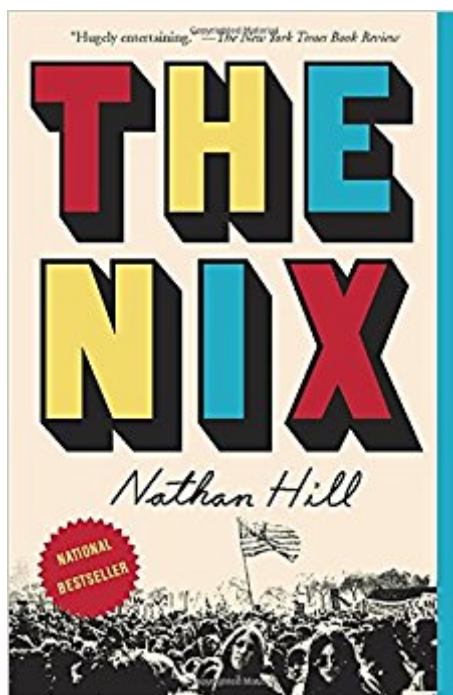


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The Nix



Synopsis

• A New York Times 2016 Notable Book • Entertainment Weekly's #1 Book of the Year • Washington Post 2016 Notable Book • Slate Top Ten Book • Nathan Hill is a maestro. • "John Irving's It's 2011, and Samuel Andresen-Anderson hasn't seen his mother, Faye, in decades not since she abandoned the family when he was a boy. Now she's reappeared, having committed an absurd crime that electrifies the nightly news and inflames a politically divided country. The media paints Faye as a radical hippie with a sordid past, but as far as Samuel knows, his mother was an ordinary girl who married her high-school sweetheart. Which version of his mother is true? Two facts are certain: she's facing some serious charges, and she needs Samuel's help. To save her, Samuel will have to embark on his own journey, uncovering long-buried secrets about the woman he thought he knew, secrets that stretch across generations and have their origin all the way back in Norway, home of the mysterious Nix. As he does so, Samuel will confront not only Faye's losses but also his own lost love, and will relearn everything he thought he knew about his mother, and himself.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

An Best Book of September 2016: The Nix is a surprising novel that you didn't know you were waiting for until you start reading. At its center is Samuel Andresen-Anderson, a failed writer and increasingly apathetic college professor, who gets a second chance at literary fame from the most unlikely source—the mother who abandoned him as a child. The American public is up in arms about a rather absurd crime that Samuel's mother committed against an obnoxious politician.

While Sam is shocked and surprised to learn the whereabouts of his estranged mother, he also realizes it's the chance of a lifetime to tap into the zeitgeist with some choice tidbits about her, if he can write it before media A.D.D. sets in. But in order to write the book that will revive him, Samuel is forced to dig into her life, and he discovers a completely different version of the woman he thought he knew; it turns out he's not the only one whose life is carved out of traumatic events. Nathan Hill is incredibly perceptive, as in this, which I can't stop thinking about: "The things we love the most are the most disfiguring. Such is our greed for them." Hill has created a brilliant junction of mother-son saga and comic satire about our self-righteous and obsessive society. This is a big, clever novel that wraps itself around you until you never want to leave. --Seira Wilson, *The Book Review* --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

If any novel defied an elevator pitch in 2016, it was *The Nix*. Acid critique of millennial entitlement, videogame addiction, and clueless academia; tender meditation on childhood friendship, first loves, and maternal abandonment; handy tutorial on '60s radicalism and Norwegian ghost mythology: Nathan Hill's magnificently overstuffed debut contains multitudes, and then some. . . . The story surges, ricocheting from sleepy '80s suburbia and the 1968 DNC riots to WWII-era Norway, post-9/11 Iraq, and beyond. It's not just that Hill is a brilliantly surreal social satirist in the gonzo mode of Don DeLillo or Thomas Pynchon (a male news anchor's face is "smooth as cake fondant"; one doomed union is "like a spoon married to a garbage disposal"), it's that he does it all with so much wit and style and heart. "Leah Greenblatt, *Entertainment Weekly* (Best Book of 2016) "A fantastic novel about love, betrayal, politics and pop culture" as good as the best Michael Chabon or Jonathan Franzen. "People I've loved broke my heart, this book. Time after time. It made me laugh just as often. I loved it on the first page as powerfully as I did on the last." Jason Sheehan, *NPR.org* "Funny, endlessly inventive. . . . [a] wild tragicomic tangle of [Hill's] imagination." *Entertainment Weekly* (A-) "Hill has so much talent to burn that he can pull off just about any style, imagine himself into any person and convincingly portray any place or time. *The Nix* is hugely entertaining and unfailingly smart, and the author seems incapable of writing a pedestrian sentence or spinning a boring story. . . . [A] supersize and audacious novel of American misadventure." *Teddy Wayne, The New York Times Book Review* "Irresistible. . . . A major new comic novelist . . . Hill is a sharp social observer, hyper-alert to the absurdities of modern life. . . . his enormous book arrives as one of the stars of the fall season. . . . readers will find this novel. And they'll be dazzled." "Ron Charles, *The Washington Post* "Hill is an uncommonly profound observer, illuminating

much about the relationships between parents and children. Nathan Hill is an important new writer, able to variously make readers laugh out loud while providing a melancholy, resonant tale. • "Eliot Schrefer, USA Today (4/4 Stars)"[A] great sprawling feast of a first novel. . . . Hill writes with an astonishingly sure hand for a young author. . . . let's just call him the real thing." Dan Cryer, Newsday

Samuel is an underachieving assistant professor of literature at a nothing college outside Chicago who dislikes his students, spends way too much time playing an online fantasy game, got a huge advance for a novel he never wrote, and is pining for the girl he loved when he was eleven. His life is stalled out big time, but he is dragged out of stasis when his estranged mother, who abandoned him when he was eleven and has never been heard from since, makes national headlines for throwing rocks at a Presidential candidate - she is the Packer Attacker! Through a ridiculous series of events, Samuel is tasked with writing his mother's life story, and is forced to investigate her life since leaving him. The Nix is the story of how mother and son came to where they are -- and where they might go from here. But really, this basic plot description does not begin to do this book justice. Nathan Hill has a dazzling imagination, and the feats of writing that he performs are an absolute joy to experience. He writes one chapter from the POV of a gaming addict, an internal stream of consciousness in which the character makes elaborate plans to quit gaming, but talks himself out of it. This is ten pages, one paragraph, and it is absolutely mesmerizing -- funny and insightful and sad, about the stories we tell ourselves. Another chapter is just a conversation between Samuel and the lawyer who is representing his mother, nothing but dialogue, and it is hysterical. Another chapter is a Choose Your Own Adventure mini-book explaining how Samuel's relationship with a violin prodigy came unraveled, because Samuel does not choose wisely. Another chapter is...you get the picture. The story of Samuel and his mother is a jumping-off point for Mr. Hill to write about a huge range of things: let's see, he covers second-rate higher education, gaming addicts, the ravenous news media, music prodigies, child abuse, child abandonment, thwarted love, the 1960s counter-cultural revolution, Allan Ginsberg, Walter Cronkite -- at one point, no joke, there is a sequence inside the head of Walter Cronkite where he imagines himself as a bird flying above the Chicago riots... and I still haven't skimmed the surface of all the things this book is really about. And if I have a criticism, that's what it is. This book is about so many things, it is so wildly ambitious and imagined, that at times it seems to get a bit out of control. Around the time Walter Cronkite was imagining himself as a bird, I was thinking, hmm, a little editing might have helped some. Reading The Nix feels a bit like watching a wildly talented thoroughbred run -- and win -- its first race. You

see the immense beauty of the animal, the strength, the speed, it easily outpaces the rest of the field, you know you're at the beginning of something special. Yes, the horse is a little wild, a little undisciplined, maybe veers around the track a bit, maybe tires at the end, but my gosh. You want to turn to everyone around you and say "Did you SEE that?" And one last thing. So many books these days are being written with a lot of technique, but they're lacking in heart. What makes this book special, to me, is that Mr. Hill's heart is as generous as his talent. He writes fantastic sentences, he has astonishing craft, but beyond that, he has true empathy, compassion and hope, He sees the insanity of the world, but he also has hope for our future. And I have tremendous hope for his.

I wasn't sure about this book at first but warmed up to it about a third of the way through. There are a lot of funny parts that were fun to read. By about the 3/4 mark, though, it was overkill. It was an okay read but not a book I would recommend to others.

Wow! (Sigh.) Wow! (Sigh.) Oh, wait. This is a book review. I should use real words to describe it. Let's see...Genius. Astounding. Mind-boggling. An absolute must-read. I would give it 10 stars if I could. The title of the book comes from a Norwegian superstition about the Nix, a cruel, vicious water spirit that appears in the form of a gentle horse. The moral of this fable is that the things you love the most will hurt you the worst. Due to author Nathan Hill's incredibly creative structure, style and plot execution, this is unlike any novel I have ever read. The plot, which is complex and jumps back and forth primarily between 2011 and 1968, is far too difficult to summarize here. Read the official reviews for that, but know that you'll only get a sliver of it. The plot simply defies succinct description! But don't worry. Complex though it is, it is easy to follow. As much as this book is about plot, it is even more about the characters. The main character is Samuel, a young professor of English at a small liberal arts college outside Chicago. He is the hub from which the other characters are the spokes--his mother who abandoned him when he was a child, a beautiful violin prodigy and her twin brother, a student who obsessively cheats, '60s college radicals, a violent police officer named Charlie Brown and a video gamer who plays to such excess that this addiction has extraordinarily dire effects on his health and brain. One of the most interesting aspects of the author's form/function is that we as readers know things--a lot of things--that the characters don't know (or take a LONG time to learn/figure out). So we have background and insight into what is happening in a boldly innovative way that is curiously effective. Most of all, Nathan Hill has accomplished every author's ideal hat trick: Great literature, highly-enjoyable entertainment and commercial success.

While there were portions of the book that were so reflective of exactly what it was like to come of age in the 60's (the home ec class became a refresher on exactly what it was like for those of us who were brought up before women's lib). There were far too many portions that just left off after going into great detail about what was happening in the present - especially the protagonist - and left so many things unresolved. I echo the other review that this book left me feeling like I wish he had a better editor. Don't get me wrong, I think he will become one of the "must read" authors in his later books; but I'm truly sick of the newest craze of time jumping in books - most of the time just because - not for any important reason; and I think the books suffer from that - I would like them to stop jumping around in time so much and if they go back to an earlier time, just bring it to the present. I saw no reason that his mother's story had to be so chopped up. It didn't help the book move forward; it just made me have to go back and check what year the chapter before was dated. I admire John Irving immensely and actually bought this based on his blurb. While a promising writer, this man has a long way to go before coming close to how Dickens wrote. Just as I would get absorbed in on perspective of the story, I'd have to switch gears and start on another. I didn't find that useful in the telling of the tale - more irritating than anything else. Don't get me wrong, this is a book that should be read, especially by the baby boomers, but it just isn't great.

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