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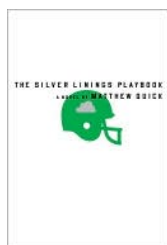
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Quick-Witted Novelist Offers Up Heavy Subjects With a Light Touch

by [Jill_Dearman](#)

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In Matthew Quick's eccentric, spirited novel [The Silver Linings Playbook](#) (Farrar, Strauss, Giroux), Pat Peoples, our hero, moves back home with his mother after a stay at a mental hospital, tries to reconcile with his estranged wife who has taken her ball and left the field, and things only get more complicated from there. And yet, Quick's story inspires as it entertains.

JD: What was the inspiration for [The Silver Linings Playbook](#)?

MQ: Fresh from college, I worked as a behavior therapist at a neural health lockdown unit, primarily with people who had suffered brain trauma or were diagnosed with severe autism. The experience had a profound influence on the way I viewed the world. When you spend eight hours a day trying to teach a teenager how to put a nut on a bolt without displaying any self-injurious behaviors, it changes your outlook on life. Getting through a day without having to physically restrain a student was to be celebrated as a minor miracle, and celebrate we did, every little small accomplishment, often with snacks. It took a lot of effort to remain optimistic in such circumstances, and I learned that my outlook really does affect my reality.

When I was teaching high school English, I wrote an essay about what was then a strained relationship with my father and our one shared interest: Philadelphia Eagles football. Sports fandom as a means of male bonding isn't necessarily breaking any new ground, but I cut a vein writing that essay and-maybe for the first time-allowed myself to be emotionally vulnerable on the page. Eventually, I got the courage up to show this essay to two good friends of mine; both happened to be my father's age. They told me I definitely had some issues to work out, and should probably devote more time to writing, because they liked my essay.

Several years later, I fictionalized and married aspects of these two life experiences. TSLP was born.

JD: Gotta ask: What's it been like to have the David O. Russell turn your book into a screenplay? Any insight for authors whose books may someday become films?

MQ: I think most novelists play [Let's Pretend My Book Will Be Made Into A Movie](#). We cast the roles over drinks with friends. We talk about who should direct. In all honesty, my top three fantasy directors for TSLP were: Wes Anderson, Hal Ashby (if he were still with us), and David O. Russell. So when I found out that D.O.R. was actually involved, it was quite a moment for me. I'm a huge David O. Russell fan. Love his work. Love it. It's smart, funny, daring, quirky, and chewy too. Exactly what I try to do with my own work. D.O.R. is a

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storytelling hero of mine.

When I got the call, I didn't even know TSLP was being shopped around Hollywood. My agent told me that Sydney Pollack and Anthony Minghella were producing. To hear names like that connected to your career is quite a thing, especially when you have been living with your in-laws and writing in their unfinished basement for three years. I immediately asked if I could write the adaptation, and I think my agent might have suppressed a laugh. When he told me that D.O.R. was writing the screenplay, I felt a little silly for having asked that one.

Sadly, Pollack and Minghella died last year. And I've learned that the road to Hollywood can be very long for novelists-even after your book has been optioned.

When I read the screenplay I felt so relieved because I really love it. But it was sort of surreal to see a three-hundred-page novel reduced to one hundred pages of dialogue. I imagine it's like a makeover specialist taking your daughter to the mall and returning her with a radically different hairstyle, heavy makeup, and clothes you have never seen before. It's still your daughter, but...

The movie will not be the book; it will be a different entity. It's best to be okay with that, I think, and simply enjoy the ride. I realize that I'm very fortunate. I'm hearing rumors about casting that make me think I'm really good at the Let's-Cast-The-Movie-Of-My-Book game. Fingers crossed.

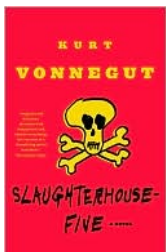
JD: What is your writing practice like? When you are stuck in the middle of a book and don't know which direction to go in, how do you muddle through?

MQ: I wrote TSLP when I was an MFA student at Goddard. Back then I used to work on multiple projects and often for twelve to fourteen hours a day. So when I got stuck, I would just switch to another project. I had quit my tenured position as a high school English teacher, sold my house, and was living with my generous in-laws. So I felt an extraordinary amount of internal pressure to "make it" as a fiction writer. I was submitting a lot of short pieces and publishing a few. I produced a large amount of work. TSLP was actually my side project-something I was doing just for fun whenever my MFA work stalled. It definitely was a productive time for me, but I'm not sure my process back then was healthy or sustainable.

These days, I take a lot more time to think and let ideas percolate. So when I have to pause, I don't necessarily see it as being "stuck." I tell myself it's like watching a sunrise. Was it Emerson or Thoreau who said, "You can't rush a sunrise," or did I just make that up? Regardless, I say that little mantra to myself a lot. Let the ideas rise and enjoy the wait. (Not helpful if you are on deadline, I know.) I run a lot and take long walks. I have come to believe that when you think like a novelist, you are always working. Always. Every life experience is subconsciously put into some sort of narrative arc. I think in story arcs constantly.

I still do sit down every day and write. But I'm a lot more forgiving lately if I don't end the day with pages and pages of good work.

JD: Who have been your greatest influences as a writer?



MQ: Kurt Vonnegut is probably my number one writing hero. I really admire how K.V. always wrote about big important ideas, but in a deceptively simple and extremely entertaining manner. Vonnegut was a very smart man, but his works are accessible to and beloved by teenagers of all intellectual aptitudes. You never get the sense that K.V. used words to sound more important than everyone else. He was always playful, like his hero Mark Twain. Whenever you think Vonnegut might get too serious, he throws in a joke. I've heard Vonnegut's work called a literary gateway drug, because he ropes in people who usually don't read novels. I love that. He never took himself too seriously. And yet, he took the craft seriously, and what Vonnegut stood for was humane and beautiful and

important.

I did my MFA critical thesis on Nobel-Prize-winner Gao Xingjian's SOUL MOUNTAIN and his belief that we need "cold literature," meaning writing that is "a purely spiritual activity beyond the gratification of material desires," * and that writers shouldn't yield to politics, marketing trends, or what is "hot." SOUL MOUNTAIN is almost five hundred pages long; is written in first, second, and third person; is full of powerful and challenging philosophical insights; and is unquestionably one of my favorite books. Reading it was a revolutionary and maybe even sacred experience for me.

No matter how long I practice the craft, I will never be able to write as well as Gao Xingjian. While I was writing my critical thesis, I decided that if I wanted to be a career novelist here in modern America, where people are proclaiming the novel to be a dying art form, regardless

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of how I felt about it, I needed to be aware of what was and is "hot." That may be a sad reality, but it's a reality nonetheless. It was at this point that I started taking the book business more seriously and learning about what happens in New York. Shortly after, I landed an agent and my career began.

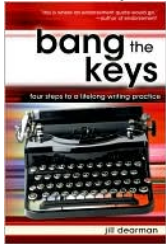
JD: What can you tell us about your next book?

MQ: My next book is a Young Adult novel called SORTA LIKE A ROCK STAR (Little, Brown & Co, May 2010). It's about a homeless seventeen-year-old young woman who does a lot of unusual community service, partially because she's goodhearted and partially because she thinks it will improve her chances of landing a much needed college scholarship. Because she's crafty, no one at her suburban high school knows she illegally lives on a bus with her alcoholic mother. The irony is that she is constantly helping others when she herself needs help. A horrible tragedy befalls Amber, and the roles are suddenly reversed, but will she be able to handle that?

My editor, Alvina Ling, recently posted this on her blog: "When I first read [Sorta Like A Rock Star], I was on the subway, and I was right in the middle of a very tragic, heartbreaking scene that resulted in snot and tears running down my face-pretty embarrassing. But people who know me know that I'm a sucker for books that make me cry, and this was love at first sight for me. This book is Juno meets Stargirl-Juno for its fresh, spunky voice, and Stargirl because of its message of optimism and hope."

We're very excited about this one.

JD: And we are too! Thanks to Matthew for the interview, and for more writerly talk and tips check out my new book



Bang the Keys Ban or stop by the site <http://www.bangthekeys.com> And for more on Matthew: <http://matthewmquick.com>. Keep the faith!

* Quote from Gao Xingjian's Nobel Lecture 'The Case for Literature'

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by [MarvelousMarcia](#) on 10-14-2009 03:44 PM

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I loved this book. Its one of those books that has you laughing and crying at the same time, and flying through a pages. A fast and satisfying read and I think it'll make a great movie. I can't wait for the movie and for this author's followup book for young adults. Based on the above conversation matthew Quick sounds like a cool guy in addition to wonderful writer.

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by [heather_leah](#) on 10-14-2009 03:57 PM

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Matthew Quick writes with poise, candor and grace. His book had me laughing and crying, and sometimes both at the same time. I am no football fan, but I am a fan of great literary fiction, and this book brought me into a world I would have otherwise never have entered. It actually brought me closer to my father's world. It is a great book that can allow someone to explore and straddle different worlds. It truly is a universal read that speaks to men and women and people of all different cultures, and I think it's because it speaks to and of the human condition. When you pick this book up, you will not be able to put it down, and the characters will stay with you. You won't be sorry.

I cannot wait to read Sort of Like a Rockstar! Whatever Matthew Quick writes, I will definitely read!

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by [BDuffy](#) on 10-14-2009 05:01 PM

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I've read and re-read The Silver Linings Playbook quite a few times. With each read, I stumble upon a new idea that is so deceptively simple, I almost zoom right past it's impressive depth. It is no wonder Q's hero is Vonnegut. A greater writer allows his/her readers the space to develop their own concusions and thoughts, and Q does just this.

This book will inspire laughter and tears, and will make you want to call your best friend. A true must-read. I look forward to reading Sorta Like A Rockstar!

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