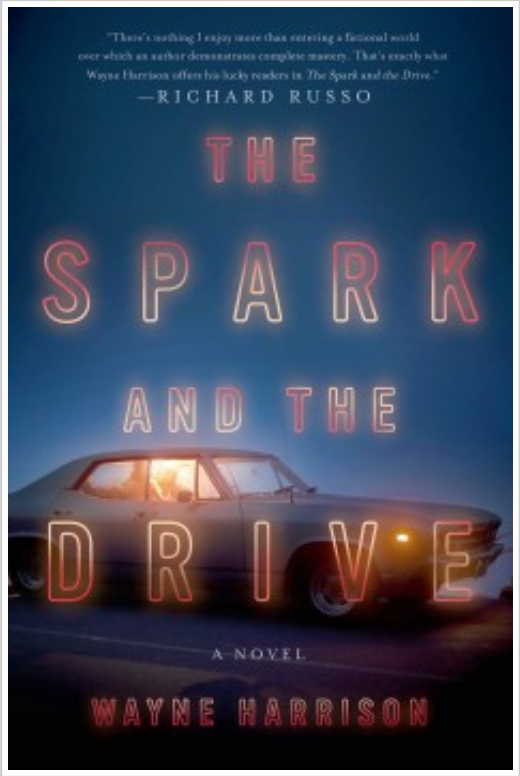


# The Spark and the Drive

by Wayne Harrison

**Price: $25.99**(Hardcover)
Published: July 15, 2014

Rating: 0.0/5 (0 votes cast)

**From the Publisher:**
***By an award-winning writer of short fiction, a devastatingly powerful debut novel of hero-worship, first love, and betrayal***

Justin Bailey is seventeen when he arrives at the shop of legendary muscle car mechanic Nick Campbell. Anguished and out of place among the students at his rural Connecticut high school, Justin finds in Nick, his captivating wife Mary Ann, and their world of miraculous machines the sense of family he has struggled to find at home.

But when Nick and Mary Ann's lives are struck by tragedy, Justin's own world is upended. Suddenly Nick, once celebrated for his mechanical genius, has lost his touch. Mary Ann, once tender and compassionate to her husband, has turned distant. As Justin tries to support his suffering mentor, he finds himself drawn toward the man's grieving wife. Torn apart by feelings...

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## What We Say

With admiring quotes from the likes of Richard Russo and Ann Packer, this novel is positioned as fiction of the first order. But it could easily be classified as young adult. Not that readers of any age care about such distinctions any more -- a good book is a good book. But "The Spark and the Drive" has all the conventions and a whole lot of hot button issues rolled up in one. You've got a 17 year old protagonist named Justin Bailey, a "suddenly" gay dad who has left his mom (but still tries to be a part of his son's life), a mother struggling with alcoholism and depression over her marriage, and a first job at a car mechanic's shop that gives our hero a whole new bunch of things to grapple with, like a father figure who's trying to figure things out himself, mortality, a sexy boss's wife and those engines. Now I can't change a lightbulb without consulting a manual, but "The Spark And The Drive" created an aura of mystery and glamour around car engines and the wizards who mastered their intricacies. But it's the 1980s and those brute engines are becoming a thing of the past. Instead of guru-like insights, the new wave of cars coming on the market feature on-board computers. Mechanics plug in a few wires and -- bing! -- get a code telling them what's wrong. Where's the beauty in that? Not a lot, so Justin remains true to his boss, even as he sees things changing. What author Wayne Harrison captures so well is the young adult in Justin, the very identity that has given its name to a genre, or rather to a marketing tool. Justin really IS a young adult, a young man who isn't quite a kid anymore and knows right from wrong and is old enough to make his own decisions and figure out who he is. But let's face, he's still kind of a kid and in over his head awfully quick. But he knows he's in over his head and isn't that the natural state of things for most adults? It's only kids and fools who think they have everything figured out and under control all the time. This is an assured, sensitive and very promising debut novel and almost makes me wish I could strip an engine and build it up again. Almost. -- Michael Giltz

Less

## What Others Say

"An engaging debut. Like Richard Russo, Philipp Meyer, and Mark Slouka, Harrison understands the rusting body of American labor. These are grease-smeared pages, full of the sounds of revving motors and the anxieties of narrowly educated men in a fading field."
***—Washingtonpost.com***
"There's nothing I enjoy more than entering a fictional world over which an author demonstrates