

The shock of the fall

I should say that I am not a nice person. Sometimes I try to be, but often I'm not. So when it was my turn to cover my eyes and count to a hundred – I cheated.

I stood at the spot where you had to stand when it was your turn to count, which was beside the recycling bins, next to the shop selling disposable barbecues and spare tent pegs. And near to there is a small patch of overgrown grass, tucked away behind a water tap.

Except I don't remember standing there. Not really. You don't always remember the details like that, do you? You don't remember if you were beside the recycling bins, or further up the path near to the shower blocks, and whether actually the water tap is up there?

I can't now hear the manic cry of seagulls, or taste the salt in the air. I don't feel the heat of the afternoon sun making me sweat beneath a clean white dressing on my knee, or the itching of suncream in the cracks of my scabs. I can't make myself relive the vague sensation of having been abandoned. And neither – for what it's worth – do I actually remember deciding to cheat, and open my eyes.

'I don't know Mum. Sorry about the other day. Sorry about everything.'

'It's forgotten sweetheart, really.'

'Promise?'

'I promise. Let's go and fly that kite, shall we?'

'I don't feel like it.'

'You're not watching telly, Matt.'

'I'm in the middle of a game of hide-and-seek.'

'You're hiding?'

'No. I'm seeking. I should do that really.'

But the other children had got bored of waiting to be found, and had broken off into smaller groups, and other games. I didn't feel like playing anyway. So I wandered around for a bit, and I found myself back at the place where the girl had been. Only she wasn't there any more. There was just the small mound of earth, now carefully decorated with a few picked buttercups and daisies, and – to mark the spot – two sticks, placed neatly in a cross.

I felt very sad. And I feel a bit sad even thinking about it. Anyway, I have to go. Jeanette from Art Group's doing her nervous bird impression; fluttering around at the top of the corridor, trying to catch my attention.

That paper-mache won't make itself.

I have to go.



I'VE GIVEN YOU THE GUIDED TOUR.

You saw it in the corner, and stretching across the far wall. Were you too polite to say anything, to ask any questions? The sprawling tubes and dirt-encrusted jars.

Strange, isn't it?

I didn't know what it was at first because it wasn't me drawing the designs. He was moving my hand, scratching my pen across the sketch pads and the bedroom wall.

His interstellar dust.

His atoms.

I would wake up in my living room, still wearing my work clothes from the night before; a pair of grey trousers and a white nursing tunic, creased and sweaty. My mouth would be dry, my neck and shoulders aching. All around me would be new materials. I couldn't think where they came from. It was the same every day, more stuff appearing.

Simon used to stay up half an hour later than me, because he was the eldest. I'd brush my teeth and be tucked into bed, but when I was certain Mum had gone downstairs, I would follow.

On the fourth stair from the top, with your forehead pressed against the banisters, you can spy through a glass panel over the living-room door and see most of the sofa, half the coffee table, and a corner of the fireplace. I would watch until the darkness of the hall closed around the glow from the living room, and the softness of their voices blended with the sound of my own breathing, so that sometimes I wouldn't even feel myself being lifted, or hear Mum calling me her little rascal. I'd simply wake up the next morning, in the warm comfort of my own bed.

One night Simon was practising his reading. It wasn't so long before that this had been a shared ritual, the two of us taking turns to read aloud from the same book.

'It's my page, Matthew. Not yours.'

'I'm only trying to help.'

'I can do it by myself.'

He couldn't. Not so well. So he practised with Mum after I went to bed, and I'd watch her patiently teach him the same words night after night; she couldn't have loved him more. Dad would be relegated to the far end of the sofa where I couldn't see him properly, only his legs stretched out in front, and a socked foot resting on the coffee table.

That's how it was as Simon read his picture book of *The Lion King*.

Drawing was a way to be somewhere else.



Mum brought me a new sketch pad onto the ward, and the right type of pencils and ink pens. So when I wasn't smoking or trying to sleep, I did sketches from my imagination.

I'm an okay artist. Mum thinks I'm better than I am. At home she has a drawer full of my pictures and stories, dating way back from when I was little.

For her fiftieth birthday I wanted to give her something special. I was fifteen and knew I wasn't the easiest teenager to live with. I wanted to let her know that I loved her, and I still cared. I'd decided to try a portrait of her, but when I ran it past Dad he said, 'Don't you think she'd prefer one of the family?' I knew he was right, so I set about doing that instead. I decided to draw us on the couch together, but I wanted it to be a surprise, so what I did was come into the living room whenever she was watching TV or reading or whatever, and I'd make secret notes and partial sketches to help me remember details, like the way she holds her neck slightly to the side, and how she crosses her legs, with one foot wrapped right behind the other ankle.

SCHIZOPHRENIA n. a severe mental disorder characterized by a disintegration in the process of thinking, of contact with reality, and of emotional responsiveness.

Etymology: From the Greek *Skhizein* ('to split') and *Phren* ('mind').

When I look at the photograph of Simon and me at Bristol Zoo, with our faces painted like tigers, I look at myself, but do not see myself.

I know that he is me because I am told he is me, but I do not remember turning six years old, going to Bristol Zoo, having my face painted like a tiger, and smiling into the lens of a camera. I do not remember my brother's face pressed against my face, the black stripes smudging into the orange on our cheeks.

If I look closely I can see we have the same colour eyes, not me and Simon, but me and the boy who is also me, the boy who I can no longer recognize, with whom I no longer share a single thought, worry, or hope.

We are the same person, all that separates us is the passing of time. There is an unbreakable thread connecting us, but I do not know him any more.



The shock of the fall - teacher's notes

I should say that I am not a nice person. Sometimes I try to be, but often I'm not. **So when it was my turn to cover my eyes and count to a hundred – I cheated.**

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Except I don't remember standing there. Not really. You don't always remember the details like that, do you? You don't remember if you were beside the recycling bins, or further up the path near to the shower blocks, and whether actually the water tap is up there?

I can't now hear the manic cry of seagulls, or taste the salt in the air. I don't feel the heat of the afternoon sun making me sweat beneath a clean white dressing on my knee, or the itching of suncream in the cracks of my scabs. I can't make myself relive the vague sensation of having been abandoned. And neither – for what it's worth – do I actually remember deciding to cheat, and open my eyes.

Teacher's notes:

Hints which can help to divide the excerpts to two categories.

1. The main character is playing hide and seek. **(So when it was my turn to cover my eyes and count to a hundred – I cheated.**

I stood at the spot where you had to stand when it was your turn to count,...)

He was cheating during the game.

'I don't know Mum. Sorry about the other day. Sorry about everything.'

'It's forgotten sweetheart, really.'

'Promise?'

'I promise. Let's go and fly that kite, shall we?'

'I don't feel like it.'

'You're not watching telly, **Matt.**'

'I'm in the middle of a game of hide-and-seek.'

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But the other children had got bored of waiting to be found, and had broken off into smaller groups, and other games. I didn't feel like playing anyway. So I wandered around for a bit, and I found myself back at the place where the girl had been. Only she wasn't there any more. There was just the small mound of earth, now carefully decorated with a few picked buttercups and daisies, and – to mark the spot – two sticks, placed neatly in a cross.

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That paper-mache won't make itself.

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Teacher's notes:

Hints which can help to divide the excerpts to two categories.

1. The main character is playing hide and seek. (**'I'm in the middle of a game of hide-and-seek.'**)
2. There is a character called Matt. He is the narrator of the story.
3. He is attending an Art group. It means draws or paints.

I've given you the guided tour. You saw it in the corner, and stretching across the far wall. Were you too polite to say anything, to ask any questions? The sprawling tubes and dirt-encrusted jars.

Strange, isn't it?

I didn't know what it was at first because it wasn't me drawing the designs. He was moving my hand, scratching my pen across the sketch pads and the bedroom wall.

His interstellar dust.

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I would wake up in my living room, still wearing my work clothes from the night before; a pair of grey trousers and a white nursing tunic, creased and sweaty. My mouth would be dry, my neck and shoulders aching. All around me would be new materials. I couldn't think where they came from. It was the same every day, more stuff appearing.

Teacher's notes:

Hints which can help to divide the excerpts to two categories.



1. He draws.

2. The main character has a split personality. There is a person who was moving his hand and it was not him at all. (**I didn't know what it was at first because it wasn't me drawing the designs. He was moving my hand, scratching my pen across the sketch pads and the bedroom wall.**)

Simon used to stay up half an hour later than me, because he was the eldest. I'd brush my teeth and be tucked into bed, but when I was certain Mum had gone downstairs, I would follow.

On the fourth stair from the top, with your forehead pressed against the banisters, you can spy through a glass panel over the living-room door and see most of the sofa, half the coffee table, and a corner of the fireplace. I would watch until the darkness of the hall closed around the glow from the living room, and the softness of their voices blended with the sound of my own breathing, so that sometimes I wouldn't even feel myself being lifted, or hear Mum calling me her little rascal. I'd simply wake up the next morning, in the warm comfort of my own bed.

One night **Simon** was practising his reading. It wasn't so long before that this had been a shared ritual, the two of us taking turns to read aloud from the same book.

'It's my page, **Matthew**. Not yours.'

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He couldn't. Not so well. So he practised with Mum after I went to bed, and I'd watch her patiently teach him the same words night after night; she couldn't have loved him more. Dad would be relegated to the far end of the sofa where I couldn't see him properly, only his legs stretched out in front, and a socked foot resting on the coffee table.

That's how it was as Simon read his picture book of The Lion King.

Teacher's notes:

Hints which can help to divide the excerpts to two categories.

1. The main character is Matthew. He is the narrator of the story. Matthew is the short form of Matt.
2. Simon is the narrator's elder brother.

Drawing was a way to be somewhere else.



Mum brought me a new sketch pad onto the ward, and the right type of pencils and ink pens. So when I wasn't smoking or trying to sleep, I did sketches from my imagination.

I'm an okay artist. Mum thinks I'm better than I am. At home she has a drawer full of my pictures and stories, dating way back from when I was little.

For her fiftieth birthday I wanted to give her something special. I was fifteen and knew I wasn't the easiest teenager to live with. I wanted to let her know that I loved her, and I still cared. I'd decided to try a portrait of her, but when I ran it past Dad he said, 'Don't you think she'd prefer one of the family?' I knew he was right, so I set about doing that instead. I decided to draw us on the couch together, but I wanted it to be a surprise, so what I did was come into the living room whenever she was watching TV or reading or whatever, and I'd make secret notes and partial sketches to help me remember details, like the way she holds her neck slightly to the side, and how she crosses her legs, with one foot wrapped right behind the other ankle.

Teacher's notes:

Hints which can help to divide the excerpts to two categories.

1. The main character draws. It is his pastime. In the previous excerpt it was mentioned that he goes to an Art group.

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I know that he is me because I am told he is me, but I do not remember turning six years old, going to Bristol Zoo, having my face painted like a tiger, and smiling into the lens of a camera. I do not remember my brother's face pressed against my face, the black stripes smudging into the orange on our cheeks.

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Teacher's notes:

Hints which can help to divide the excerpts to two categories.

1. Simon is the main character's elder brother.
2. It is again mentioned that he has a split personality. And there is a boy who is not him at all.



The shock of the fall - worksheet_teacher's notes

Appendix 2

Worksheet

1. According to the excerpts, choose from the following features and traits those ones which describe the main characters, Charlie and Matt, the best.

introverted – communicative – creative - superficial - contemplative – cheerful – likes his close relatives – friendly – sociable – solitary – perceptive – indifferent – sensitive

Charlie	Matthew

2. Make a list of other features and traits of the main characters which you revealed while reading the excerpts:

.....

.....

.....

.....

3. Certainly, you have recognised that Charlie analysis each situations in details. Find a technical term which describes this feature. You can help yourself with a dictionary.

The feature:

The used dictionary:

4. a) After reading the excerpts you could notice that both characters were feeling **sad** for some reasons.

Analyse the reasons why were they feeling sad.

- b) Create an abstract noun from the adverb sadly and make a list of synonyms of this word which would express the stated emotion of the characters. You can help yourself with a dictionary.

.....

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-
-
5. Think and find out which features and traits had these main characters in common and what the difference was between them.

Features in common	Differences between the characters

- c) From the following idioms chose those ones which characterize one of the characters. Explain the idioms. You can help yourself with a dictionary.

His heart sinks	His face falls
Take the rough with the smooth	With a sinking heart
Give somebody the elbow	A social butterfly
Have your head in the clouds	A dark horse



The shock of the fall - worksheet_teacher's notes

Appendix 2

Worksheet

6. According to the excerpts, choose from the following features and traits those ones which describe the main characters, Charlie and Matt, the best.

introverted – communicative – creative - superficial - contemplative – cheerful – likes his close relatives – friendly – sociable – solitary – perceptive – indifferent – sensitive

Charlie	Matthew
Introverted, contemplative, cheerful, communicative, likes his close relatives, friendly, sociable, perceptive, sensitive	Introverted, creative, contemplative, likes his close relatives, solitary, perceptive, sensitive

7. Make a list of other features and traits of the main characters which you revealed while reading the excerpts:

.....**Students' answers**

.....

.....

.....

8. Certainly, you have recognised that Charlie analysis each situations in details. Find a technical term which describes this feature. You can help yourself with a dictionary.

The feature: **rumination (the act of thinking carefully and for a long period about something), chew your cud (to think slowly and carefully about something)**

The used dictionary: **dictionary.cambridge.org**

9. a) After reading the excerpts you could notice that both characters were feeling **sad** for some reasons.
Analyse the reasons why were they feeling sad.
- d) Create an abstract noun from the adverb sadly and make a list of synonyms of this word which would express the stated emotion of the characters. You can help yourself with a dictionary.



.....
Students' answers.....

Sadness : dejection, melancholy, depression, despondency, blues, sorrow, grief

10. Think and find out which features and traits had these main characters in common and what the difference was between them.

Features in common	Differences between the characters
Students' answers	Students' answers

e) From the following idioms chose those ones which characterize one of the characters. Explain the idioms. You can help yourself with a dictionary.

His heart sinks (you suddenly feel sad or depressed about something) : **Charlie (his aunt's death), Matt (he doesn't know who is this person inside him)**

With a sinking heart (with a feeling of sadness or fear): **Charlie, Matt**

Take the rough with the smooth (accept the unpleasant part of something) : **Matt**

His face falls (he looks suddenly disappointed or upset): **Charlie**

Give somebody the elbow (to tell somebody that you no longer want to have a relationship with them): **None of them**

A social butterfly (A social butterfly is an extroverted person who loves to socialize. Like a butterfly goes quickly from flower to flower, a "social butterfly" often goes around a room having conversations with many people.): **None of them. Charlie was more sociable, had some friends. Matt didn't have any.**

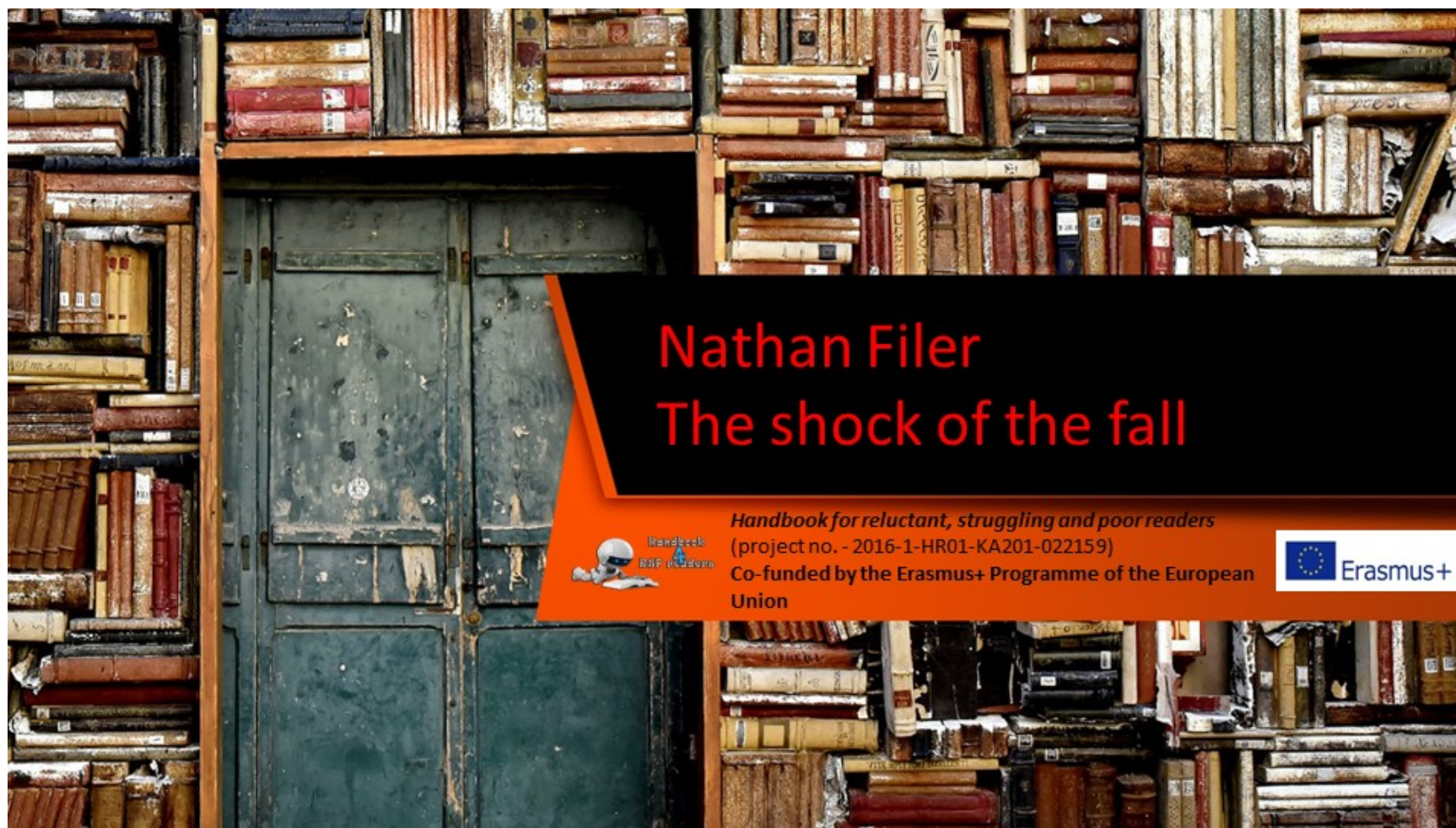
Have your head in the clouds – (If you have your head in the clouds, you are so absorbed by your thoughts that you are not paying attention to what is happening around you.) : **Matt (lost in his world)**


A dark horse (If you refer to a person as a "dark horse", you mean that they are secretive, or that little is known about them.) **Matt: didn't speak about his second personality**



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Handbook for reluctant, struggling and
poor readers


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Plot

- Matthew Homes
- life in a psychiatric asylum
- his brother died in an accident
- schizophrenic; saw his brother in everything
- he got to leave the asylum
- still saw his brother, had to take shots
- memorial for his brother



*"I am myself, the same self
I have always been, the one
person I can never escape."*



Nathan Filer

COSTA Book of the Year
2013

'Heartrending' SJ Watson, author of Before I Go to Sleep

THE SHOCK of the FALL

Handbook for reluctant, struggling and poor readers
(project no. - 2016-1-HR01-KA201-022159)
Co-funded by the Erasmus+ Programme of the European
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Setting

- Bristol
- Modern day England



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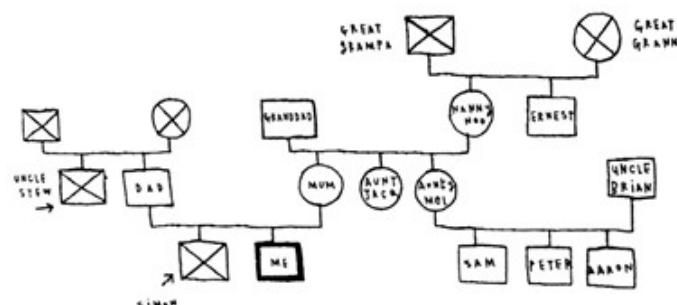


Characters

- Matthew Homes
- Simon Homes
- Mum & Dad
- Jacob Greening
- Nanny Noo
- Denise Lovell
- Annabelle

This is called a genogram.

It's a family tree that doctors draw. It's to help them see which branches bear the rotten fruit.





Quotes

- “I can only describe reality as I know it. I'm doing my best, and promise to keep trying. Shake on it.”
 - “Some things in life are exactly as we imagine.”
- “I don't want the world to keep turning without me on it.”
- “It doesn't need to be perfect,’ she said at last. ‘It’s already wonderful.”





Theme

How does someone with a mental illness deal with a
loss?

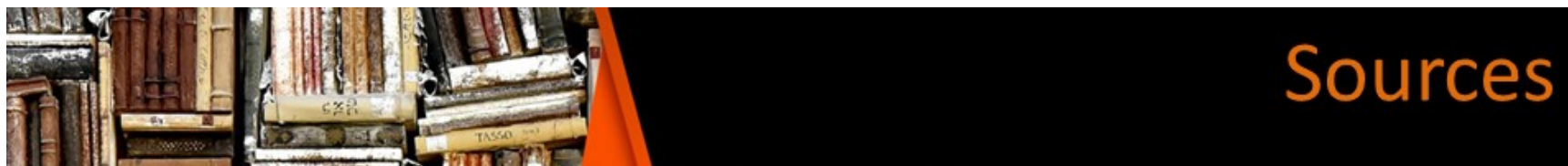




Background

- Nathan Filer was born in Bristol in 1980
- His debut novel *The Shock of the Fall* – which describes the life of a young man with schizophrenia – was published in 2013 to wide critical acclaim.
- The Shock of the Fall won many awards





- <http://nathanfiler.co.uk/>
- <https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/16120760-the-shock-of-the-fall>
- <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2014/jan/18/shock-fall-nathan-filer-review>
- https://www.goodreads.com/author/quotes/6569002.Nathan_Filer?page=2

