



# Three Seasons: Three Stories of England in the Eighties

*Mike Robbins*

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**A washed-up trawler captain. A sleek young businessman. And the Master of an Oxford college.**

**Through these three characters, all beautifully drawn, Mike Robbins has created a vivid picture of the 1980s, a divisive era of great change.**

*Three Seasons* is a book of three novellas, unconnected with each other, but all set in the south of England in the 1980s.

In *Spring*, a middle-aged Hull trawler skipper, his great days gone, has one last throw of the dice in a South Coast port.

In *Summer*, an ambitious young man makes his way in the booming Thames Valley property market, unconcerned with the damage he does to others.

In *Autumn*, the Master of an Oxford college welcomes his two sons home, but they awake difficult memories from half a century before.

*Three Seasons* is about the Thatcher era in Britain, but it is not about politics. These three stories are portraits of a country and its people on the verge of change.

## Three Seasons: Three Stories of England in the Eighties Details

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Author : Mike Robbins

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## From Reader Review Three Seasons: Three Stories of England in the Eighties for online ebook

### M.F. Moonzajer says

The “Three Seasons” is an outstanding piece, written by Mike Robbins. I enjoyed reading all the three stories, but the first one was quite exceptional. Mike has created the events so real that I felt I was not only reading a book; but also standing next to a man in a boat and watching everything by my own eyes...

The beautiful structure of sentences and the imagination he has created with them pushed me to read constantly the first chapter without a break.

"Kevin, at 17, was still growing. Day by day quite unreasonable amounts of food vanished into him. Steaming plates of spaghetti chased casserole dishes of beef stew to join the mighty roast of the day before, to fuel the building of a new human machine. The ma-chine didn't look that impressive, being a shade under five foot ten and rather thin; but his face was open and cheerful, albeit so covered in spots that you'd be hard put to find unblemished skin in between."

I have read many books by present-day authors, but the “Three Seasons” was somehow different from all of them. Why? Because, it is not only about a story that you read, but also about the reality you get to learn about the harshness of life “the story of a fisherman’s life and the secrets you have never heard” - when the weather is freezing and you are in the water and yielding your last breath.

For me a man who lives in a landlocked country, the story is quite interesting. Because I always thought, catching a fish is just pulling and pushing your net on the water, but I learned no, it is all about the pain and suffering you have to go through to survive. From chopping fingers, to getting burned and freezing weather, but again do not worry, Katherine (A lady journalist who works for gazette) and her bizarre questions will keep you occupied.

Some parts of the book is even written in a very good rhyme like this one

"A thin morning sunshine had broken through and the sky was blue, but patches of very dark grey cloud hung on above the town, in which the first cars were beginning to move."

Total inspiring

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### Rebecca Gransden says

In Three Seasons Mike Robbins takes us back to the 80s. Not in that detached retro deconstructionist way that makes it look like a plastic paradise to all who never lived through it, but instead to a world of surface promise and ideas too big for its boots, about the disparity between a culture invested in tradition and bygone eras but aiming itself full throttle into the unknown. The novellas contained within this brief collection are very British, but even more English. The mundanity of everyday life and the difficulties of restless egos rub shoulders with those settling for less and others facing disappointment. Tension between generations is perceptively represented. A consistent thread is the undercurrent of background forces, working away

without the conscious acknowledgement of the characters. The strength of these stories comes from the author's detailed observations of human nature and the stage upon which these tales are played out. Everyone has known a Terry Malcolm. I will say no more. I was impressed by how easily the writing flowed and just how vividly I time travelled. Though the stories are satisfying they contain an air of ambiguity that leaves the reader with the sense of a full and rounded world outside of what is on the page.

As an aside, I thought the simple and expressive descriptions of landscape and nature were quite fine.

A rewarding collection, centred on characters penned with an empathetic and sophisticated eye.

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### **Kevin Cole says**

In my early thirties, I went through an intense period of Anglophilia. The more I read about England and the English, the more convinced I was I'd been born in the wrong country. The fact that I couldn't just hop on a plane and move to the home of my ancestors frustrated me greatly. This surely contributed to the savagery I directed at my home country while writing my own novel, in which I pretend to be English and rewrite reality.

That passion has since cooled, but reading Tom Robbins' *Three Seasons* resurrected, briefly, a bittersweet affection for a time and place that was never mine.

*Three Seasons: Three Stories of England in the Eighties* collectively creates a living, breathing sense of a world that, once read, will never leave your head, a feat I believe is possible only through literature.

And make no mistake, this book reads like lit. In fact, I haven't read such expert storytelling since university. Mr. Robbins is effectively God. He looks upon a person, and instantly knows everything about him before casually moving on to another. The rumours are true: Third-Person Omniscient lives!

The prose is calm and smooth. I never had to reread a sentence to understand something - a hard trick, I assure you. The details are many but not too much. The dialogue is interesting and realistic. Real fiction writers can pull this double duty without seeming to break a sweat.

Of the stories, I liked "Summer" best, though it's hard to say why, since the protagonist is quite the git. I see from other reviews I'm not alone. Maybe it's because we've all known people like Terry Malcolm. He's hardly Heinrich Himmler, but he is one of those shallow cunts you really hope a just God will one day put in his place.

Mr. Robbins is an elegant writer who, should you give him a few quiet hours, will entertain you at an elevated level.

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### **Heena Rathore P. says**

DNF

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## Travis Jared says

In England, by most accounts, the penultimate decade of the 20th century began a few months prior, with the Labour Party's sweeping electoral defeats of late 1979. Scarcely a year into this new nominally-Conservative era, formerly posh Brixton, Toxeth, and Chapteltown neighborhoods of London, Liverpool, and Leeds exploded into race riots, as unemployment skyrocketed. IRA bombings throughout England punctuated the Time of Troubles continuance into its middle decade. On the other side of the globe, Argentina invaded the farthest flung remnant of the Empire, sparking the Falklands War. To many at the time, it must have seemed the United Kingdom was coming apart at its seams.

What had appeared for generations to be a mostly orderly, British-organized world (occasionally reaffirmed through major wars) was deconstructing, socially and economically, before their eyes. It is against this backdrop that Mike Robbins draws the characters of *Three Seasons*, each attempting to place themselves within the tumult of transition, through the course of three chronologically consecutive, yet ostensibly unrelated, novellas.

Deep in the UNESCO archives there is a striking Peter Lord photograph from 1975, in stark black and white, showing the hulking Tyne Pride Tanker towering above Leslie Street in Wallsend, the port of its birth. Within a decade, that historic shipyard and dozens more along the northeast coast of England would be all but closed, belated recognition of the shrinking navy and a new global economy. The larger-than-life seamen of the opening chapter, once rulers of the North Atlantic, pit themselves against this preordained deflation in a most direct fashion. But in the pages that follow, Robbins skillfully weaves the stories of journalists, businessmen, professors, ad-men, brokers, housewives, mothers, fathers, and all manner of Englishmen and women, who were also battling to keep their footing atop more subtlety shifting sands.

The author humbly claims these stories salvaged from the bottom of the suitcase he departed London with in 1987. More likely the originals were carefully barreled in the back of his mind, to age and mature, as Robbins circumnavigated the world as a development worker. The nuance and body that flavor this work, the depth conveyed in even a few short sentences, could only be written by a man who has lived a multitude of lives. While the bones of these stories may well date back to 80's England, the characters that inhabit that world are surely enlivened by the decades since.

By structuring his work as three independent books, Robbins necessarily invites comparison – and favoritism. *Spring*, which draws heavily on the author's formative years as a young journalist working the English docks and its gruff men for tales, is one of the best short stories I have ever read. It is masterfully foreboding, building relentlessly from the first few lines in the darkened night of a small, seaside town to its climax out beyond the breakwaters. In a simple reading, it could be a cautionary fable of ego, but through the delicate exposure of each character's ultimate fragility, Robbins creates a nearly comprehensive empathy for all the fated participants. The result is a remarkably compelling and incredibly complete story of just seventy pages, where it seems not even a single additional word need be appended.

In contrast to *Spring*'s perfect, singular arc, the following *Summer* is a layered complexity of competing personal stories. As a loosely woven mat, the individual reeds touch only occasionally, but at critical intersections, dipping above or below, redirecting each other's paths in varying degrees of intensity. It may be presumptuous to suggest, but at times it feels Robbins here is pushing his own literary bounds to see how far he can fly – much like the primary character's white BMW coupe, hurtling around country corners at the limit of adhesion. Insomuch as his insufferable lead Terry has been thoroughly fleshed out as a character, but 1-dimensional as a human being, Robbins has succeeded. The real strength, however, of this story is the

exploration of his characters over the transitory generation described in the introduction. Taking liberty to examine their previous incarnations as idealistic youths, Robbins builds almost incongruous backstories that, in the shift back to the present, highlight the shift the whole nation took in the intercession.

*Fall*, paradoxically perhaps, plays as a comfortable, extended denouement. Now zooming further out to capture several generations of England's cultural evolution, the reader can place the previous tales and their consequences along a greater spectrum of continual change. With the wisdom of years, Robbins, through his professorial muse, seems to desire to reassure all of his characters (perhaps even the prior iterations of himself, the wet-behind-the-ears journalist and the middle-aged aid worker) that the grander themes of humanity – of family, of tolerance, of thoughtfulness – will weather the storms of progress, come what may.

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### **Alison says**

This was an enjoyable read. Three stories - Spring, Summer and Autumn - unrelated, but portray different people at different stages of their lives as they live through an era of great change.

Whilst I'm too young (ahem) to remember the major struggles of the 80s, and these stories are of England (being Scottish and all), Mike writes with such eloquence and grace that no matter which era or country you were born in, you can feel the characters' presence and conflicts with 'modern' life.

Fresh and to the point, this novel was an easy read, and leaves you thinking about life in the 80s for a long time after.

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### **Diana Febry says**

4.5 stars rounded to 5.

Three well-written novellas that compliment each other make this book a good value read.

In each story the author captures the ambience of the 80s brilliantly. The central characters were diverse, an elderly fisherman struggling to make a living around fishing quotas, a Yuppy fully embracing 'Its all about me & loadsamoney' culture and an academic from a privileged background. All expertly drawn and realistically flawed (and one character particularly loathsome) they were people I could easily relate to and recognise.

The combination of stories that span class distinctions give an excellent snapshot of Britain in the 1980s. The contradictions, unfairness, hypocrisy and sense of monumental change.

Personally my least favourite story was the first but I thoroughly enjoyed the other two. Depending on the reader's age and disposition the book could be considered nostalgic, retro or dated but as someone who was there I can say it captures the essence of the decade perfectly.

I've added another book from this author to my reading list.

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### **Suzanne Gibson says**

Thank you for my copy of this book which I received in a goodreads giveaway.

Three seasons is a short book of three stories all set in England in the 1980s. Spring is about a washed up

fisherman living in the past and desperate to make his big breakthrough.

Summer was my favourite story. Terry is an estate agent and one of the most unpleasant and obnoxious people. His career is everything to him and he cares not one bits for the people, including his wife, that he damages in pursuit of his dreams.

Autumn is a story of a college lecturer struggling with the lives of his grown up children.

A great read, very quick but full of substance

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## **Harry Whitewolf says**

Mike Robbins certainly knows how to write, and for a book like this which contains three short novellas, he definitely manages to effortlessly pack a hell of a lot in, with all those important parts of what makes good fiction sewn together: great characterisation, a sense of place - with all its sounds and smells, well constructed stories that go off on tangents but tie together, inserting technical facts which are easily understood by the layman reader, and managing to be both deep and humorous along the way.

To be honest, I didn't engage with the stories on a personal level quite as much as I did with Robbins' other two fiction books that I whole heartedly loved reading ('Dog!' and 'The Lost Baggage of Silvia Guzman'), but there is still much to enjoy in these three gentle stories that reflect different facets of English life in the 1980s.

The first story, set in Spring, about the crew of a fishing trawler is a lovely little tale that perhaps epitomises the modern changes of industry and the day to day lives of the working class.

The second, set in Summer, is a great reflection on the newness of middle class Yuppie 80s, where privatisation, property and business took centre stage and turned Great Britain into even more of a Capitalist nightmare, despite the tale being primarily about a right idiot who you'll love to despise; a brilliantly crafted character, and one of the most memorable from this book.

And the last story, set in Autumn, takes the reader to the upper classes, where an Oxford tutor is forced to return to his youthful past, when his family arrive home with their own problems and ambitions. (A very clever story, where the present, the past, and the settings of two countries are entwined with sheer ease – not an easy thing to do in a story only 80 pages long.)

When I started reading, I wondered why Robbins hadn't gone the full hog and made this book 'Four Seasons' and included winter, but – in my opinion at least – I realised that these three seasons were perfect to reflect the three classes of 80s' England.

In Spring, there is hope. In summer, there is uncaring. In autumn, there is the eve; the penultimate stage before 90s post-Thatcher Capitalism comes in abundance (where even Derek Trotters yearn to be Yuppies).

But most of all, this book isn't about Capitalism or Thatcher Britain; it's just about people.

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## Casey says

The book begins with Spring. Skip is a coarse old sea captain, obsessed and desperate to relive the triumphs of his past in the fishing industry. He goes out on a foolhardy expedition that ends in a tragedy. The man, nonetheless, remains dwelling on his dreams. Kevin was my favorite character in this story. I loved his carefree attitude and the way he brushed aside his father's disapproval of him joining Skip's sea crew to find a proper job in the most humorous kind of way. He was so easy for me to like.

In Summer we have Terry, or 'the pig', an estate agent, who reminded me of an overly confident, self-absorbed maniac. He's the kind of person who has little to no consideration at all for the people around him unless they add to his own personal gain. He and his wife don't even have a foundation anymore because he's so obsessed with his job. Talk about someone who really needs to just stop and smell the roses!

Autumn opens with a student receiving a harsh rebuke from the school's headmaster whom we come to know as Paul Makepeace. Paul's story of his youth especially touched me. He was the misfit in the private school where he was relentlessly bullied about his height. He learned to accept the pain with detachment. I felt the character's emotions. He had me tearing up at some points. I was so grateful he had a friend in Christine. They were kind of oddballs. I also really liked Christine's vigorous and eccentric vicar father. After learning about his past, I began to see Paul mold from an impassive boy into a stern, though considerate father. He wanted what was best for his children, but he didn't control them and he wasn't cruel. I saw him as a very practical man. I loved the hectic interactions between him and his family, and in a way I felt like his life story could have been its own individual book.

All personal opinions aside, this book is a very well written. The author combined a group of character driven stories wonderfully. I enjoyed reading this.

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## Pete says

I found the writing in these novellas engaging and descriptive, and yet not so contrived as to leave long descriptive passages. I was never inclined to skip sections, which is my crude gauge for the readability of literary fiction.

The author's journalistic background shone through as each story included detailed subject background, some relating to the era—the 80s—but mostly as a vehicle to delve deeper into the plots and characters. I found the information interesting and informative but never overpowering.

I enjoyed each story for different reasons, and there truly is no connection between them. This made for three enjoyable reads, although I felt a bit short-changed by the ending of the second tale.

If you enjoy a writer who takes the time to word-paint the weather and the physical scenes and characters, I think you'll enjoy these stories. I did.

Disclaimer: This review was originally written for "Books and Pals" book blog. I may have received a free

review copy.

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### **Jacqueline Boss says**

These are beautifully told stories with a very strong sense of place- it is easy to get lost in them. Each story was told with a unique voice, and all were very good. It's funny that many of the other reviewers preferred the third story- though good, it was definitely my least favorite of the three. I actually enjoyed reading about the characters I didn't like in the first two stories- and in the second, I was very actively rooting against the clearly unlikable Terry. I'm not sure which story I would choose as my favorite, because I enjoyed both Summer and Spring so much.

I really want to drill home the strength of the worlds that Mike created. Reading these stories, you strongly feel like you are there with the characters, which I think is something rare. Not many stories can accomplish that so well.

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### **Warren Dean says**

As advertised, this book is comprised of three novellas set in England in the nineteen eighties. The relatively rare novella format (a book that is longer than a short story but shorter than a novel) is said to be making a comeback in the age of e-books. This is a good thing because, in the hands of a skilful author, a good novella allows for the character development expected of a novel, while retaining the immediate, punchy quality of a short story.

In each of the three seasons of the title, the author achieves this dual objective with consummate ease. In Spring, I counted no fewer than five well-developed characters; including the likeably self-effacing John, who was blown up minesweeping at the end of the second world war. In Summer, there are three; my favourite being the artfully crafted Eileen, long-suffering wife of the dreadful Terry Malcolm. (She is going to leave him, I swear.) And in Autumn there are three; four if you count the deceptively vacant Tamsin, who is quickly revealed to be someone who knows how to use her looks to get what she wants.

Although the stories themselves are unrelated to each other, a subtle theme that unites them is that of how events in the present are often shaped by events of the past. Spring is the saga of the dour Skip, who is desperate to recapture his faded glory days as an award-winning captain during the sixties. His bitter reminiscences cloud the decisions he makes, leading to unintended consequences. The culmination of Summer is a flashback to a confrontation between Terry and Roy during the seventies, shedding a different light on the relationship between them. Autumn also culminates in a flashback, this time an extended one which goes back fifty years. This was the highlight of the whole of *Three Seasons* for me and, other than disclosing that it involves an old radiogram, I won't spoil the plot with any further comment.

Also running through the novellas are themes we have largely forgotten twenty- five years later; when speeding was policed by cops in cars rather than by ubiquitous speed cameras, when vinyl records were losing the battle against compact discs, when radiograms were being converted into drinks cabinets, and when people routinely lit up cigarettes in bars, restaurants, and buses.

At least things are so much better now. All we have these days is global poverty, a pervasive culture of

entitlement, endemic corruption, hip-hop, twitter...

Hmm, anyone got a time machine handy to take me back to the eighties?

(I received a free copy of this story in exchange for a credible review.)

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### **Jason says**

Three seasons is a book containing three beautiful stories, Spring, Summer and Autumn. I think it is talking about life, Spring is about a teenager starting a career in fishing, Summer is about an arrogant middle aged man not caring about anybody but himself and Autumn is about an old professor about to enter retirement.

The research by Mike has been impeccable, the detail during Spring was fascinating, reading about the scenes on the boat transported me there, so much so that I got my first ever craving to watch "the perfect storm". I also found Summer to be interesting as the story is based in the area I live, I am pretty sure at one point one of the characters drove past where I work (Bonus points to the author there). The best parts of Autumn were the characters, very well created and how the death of the record was handled had me laughing, I remember when the CD came out I hated them too, well they got their comeuppance with the arrival of the MP3!

This is the first work I've read by Mike Robbins and I'm really looking forward to reading some more.

Blog review is here> <https://felcherman.wordpress.com/2018...>

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### **Emma Jaye says**

As several other reviewers have summarised the plots, I will not do so again. Mike Robbins expertise at fleshing out characters into believable people in so little time is quite remarkable.

I lived through the period in the south of England, albeit as a teenager, and yes the themes of drink driving being common for some people was, unfortunately, very true. The likelihood of being caught or not was indeed the deciding factor, rather than the danger of the activity. As for the Masons and funny handshakes, which are mentioned in Summer, yes they did exist in many occupations, including the police. The subject always produces an interesting expression of profound disgust from a relative who was a middle grade police officer in London during the period.

The intricate, technical details of fishing trawlers, cars and gliders in the first two stories left me cold, but the characters, and the way their memories were seamlessly linked into their current actions was masterful.

Like other readers, I found the third story the most enjoyable. Up until that point I admired the writing style and professionalism of the writer rather than enjoying the material, which left me in a quandary on how to rate this work, but the third book sealed the deal.

I'd be interested in reading more about the characters in Autumn. The aid worker, the flighty brother and his new wife, the artistic sister and how their father moved from being the family disappointment to the successful man he appears to be in the novella.

