



The Bonfire of the Vanities

By Tom Wolfe

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Tom Wolfe's modern American satire tells the story of Sherman McCoy, a Wall Street "Master of the Universe" who has it all — a Park Avenue apartment, a job that brings wealth, power and prestige, a beautiful wife, an even more beautiful mistress.

Suddenly, one wrong turn makes it all go wrong, and Sherman spirals downward in a sudden fall from grace that sucks him into the ravenous heart of a New York City gone mad during the go-go, racially turbulent, socially hilarious 1980s.

From the Trade Paperback edition.

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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

After Tom Wolfe defined the '60s in *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test* and *Radical Chic and Mau-Mauing the Flak Catchers* and the cultural U-turn at the turn of the '80s in *The Right Stuff*, nobody thought he could ever top himself again. In 1987, when *The Bonfire of the Vanities* arrived, the literati called Wolfe an "aging enfant terrible."

He wasn't aging; he was growing up. *Bonfire's* pyrotechnic satire of 1980s New York wasn't just Wolfe's best book, it was the best bestselling fiction debut of the decade, a miraculously realistic study of an unbelievably status-mad society, from the fiery combatants of the South Bronx to the bubbling scum at the top of Wall Street. Sherman McCoy, a farcically arrogant investment banker (dubbed a "Master of the Universe," Wolfe's brilliant metaphorical co-opting of a then-important toy for boys), hits a black guy in the Bronx with his Mercedes and runs--right into a nightmare peopled by vicious mistresses, thin wives like "social x-rays," slime-bag politicians, tabloid hacks, and Dantesque denizens of the "justice" system. If the Coen and Marx brothers together dramatized *The Great Gatsby*, Wolfe's *Bonfire* would probably be funnier. Many think his second novel, *A Man in Full*, is deeper, but *Bonfire* will never die down.

You might find it interesting to compare the film *The Bonfire of the Vanities*, a fascinating calamity perpetrated by the geniuses Brian De Palma and Tom Hanks, with *The Right Stuff*, one of the very best films of the '80s. --Tim Appelo

From Publishers Weekly

In his spellbinding first novel, Wolfe proves that he has the right stuff to write propulsively engrossing fiction. Both his cynical irony and sense of the ridiculous are perfectly suited to his subject: the roiling, corrupt, savage, ethnic melting pot that is New York City. Ranging from the rarefied atmosphere of Park Avenue to the dingy courtrooms of the Bronx, this is a totally credible tale of how the communities uneasily coexist and what happens when they collide. On a clandestine date with his mistress one night, top Wall Street investment banker and snobbish WASP Sherman McCoy misses his turn on the thruway and gets lost in the South Bronx; his Mercedes hits and seriously injures a young black man. The incident is inflated by a manipulative black leader, a district attorney seeking reelection and a sleazy tabloid reporter into a full-blown scandal, a political football and a hokey morality play. Wolfe adroitly swings his focus from one to another of the people involved: the protagonist McCoy; Kramer, the assistant D.A.; two detectives one Irish, the other Jewish; a slimy, alcoholic British journalist; an outraged judge, etc. He has an infallible, mocking ear for New York voices, rendering with equal precision the defense lawyer's "gedoutdahere," the deliberate bad grammar ("that don't help matters") of the wily "reverend" and the clenched-teeth WASP locution ("howjado"). His reporter's eye has seized every gritty detail of the criminal justice system, and he is also acute in rendering the hierarchy at a society party. He convincingly equates the jungles of Wall Street and the Bronx: in both places men casually use the same four-letter expletives and, no matter what their standing on the social ladder, find that power kindles their lust for nubile young women. Erupting from the first line with noise, color, tension and immediacy, this immensely entertaining novel accurately mirrors a system that has broken down: from the social code of basic good manners to the fair practices of the law. It is safe to predict that the book will stand as a brilliant evocation of New York's class, racial and political structure in the 1980s. 200,000 first printing; \$200,000 ad/promo; Literary Guild dual main selection; author tour. Copyright 1987 Reed Business Information, Inc.

From Library Journal

Insulation is the key to living in New York, according to millionaire bond salesman Sherman McCoy insulation from "them." So when he makes a wrong turn one night and finds himself driving through the South Bronx in his Mercedes, he panics. In his haste to get back to Manhattan he sideswipes a pedestrian; made tabloid news by a sleazy reporter, the incident has every politician in town crying for McCoy's blood. As some critics have long maintained, Wolfe's genius may be better suited to fiction than to journalism; his novel has all the knowledge, insight, and wit of earlier works but tones down the notorious stylistic excesses. The result is not just Wolfe's most successful book to date but one of the most impressive novels of the decade. Edward B. St. John, Loyola Law Sch. Lib., Los Angeles
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Users Review

From reader reviews:

Stephan Stephens:

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Ebony Thornton:

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