which Rob thinks defines their relationship. He waits for Laura to leave the house before smoking a cigarette.

Rob owns his own record store called Championship Vinyl. He is late and his co-worker Dick has opened the shop. By midday, his other member of staff Barry arrives. It is not his day to work, but Rob explains, that though Dick and Barry both work part-time they come to the shop every day.

The three of them pass the time by making tapes of their favorite bands and top five lists of their favorite songs of, for example, the first track on the first side of an album. Rob thinks it is good to have something to do because most days Rob receives very few customers. Even when someone walks in he often drives him or her away because they do not like the right sort of music. On the morning Rob breaks up with Laura, Barry swears at a customer because he asks for the Stevie Wonder tune I Just Called to Say I love You.

In the evenings, the three of them go to gigs at a pub called the Harry Lauder. On the day of Rob's break up, they go to see the American singer Marie LeSalle. She has an excellent voice and Rob falls in love with her, even getting jealous when her band member T-Bone shares her microphone. Marie surprises the three men by approaching them and asking if they know any good record shops in the area.

Marie becomes a regular at Rob's store, inviting the three men to her gigs and embarking on an affair with Rob. Rob likes Marie, but he cannot stop thinking about Laura. Laura still phones him regularly and to make matters worse she is living with his old neighbor Ian Ray, a man he hates.

Rob's jealousy leads him on a quest to discover where he has gone wrong in his past relationships. He contacts the five women on his list and goes to see them one by one. Allison Askworth married the man she left Rob for. He is surprised because she was his first girlfriend at the age of fourteen. He visits Penny Hardwick in a cafe. She tells him the reason she did not want sex with him is because she was in love with him and wanted to wait. When he broke up with her she was so upset she slept with the first boy that asked. Jackie Allen married Rob's friend Phil. Rob thinks they are officially the most



boring couple in South of England. Sarah is the female version of himself. Rob knows he could probably sleep with her, but decides to leave it.

His most memorable relationship was with the beautiful punk Charlie Nicholson. He phones her up and she invites him to a party at her house. As soon as Rob arrives, he feels out of his depth because everyone in the room, apart from him, has good jobs, marriages, and kids. After making a few inane comments, he decides to keep the conversation to the minimum and the drinking to the maximum. By the end of the night he is drunk enough to ask Charlie why she left him for Marcus. She tells it was because he was insecure about her and it in turn made her feel insecure. In the end, she felt like she was dragging him around.

Everything changes when Laura's dad dies. Her father was very fond of Rob and she invites him to the funeral. The funeral is a difficult affair and Rob, getting in an argument with his friend Liz, storms out of the house. He is lying in the neighbor's flowerbed when Laura stops by in her car and tells him to get in. She says she has also walked out of the funeral and now she wants to take Rob somewhere to have sex.

The sex does not work out, but the two of them realize they want each other back. Laura moves back into Rob's apartment on the condition he sorts out his life. She tells him to write a list of his top five dream jobs. The only practical one he comes up with is an architect. However, when he realizes it takes seven years of training he decides against it. Instead, Laura helps him to make the best of what he already has. They arrange for Marie LeSalle to play at his record shop, and then resurrect his career as a DJ at the Dog and Peasant pub.



Chapters 1-4

Chapters 1-4 Summary

The narrator Rob lists his top five break ups. Number 1 is Alison Ashworth. He dated Alison for a few hours in 1972 when he was only thirteen years old. A year later, he dated Alison Hardwick. At this point in his life, he was looking for more than just a kiss, but Alison refused to give him anything. He broke up with her and she promptly lost her virginity to another boy. Next on his list is Jackie Allen. He shamelessly stole her from his friend Phil and then went to a tattoo parlor to have her name tattooed on his shoulder. The tattoo artist refused to serve him, and only a few weeks later she went back with Phil. His biggest love is Charlie Nicholson. He met her at university, but she was so beautiful it made him feel insecure. His insecurity lead her to leave him for Marcus and the pain of the break lead him to quit college. The final woman on his list is Sarah Kendrew. Rob explains that Sarah had had her own Charlie, a man called Michael, and this common lost love brought them together. After a few months, the connection had worn thin, but they did not break up for another two years.

Rob's girlfriend Laura leaves decides to leave him. She says she does not know what she is doing, but needs some space. When she leaves Rob lights a cigarette

The same morning he heads for work. Rob owns a record store called Championship Vinyl. His co-worker Dick has already opened the shop and Rob apologizes for being late. He does not mention he has broken up with Laura because he knows Dick will not know what to say. He asks Dick if he had a good weekend and Dick says yes, he found a rare record at the market.

That morning they get only one customer, a drunk Irishman called Johnny. Rob has to tell him to leave. At lunchtime, his other member of staff Barry arrives. It is not Barry's day to work, but Rob says though Dick and Barry work part-time they both come to the shop every day. Rob presumes they do not have much of a life outside the shop.

Barry talks in lists. For example, he suddenly states his top five blind musicians and consequently Rob and Dick do the same. This can often lead to arguments, and today Barry puts on a tape with Walking on Sunshine. Rob is not in the mood to hear happy music and tells Barry to shut it off. Barry and Dick then argue passionately about the Righteous Brothers.

Rob goes back to his empty house. His mother phones and he tries to pretend everything is normal. She soon annoys him and he blurts out Laura has left him. His mother cries and Rob ends up having to console her. He tells the reader he knows that that you always end up looking after the person that started looking after you, but he has been looking after his mother since he was nine. He tells his mother everything will be okay and he will find someone else, settle down, and have kids.



A customer enters the shop and asks for the Stevie Wonder song "I Just Called to Say I Love You". His taste in music angers Barry, who tells the customer to leave the shop as if he had come in drunk and screaming. The customer leaves and Rob tells Barry never to talk a customer like that again. Barry says Rob is getting soft. There was a time he would have ran down the road screaming at the customer about his lack of taste. Rob knows Barry is right, but he decides he cannot be bothered to argue.

Rob goes home again to an empty house. In time of trouble, he likes to rearrange his CD collection. When he was living in with Laura, he had his albums in alphabetical order and he now puts them into chronological order starting with Robert Johnson and ending with the last album he bought before Laura left. He says many people find organizing their record collection boring, but for Rob it is his life.

Chapters 1-4 Analysis

Hornby opens the book with Rob's top five break ups. This begins the major theme of the novel, how Rob trivializes his life through making endless lists that have little substance and no real benefit. If anything, they prevent him from moving on. The relationship that defines him and his biggest love is Charlie Nicholson. He met her while at University, and she was so beautiful he constantly questioned why she would want to be with someone so average as himself. This low self-esteem is one of Rob's main characteristics, and one he needs to get over if he is to develop as a person. However, his lists allow him to celebrate his misery and keep him in a state he has begun to feel comfortable with.

Real passion does not come easily for Rob, and he claims that his relationship with Laura never gave him sleepless nights. In fact, the relationship symbolizes his emptiness. The feeling of emptiness continues in his work place. Britain is currently in a recession, and in this section only one customer enters the shop. Rob shows little anger at this, and presents it as something he expects and just another thing working against his need to move on in life.

He can only express his disappointment and feelings through music. In this section, he asks Dick if he had a good weekend and Dick says he did because he found a rare record on the market. At the end of the day, Barry puts on happy song and Rob insists he turns it off because he is not in the mood. When he goes home he focuses his anger on his record collection, rearranging his albums so they correspond to his relationship with Laura.



Chapters 5-9

Chapters 5-9 Summary

Rob, Barry, and Dick go to the Harry Lauder pub to watch a band. Rob explains they usually have some crap punk band playing, but tonight they have the American singer Marie Lesalle. As Rob watches her performance, he realizes two things. First, he is desperately missing Laura, and second he is in love with Marie LeSalle. When she sings a Peter Frampton song, Rob begins to cry.

After the performance Marie walks up says hi. She asks the boys if they know of any good record shops and Barry quickly says Rob has one. Marie says she will come to see them tomorrow. Rob is annoyed Barry told her about the shop. He knows if she visits one of them will fall in love with her.

When Rob arrives home, he has two messages on his answer phone. One is from Laura's friend Liz, inquiring how Rob is coping with the split. The other message is from Laura. She says there are a few things she needs and Rob has to call her in the morning.

Rob phones Laura in the morning. They have a pleasant conversation, but Laura tells him she is staying with Ian. Rob cannot think who Ian is and his name stays with him throughout the day.

In the afternoon, Marie walks into the shop while they listen to one of her songs. She buys seventy pounds worth of tapes and then invites them to a gig at the White Horse. When she is gone, Barry says they can go to the gig in Rob's car. Rob reminds him the car was Laura's and they will have to use public transport. Barry is not happy that he has to spend money ,and his preceding harangue makes Rob feel guilty.

Back at home he sees a letter addressed to his old neighbor Ian Raymond and immediately realizes that he is the Ian Laura was talking about. Rob never liked Ian, but he can remember Laura sweeping her hair back as she talked to him and looking at him all doe eyed. He can also remember nights when he and Laura would listen to Ian having sex in the room above. Rob wonders if Laura is having better sex with Ian than she had with him.

Rob gets a call from a woman in Wood Green offering to sell him her record collection. Rob does not usually deal in such ways, but he hears something in the woman's tone that intrigues him and decides to go.

Her collection is the best Rob has ever seen, including an original God Save the Queen single by the Sex Pistols and a host of original Elvis numbers. Rob asks how much, expecting the woman to say around seven thousand pounds and she tells him fifty quid. Upon further questioning, she tells him the collection is her husband's and he has asked her to sell them because he is desperate for cash. However, she is determined to sell



them as cheaply as possible to get him back for running off with their daughter's twenty-three-year-old friend. Rob says he cannot take them so cheaply and tries to raise the woman to five hundred pounds. The two of them then partake in a bizarre negotiation where Rob tries to raise the woman's price and the woman tries to lower it. Finally, the woman says she will not take any more than ninety pounds. Rob has to decline the offer, but she allows him to buy an Otis Redding single for ten pounds.

Rob, Dick, and Barry go to the White Horse to watch Marie sing. She dedicates a song to the Champion Vinyl boys, making Barry's night. Rob is less impressed and becomes even moodier when a Texan called T-Bone walks onto the stage. He is a tall man with blond hair and high cheekbones and it is obvious the way Marie and T-Bone share the microphone that they have shared an intimacy.

The next day Rob gets to work late. Dick tells him Liz has phoned and wants him to ring her at work immediately. Rob decides leave it. He knows that she wants to cancel their evening drink and knows the reason why, but he will let her come to the pub and tell him to his face. When she arrives, she calls Rob an asshole. Rob decides she is right.

Rob thinks back to when he first met Laura. He was DJing at a club in Old Kent Town playing Got to Get You Off of My Mind by Solomon Burke when she came up and asked where she could buy the record. Rob told her if she came back the following week he would bring in a tape.

Rob spent the week making up a tape of his favorite songs for her. She came back to the club, Rob gave her the tape, and they developed a relationship.

Rob says it was never a relationship where he suffered sleepless nights thinking about her, but rather he developed a dependency. At the beginning, they went out a lot and when the lease on her house ran out, she moved in with Rob. Everything went smoothly until she found a better job. At the same time, Rob's record shop began to lose business and he slumped into a depression.

Rob says the previous night Liz met Laura for a drink. He does not know exactly what happened, but he thinks he knows their characters well enough to guess Liz shouted at Laura for starting a relationship with Ian and in reply, Laura probably told Liz at he had an affair with someone while she was pregnant. She decided to have an abortion and then a while later he borrowed a lot of money from her and never paid it back. Furthermore, he told her he was unhappy in the relationship and was looking for someone else.

At work the next morning, Barry asks Rob where he got to at the White Horse. Rob asks where Barry got to, but Barry is having none of it. He tells Rob that he just disappeared and they were looking for him for hours. Rob thinks they were probably looking for ten minutes. Barry continues to say T-Bone is a really good person, sang a couple of numbers with the other bands, and came over to chat. Rob spends most of the day in a bad mood.



By the end of the shift, they are back on good terms, preparing for their routine Saturday night drink and reciting their top five Elvis Costello numbers. However, when Rob walks outside Laura is waiting for him. She smiles and Rob, remembering he should be miserable, scowls.

Chapters 5-9 Analysis

In this section, Hornby develops the theme of Rob's low self-esteem. He meets Laura and she tells him she is seeing his old neighbor Ian. From then on, the only thing he can think of is if Ian is better in bed than he is. This articulates itself in a dream, first about Laura and Ian having sex and then about Charlie and Marcus having sex. Later on, he goes to a gig to see Marie LeSalle play and falls in love with her. Even though he has just met her, he experiences great jealousy when a man called T-Bone shares her mic. He thinks he has no chance because T-Bone is a tall, blond haired Texan and he is a short, distinctly average man from Watford.

Hornby articulates Rob's inability to communicate his true self when he visits a woman in Wood Green with the idea of buying her record collection. He refuses because she is only charging fifty pounds when the collection is worth thousands. This display of morals is interesting because the reader soon finds out that he lacked any sort of morals during his relationship with Laura. While she was pregnant, he embarked on an affair with another woman, contributing to Laura having an abortion. Then he borrowed a large sum of money, which to this day he has not paid back. He accepts that this makes him an asshole and even hates himself for having done it, but that feeling has become such a major part of his life it has become his only security.



Chapters 10-14

Chapters 10-14 Summary

Rob and Laura go back to his flat. Laura asks if he has reorganized his record collection and Rob tells her they have better things to talk about. He is annoyed because he should be the one taking the moral high ground, but he cannot even get off first base. The discussion moves onto why they split up. Rob asks if it's because she has a better job. She is miffed he can ask such a question and puts it down to immaturity. Rob asks about Ian and she says she is only with him for a few days while she finds somewhere else. Rob presumes this is a lie and Laura tells him perhaps if he did some growing up, they may still have a chance of getting back together. Rob ponders this and asks if the sex with Ian is better. Though angry he could think to ask such a question, she admits they have not yet had sex. However, she says the sleeping part is much better with Ian than Rob. This comment does nothing for Rob and he wanders off happily to meet Barry and Dick in the pub. He feels so happy he ends up sleeping with Marie.

Rob goes to Marie's house and they break into her duty free alcohol. Rob says when he was young he would stare into the woman's eyes and try and say something really mature, nowadays he just waits for the appropriate moment before leaning in to kiss. The moment comes when he asks her to show him the bathroom. They stand up simultaneously, bumping into each other and Rob takes the opportunity to grab her waist and kiss her.

They continue drinking before retiring to her bedroom. Rob says he has never felt so nervous before sex. He feels even more nervous when he sees how good she looks naked. Fortunately, Rob remembers he is wearing a pair of rather nice boxer shorts.

In the early hours Rob gets out of bed and enjoys a cigarette. Marie soon joins him and they have an intimate conversation about why he feels so blue. She says she is going to do something awful and put on a tape of one of her performances. Rob is enjoying the moment when she tells him listening to your self is similar to masturbation.

On Sunday, Rob has nothing to do so he decides to visit his parents in Watford. He is knocking at the door when his mother calls from a neighbor's window across the street.

The neighbors are having a party. He sees his father boring someone at the end of the room and for some reason it dampens his already low spirits. His mother's friend Yvonne finally relieves him from the situation and tells him to go home for a cup of tea.

A while later his father comes back home drunk, insisting they all to the cinema to watch Howard's End. Going to the cinema with his parents is not Rob's idea of a good time, particularly as they like films such as Oh! Mr. Porter. He says he thought his father disagreed with going to the pictures and his father says he does not agree with the



rubbish Rob watches, but he sees nothing wrong in going to see a well made British film.

They go to the cinema and Rob sees what he calls the Most Pathetic Man In the World, a man with buckteeth wearing a blue anorak. He is also with his parents and he smiles towards Rob, as if they are kindred spirits. Rob lists this moment as number one in his top five low points of his life.

Rob, Dick and Barry are having a great time talking about their top five track one songs from the first side of a record when Dick drops a bombshell. He says he cannot make the pub tonight. Barry is aghast and tells Dick if he has not got a good excuse then he wins the Weedy Weed of the Week award. Dick turns shy and Barry realizes he is going on a date. He is upset because Rob has slept with Marie, and he, the sexiest of them all, has no one.

He asks what her name is and Dick tells him she is called Anna Moss. He met her at a gig with some friends. Barry makes some silly puns on her name, including asking if she is green with envy. Rob thinks Barry always does what Rob calls turning women into men, and he hates it. Eventually Barry's joking turns into anger and he storms out of the shop. Dick is now guilty because Rob has no one to go out with, but Rob tells him to go and enjoy himself.

Something very special happens at the shop. They have been trying to sell an album called the Sid James Experience for so long it has become joke in with the customers. Sometimes a regular will come in, pick the album up, walk to the counter as if to buy and then jokingly change their mind. On this day, a man shows genuine excitement he has finally found the album he has been looking for most of his adult life. To Barry, Dick, and Rob's amazement, he buys the record and leaves the shop.

Later that day Rob arranges to meet Laura at a pub. He asks her if she has slept with Ian yet and she reacts angrily, asking if that is the reason he asked her for a drink. He admits it is and asks the question again. She says she does not know what to say and looks away. The next day the man brings back the Sid James experience, saying it was not the record he thought it was.

Laura rings Rob to admit she has slept with Ian. The truth puts Rob in a deep depression and he thinks back to his previous girlfriends. He decides he will do something his hero Bruce Springsteen always sings about and meet up with his old flames.

Chapters 10-14 Analysis

The problem with Rob acting so insensitively is that Hornby presents it as something that he has developed and not something that comes naturally. In reality, Rob is a sensitive person both about his own feelings and the feelings of others, but he has just forgotten how to use it in the right way. When Laura comes to his house to talk about the break up and her current relationship with Ian, Rob knows he should not ask about



their sex life, but he cannot help himself. He seems to ask only because he wants something to make him feel. She tells him they have not had sex yet and Rob is happy for the rest of the day.

In this mood, Rob goes to see Marie perform and ends up going to her place and having sex. Rather than making him feel good about himself, he finds he still cannot forget Laura. Consequently, Marie and Rob ending up sharing an intimate conversation, proving Rob's hidden sensitivity and his inability to forget. In fact, that is part of Rob's problem. Everything he does seems designed to make him feel worse.

Hornby presents this feeling as very British and almost expected, particularly by the older generation. In this section, Rob visits his parents in Watford and they do nothing to raise his spirits. When his parent's neighbor Yvonne notices his bad mood, her only suggestion is that he goes back home and makes a cup of tea. Rob's father articulates this British misery by saying they should all go to the cinema but not to watch foreign muck, but a well made British film called Howard's End. It is this sense of tradition and it's connection with a more depressing time, for example the Second World War, that Rob's generation needs to get away from, but cannot seem to escape.



Chapters 15-19

Chapters 15-19 Summary

Liz insists Rob come out with her for a drink. At the pub, she tells him he has to stop phoning Laura because it is annoying both her and Ian, but she admits Ian is an even bigger asshole than Rob. Rob asks how she knows and Liz says Laura told her so. Laura also said she started going off Rob when he made fun of Ian's political viewpoint and the fact he wore dungarees. Liz says Laura thinks Rob used to be full of enthusiasm and now she thinks he is just bitter.

Rob phones the parents of his first girlfriend Alison Ashworth. Her mum gives him her number and Rob plows for more information. She says her daughter married Kevin Bannister and Rob is shocked. Kevin was the boy she left her for at only thirteen. Alison's mother asks how Rob knows her and he said she was his girlfriend before Kevin. He decides it will look weird if he told her they only went out for a day, so he says they were in a relationship for one week.

Meeting Penny is easy. His mother is in contact with Penny's mother and she has already given him her number and told him to get back in contact. He phones her up and they arrange to meet in an Italian restaurant.

Penny is a radio journalist and Rob describes her as an easygoing sort. He is comfortable enough to launch quickly into a conversation about how she would not let him touch her and then immediately lost her virginity when they broke up. He tells her about Laura and Ian, saying he currently feels like the rejection man. Penny says she was in love with Rob and when he ended the relationship, she was determined to get back at him, which is the reason she slept with Chris Thomson.

A man looking like a Status Quo roadie stops outside the shop and takes a long look at an advert posted in the window. Barry put it up years ago, saying he is looking for band members and has since had one response. The man walks into the shops and asks if Barry is around. Barry is in the back sleeping, but Rob wakes him up with the exciting news. The Status Quo roadie says his band is looking for a singer and asks if Barry would be interested. Barry says yes and they exchange numbers.

Rob goes to see Jackie, another old flame. She is married to a man called Phil, and Rob describes them as the most boring couple in the South of England. They tell Rob the secret of a strong relationship is not to walk away at the sign of a problem, but to keep working at it. Relationships are not all about candlelit dinners.

Back at home, Rob is organizing his record collection when Ian phones. He asks Rob if he can stop phoning Laura ten times a day because it is harassment. They even saw him waiting outside the house. Ian asks if Rob agrees that he stops his nonsense and Rob says "dunno". When he puts down the phone he comes up with a number of lines



he could have used to annoy Ian, including telling him he will not leave them alone and if he were Ian he would change his number and address. "One day soon you'll look back on one visit to the house and ten phone calls a night as a golden age".

Rob meets his ex-girlfriend Sarah at a pizza place. She tells him Tom, the man she left Rob for, left her to marry someone else. Rob wants to laugh, but manages to keep a straight face. He realizes he could probably sleep with Sarah, but decides against it. Before they part, they tell each other they should meet again.

Chapters 15-19 Analysis

Hornby constantly uses musical references as a metaphor for Rob's feelings of inadequacy. In this section, Rob manages to offload a record called the Sid James experience, a record he has been trying to sell for years. Sid James is a comedy actor from his parent's generation and the fact that himself, Barry, and Dick are so happy that they have sold it highlights their need to move away from their parent's and grandparent's generation. At the end of the day, he meets Laura and she tells him she has had sex with Ian. A week later the man brings back the record saying it was not the album he thought it was, consolidating Rob's misery.

The one thing that takes Rob away from his misery is brutal honesty. In this section, his friend Liz tells him Laura told him the reason she broke up with him was because he had lost his enthusiasm for life and had become a bitter man. Now armed with this information, he can begin to change into the man that will make him attractive to Laura again. For the first time in the book, he decides to do something constructive and rings his ex-girlfriends in an attempt to find exactly where he has gone wrong in his relationships.



Chapters 20-24

Chapters 20-24 Summary

Rob phones Charlie, the final ex-girlfriend on his list. He only gets the answer machine, but he leaves a message. Two days later, there is still no answer and he leaves another message. He decides this is the ultimate rejection.

Marie comes into the shop. Rob has not spoken to her since they slept together and she pretends to be angry. Rob wants to say that when English men have one night stands they tend not to see the woman again, but he manages to stay quiet and accept an invitation to watch T-Bone sing.

A few days later Charlie returns for his phone call. She apologizes that she did not return his call earlier, but she was in the States on business. Rob tries to make out he knows what she means, but does not quite pull it off. Charlie says she has a husband, but no children because she is too busy. In fact, she has a party on Saturday and if Rob is free she would like him to come. She tells him a single woman called Clara will also be present and she thinks she is right up Rob's alley. Rob puts down the phone, disappointed Charlie is not the same person and has lost her sense of humor.

Rob visits Charlie's house. He thinks Charlie is beautiful and even the crows feet at the corner of eyes give her elegance. He is desperate to meet Clara because he wants to know what kind of person she thinks is "up his street". He wonders if she thinks he is an Old Kent Road man or a Park Lane man.

As soon as she escorts him into the lounge, he feels out of his depth. One couple has a dog called Dizzy Gillespie and they ask Rob if he likes dogs. He says not really and no one says anything for a while. In fact, Rob claims it is his one significant contribution to the evening's conversation. He spends the rest of the time feeling inadequate that he never finished his college education and developed forceful opinions. He realizes lists are the only thing he has.

At the end of the evening, Charlie is desperate to know what he thought of Clara, but Rob is very drunk and asks her why she split up with him all those years ago. Charlie tells him she liked him more than the person she left him for, but his insecurity made her feel insecure and she felt like she was dragging him around.

Laura finally come to move her things out of the house, a month after moving out. Rob says it is easy to sort out because for example all of the good records are his. They have a playful conversation about what a crime it is to sing along to Hi Ho Silver Lining by Steely Dan and Laura admits she used to do that exact thing. Rob is aghast and Laura laughs at him, saying she is only joking. She then stops laughing because as Rob says it is wrong for her to have a good time.



It is Rob's birthday and it looks like he has to spend it on his own. He decides to do it in style and goes to the video shop to rent out *Naked Gun 2 1/2*, *Robocop 2*, and *Terminator 2*. He is just halfway through *Robocop* when Laura rings from a phone box to wish him happy birthday. He questions why she is ringing from a phone box and she says Rob probably knows the answer why. He does, but he wants her to tell him.

After he has finished his videos he decides to go out after all and rings some of his friends. He gets out Marie, a man Dan Maskell, a man called Steve, and T-Bone and his gorgeous girlfriend. Rob thinks this is the only time such a strange mix of people are ever likely to get together. Steve tries to talk about Star Trek conventions and great ales from northern England while T-Bone and his girlfriend give the impression they want to be somewhere else. Rob does not blame them.

A few days later Rob is back at the shop. Barry tells him his new band are awesome and everyone loves them. Rob already knows from Marie that they are awful, but decides to humor him. Dick asks Rob to come out on a double date with him, Anna, and Anna's friend, who is only twenty-one. Rob declines the offer. A few days later Laura phones to say her father has died.

Chapters 20-24 Analysis

Rob is now beginning to express himself in a more constructive way. However, it does not come immediately, and initially he shows he is only getting better by how he thinks rather than what he says. In this section, Laura's lover's rings him to tell him to leave them alone. Apparently he has been ringing Laura ten times a day and hanging around Laura's house. Ian asks if he agrees to leave it and Rob says, "dunno". However, when he puts down the phone, Rob examine a number of alternatives to what he could have said that show a thoughtfulness and passion that he was lacking before.

That Rob had been a hanging around Ian's house is interesting in itself and brings up questions of the books point of view. Up to then the reader must of felt they had been privy to all of Rob's thoughts and bad habits, but this is the first time the reader hears of such obsessive behavior. It shows that, even in Rob's want to present his life as miserable, his ego prevents him from showing how desperate he really is. In fact, part of Rob's problem is that he seems to think his misery is a style choice that defines him as a person.



Chapters 25-29

Chapters 25-29 Summary

Laura phones Rob to invite him to her father's funeral. She says her dad was very fond of him and would have liked him to be there. Rob accepts and asks if her relationship with Ian is still going strong. She says no.

At work Rob, Dick, and Barry talk about their top five funeral songs. Rob is trying to generate a serious discussion, but it soon turns into a joke and they begin to include such songs as Leader of the Gang and Tell Laura, I Love Her. They all laugh at their humor and Rob is glad Laura is not there to see their amusement.

Rob goes to the funeral with Liz. He is slightly taken aback that the funeral is at a crematorium, and his insensitivity upsets Liz. Luckily, Rob manages to change the conversation and talk about Liz's father, who also died not long before. He asks how she felt at the time and how it has affected her since. Her honest answers put Rob in the right mood for the occasion and in fact, the occasion affects him more than he thought it would, particularly when he hears Laura cry.

At the end of the service, he spies Laura holding some of her friends, crying, and wishes he could comfort her. Laura sees Liz and Rob standing by alone and walks to them. She thanks them for coming and embraces them both for what seems alike an eternity. When she finishes, Rob thinks "I feel that I don't need to offer to become a different person: it has happened already".

Rob and Liz talk to Laura's sister, Jo. Jo says she is not feeling too bad and neither is her mother, but Laura has had a tough few weeks and she is very upset. Rob proudly thinks that he caused her to feel that way and tells them not to mind him and to continue talking about him if they want. Liz tells Rob they were not talking about him, but Ian. Her rather abrupt answer leads Rob and Liz into an argument and Rob walks out of the house.

Rob is lying in a wet flowerbed when Laura stops by in her car and tells him to get in. She says she has also left the house in a temper and Rob tells her what a great pair they both make. They continue into a conversation about Ian. Laura says she never really liked him and she only used him to throw into the middle of their relationship. She then asks if Rob will have sex with her.

Laura drives to a quiet spot and they begin kissing. Laura climbs on top of him, and Rob asks if she is still on the pill and if not, whether she and Ian used protection. Laura begins to cry. She says she is upset because they were partners only a few weeks ago and now Rob is upset she might kill him.

They decide against sex and go for a chat and a few beers at a pub. Back at Laura's house, Laura shuts herself in a room with her mother, while Rob waits nervously outside



with Jo. When Laura comes back out, she takes Rob by the arm and tells him they are going home.

Rob thinks back to five conversations he has had with Laura in the first few weeks they were back together. They argue about music and life. Rob complains that she has made a compilation tape with three versions of Bright Eyes and tells her Solomon Burke's version is better than Art Garfunkel's. She disagrees and Rob reminds her she used to like Solomon Burke. Laura laughs. She says she only said she liked Solomon Burke because when she first met him she knew he liked him and therefore it was a way to attract his attention, and it worked. She says she grew to like Burke, but Rob is still disappointed. Laura tells him it is just life.

Laura takes Rob to her friend's Paul and Miranda's house. Rob is happy because it is an endorsement, but at the same time, he doubts he will get on with them. He describes Paul as a bit of a nerd with long unkempt hair and stubble, a look of someone who spends too much time in front of a computer.

To his surprise, Rob gets on with both Paul and Miranda and even catches himself having a good time. Halfway through the evening, Laura tells him to have a look through their record collection. He tells her there is more to life than records, but she insists. In their collection, Rob finds Tina Turner, Pink Floyd and just about every record that in his book constitutes bad taste.

On his return to the table, Laura asks what he thinks and he says each to his own. Paul and Miranda laugh and Rob tells them they do have a couple of good Beatles records, of which they can be proud. Laura tells him she has never heard him be so diplomatic about someone's record collection.

Rob introduces Laura to Marie. Laura loves Marie's performance, but when they meet face to face, they are not so polite to each other. Nevertheless, Laura asks Marie to make a musical appearance at Rob's shop, like the kind they have in the big record stores. Marie is taken aback by the suggestion, but she agrees.

On the day of the performance, Barry asks Rob why he has never asked his band Barrytown to make an appearance at the shop. There is no sensitive answer and Dick tells Barry that Rob has already done him a favor by letting him put a Barrytown poster in the shop window. Barry, however, does not think it is enough.

Marie makes Rob a lot of money and for the first time in a while Rob feels like he is running a proper business. In fact, after the elation of having so many people in his shop, he finds himself on a downer. He decides people do not work on alleyways in Holloway but in the center of the city or down mines—any place where there is action.

Chapters 25-29 Analysis

As the story moves on, Rob realizes he has to accept people as they are and not define them by their tastes in music or film. In this section, he phones his ex-girlfriend Charlie



to inquire about why their relationship went sour. Despite the fact that he has not spoken to her for years, he presumes she has lost her sense of humor simply because he is able to make fun of her without her noticing. When he gets to her house for her party, this feeling persists not only with Charlie, but the other guests as well, and he decides to keep his conversation down to a minimum. When he finally gets to talk to Charlie, she shows that though she is not the person he remembers, she is still a good, honest person. This moment makes Rob realize his life is more about lists than real opinions.

From here, he seems to view life more clearly. When Laura comes over to pick her things up he makes her laugh and notices she cuts herself short, communicating to him that she is trying not to be herself when she is around him. This confounds him until his birthday a few weeks later, when Laura phones him to wish him a good day. She is phoning from a call box, but when he asks why, she denies that she is. Rob knows it is a lie and realizes she still wants him. It is this realization that allows him to act on what he has learned in the previous few weeks.



Chapters 30-35

Chapters 30-35 Summary

Laura asks Rob to write down his top five jobs. His only practical one is architecture, a trade that he claims makes a surprising entry at number five. Apparently at school, he was good at technical drawing. Unfortunately, he is not prepared to do the seven years of training, but the thought of doing something else is becoming increasingly appealing.

Rob decides to recreate his Groucho Club night at the Dog and Peasant. He puts what he calls a fly poster in the window of his shop, claiming it as the only creative idea he has ever had in his life. Later on, Barry shocks him by stating Laura has allowed Barry's band to play in the interval. Rob tells him he will give him 110% of the profits if he does not play. He says it will be embarrassing for everything because the pub will be full of Laura's Bourgeois Lawyer friends and they will not appreciate such a racket. Barry is offended and says they are not as bad as he thinks. Rob says they could not possibly be that bad. Barry ignores him and says they have changed their name from Barrytown to Sonic Death Monkey. Rob reminds his friend he is in his thirties and cannot contemplate calling his band such a name. Barry says he is determined to live life on the edge.

A journalist called Caroline interviews Rob for her free paper. Rob is immediately taken with her and thinks about asking her out on a date. He compromises by making a tape, but he is really taken by her. Laura questions him jokingly and he suggests they get married. Laura is not so sure.

Rob's Groucho night goes well. After his first set he introduces Barry's band. Barry wants him to say people be afraid, be very afraid because here is Sonic Death Monkey, but Rob can only manage to mumble their name into the microphone. To his surprise, Barry and his band walk out in suits and ties, claiming their name is now Back Beat before launching into a version of Twist and Shout.

Afterwards, Rob professes his surprise Barry did not embarrass himself and that actually they were quite good. Barry says they had been struggling to find a direction and think they may stick to playing hit numbers at weddings because it is better to see people dancing than to see them holding their hands over their ears. He then tells Rob he is surprised and a little disappointed he is DJing at such a populist venue. Rob states that this was not a joke on Barry's part.

Rob goes back to his turntable and closes down the night with a few numbers. His Solomon Burke, Got to Get You off My Mind gets the thumbs up from Laura and everyone, out of duty, dances to it. Marie is drunk, T-Bone seems interested in Caroline, Dick is dancing with Anna, and Laura is arguing angrily with Liz.



Chapters 30-35 Analysis

In this section Rob begins to rediscover the person he was when he first met Laura, resulting in him winning back her hand. The first sign that he is changing is when he is talking to Liz about going to Laura's dad's funeral. He begins upsetting her with insensitive comments, but soon realizes his mistake and changes the tone of the conversation to talk sincerely about the death of her own father. The second example is in the record shop when the Rob, Dick, and Barry jokingly think of songs Laura should play at her father's funeral. Rob participates in the joke, but not without a little guilt and the thought that he is glad Laura is not there to hear what they are saying.

The funeral itself unexpectedly touches him, and he even says at the end of the service that the experience has changed him for the better. With this rediscovery of his sensitivity, he begins to react more expressively to what people are saying. When Liz talks about Ian, Rob storms out of the house. Laura follows him and the two of them decide to go for a drive and find somewhere to have sex. Unfortunately he is not up for it, but his questions of whether Laura used protection when she was with Ian and if she is still on the pill shows a more responsible attitude.

At the end of the section, Laura takes Rob to her friend's house. After dinner she insists Rob goes to look at their record collection and Rob tells her there is more to life than music. She continues to insist however, and he eventually checks them out, noticing such awful entries as Tina Turner and Pink Floyd. He returns to the dinner reiterating the fact that a person's record collection does not make up a person. This is not just something he knows Laura wants to hear. He actually does like her friends, despite their poor taste in music.

It seems that Laura now has Rob where she wants him, and she gets him to write a list of his top five dream jobs in an effort to get his life moving in a different direction. However, this only results in Rob becoming unhappy again, and it becomes clear that he does not need to change his direction, but rather the way he deals with his current life. Hornby is making the point that he has been unhappy in what he has been doing because he did not like himself, and hence he was judging himself against what he saw as the success of others. In the end, he tries to make a success of what he already has and finds relative contentment.



Characters

Rob

Rob is the main character and the narrator of the novel. His bleak outlook on life and his low self-esteem leads to his break up with Laura. She makes it perfectly clear she still is in love with him, but if he wants her back he has to rediscover his enthusiasm and humor. Rob decides he does want her back and goes on a journey of self-discovery.

His first stop is his work place. Rob owns a record store called Championship Vinyl that seems to be going the same way as his life. Britain is currently going through a recession and few people are keen to buy records. However, its low turnover has a lot to do with the Rob's insistence to cater for the more discerning customer, and he is even known to turn away people that do not share what he regards as good taste. Rob expresses his love for music through making top five lists with his two members staff members Dick and Barry. While there are no customers in the shop, they ask each other such questions as their top five opening tracks of all time, and then berate each other if the answers do not fit with each other's tastes.

As soon as Laura leaves him, Rob begins to realize how empty this life has become. When Barry does what he calls the normal thing and turns a customer away for trying to buy a Stevie Wonder's I've Just Called to Love You, he tells him never to do it again. Barry is not happy with his boss's attitude and it ignites a frustrating friendship between the two of them, symbolizing Rob's emptiness.

Despite their aggressive attitude towards each other, along with Dick, they visit gigs together and go to the pub. At one gig, they meet the American singer Marie LeSalle. Rob immediately falls in love with her and after an initial period where he ignores her, the two of them embark on a one-night stand. There are signs that the relationship could develop, but the middle-aged Rob is too upset about Laura for it ever to get off the ground.

However, it is through Marie that Rob begins to realize some positive things about himself. For example, he thinks it is impressive that a balding man who wears bad jumpers can sleep with a celebrity and he puts it down to his ability to listen to women rather than tell them his opinions. He thinks this is the reason that such an average man as himself has managed to sleep with a total of women well above the national average. Combined with the damage Laura's relationship with his old neighbor Ian has on his ego, he decides to revisit his top five break ups and discover where he has gone wrong.

Through these five women, he gets a better understanding of himself and begins to rediscover the person Laura fell for. When Laura's dad dies, she invites him to the funeral. The sensitivity he displays immediately results in the two of them getting back together. However, Rob suffered a real scare when Laura left him and he knows he cannot go back to the person he was and tries his best to change his ways while still



maintaining his identity. At the end of the book he becomes more accepting toward people, his business picks up, and he resurrects his career as a DJ

Laura

Laura is Rob's girlfriend. Their relationship becomes sour when she finds a job as a lawyer and begins earning more money than him. It becomes worse when she gets pregnant and Rob has an affair. Laura aborts the baby and just about manages to forgive him. He then proceeds to borrow a large sum of money from her that he never pays back. At the beginning of the book, she leaves him and takes up with his old friend Ian Ray.

Laura is by no means over Rob, and though she complains he will not leave her alone, she encourages his behavior by telling him there is still a chance they can get back together. In the middle of the book, a month after their break up, Rob states she has not even moved her things from his house. In retrospect, this suggests Laura is trying to force Rob into changing and never meant the split to be forever.

Her ploy works, but it is her father's death that encourages her to reenter the relationship. Her father was very fond of Rob, and so she invites him to the funeral. With her father gone, it is as if her life is as empty as Rob's and she needs something in her life that will provide security. Whether Rob provides this security because she has been living with him for so long or because he is a strong person, it makes no difference, she sees in him what she wants. When they get back together, she goes about actively encouraging Rob to do more with his life and become the person she knows he is.

Barry

Barry works at Rob's shop. He is supposed to work there part-time, but has such a lack of anything else to do that he comes to the shop every day. Here he encourages the others to make top five list of their favorite songs and berates Dick. When customers come in, he serves them only if they have what he considers be good taste.

Barry's one ambition is to have a band, and for years he has had a poster in the shop window advertising for band members. One day, much to his delight, a man answers the advert, looking for a singer. Barry does not lack confidence and immediately states he is the person they are looking for.

The band is called Barrytown. Though Barry is adamant they had the name before he arrived, the constant barrage of abuse encourages the band to change their name to Sonic Death Monkey. When Rob begins DJ'ing, he asks if he can play at one of Rob's gigs. Rob says no, but Barry manages to arrange it through Laura.

When they play the gig the band turns up in suits and Barry sings popular numbers like Long Tall Sally. This is a little different to what Rob expected and he asks Barry why the



band has changed its style. Barry says they were sick of people leaving the room with their hands over their ears and he would much prefer to see people dancing.

Dick

Dick is the quiet member of the staff working at Rob's record store. Like everyone else at the shop, he is obsessed with music,. For Dick, the more bizarre the music is, the better. Unlike the others, he is not so forthcoming with his views and appears more an observer of the music scene than a major participant.

He becomes more involved in life when he finds a girlfriend called Anna. Despite Barry's teasing, Dick and Anna's relationship develops and never faces any major problems. By the end of the book, Dick still lacks confidence, highlighted by the fact that he only shuffles his feet to Rob's songs, but in Hornby's eyes, it has become as much a virtue as a fault.

Marie LeSalle

Marie is the American singer Rob falls in love with. There is the suggestion the feeling is mutual and that the relationship could develop into something bigger. The fact that it does not is partly due to Marie's self-confidence and independence. She has no problem approaching Barry, Dick, and Rob at her own gig and striking up a conversation, and takes little offense at Rob's obsession with Laura. In fact, she happily talks about it without ever presenting herself as just a shoulder to cry on. This highlights Marie as a people's person who gets on with just about anybody.

Liz

Liz is Rob and Laura's feminist friend who likes nothing more than getting involved in the problems of other people. When Rob and Laura split up she does not take sides but instead acts as the mediator.

Ian Ray

Rob's ex-next door neighbor and the man Laura moves in with when she breaks up with Rob.

T-Bone

A member of Marie's band



Anna Moss

Dick's girlfriend

Jo

Laura's sister



Objects/Places

Rob's House

Rob live in a house in Crouch End in London.

Championship Vinyl

Rob's shop

Harry Lauder

Rob, Dick and Barry's regular pub and the place they meet Marie.

The White Horse

Marie plays a gig here.

Laura's Parents House in Amersham

Rob goes here after Lara's father's funeral.

Rob's Parent's House in Watford

Rob visits his parents one Sunday and they go to the cinema.

Charlie's House

Rob visits his old girlfriend Charlie in her house in London.

The Crematorium

Rob visits the crematorium for Laura's father's funeral.

The Dog and Pheasant

Rob DJs at the Dog and Pheasant pub.

Marie's Apartment

Rob goes back to Marie's apartment after her gig at the White Horse pub.



Themes

Hiding Behind One's Hobby

Rob's hobby is music. He owns a record shop, regularly goes to gigs, and has an enormous record collection. Along with his colleagues Rob and Dick, his hobby has become an obsession. Together they send people away from the shop if they think he or she does not have a good taste in music, make compilation tapes corresponding to their moods, and spend most of their working day thinking up top five lists. Music has consumed Rob's life for so long he has begun to define his life by lists and references to popular culture. In Rob's world, his girlfriend is pretty in a Sheena Easton pre-Hollywood makeover kind of way and Bruce Springsteen singing about revisiting his old flames sounds like a good idea.

Unfortunately, while away from his hobby, Rob struggles to cope with life. The book begins with his girlfriend Laura leaving him for very legitimate reasons. Not long before, Rob had an affair with another woman while Laura was pregnant. After Laura had an abortion, Rob borrowed a huge sum of money from her and never paid it back.

His normal relationships are no better. He states that he has stopped phoning his friends and thinks the only two people he hangs out with, Barry and Dick, are losers. The only thing they have in common is music. Interestingly, Rob only gets along with Barry when they are devising their top five lists. The rest of the time Rob shows great bitterness towards him.

Learning to Like Oneself

When Laura leaves, she forces Rob to reevaluate his life. For the first time in a while he has to look outside his insular world and at why he has caused his girlfriend so much pain. Initially he seems to decide that he cannot help it and that is just the way he is, but Hornby presents this as part of his problem. He has become so comfortable disliking himself, that along with his hobby, he has allowed it to define him. Not until Laura embarks on an affair with his ex and hated neighbor Ian Ray does he decide that enough is enough and he must win Laura back.

The first step is to realize how his actions had affected the people around him. In this regard, his friend Liz plays an important part. One day she meets Rob in a pub and tells him she knows that Laura had an abortion and she thinks Rob is a complete asshole. Along with Laura's affair, this prompts Rob to make a top five list of his ex-girlfriends and get back in contact with them to ask where he has gone wrong. His ex girlfriends honestly give him a clear picture of why his life and his relationships have failed: he lacks self-esteem.

From this moment, Rob becomes more thoughtful. In particular, he catches himself speaking insensitively to Liz at Laura's father's funeral and quickly changes the subject



to something more appropriate. Liz is also the instigator of an argument that results in Rob leaving Laura's house. However, for the first time in the novel, Rob is showing some passion and Laura follows him outside. Together they go to a pub to talk about their relationship and Rob wins her back.

Laura is still adamant Rob needs to change. She persuades him to write his top five dream jobs. The only practical one he comes up with is an architect, but he decides it will take too long to train for. In the end, he realizes the way happiness is to understand himself and appreciate what he already has. With this in mind, Rob makes an effort to attract more customers to his shop and reignite his DJ career at the Dog and Peasant. The result is that his relationships with his friends and Laura become stronger.

Popular Culture

Hornby continuously litters his book with references to popular culture. Even his similes and metaphors revolve around films, music, or television. For example, when Laura tells him their breakup has nothing to do with anyone else, he states Celia Johnson would probably have said the same to her husband if she had gone off with Trevor Howard at the end of *Brief Encounter*.

One important aspect of the book is Rob's generation's need to move away from an older generation still obsessed with the World Wars and Britain as an empire. Again, Hornby symbolizes this need with a reference to popular culture. A man comes into his shop and buys an album they have been trying to sell for years called the Sid James Experience. Sid James is a famous comedy actor from their parent's generation, and Rob's happiness that he has finally sold it shows his generation's need to move on. However, a week later the man brings the album back, stating it was not the album he thought it was, and symbolizing not only Rob's inability to move on, but also a country in the middle of a recession.

In this regard, Hornby uses popular culture to show how it can blind people from reality. Firstly, Rob constantly makes top five lists with Barry and Dick, from their top five Costello songs to their top five songs to play at a funeral. When Rob finds himself alone on his birthday he hires out *Robocop 2*, *Terminator 2*, and *Naked Gun 2 1/2* and watches them consecutively. Perhaps most telling is when Rob's parents take him to the cinema to watch the British film *Howard's End*. Rob says he thought his parents did not agree with going to the pictures and his father tells him he does not like the foreign movies Rob watches, indicating that popular culture is a way for Rob to rebel against the traditionalists.



Style

Point of View

Hornby tells the story from the point of view of the main character Rob Fleming, and as such, it is unreliable. One of the main reasons is that Rob's character is very self-obsessed, so everything that happens affects him directly and he thinks it happens because of him. For example, before he meets Marie he gets jealous because he sees her sharing her microphone with T-Bone. His self-obsession can also turn into self-hatred, yet at the same time this self-hatred is a style choice with all the vanity that this suggests. He is happy communicating to the reader how miserable he feels about breaking up with Laura, constantly asking her if she has had sex with her new boyfriend Ian, but the reader has to wait for Ian to phone to know that he has been waiting outside his house.

In other words, Rob desires to let everyone know how miserable he is, yet stops when he is afraid it could make him look bad. This is directly linked to the music Rob constantly refers to. He seems to communicate to the reader only what he thinks his heroes like Bruce Springsteen and Elvis Costello would do in a similar situation. Outside of their world, he feels less comfortable. It is this reliance on the representation of true feeling that he needs to get past before he can win back Laura.

As the book goes on, Rob shows more thoughtfulness in his narration. The most telling moment comes when he is talking with his work mates about what music Laura should play at her father's funeral. He laughs along to Barry's suggestions, and even adds his own, but at the same time he professes he is glad Laura is not listening to them talking, showing he has at least realized his words have an effect.

Setting

The settings play a big part in the book's meaning. The reader rarely sees Rob away from his house or shop, indicating how comfortable he has become in his misery. In these two locations, Rob does little more than argue or think about how terrible his life is, as if their very sameness is a comment for own his feelings of inadequacy. The only thing he can do to relieve the situation is to surround and occupy himself with his obsessions. In his house, he tries to get over his relationship with Laura by organizing his record collection, and in his shop he talks about nothing more than music and top five lists.

Interestingly, in both locations, Rob is the boss. It seems because he owns both his shop and his house he feels he has to right to act in the way he wants. Accordingly, he has hired the likes of Barry and Dick because he knows they will take his bad moods. In fact, at the shop, he is sometimes exceptionally mean toward Barry and anything that could potentially make Barry content, such as his band. This is in comparison to when



they go out to pubs where Rob is far more approachable. He displays a similar attitude to his girlfriend Laura. When they are in the house, he displays a sarcastic and defensive attitude aimed only to make him feel better. When he goes to her or her friend's house, he displays a more open and sensitive attitude.

The more he moves away from these locations the more he learns about himself and the less selfish he becomes. The first example is when he goes to Marie's house. Outside his comfort zone, he becomes fearful that he will not perform in bed, forcing himself to look and question at the way he thinks. By the end of the night, he and Marie are sharing an intimate conversation about each other's problems. After this episode, he visits all his ex-girlfriends in various parts of London and South of England, each time finding something more about who he is. By the end of the novel Rob is happier, not because he is moved out of comfort zone, but because he has extended world beyond his house and shop.

Language and Meaning

Hornby uses an informal style with many British colloquiums. Non-British readers may find these hard to understand, but as a character, Rob is a product of his environment that of course is Britain and the recession the country went through in the early nineties. Despite this, Hornby also constantly references, and uses as metaphors, American popular culture. The references work in two ways. First, they highlight how he hides from his real feelings, and second, they mark the conflict Britain has with the older generation who are more interested in British values and the younger generation who want to move on. Hornby highlights this when Rob goes to see his parents and his dad suggests they go to the cinema. Rob's dad does not want to see any "foreign rubbish", but would prefer to watch British films like *Howard's End*. In contrast, Rob is more comfortable watching American genre movies such as *Robocop 2* and *Naked Gun 2 1/2*.

Hornby uses dialogue to show how Rob changes. Rob is emotionally immature and his thoughts tend to reflect this, but his increasingly serious and thoughtful words shows he is learning to control who he is. At the beginning, he constantly talks in metaphors, usually comparing his situation to a song or film. As the story continues and he begins to understand how much his words affect people, he begins to talk in reference to his own life and how he feels. The turning point comes at Laura's father's funeral when he is talking to Liz. Initially he show insensitivity toward the death of Laura's father, but when Liz reacts negatively he wins her back by showing interest in what she went through when her own father passed away.

Structure

High Fidelity is a character driven book, focusing on Rob's plight. At the beginning of the book, his girlfriend Laura leaves him, and his goal then is to rediscover his enthusiasm for life. He partly needs to rediscover his lust for life to win back his girlfriend, and



initially the reader may think this is the point of the story. However, he wins Laura back about two thirds of the way through, indicating his main objective is to win himself back.

Hornby reflects this by gradually moving Rob out of his comfort zone. It is only when he meets more people and receives positive interaction that he finds out who he really is. Initially Rob thinks he is comfortable with being miserable. He spends all his time in his shop hating his customers and his staff, or at his home hating himself. The turning point in the story comes when he decides to revisit his ex-girlfriends. It is more his increased attentive attitude rather than what he finds out that allows him once more to enjoy other people's company, which in turn makes him feel better about himself. However, the book does have a twist on this rather conventional theme. The fact that he gets back to his girlfriend so far from the end shows that it is not just about Rob. Other people have to accept him as well. Laura tries to completely change his life, but in the end he proves his problem was not with what he was doing, but with the negative way he was comparing his achievements with other peoples. The book ends with Rob going back to his old life with a more positive attitude.



Quotes

"unhappiness really meant something back then. Now it's just a drag, like a cold or having no money." p. 10

"I'm here, in this stupid little flat, on my own, and I'm thirty-five years old, and I own a tiny failing business, and my friends don't seem to be friends at all but people whose phone numbers I haven't lost. And if I went back to sleep and slept for forty years and woke up without any teeth to the sound of Melody Radio in an old people's home, I wouldn't worry that much, because the worst of life, i.e., the rest of it, would be over. And I wouldn't even have had to kill myself." p. 53

"So I go to Wood Green and I come back with a mint-condition "You Left the Water Running," which I pick up for a tenner. That's not a bad morning's work. Barry and Dick will be impressed. But if they ever find out about Elvis and James Brown and Jerry Lee Lewis and the Pistols and the Beatles and the rest, they will suffer immediate and possibly dangerous traumatic shock, and I will have to counsel them, and . . ." p.56

"They always say that. They always, always say that it's nothing to do with anyone else. I'll bet you any money that if Celia Johnson had run off with Trevor Howard at the end of Brief Encounter, she would have told her husband that it was nothing to do with anyone else." p. 76

"Is it better?' 'Is what better? Is what better than what?' 'Well. Sex, I guess. Is sex with him better?' 'Jesus Christ, Rob. Is that really what's bothering you?' 'Of course it is.'" p. 79

"Going to the pictures aged thirty-five with your mum and dad and their insane friends does not take your mind off things, I discover. It very much puts your mind on things." p.99

"If I said to you, "I haven't seen Reservoir Dogs yet," what would you think?' 'I'd think, you're a sick man. And I'd feel sorry for you.'" p. 101

"Why would I want Dick to be unhappy? I wouldn't. I want him to be as happy as anybody has ever been. I want him to show the rest of us that it is possible to maintain a relationship and a large record collection simultaneously." p. 113

"We're not talking joky understatement here, Rob. We're talking harassment. Ten phone calls a night, hanging around outside my house . . ." p. 127

"She looks at me to see if I'm joking. When she laughs, it's clear that I am." p. 157

"She's had a pretty rough few weeks already, without this," says Liz, and I feel a little surge of something like pride: That was me. I made her feel like that." p. 171



"Solomon Burke! "Got to Get You off My Mind"! That's our song! Solomon Burke is responsible for our entire relationship! 'Is that right? Do you have his phone number? I'd like a word with him.'" p. 199



Topics for Discussion

Do you think Rob's misery is a style choice?

In what way does Hornby's use of setting reflect his negative attitude?

What does Rob's constant references to music and film say about his character?

Do you think the book is about Rob changing his attitude or do other characters have to change as well?

What does it say about Rob that he rarely sees his old friends and surrounds himself with people he claims not to like so much?

Why is it significant that Rob changes his attitude, but not his lifestyle?

In what way does the book attack British tradition?