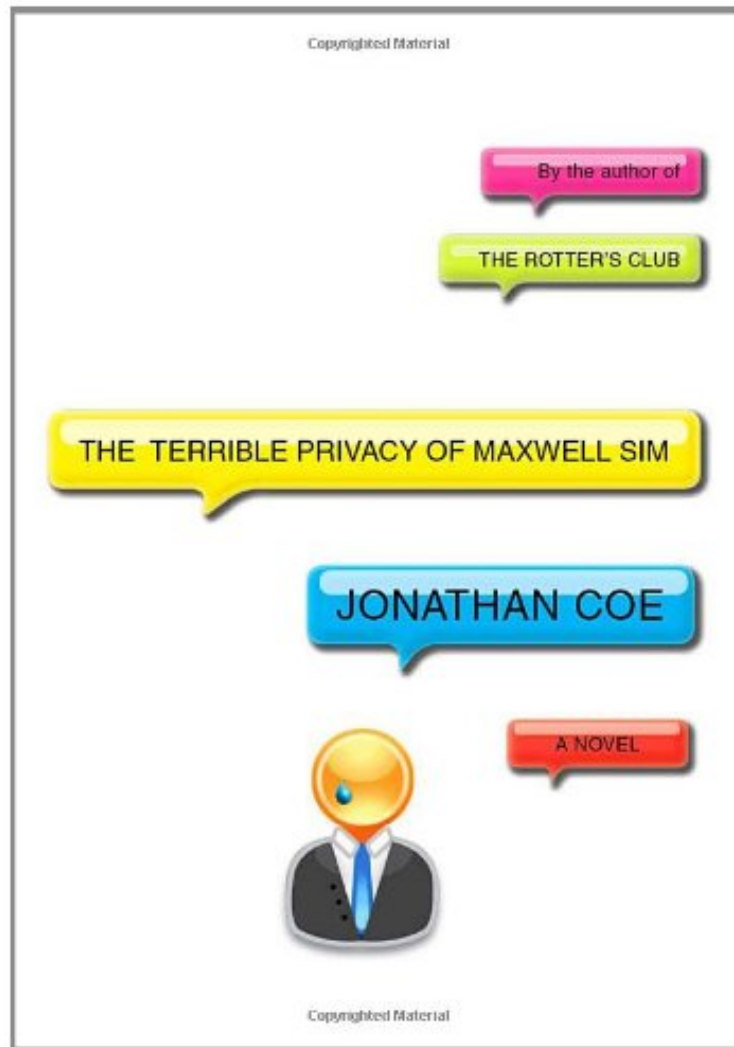


[Download] The Terrible Privacy of Maxwell Sim

The Terrible Privacy of Maxwell Sim

Jonathan Coe

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Jonathan Coe : The Terrible Privacy of Maxwell Sim before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Terrible Privacy of Maxwell Sim:

3 of 3 people found the following review helpful. Excellent up to the penultimate chapterBy AcornMaxwell Sim is forty-eight, an only child and a lonely man. His mother died years ago, his introspective and distant father went off to Australia, and six months ago his wife Caroline and daughter Lucy upped and left. Since Catherine's departure he has been severely depressed and unable to work. When things look bleakest, an old friend offers Maxwell an opportunity at a toothbrush manufacturing company. All he has to do is drive to the Shetland Islands, do some filming and get publicity for a new line of products. It should be the start of a recovery, but for Maxwell Sim it is the beginning of a descent into a private purgatory.Caroline bought Maxwell a ticket to Australia so that he could attempt some

reconciliation with his father. It didn't go well, but the sight of a Chinese woman and her daughter in a restaurant, and the intimacy of their company, inspires him. He returns to England and on the way meets a young woman named Poppy who is kind, even if he doesn't realise that at the time. Through Poppy, Maxwell becomes familiar with the story of Donald Crowhurst, a man who tried to fake a round-the-world sailing trip, went mad, then disappeared at sea. As Maxwell heads off for the Shetlands, he increasingly sees his trip as a reflection of, and then indistinguishable from, the voyage of Crowhurst. On his journey he visits Caroline, now more attractive and happy in her new life. He has an unsatisfactory dinner with Lucy, collects a folder of poems and a short story from his father's flat near Birmingham and looks up an old school friend in Edinburgh. These meetings, and the reading that he does along the way, radically re-write the history of his childhood and the relationship of his parents, and eventually bring him face to face with some cold, ugly truths about his own character. There are some deliciously comic moments in this novel, some that come up on you by stealth, some based on coincidence, and others simply knockabout. Coe manages Maxwell's descent into madness with a sure hand. Indeed, at times I could sense Coe enjoying himself as he was banging out the words. Maxwell Sim is a very sad character, but one for whom we cannot help but have a deep sympathy. There is also some biting social criticism - a common element in Coe's work. Often in passing detail or oblique comment, the lunacy of modern Britain is exposed. It is a country dominated by snake oil salesmen in business, politics and culture. An old woman who lives opposite Maxwell's father's flat is driven to tears by the degradation she sees around her. Old values of craftsmanship, sociability, community and self-respect have been corrupted by money and greed, but at the same time the lowest common denominator proves far too seductive. Maxwell himself cannot live without shopping malls, soulless franchises and fast food on the motorway services. Jonathan Coe is a fine satirist and a trenchant critic of contemporary life. He has a keen ear for the drivel that passes as conversation in modern society and a sharp eye for the bleakness of the rich societies in which we live. However, the final chapter of this book sparked two contradictory sets of emotions. On the one hand I was disappointed at the crudely engineered ending that uses the device of the author intervening in the story. It's a tired old trick, and it was ironic to find it in this novel given that I had previously compared Philip Hensher unfavourably with Jonathan Coe partly because Hensher employed the same technique. After a great and giddy ride on Maxwell's journey, the final chapter gave the impression that Coe had run out of steam and out of ideas in terms of the plot. I would love to think that he was being playful and giving the reader a cheap and tawdry ending as a final comment on modern life, but if I am being honest with myself, that just won't wash. On the other hand, the sketches of ideas in the final chapter provide a fascinating insight into the creative process. The chapter reinforces the idea that creativity is not so much inventing something totally new, but rather taking the strands from the world around you and weaving them together in a way that is very different to what has gone before. It is the stuff of paradigm shifts in science and technology as much as the foundation of great works of art. So what to do? If you just want to read a great novel, don't read the final chapter. If you enjoy stories and are inured to disappointment in life, continue on. And if you want to ponder the mechanics of creativity as well as read a great novel, leave the final chapter and read it a few months down the track. It will be rewarding in its own right.

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Privacy is the subject

By Barbara Klein

The reader will miss the delightful playfulness of this novel if it is read solely as one individual's breakthrough to a deeper understanding of himself, although it is that. Jonathon Coe's best novels do not focus so much on private lives as on the social context that shapes them. One of his acute observations about that context is how swiftly it changes from one generation to the next. Imagine now that you have an appointment to meet a friend, a very significant, emotionally charged appointment. You go to the appointed place, but the friend does not show. What would you do? Well, of course, you would send him a text. "Where RU?" Everything would become clear in an instant. In case you did not immediately think of that, the cover of Coe's novel jogs your memory by encasing its information in bubbles similar to those that carry text messages on an iPhone. In this age of the Internet, privacy has become one of those topics subject to endless commentary and hand-wringing examination. Max has picked up on this contemporary thread. He comments that he had read somewhere that there are always about five pairs of eyes keeping him under constant surveillance. We have lost the kind of privacy that lured Donald Crowhurst to madness and death. But is that a bad thing? There is in the novel a sense of nostalgia for a time when communications between individuals required pen and ink, when delivery of news might take several weeks, might arrive too late, in fact, to be useful. Coe is interested in that nostalgia, but he is not nostalgic. His fiction exposes the fallacy of his characters' belief in some former merry old England with quaint pubs serving shepherd's pie. As Max observes when he begins his journey, he is old enough to remember what service stations along the highway used to be like with horrible, cheap plastic tables and unspeakable food. Some things actually improve. Miss Erith's angry mourning over some version of England she claimed to have known is clearly error, a fantasy based on tourist brochures. In presenting the story of Max and his terrible loneliness, Coe is playing with ideas of privacy and particularly the fear of an invasion of that privacy which have become important in contemporary society. One of the main targets of unfavorable comment when the subject of privacy arises is the ubiquitous presence of Facebook. But surely everyone gets the joke when Max returns from Australia and logs on to Facebook hoping to find messages from his 70 Facebook friends that had been posted in his absence. There is no such thing as being absent from Facebook. That is the whole point. If Max wanted someone to write on his wall, he had to post something for them to write about.

"Here's my Dad and me having a drink at Sydney harbor. He's a dour old sod." Max's hurt feelings when he finds no messages for him on Facebook is funny in a very Jonathan Coe kind of way. Facebook is one of the many contemporary social constructions that Max just does not understand. The episode involving Max's friendship with his wife as Liz Hammond is a wonderfully complex investigation of all kinds of issues involving privacy and the invasion of it. I think the Donald Crowhurst story and then the story of Max's father and his dreadful isolation show the down side of privacy. People suffer in their self-enforced seclusion. Max's discovery of his father's secret, his violation of that privacy, allowed him to begin a friendship. And when he discovers his own secret, he is able to reach across the globe in an instant to make human contact. That is a good thing. 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. A Return to Form By JD Cetola Jonathan Coe is one of my favorite authors. I consider "The Rotters' Club" and "The Closed Circle" to be easily in my top 20 favorite books of all time. Coe has a knack for writing thoughtful and clever novels with plenty of black humor and relevant societal commentary. I found "The Rain Before it Falls" a disappointment although I did enjoy Coe's bio of B.S. Johnson ("Like a Fiery Elephant"). "The Terrible Privacy of Maxwell Sim" isn't quite up to the lofty standard of the Rotters' books, but it is certainly on par with "The House of Sleep" and "The Winshaw Legacy". In short: a very worthy read. "The Terrible Privacy of Maxwell Sim" is essentially about the importance of love and relationships. Sim is on a quest to determine what "a real relationship between two human beings should be, at a time when people seemed to be losing the ability to connect with one another, even as technology created more and more ways in which it out to be possible". Coe uses the ill-fated sailing trip of Donald Crowhurst as more than a metaphor/pre-cursor to Sim's on quest for meaning as Sim embarks on a solo trip to the remote northern UK to peddle toothbrushes. "The Terrible Privacy" is loneliness and Sim's quest to eliminate this privacy is told with great care and humor by Coe. Very highly recommended.

Maxwell Sim can't seem to make a single meaningful connection. His absent father was always more interested in poetry; he maintains an e-mail correspondence with his estranged wife, though under a false identity; his incomprehensible teenage daughter prefers her BlackBerry to his conversation; and his best friend since childhood is refusing to return his calls. He has seventy-four friends on Facebook, but nobody to talk to. In an attempt to stir himself out of this horrible rut, Max quits his job as a customer liaison at the local department store and accepts a strange business proposition that falls in his lap by chance: he's hired to drive a Prius full of toothbrushes to the remote Shetland Islands, part of a misguided promotional campaign for a dental-hygiene company intent on illustrating the slogan "We Reach Furthest." But Max's trip doesn't go as planned, as he's unable to resist making a series of impromptu visits to important figures from his past who live en route. After a string of cruelly enlightening and intensely awkward misadventures, he finds himself falling in love with the soothing voice of his GPS system ("Emma") and obsessively identifying with a sailor who perpetrated a notorious hoax and subsequently lost his mind. Eventually Max begins to wonder if perhaps it's a severe lack of self-knowledge that's hampering his ability to form actual relationships. A humane satire and modern-day picaresque, *The Terrible Privacy of Maxwell Sim* is a gently comic and rollickingly entertaining novel about the paradoxical difficulties of making genuine attachments in a world of advanced communications technology and rampant social networking.

From Publishers Weekly Coe (*The Rotters' Club*) broadly satirizes the disconnectedness of modern life with the story of Maxwell Sim, who has 70 Facebook friends but no one he can turn to when his wife and daughter leave him. After a trip to Australia to reconnect with his estranged father leads nowhere, Trevor, one of Max's few real friends, offers him an unusual gig: drive a Prius to the northernmost tip of the British Isles as part of a promotion for a startup eco-toothbrush company. Max takes a meandering route that allows him to visit his ex-wife, check in on his father's long-empty apartment, and pay a visit to the parents of his childhood friends. He also develops a romantic fixation on the voice coming from his GPS, which he names Emma. True connection is elusive: Max gains insight to his marriage, but only after using a fake identity to befriend his ex-wife online; haunting incidents from his teenage years come into focus belatedly, and the clarity he finally achieves comes at the prompting of a stranger. Coe has a lot of fun skewering the way technology and social media have become buttresses of society, but the antic plot and unfortunately precious conclusion water down the thoughtful points. (Mar.) (c) Copyright PWxyz, LLC. All rights reserved. "[A] witty, sympathetic, and often painfully funny take on real loneliness in the virtual, socially networked world." —Library Journal "Coe's voice, spoken through Max's perspective, effuses the novel with an easy, understated and satirical sense of humor that is a joy to read . . . An excellent and entertaining take on how our countless methods of modern communication are making it harder to truly connect." —Katie Stroh, *The Daily Texan* "[A] beguiling combination of picaresque comic adventure, meditation on the idea of meta-narrative, and thought-provoking reflection on the place of social media in our lives." —Heather Paulson, Booklist "Funny, acerbic and, most of all, a novel that could not have been born at any other time than the present." —"What We're Reading Now," NPR "A smart satire of materialism and modern life . . . Coe is a funny writer, and it's a testament to his skill with character that for all of his hero's maddening faults and failures, Sim never wears out his welcome . . . Much like its targets, the book stubbornly delivers moments of humor and humanity." —Chris Barton, *Los Angeles Times* "Touching and admirable .

. . . Coe masterfully equips [his] vibrant and ingenious novels . . . with trap-like ironies that snap shut on his characters without bending them out of shape.” —Mark Martin, Barnes and Noble “Beguiling . . . Coe has devised a powerful structure upon which to hang his exacting sense of humor and acute social observations, [and he] leaves the reader uncomfortably engaged with the consequences of Max’s terrible privacy, an unbearable loneliness that I would wager many of us share in this globalized world of greater and greater connectedness in which we are anything but connected.” —Martha McPhee, San Francisco Chronicle “Coe’s ninth novel cleverly plays with the reclusive-in-plain-sight notion and pokes gentle fun at our society’s love affair with modern gadgetry. It is a compelling, poignant read.” —Sara Vilkomerson, Entertainment Weekly “On the one hand, [Coe’s] novels are immensely pleasurable in traditional ways: rich in characterization, emotionally resonant, thoughtfully plotted. On the other, he’s committed to unorthodox, even daring formal conceits, which energize his books by shaking them out of any possible complacency . . . Coe manages all that while also being very, very funny. There are many contemporary writers who can make you laugh, but Coe is one of the few whose comic set pieces do that and feel like miniature works of art. He has a genius for perfectly constructed jokes with hilarious payoffs.” —Ed Park, Bookforum “In his sparkling and hugely enjoyable new book Jonathan Coe reinvents the picaresque novel for our time.” —Yorkshire Evening Post “Clever, engaging, and spring-loaded with mysteries and surprises.” —Caroline McGinn, Time Out “A brilliant depiction of 21st century life [and] a truly magnificent novel. . . . Coe manages to make me howl with laughter and sob with tenderness within the same sentence.” —Patrick Neate, The Bookseller “Classic Coe.” —Vogue “[Coe] gives us witty and tender humanity, and reminds us that while the winners write the history, it is life’s losers who have the best stories.” —Simon Baker, The Spectator “An amiably lunatic journey into the unknown. . . . Coe’s satirical eye is as dependable as ever.” —Financial Times “Most entertaining. . . . A parable about the feeling many now have of not being in control of their own story.” —The Independent “Cunningly plotted, extremely well-written and very, very funny.” —The Telegraph “Exceptionally moving. . . . [it tells] us something about loneliness, failure and the inability to cope that we haven’t quite read before.” —The Guardian “Masterly. . . . [Coe’s] eye for the details of contemporary life remains as sharp as ever.” —Daily Mail

About the Author Jonathan Coe’s awards include the John Llewellyn Rhys Prize, the Prix du Meilleur Livre Étranger, the Prix Médicis Étranger, and, for *The Rotters’ Club*, the Bollinger Everyman Wodehouse Prize. He lives in London with his wife and their two daughters.