

AN  
**EXPENSIVE**  
EDUCATION

NICK McDONELL  
AUTHOR OF *TWELVE*

## An Expensive Education

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# An Expensive Education

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## **An Expensive Education** Nick McDonell

McDonell's third novel takes readers into Harvard through its dormitories and dining halls, into its elite finals clubs and lecture halls. "An Expensive Education" is a smart, relentless novel set at the troubled intersection of ivory academia and realpolitik.

## **An Expensive Education Details**

Date : Published August 5th 2009 by Atlantic Monthly Press (first published 2009)

ISBN : 9780802118936

Author : Nick McDonell

Format : Hardcover 294 pages

Genre : Fiction, Cultural, Africa, Adult, Thriller, Politics

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## From Reader Review An Expensive Education for online ebook

### Trixie Fontaine says

Got this off the library's highly-recommended shelf without knowing anything else about it (highly rec'd plus info on jacket). Probably would have steered clear of it if I'd read the reviews & author bio here first, but glad I didn't. Not saying it will become a fave of mine, but a lot of the resentment towards the author and the book seems out of hand. **Living on the west coast and not giving two shits about Ivy League rivalries and unfair advantages given to well-connected New Yorkers (WHAT'S NEW?) except as fun soap opera stories, I read this purely for entertainment; the book delivered it.**

Like Gossip Girl meets international intrigue spy . . . whatever (I haven't read much in that genre), the pacing / unfolding of characters and plot was great. Not Hollywood Wives perfect (hahaha for reals), but great. The shorter length of chapters made it extra readable.

I disagree with reviewers saying the author writes unreal women that are just men's fantasies. I actually thought the portrayals of women were great, especially for this kind of story. The way alcohol abuse was represented and woven all through the book also seemed spot on.

This book gave me all of the things I want bestseller type of books to give, but don't. Not super-snob literary, but definitely not a throw-away. There was a lot to this book about class and race and gender and globalism and romance and bad rich guys fixing shit without the enjoyability and accessibility of the stories being ruined. I was surprised at the typos and words left out in the book, though, given how rich and fancy and special this guy supposedly is.

Goodreads reviewers are telling me to hate it, but I really didn't.

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### Bookmarks Magazine says

Critics praised McDonell's third foray into fiction as an engaging mixture of political thriller and campus novel. Even those who found minor faults with its lack of depth and lack of moral ambiguity commended McDonell's vibrant writing and feverish, page-turning pace. Though the plot isn't terribly innovative and the central mystery is quickly solved, Teak's disarming idealism and sulky soul searching -- "more Holden Caulfield than James Bond" (*New York Times Book Review*) -- propel the story forward and give it charm. Critics also appreciated McDonell's caustic behind-the-scenes tour of his alma mater and his biting descriptions of its privileged elite. Compared to Graham Greene and John le Carre for his storytelling skills, McDonell has proved that the third time is the charm. This is an excerpt of a review published in Bookmarks magazine.

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### Ann says

Fast, dirty, and unmoving - which is not to say that *An Expensive Education* is bad. In fact, I rather liked it, despite its flaws - in McDonnell's world, even the women are macho, and anyone who feels feelings is doomed - and the fact that a good 50% of it would be possibly unintelligible and definitely insufferable if

you're unfamiliar with Cambridge (ah, the days of settling matters of geo-political import at Shay's and Daedalus!) But if you've spent any time in an ivy-festooned hall of higher education, you'll be on familiar enough ground here: An Expensive Education is just OK as a prodigal son of le Carre but great as a Very Special Episode of Gossip Girl, supremely in-the-know about special pathology of the socio-economic class precocious in matters of money, vice, and criticism but very much in need of some Remedial Conscience 101.

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### **Abby says**

Nick McDonnell writes a cliched plot of Third World/CIA intrigue that recycles all of the stereotypes of an international potboiler without any of the fun or intrigue. Each character is a one-dimensional archetype: the rude, racist preppy; the spoiled bohemian; the studly African; the man-eating female professor; the scholarship student reduced to cleaning bathrooms; and so on and so forth. None of the characters possess truly redeeming qualities and seem angry, depressed, or selfish. This was not my experience when I attended Harvard over 10 years ago. (Also, Harvard's Porcellian does not equal Yale's Skull and Bones, as Yale's connection with foreign policy and international entanglements has been much better documented.)

McDonnell's youthful age and inexperience show through in his writing, but I'm keeping my fingers crossed for the future.

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### **Duca Blueheart says**

Detaliile sunt bune pentru a putea în?elege ac?iunea unei c?r?i, dar aici au fost multe r?u de tot. Salturi în trecut bru?te, detalii despre personaje care nu apar decât o singur? dat?, maxim de dou? ori, dup? care dau col?ul, iar în aceste dou? d??i le este prezentat întregul CV de care chiar nu îmi pas?.

?i în plus personajele principale p?reau a fi marionetele unui singur personaj – fantom?. Nu e a?a c? nu are logic?? ?i îl consider personaj – fantom? pentru c? nu a ap?rut ”fizic” decât o singur? dat? – Hatashil – în timp ce satul lui plin de so?ii ?i copii ai s?i a fost aruncat în aer. Masacru atribuit lui de c?tre nu ?tiu ce organiza?ie american?, de care nu se d? nici un delaiu concret.

Recenzia complet? o pute?i g?si pe blogul meu - *Reader's Republic*

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### **Corny says**

I enjoyed reading this cynical account of life in the CIA and at Harvard in the current decade but I can't say that it evoked any particular emotional response. It is not a new theme that there are a bunch of venal manipulators safeguarding our security nor that they do things beyond all ethics in the name of "the greater good". Being reminded of this is not comforting despite its probable truth and so I had a negative reaction to the subject.

However, the plot is complex and believable and the characters are well drawn and interesting. Good does not triumph in the end but expediency does. This is neither a novel of university poitics nor a thriller but it contains elements of both. I praise it for its uniqueness and its unwillingness to sugar coat the story.

McDonell is a talented writer. I just do not care much for his overarching nihilism.

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### **Michael says**

This was a strange book for me. It seemed a little disjointed with the various characters and locales. On one hand it had the makings of a very good betrayed spy story, a-la LeCarre', with its lead character Michael Teak and his connection with a rebel leader in the African Horn area around Somalia. But then it has a contrived and artificial feeling as it tries to tie-in connections with various characters at Harvard University (where Teak had gone to school), from an african student trying to get into one of its prestigious clubs (which has alumni ties to foreign intelligence agencies) and his professor on African studies who has written a Pulitzer prize winning book on the same rebel leader. The connections just don't feel true or well developed. The descriptions of the Harvard campus life and its students also left me wondering why anyone would want to go there.

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### **Kris says**

Write what you know. For most of us that means writing about life in suburbia; enduring the tedium of daily life: commuting, bitching, school or work, petty social dynamics, and household humdrum. For Nick McDonell, son of famous editor Terry McDonell and godson to the late Hunter Thompson, it means writing about life on the Gold Coast of Harvard interspersed with adventures in far-flung countries where tenuous relationships are forged in the spirit of 'keeping things interesting'.

I had my doubts about this book. Mostly that McDonell, 25, didn't have enough experience (in life and otherwise) to write anything worth reading. McDonell quickly overturned my concerns. Though it would seem he's hopeful about most people, he's also keenly interested and aware of the less attractive traits in them. And, what's of particular interest here is the wielding of even the most regal of institutions (namely the US government and its field office, Harvard) to these twisted biddings.

Since weighty substance is hard to convey, often readers forgive minor abuses of language when the heart of the matter is true. But this tradeoff needn't be made here. Unlike the writing of many of his so-called 'peers', McDonell writes with force and purpose; quick to his point, we're spared the endless drivel to be expected by the likes of a Franzen.

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### **Ali says**

The first hundred or so pages of this book are nothing but Ivy League name dropping. To be fair, though, I'm not sure that McDonell could've written a book largely set on Harvard's campus without it, though.

The characters were very cardboard (the WASP-y undergrad, the WASP-y CIA recent alumnus, the drunken Iranian journalist, the naif African college student, etc., etc.) but the author still manages to tell an entertaining spy story. It jumps very quickly between different characters' points of view, and while I don't have a problem with stories told from different angles, this one switches so often that I had a hard time really getting involved with any of them.

I'd put this book in the category of good beach reading -- especially for those Harvard grads who want a trip

down Memory Lane -- but don't expect great literature, even by the standards of spy fiction.

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### **Cheryl says**

"Mike Teak has a classic Harvard profile. But only on the surface. He's a 25 year old scholar/athlete from an upper-class family who was recruited by his godfather to work for a U.S. intelligence agency. On a covert mission in a Somali village, he delivers cash and cell phones to Hatashil, a legendary orphan warrior turned rebel leader. It's a routine assignment until, minutes after they meet, the village is decimated by a missile assail, and although Mike escapes, his life is changed forever. Taking off at the troubled intersection of academia and realpolitik and shifting from the elite final clubs of Harvard College and the manicured lawns of Harvard Yard to Somalia's dusty tracks and East Africa's high-ended hotels, An Expensive Education is a story of corruption and love, betrayal and sudden death."

He has two previous books that I am interested in reading. Checked a used book store yesterday - they do not have them. May check the library.

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### **Bookaholic says**

Dacă aici urmărit "Gossip Girl" sau alte seriale care descriu elita new yorkeză? și/sau americană în extenso și aici rămas cu o senzație de plăcere cumva vinovată, ceva similar vezi încerca să citind O educație costisitoare de Nick McDonnel, roman apărut în colecția Strada Ficțiunii de la Editura Allfa.

Cartea a fost să continuă să fie un bestseller încă din 2009 când a văzut lumina tiparului în SUA, iar anul acesta a apărut și în România. Scriitorul este un Tânăr din Manhattan, New York, care peste o lună va împlini 28 de ani, iar O educație costisitoare este al treilea său roman, primul, Twelwe, marcând un debut pe care critica americană l-a considerat fulminant (McDonnel avea 17 ani la momentul respectiv), suficient încât să ajungă să fie comparat cu Graham Greene și John le Carre. (continuarea cronicii: <http://bookaholic.ro/o-educatie-costi...>)

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### **Sophie says**

This book is a bit tricky to sum up. Basically, it's about a group of Harvard people and how they are involved in and affected by a massacre in an African village. Some of the people are journalists, some students, some professors and some are secret agents working for the government. For a while, no one knows the truth behind the massacre, and the people involved don't know where they stand and where their loyalties lie anymore. It's part political thriller and part portrait of Very Privileged People (and some who aren't that privileged).

It's an intriguing enough read, but it felt a bit uneven at times - and in the end a lot was tied up a little too neatly, which somehow didn't seem to fit with the rest of the novel. The characters are, for the most part, not very likeable, but they did feel like real people. Overall, a good and worthwhile read.

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### **Asho says**

This was such a "boy" book, full of spy games and female characters that seemed to step right out of the fantasy of an 18-year-old boy with no actual experience with women. There were quite a few times when I rolled my eyes reading this, thinking, "Every man wants a woman to behave like this but they don't." I'm not sure how this book ended up on my "to-read" list in the first place. I think maybe I read a review somewhere and was intrigued by the idea of a Harvard satire, but "Harvard satire" ended up being more like "Harvard cliche" (and Tom Wolfe does the Ivy League cliche genre better, anyway). I also hadn't realized how much of this was going to be about conflict in Africa. I had never read anything like this before so I tried to appreciate the experience. And I can't say that I disliked the book, exactly, it just wasn't what I was expecting. This basically read like a guy's version of chick lit. It just wasn't my style.

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### **Jody says**

I found this book by a young author hard to follow. I was well into it before I figured out how all the characters related to each other but maybe I'm just slow. Who was behind the the attack on a small African village? Why are they covering up the truth?

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### **Tony says**

McDonell, Nick. AN EXPENSIVE EDUCATION. (2009). \*\*. This is the third book by this twenty-something author which has received generally good reviews. I didn't like it all that much. The author was praised for his Hemingway-styled prose. I thought it resembled the constructions in the Dick and Jane books. His characters had no depth and seemed to be only driven by ambition, ambition fueled mostly by the desire to be better or more successful than their Harvard classmates or alumni. As I was reading it, I got the feeling that the author had set up a story chess board and that I was just watching him move the pieces around. It's kind of a spy novel, though not in the class that the reviewers put it. It's not Le Carre. It's definitely not Graham Green. I see a lot of potential talent in the author, but not much of it comes out in this book. Maybe I should try his earlier book, "Twelve," then again...

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