



The Privileges

Jonathan Dee

[Download now](#)

[Read Online](#) 

The Privileges

Jonathan Dee

The Privileges Jonathan Dee

Smart, socially gifted, and chronically impatient, Adam and Cynthia Morey are so perfect for each other that united they become a kind of fortress against the world. In their hurry to start a new life, they marry young and have two children before Cynthia reaches the age of twenty-five.

The Privileges Details

Date : Published February 1st 2011 by Corsair (first published 2010)

ISBN : 9781849015936

Author : Jonathan Dee

Format : Paperback 344 pages

Genre : Fiction, Literary Fiction, Contemporary, Family

 [Download The Privileges ...pdf](#)

 [Read Online The Privileges ...pdf](#)

Download and Read Free Online The Privileges Jonathan Dee

From Reader Review *The Privileges* for online ebook

Mark says

This was, apparently, a Pulitzer Prize finalist in the year 2011.

For a while, I expected this book to be the 2008 financial crisis version of *The Great Gatsby*. The big thing I took away from that book once I read it as an adult was the underlying message that this style of life couldn't last, so the collapse at the end was as inevitable as the Great Depression (which had not even happened when the book was written, and makes it all the more amazing for that).

The parts were all there for *The Privileges* to go in that direction: obscenely wealthy people in Manhattan and the lives they live, particularly when the man of the house, Adam, decides to start dabbling in some things that would get the SEC very much up in his business if they ever caught wind of it. You wait for the hammer to drop about this, but it ultimately turns out that he's so smart and so good at it that he never gets caught. Though to go really *Gatsby*, this book would have had to have been published before 2008 anyway, which it wasn't - and it doesn't go in that direction in any case.

So then he ends up being a hedge fund manager, and the details of this are light. He does stuff that is never described in detail, perhaps because the author, like the rest of the world, is not knowledgeable about that arcana. I did not ever get the impression that Adam was being as portrayed as the next Bernie Madoff (which is also a path this book might have taken) - there is a passage where he specifically thinks that he can justify his actions to himself because he knows he is not stealing other people's money. I don't feel like Adam would have been trading in bundled sub-prime mortgages. So no *Gatsby*. He doesn't even cheat on his wife and his wife doesn't cheat on him.

The story opens with the wedding of Adam to Cynthia. They are very young - 22, and they are not obscenely wealthy at this time. They are not the children of money. This opening with the wedding is really great stuff, easily the best part of the book and it's probably the strength of this part that got it notice for awards or whatever. It's good that they didn't start out as silver spoon people because you have more sympathy for them that way. Through most of the novel are the contrasts between how the Moreys do things with respect to their kids (i.e. they aren't absentee parents) compared to all the other rich people. In essence, they inhabit a world where they don't really belong, and when this struck me I was expecting some depressing, *Revolutionary Road* kind of stuff, which also doesn't happen.

I almost feel like the message of this book is, "Rich people are people, too." Except not, since the Moreys are so clearly outcasts from the society of movers and shakers, so they pretty much just say to hell with it and make their own place to belong. The kids exhibit some spoiled rich kid tendencies but this is, again, not presented in an unsympathetic way. Or at least it seemed that way to me. When the daughter takes the inevitable first step down the Lohan bender path, you're not rooting for her to become a totally messed up human being. A character in the novel remarks on this: people love to see the rich and powerful knocked down a peg. This is true, especially when they are sanctimonious. The Moreys are not like this when you see them from the inside, but you kind of get the impression that every other rich family they know is.

So, I don't know. 80% of this is very good stuff, a story about characters who just happen to have more money than I can comprehend. The last part is just this giant meandering mess. Seriously, what is going on here? The novel's cover has praise from Jonathan Franzen, author of *The Corrections* (also a Pulitzer finalist but not winner), which this book might compare to except it's not depressing enough. However, the son goes

off on this adventure that I can only liken to Franzen, when Chip just randomly absconds to Lithuania, gets in some stuff over his head and is lucky to escape alive.

I'm not sure what the point is with the son here, Jonas. Are we supposed to think this is a circular ending? Jonas is going to be his dad's equivalent in the weird outsider art world? This question is not answered because we aren't shown enough of the resolution of his crazy experience. This kind of stuff drives me insane in books. Why did we have to end with Jonas' concussed mental rambling? Would it have been too much to show us what path he's starting down, instead of showing him at the crossroads? I really hate the ambiguous crap. I don't want to spend eternity debating over whether the sudden fade-to-black in the last Sopranos episode meant that Tony got whacked. I just want to know how the story ends, what the principal characters will be doing when we stop looking in on their lives.

It's not the first time and it won't be the last that I remark that I have this very picky tendency about endings of books. I hate so many endings. But the book's ending is the last impression you have of it and I don't see why so many authors leave a sour one with that kind of non-conclusion. Give me the orchestra running through the theme at a tempo so slow the conductor is signaling every note, major chords filling up the whole hall, you hit the last note and the brass took a deep breath for the big fermata and the timpani is banging out that end-of-a-symphony-or-John-Williams-movie-score timpani thing, and then the woodwinds and strings to some crazy run of notes, then the caesura, then just a brief moment of silence before one final hit of the note sounds, blended perfectly and echoing before the applause starts.

I want them to give me that in book form, but so few even try. Of course, there is a happy medium for these things. Sometimes an author goes too far the other way and you end up with the epilogue to Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows. It's often the ending that separates an OK book from a good book for me, or a good book from a great book. For a book that was fairly straightforward the whole way through to end in such a messy way, that definitely lost points. Oh well. There's still some great stuff in these pages.

Kelly says

The first 32 pages were fantastic. The rest was a whole lot of untruthful feeling nothing that just kept going on for reasons I didn't really understand, if the end was really where he intended to go. Did he fall in love along the way? Did he think this was a political thing all of a sudden? Where did he get that idea? Well, it's his story I suppose. But after page 32 I don't much see the point in joining him.

KerryH says

*The rich get rich,
and the poor get poorer,
Ain't we got fun?*

Warning: Spoiler Alert

There is an Antarctic chill that permeates this novel. It is not a physical chill like that I feel when I read the best of the Scandinavian noir thrillers but more an awareness of the chilling lack of empathy that oozes from the principal characters, Adam and Cynthia Morey. The book opens with the wedding of the golden couple, Adam and Cynthia, and it is a delicious, razor-sharp analysis of the perfect wedding from several points of view. The perfect bride 'walks in, ahead of her own entourage like a prizefighter, in the dress, the makeup, the veil and gloves, the full regalia. Masha and Ruth together make a gasping sound ...' They are the perfect couple, and they are in a big hurry to shed their past, their inconvenient families, and to get on with the process of making squillions of dollars, producing two equally perfect kids who 'could model. They look like a Ralph Lauren catalogue', and establishing themselves at the pinnacle of power and influence in New York. We, as readers, follow the couple through the decades as they set about making their dreams come true. As a young mother, Cynthia is over-protective, over-indulgent, nervous and unsure of herself. No surprises there. However, I did roll my eyes at her conviction that her children would need counselling for PTSD after a brief separation from their mother on the subway in New York. Meanwhile, Adam goes about his goal of making obscene amounts of money in the shortest possible time and his foray into the world of insider trading is not unexpected, and makes for interesting reading.

There are many, many delicious quotes in this book that has a barely perceptible ironic undertone. Jonathon Dee is a superb writer, and his prose is elegant and lucid. Kudos to him for inspiring me to continue reading about two characters whose morality and behaviour I regarded as abhorrent. I admire the way that Dee avoided the pitfall of having his male protagonist comply to a stereotypical model of hard-living, drug-taking, alcohol-abusing Type-A unfaithful male. When the attractive waitress as a function wrote her phone number on Adam's hand, I thought 'here we go' but Adam wasn't interested, his love for his wife remained paramount.

It was interesting the way Dee played with readers expecting a possible epiphany in the main characters. Were we as readers meant to feel some kind of redemption taking place in Cynthia as she snuggled up against her dying father? Was this woman finally allowing some of her past to reach out and touch her icy self-awareness? Or is it as she stated, that she is simply tired of riding shotgun by the bedside and needs to lie down, and the bed is better than a cold hospital floor? Needs must? I suspect it is the latter. Some critics have complained about the ending to Dee's novel and I think that, although it works, the ending would it have benefitted from a few more explanatory paragraphs. Abrupt shifts in chronological time have been used before, specifically between Chapters Three and Four. This confused me. At first I thought I must have nodded off and missed a great chunk of the book and had to backtrack. But no, Dee moved straight from the preceding chapter where Cynthia is consoling her husband on the imminent collapse of his insider-trading scam, to several years later where Adam now heads his own investment firm and Cynthia is chair of several extremely wealthy philanthropic charity funds. There has been no comeuppance for the Moreys throughout this novel, no being held account for their actions, and this is the way their lives will continue. I foresee that Jonas will recover, embrace the riches that are his by birthright, and continue down the same path as his parents. April will either be reborn by her experiences in China or head down a Lohanesque path to oblivion and Adam and Cynthia will continue with their uber rich life bereft of any kind of moral compass.

Phil says

Here's a book by a Columbia professor who, in my estimation, wanted to write a story that would capture the height of the "silly money" nouveau riche of the mid-2000s.

It's a fine idea, in theory. As readable and flowing as Dee's prose is, he's only able to string together a few

good moments without actually giving us a compelling plot or characters who were very convincing or interesting.

Adam - a seemingly just-above-average dude who receives the magical ability to make money in the derivatives game. If you'll read carefully, we're never given any indication that he can actually invest. We're told that he's well-liked by the boss and rewarded bonuses, accordingly. Yet, he starts an insider trading racket and, the next thing you know, he's parlaying his skills into legit market deals. Sounds like a novelist making shit up just to piece together a good yarn. He's largely absent from the third act, which I found disappointing.

Cynthia - Adam's wife. Seems to be intelligent. Has no marketable skills. Raises kids. Questions self-worth. Next thing you know, she's turned into Queen Philanthropist. I don't think so....

April - eldest child. Actually, the most true-to-life character as she embraces being rich by doing drugs and hanging out with euro-trash leeches. I would've rooted for her to die, but that would've been a cliché move by Dee. Instead, her Dad takes her on a field trip to China to see what real poverty looks like. My only question: why did they wait until she was 24 to snap her out of it!?!

Jonah - youngest child. Cliche rich-kid-rebellion character. Finds the rich life inauthentic and seeks an education in art (oh, the irony!). Blah, blah...should've died at the end.

This really should rate 1 star but it is probably better than I give it credit for. I just had an uneasy feeling, the whole time I read it, that it was complete bullshit and Dee didn't have a handle on his characters or that life, very well.

Roderick Hart says

The subject of this book is the effect of money, in excess, on those who have it, in this case Adam and Cynthia Morey and their children April and Jason. They have money because Adam works at a hedge fund, where he is second-in-command to the boss, who likes him personally and regards him as his heir apparent.

Not content with the vast sums he 'earns' at the hedge fund, Adam starts making even more through insider trading. He can only do this safely with the help of others and begins this operation with the help of another risk-taker, Devon, whom he meets at a party. So the Morey family end up with wealth at their disposal as evidenced, for example, by their private jet.

One thing the Moreys have going for them, apart from money, is love. Adam and Cynthia love each other and both are happily faithful. They also love their children, who are very different one from the other. April, the older, seems worldly wise and faces the family wealth head-on. She distrusts Jonas' attempts to be 'authentic', whether in his attitude to music or his life with his girl-friend Nikki. In April's opinion, they are slumming it in the apartment they share. Since he could easily afford to live in much better style, how authentic is choosing not to do so? She also fears that Nikki may be a gold-digger, which does not seem likely. She curtails her visit to the happy couple by whistling up the private jet.

But April is not in a position to be critical. She mixes in bad company, takes drugs and has to be bailed out by mum when she gets into trouble. She hasn't the faintest idea what her life is about, so in her case money does not provide direction. She is a wholly pointless person, which is not the case with Adam and Cynthia.

Cynthia hasn't done a day's work in her life but likes spending. Initially she spends on houses, restlessly moving from one to another, better place. Later she becomes a lady-bountiful figure, doling out large sums to worthy causes on behalf of the family foundation. She takes this seriously and puts genuine effort into it.

One side-effect of having so much money is a tendency to be hard-nosed in her dealings with others. This can be as simple as stating her position with brutal clarity, as happens when she discovers that her father, now dying, has been living with a woman called Irene Ball. She is not hostile to Irene, and aware that Irene loves her father and is genuinely upset that he is dying, but she cuts through the pleasantries to agree a figure with Irene which will see her straight after her father dies.

How good is this book? It begins with a lengthy set-piece, Adam and Cynthia's wedding and subsequent reception. I am not the best person to judge this since I can't stand weddings, this one being so grisly I nearly stopped reading on. As the book progresses we meet a few additional and interesting characters, such as Nikki's mentor in the art world, Agnew. Jason starts taking an interest in art which leads him into a potentially dangerous situation with an artist who may or not have been talented but was certainly off his trolley.

There are quite a few statements concerning money and its effect on the individual and society for the reader to chew on, but no critique at all of those who make money out of money as distinct from capitalists pure and simple who fund businesses directly. And there is a feeling that, after the large opening set-piece, the book becomes gradually more episodic before finally petering out in an unsatisfactory manner. As the last of the water sinks into the sand it's too bad if you're still feeling thirsty.

Anna says

A classic narrative about a financial tycoon and his family's Vogue-worthy life, with the fine observations with which Dee endeared himself with his readers in *Palladio*, *The Privileges* is conventional in its style, but so unnervingly unconventional in terms of the most important building block of a novel or in our case, the lack thereof: those neatly tied moral bows that make a book what we call a satisfying read. This is also a recurring criticism against this book, which, however, has not outshined its virtues in my reading experience.

It begins with an acclaimed first chapter that captures with lens-perfect clarity the wedding of Adam and Cynthia, panning the scene through the incredibly effective use of present tense. It is only the wedding that is described thus, suggesting that lovely timelessness all young people dream about. As soon as the postnuptial period of their life starts, the narrative shifts to the more common past tense, to show that the timelessness has ceased and given way to less spectacular experiences, the couple have fallen back to earth, which is under the rule of temporality.

The characters make a point of creating something new. Their story has no past, we never get to see what they were like without or before each other. On a side note, this is realistic (and a positive thing, I must add): indeed those who marry young and grow up together, will have their personalities shaped by their mutual experiences, unlike late-age marriers who bring their well-formed and often rock solid personalities in the marriage.

All is not perfect in their wonderland: Cynthia will go through the usual mind-changing experiences of

motherhood: *All the energy and heedlessness and faith in herself that he had always adored had lost its outlet and so that faith had backed up, as it were, into the lives of the children.* Adam is slowly pushing his luck, not even trying to find his limits, but rather being well aware of them and playing with them for the sheer pleasure of risk both in his professional life (insider trading) and his personal one (a memorable scene where he asks for the phone number of a bartendress only to wash it off his hands as soon as he leaves the room).

Even though they declare themselves to be the headwaters of a new dynasty, it is questionable whether they succeed in creating their own brand. What we see is a closed-loop micro-community: Cynthia looks sarcastically at all attempts at connection of her own family, and albeit a philanthropist and warm-hearted person by all accounts (the narrator's, the husband's, the daughter's), almost all of her actual words are cynical and rather unkind. The absence of long-term memory they boast also surfaces in their children. Childishly, Jonas is thrilled when his artistic discovery is not something that was on his professor's radar.

Initially I considered the art history digression to be the book's major weakness, as it seemed to serve no other purpose than flaunt the author's knowledge or ideas. By comparison, Dee almost inexcusably omits to plumb the arcana of financial derivatives, as would have been fit for an author often compared to Franzen. But at a deeper look, *the outsider-art detour delights us with its extraordinary figurative quality: as presented here, it is a perfect metaphor that captures the very essence of what this family is like: a self-sufficient world with its own affective ecosystem, which engenders creations that are splendid for the eye, but so impenetrable by the mind and soul.* In plain terms: something we admire, but we have no idea what to do with.

Following a spectacular first chapter, an intriguing second chapter, and a stagnating third one, in the fourth and final chapter we do get something that resembles closure for the reader, as each of these four incredible seeks attachment in the more traditional sense: April taking refuge in her mother, Jonas finally succumbing to the security his family's wealth offers, Cynthia reaching out to her dying father, and Adam immersing himself in matrimonial peace.

For these subtleties and the utter aesthetical pleasure I found in it, I must rate it 5 stars in spite of what I initially told Noémi, the inspiring book buddy who made this reading even more memorable for me :)

Erin says

Jonathan Dee opens *The Privileges* with a wedding and 30 pages of cinematic, voyeuristic, tipsy, sweaty, dizzy, loud, lift-the-flap book-type fun. Sadly, all my literary serotonin was spent in that first chapter, and I was left to nurse a hangover for the remaining 200 pages. This book was enthusiastically endorsed by Jonathan Franzen, Richard Ford, and Tom Perrotta, among others, so I guess I expected to be knocked sideways by the whole thing.

Jonathan Dee gives his characters everything - mind-blowing wealth, a nauseatingly flawless (or, at least, unchanging and uncomplicated) marriage, adorably precocious (or, at least, unchanging and uncomplicated) children. There's a whole lotta giveth, and very little taketh away. Dee's characters are profanely rich, self-satisfied people with no legitimate problems. The stakes are plenty high; Dee's characters stand to lose so much, to fall so far. But they stay standing, things never fall apart, and the reader is led on a carrot chase for a catharsis that never comes.

I think Dee was trying, very consciously trying, to tell a morality tale, to examine ethics and mores and risks in the world of high finance and uberwealth. And maybe I missed some great discovery there. When the characters are cardboard and the plot never gets off the ground, who can follow the social underpinnings?

There's also some rather flat, insipid dialogue, an awkwardly didactic foray into art brut, and an untidy way with the passage of time.

Somehow, despite its stodginess, *The Privileges* never stops entertaining. I realize my criticisms sound like a categorical indictment, but this was actually a pleasant summer read somehow - note the 3 stars! 3 out of 5 ain't (too) bad.

Claire Handscombe says

I really liked this until the final fifty pages or so. The ending left me feeling that the author was trying to say something deep - otherwise the ending is just a bit odd - but I couldn't have told you what.

Greg says

Even though it is only November 19th, 2009; I'm going to go on record and say that this book *is* the best book of 2010. Maybe I will be proven wrong, and I hope that I am, because that other book will be absolutely fucking amazing if it is better than this.

Since none of my fellow goodreaders to date have given this five stars is baffling to me, that some even gave it three stars makes wonder what is wrong with them, I will not judge though.

I hate writing reviews of books I love, I'd much rather tear into some piece of shit. It's so much easier. And I always get more votes for those reviews.

Why this book is amazing:

1) The first chapter. This might be one the most amazing pieces of fiction writing ever. It is so perfect in it's pacing, in it's scope, in it's language. So many details are caught about so many different events and characters in a mere 25 pages that it's astounding. The chapter works on different levels and it all functions so smoothly. Even if you don't care to read about rich people do yourself a favor and read this chapter. It is everything that the minimalism of the 1980's could have been if it had been done with a non-minimalist scope.

2) It's easy to look down on the remaining 225 pages of the book, because they don't live up to the first chapter. The scope is narrowed down, the jarring movement from character to character is slowed down; and the reader finds him or herself now confronted with the day to day story after the dizzy excitement of the first chapter wedding. The stylistic difference between the first chapter and the rest of the book is subtle, but it works in a temporal way... it mirrors life and the experience of the difference between living an exciting moment and living day to day, as the book goes on there are more subtle shifts in the pacing of the book that reflect the way that (I at least) have changed in the experience of time as one gets older.

3) The subject matter. The characters of this book are the people who people like me hate. We are the tattooed hipster girl that the drunk hedge-fund guys are trying to pick up at one point in the book when one of the guys tells another, "but you know she fucking hates you right?" (ok not an exact quote the book is no longer in my possession (Karen don't worry it's at work)). I should hate these people. Dad is an alpha-male, no-worries, lucky bastard who everything falls into his lap. The Mom is a woman who's biggest problem in life is trying to figure out what to do with all her free time and money. Their kids, well I won't say much about them, since that will give away some of the story. They have everything, they want of nothing, the world is theirs.

One should hate these people. They are easy targets for literary types. Show their superficiality, make them idiots, show their moral depravity, etc., Or for the non-literary but dreamy bookreader, make them picture perfect and what everyone wants to aspire to, make them like a family out of a harlequin romance. Or make them a thinly veiled disguise for what you wish you were, using these rich assholes as a stepping stone in your own attempt to occupy the space they live in (I'm thinking *Devil Wears Prada*, *Nanny Diaries*, any of those other 'expose' New York chick lit novels, or maybe even Jay McInerney or Bret Eaton Ellis).

This novel though takes a different route. He gives us a picture of these people that doesn't let them off scotch free, but doesn't paint them as morally depraved morons either. I don't know how to really put it into words, think of what someone like Richard Yates or Jonathan Franzen have done for the dysfunctional suburban family, Dee does for the happy mega-rich family.

4) I have more things I want to write about. There are so many interesting and subtle little things Dee does in this book, but they compromise the story too much, so I will be silent about them.

This review is probably a failure in convincing anyone that this book should be read, but I hope I passed along at least a little bit of the excitement I'm feeling for this book. Even though I read it already as an ARC, I'm really considering buying the hardcover as soon as it comes out, just to be able to read it again, or at least read the first chapter over and over again.

Paul Bryant says

1) I believe that whatever disasters strike this small blue planet of ours, global warming, a new pandemic, whatever, the rich will not only sail through unaffected, they'll hardly notice what's killing the rest of us. They'll be somewhat put out when they have to replace their domestic staff more frequently because the staff they have keep dying from bird flu or lack of clean water or whatever. But that's all. The rich are in the process of spinning off into their own sealed world where nothing, no revolutions, no catastrophes, no diseases, can touch them anymore. They live longer than us, they're taller, they're more intelligent and obviously more beautiful. If they're not, they fix it. Everything can be fixed. They'll begin cloning themselves soon. Homo superior. We'll see it in our lifetimes. They're already cloning their pets.

2) This novel was like a whirlwind romance – I'd never heard of Jonathan Dee until a couple of weeks ago. I thought his novel was so pretty, so funny, so fascinating. I hung on its every word. By page 50 I was in love. Well, it seemed like love. I called it love. But then... well, I suppose you would just say that we got to know each other a little better. By page 200 I was avoiding its phone calls, and when we were together, I couldn't meet its eyes. When it left me suddenly on page 297, you know what? I was relieved. And it had all started so brilliantly.

3) The first chapter of this novel is absolutely wonderful. Let the record show. It describes a wedding of a golden couple. You've seen your Altman, your opening of Godfather 1, Rachel Getting Married – all great wedding scenes. This is another. Now : if the rest of the book was like that, it would be my book of the year, no question.

4) Our story is what happens to the golden couple, which is, Adam, the husband, is a financial whiz and they get gigantically rich and buy shit. And they have perfect children and the children buy shit.

5) Everything is tickety-boo. Cynthia, that's the wife, has a little wobble, you know, I'm so brilliant and I'm stuck at home in this drop dead apartment overlooking the Planet-would-I-lie-to-you-arium, and I'm all suicidal because my great potential is unfulfilled by only having a squillion bucks and only having gorgeous kids and only having a gorgeous hubby who shags me so well. Where is the Drano? I must drink a whole bottle right now. Oh, I do not know where the Drano is because I am so rich I never see cleaning products. But she gets better so that's okay.

6) Then the kids grow up and there's a bit about the daughter April's slightly Lohanistic shenanigans, and there's a long long bit about the son Jonas's foray into the world of outsider art (you know, the art made by certifiably mad people and autists, very a la mode) and I had a problem with this section big time. Because

a) it read way way too much like a straight lift from Junebug, which is a rather lovely movie made in 2005 about a rich arty type trying to get her hands on an outsider art hillbilly crazy guy; and

b) it also read way way WAY too much like Jonathan Dee had made his own foray into the world of outsider art dealing, the academics and the gallery types, the exhibitions, the revered artists, and he'd gone to a particular outsider art show, and basically tipped what could have been an article for Penthouse or GQ lock stock and barrel into his novel, and it shows – after all this bland stuff about the richness of rich lives you suddenly get detail upon detail, insight upon insight, regarding this arcane sub-sub-sub-world – and in a novel this is like seeing the mike boom waving into the frame – you're not supposed to see it, it's all supposed to be seamless. Compared with the outsider art details, the descriptions of Adam's financial brilliance is so featureless and skirted-over that I could have written it and what I know about investment banking could be written on half a grain of rice and still have room for an outsider artist to fanatically draw a tiny street map of lower Manhattan.

7) Then there's a tiresome long section about Cynthia's estranged father dying. Suddenly she has emotions. Suddenly she has vast emotions about her father who she hasn't been in contact with for years. Maybe people are really like that.

8) So it kind of looks as though Mr Dee is working towards saying that you may be rich but you can't avoid emptiness, Lohanism, madness and death. But no – I think he's really saying that with a modicum of intelligent application sufficient wealth will enable you to avoid all of that, and more.

9) This novel coulda been a contender. It just needed a couple of sessions with a novel guidance counsellor. But it wasn't to be.

B the BookAddict says

I mean no offense when I say, what I can't fathom is when people don't like this book – then reveal they actually only don't like the characters. I make this distinction here because a lot of people who didn't really like this novel tend to make very little comment on the actual writing itself. That's probably the art of a great novelist: to present you unlikable characters and yet get you to like the book anyway. I think Jonathan Dee achieves that in this novel.

The Privileges is slick, witty and urbane. A mere 258 pages, I could easily have read another 300 pages of this ebullient tale. A *modern family saga* (Dee's own description), it is complex and delicious. It tells the tale of the Moreys; Adam, a hedge fund manager and Cynthia, a magazine editor and follows from their wedding to the pinnacle of their dreams, approximately twenty five years later. The thing I kept thinking as I read was that I don't think Jonathan Dee actually wants you to like these two characters. You realise very early on that they live in a bubble and are so selfish; Adam and Cynthia actually call the year they marry *Year Zero* meaning it all starts from here and absolutely no-one else matters – not even their parents.

The first chapter entirely is devoted to Adam and Cynthia's wedding and here the basis of their personalities is revealed. So smooth is the prose that one could be forgiven for feeling almost like one were actually at the wedding. Conrad, Adam's brother, calls them a charmed couple and the story reveals this to be mostly true. Both are narcissistic, talented, attractive and obviously meant for each other – if in the realms of their selfishness alone. As the story progressed, I found them each to be quite complicated as well.

Adam has a fairly meteoric rise to the top; with a not small bit of insider trading on the side which makes his family moderately then extremely wealthy. Cynthia has given up her job to raise their children. They are flawed people despite all their advantages. Adam is insider trading and Cynthia is at first often aimless, she cries easily and often and she fiercely, rudely excludes anything outside their family unit. Their children, April and Jonas, are quite polar opposite siblings – April is the epitome of a spoiled rich kid while Jonas is a deep thinking, quite introverted musician. But even flawed people have a redeeming quality and the Morey's is the set-up of their own charitable foundation. Having more money than you know what to do with can be a quandary for some but not these two. As Adam continues to make an embarrassing amount of money, Cynthia becomes involved in the process of helping those less fortunate. Adam supports her in this venture. An admirable quality in a couple who have presented previously as being so cocooned in their own world.

One of my favourite pieces of dialogue is when the wife of Adam's boss (an annoying woman in Cynthia's view) asks whether the children go to school.

"Why, yes" Cynthia says. "We thought that would be wise"

I could wax here lyrically about Dee's prose – very droll, human, brilliant, acerbic, savvy, complex, sophisticated and I could continue. But mostly I liked this book because Dee presents two people whom most of us would dislike; even for their selfishness alone and yet makes their story hugely readable. I enjoyed that it is not a moral tale – there is no comeuppance metered out here, no societal justice. For me, this novel is a work of great literary fiction. I guess those who haven't read it will have to make up their own minds.

Esil says

This was one of the *New Yorker's* best books of 2010. It has a similar sensibility to Jonathan Franzen's *Freedom*, but I liked it much better--the writing was good, the characters somewhat more complex than stereotypical very rich New Yorkers, and most significantly the story was tighter--until the end. What

prevented me from giving it 5 stars was the end. With the exception of the powerful storyline between Cynthia and her dying father, the story just fizzled out.

Elyse says

This little book is AMAZING! I can understand why people reading this book get 'triggered' (mess with your ZEN as , Lori said), but this was one of the best contemporary books I've read in a long time.

Its very well written-bold-intimate-filled with tension -original and intelligent -powerful!

This is a fabulous 'discussion' book (too bad our book club didn't pick this one).

I read a few of the reviews here on Bookreads. (I find all of them worth reading). I happen to like the other 5 star review ---and the first 4 star review. (so I don't need to add more to what they said).....
but I will ADD this: (haven't seen anybody write this yet).....

and I'm willing to take a chance. I know families like this. Paul and I are even friends with a family pretty close to this couple (and their adult kids)-----minus the international foundation and private plane ---Living in Silicon Valley ---private independent schools on the Beach of Carmel ---etc. -----well, Jonathan Dee was not that far off the mark.

Maya Lang says

I knew from the first page that I would love this novel. There is a kind of happy relief and immediate pleasure when in the hands of a master, when the prose is gorgeous, the dialogue pitch perfect, the characters vivid and full. Then came the emotional insights, which are piercing. Jonas, age five, loves to collect items but wishes his helicopter mother wouldn't get so involved. When he likes a set of books, "she went out and bought the entire rest of the series, numbers four through sixteen. When it was almost more fun not to have them yet--to know they existed out there somewhere and waited patiently to be found. He didn't know how to tell her this."

It made me happy that this novel was a Pulitzer finalist. Gorgeously written, it is filled with wit and intelligence, a damning observation of the type-A Manhattan family, that world of wealth and achievement, yet throughout, the novel is filled with heart. Jonathan Dee inhabits his characters rather than hold them at arm's length. As Roxana Robinson wrote in The New York Times, "Dee is at once funny, subversive and sympathetic. In fact, the strange harmonies of his authorial voice, which combines ravishing language, a bleak view of humanity and Dee's own innate good nature, provide much of the novel's interest."

Then there's the fact that the opening chapter is narrated in present tense; subsequent chapters use the more traditional past voice. Not many authors would attempt this switch, but it works beautifully. There wasn't a single flashback, which is fitting for a power couple that refuses to engage with the past. Dee's choices with structure are thoughtful, his execution deft. An outstanding novel, one of the best I've read in some time.

switterbug (Betsey) says

There was very little in this book to scoop me up or draw me in. I thought it was rather banal and ultimately resided in the upper end of the guppy pool. Deeply superficial. It was billed as DeLillo-esque, which is why I wanted to read it. It tanked.

When writing about obscenely rich navel-gazers, it helps to be fresh and original. I enjoy essentially unlikable characters in literature--they are often savagely solipsistic and subversive. Tom Wolfe, Martin Amis and Zoe Heller create self-regarding characters with a literary elan. It was the pasty cardboard cutouts that irked me; Adam and Cynthia were conspicuously thin and stale. Within the text, Dee advances his theories of manufactured art ruining culture in this day and age, but he didn't really give us something fresh-out-of-the-wrapper, either. Maybe he was being cheeky, but it fell flat to me.

The second part of the novel, once Cynthia and Adam have been established as scheming masters of the universe, highlights their children, Jonas and April. April doesn't do one unexpected thing or have two original thoughts. Jonas tugged at me for a while with his ambivalence and innocent pretense. His lofty cynicism and earnest ideology had a guileless streak, which gave him some dimension. But, almost abruptly, he unraveled into stream of consciousness nothingness.

There was a hospice scene toward the end that was authentic and effective. I know this from working as a hospice nurse for many years. The author captured the helpless fury and the meek awkwardness. The saliva in my throat burned and I was there with the characters. Dee either did his research or experienced this personally. However, the ending (following the hospice scene) was grandiose and melodramatic. It rattled hysterically and left a stream of synthetic fibers everywhere.

Talia Carner says

Shallow characters and shallow wrting for a thin plot...

I am not in the habit of trashing novels. If I find a work to be less than compelling, I simply do not continue reading. However, this was an assignment for a book group, which forced me to read to the end. I was particularly intrigued since I had noticed the special place the NYT had given this novel in the annals of last year's literary as a "tour de force"--as did some other media outlets.

Therefore, without the risk of destroying Mr. Dee's career, I am taking the liberty to be frank about my disappointment in our cultural beacons that award the best books. Had *The Privileges* remained somewhat obscured, I would have kept my silence.

I hardly managed to swallow the "telling" throughout the novel, that had very little "showing." Time and again the author was instructing the reader what to think, how to view the characters and how to understand their actions. Nevertheless, even as he kept telling me what's what, I failed to grasp their motivations. It is not just that Dee wanted to show them as living shallow lives and therefore made them shallow. He wanted me to think that there was depth to their shallow lives, a mirror of a mirror to emptiness that was actually filled with meaning.

What astonished me was that The New Yorker wrote "There is a minimum of authorial omniscience," while I read nothing but authorial voice page after page.... Did I read a different book?

It didn't even seem that Dee knew anything about trading--outside or inside--to write about it. In fact, it didn't seem that he knew the lives of the privileged nearly as well as Tom Wolfe when he wrote "Bonfire of the Vanities." Dee's connection to the material seemed to be as superficial as his cut-out cardboard characters.

Some character development in literature is meant to create a person that we abhor. (e.g., Humbert Humbert in Nabokov's Lolita.) A good author makes us want to stay with that negative person in spite of us. Not so in the case of Adam and Cynthia.

The only character with some depth was the son, and he came to life on the page more fully toward the end, just as his mother was moving into an incomprehensible phase relating to her sick father. {Spoiler:} Supposedly, the father with whom she had had no relationship with and of whom she hadn't thought of for two decades was dying, and now the sense of loss and grief was overwhelming. "Give me a break," I kept saying to myself, waiting for some twist that would give this faux emotional non-drama a meaning and a big "aha!" moment. But that was not forthcoming.

The book left me wondering what was missing in my ability to read a book and to fail to understand why the NYT, The New Yorker, Vanity Fair (and the Pulitzer Prize committee?) thought so highly of this amateurish piece of writing. Or perhaps, the "Emperor is really naked."

Simona Stoica says

Recenzia complet?: <http://bit.ly/2lh7Zu6>

„Uneori, sim?ea c? ignoran?a lui era nem?rginit?.”

Ambi?ia poate s? fie toxic?, cu at?at mai mult dac? majoritatea dorin?elor noastre au r?d?cini materialiste. Vrem s? fim boga?i, (ve?nic) tineri ?i frumo?i, s? nu cunoa?tem gustul e?ecului ?i s? fugim de griji, boli ?i de probleme, s? atingem iluzia nemuririi, doar pentru a am?na re?toarcerea la realitate, unde visele sunt greu de îndeplinit, iar zilele se succed într-o monotonie înfrico??toare, de care nu reu?im s? ne desprindem sau, m?car, s? ne îndepr?tm.

Întotdeauna ne dorim mai mult, chiar ?i atunci când suntem ferici?i ?i împlini?i. Vrem s? avem succes în tot ce ne propunem ?i s? ne dep??im limitele, s? transform?m fiecare „nu” într-un „da”, imposibilul în posibil. Treptat, uit?m de propriile aspira?ii ?i devenim invidio?i pe cei din jurul nostru, pe bucuria lor, pe familia lor, pe stilul lor de via??, pe care vrem s?-l copiem, doar pentru a ne îmbun?t??i statutul social ?i a-i face pe al?ii s? se simt? mici ?i inferiori. A?a cum (poate) ne-am sim?it ?i noi, la un moment dat.

Din p?cate, nu suntem dispu?i s? muncim sau s? facem sacrificii pentru a cre?te ca persoane. C?ut?m mereu ruta ocolitoare, în?el?m ?i min?im pentru a gr?bi „procesul”, ne îndepr?tm de familie ?i de prieteni pentru a urm?ri un ?el pe care-l numim suprem, un ?el detestat ?i gre?it, ce ne asigur? un viitor mai bun ?i mai prosper, dar pentru care pl?tim cu un trecut pe care ajungem s?-l regret?m ?i cu un prezent de care nici m?car nu ne amintim.

„Nu era vorba de bog??ie în sine. Era vorba despre a duce o via?? grozav?, o via?? impresionant?. Banii

Charles Matthews says

I've been blurbed enough with quotations taken out of the context of my reviews that I know not to put complete faith in blurbs. But when the review copy of this book arrived with blurbs from writers I like, such as Richard Ford ("verbally brilliant, intellectually astute, and intricately knowing") and Jonathan Franzen ("a cunning, seductive novel about the people we thought we'd all agreed to hate"), then I really have to give it a go.

Dee's novel is an exploration -- and sometimes a refutation -- of some familiar propositions:

Tolstoy: "Happy families are all alike."

Fitzgerald (allegedly): "The rich are different."

Hemingway (allegedly): "Yes, they have more money."

Faulkner: "The past is never dead. It's not even past."

Conventional wisdom: "Money can't buy happiness."

Traditionally, a writer who wants to put his characters to the test deprives them of everything: Think of Job on his dung heap, Lear on the heath. Dee does the opposite: He gives them everything. He creates the perfect couple, Adam (the first man) and Cynthia (the goddess of the moon, which, though its light is reflected, has power over the tides -- in this case the tides of wealth created by her husband). He gives them perfect children, though they are challenged, as their names indicate: April (the cruelest month) and Jonas (whose near-namesake is, like Job, one of God's guinea pigs).

Novels are driven by tension, and it's hard to generate tension if your central characters are perfect: a loving, faithful couple who do everything to provide their children with a happy life. Of course, Adam and Cynthia Morey aren't perfect: He's a workaholic who flirts with the law by starting an insider-trading scheme; she's unfulfilled by the life of a stay-at-home mom. So for part of the novel, the tension comes from uncertainty about whether Adam will get caught and Cynthia will have a breakdown. And once that tension is resolved, there's the tension about what will happen with their overprivileged children: Will April turn into a Paris Hilton or a Lindsay Lohan? Will Jonas have the resources to find the authenticity he finds lacking in the life of the fabulously and famously wealthy?

No, happy families aren't exactly all alike, and the rich aren't different just because they have more money. But the novel also points out the truth in those axioms. More to the point is Faulkner's aphorism. For Adam and Cynthia both believe that they can unplug themselves from the past, and near the novel's end, Adam proclaims to Cynthia, "you and I pretty much had to start over in terms of family, and we did it. We succeeded. We're Year Zero." And she agrees: "Baby, we didn't just succeed, we're a fucking multinational.... We've trademarked ourselves."

But the affirmation of their rootlessness, which comes ironically when Cynthia is at the deathbed of the handsome, feckless father she has barely known, ignores the plight of their children. As a girl, April made up a family history for a class that encouraged self-esteem, and as a young woman she is terrified by the

emptiness that faces her when she contemplates her future. Jonas has sought, first in music and then in art, for something genuine that he finds lacking in contemporary culture, and his quest for it puts his life in the kind of jeopardy that a privileged existence hasn't prepared him for.

As Franzen's blurb says, these are "the people we thought we'd all agreed to hate," and Dee audaciously presents them in the context of a love story. Jonas says of his parents, "They are just really in love with each other, in this kind of epic way." Dee even inverts the paradigm of the love story: His begins with the wedding that conventional love stories end with. The rich are supposed to be the targets of Tom Wolfean larger-than-life satire. Dee's novel is not without satire, but his rich family is as much the weapon of delivery as the target.

Abby says

The Privileges is a book with an interesting premise and interesting characters. The book bills itself as a intimate look into the rise of a financial tycoon and his family at the beginning of the 21st century and their moral and emotional quandaries.

Jonathan Dee is a gifted writer. He situates the characters in a rarefied social milieu with all of the right signifiers and dialogue. The first chapter reads like an Edith Wharton novel. As Cynthia and Adam prepare for their wedding, you get a sense of them as petulant and spoiled; yet, also beautiful and brilliant. They are clearly poised to seize their destinies...and conquer New York City.

Adam rises up in a private equity firm; and Cynthia, after a brief stint at a Vogue copycat, becomes a full-time mother to two beautiful children. (Dee constantly emphasizes how much they look like miniature Ralph Lauren models.)

Adam devises an insider trading scheme, which supposedly comes to the brink of exposure after countless years. However, this never happens and the novel loses its narrative strand and coherence. After avoiding this pitfall, Adam and Cynthia become wealthier than ever. Adam starts his own hedge fund and becomes a multi-national billionaire with private jets; Cynthia founds a family foundation; the daughter becomes a drug-addicted party girl; and the son becomes a socialist-spouting university student with a penchant for "outsider art." Way too much space is spent digressing on the intricacies of outsider art, but most of the novel's second half is given to digressions of various sorts, in characters or action.

We meet Adam's brother and his wife. We learn that "all of the other Dalton moms" hate Cynthia because their husbands supposedly "want to sleep with her." We learn that one of Adam and Cynthia's daughter's friends may or may not be abused. We learn that Cynthia's father is dying and has obtained a late-in-life girlfriend. In short, we are introduced to random characters and scenes that feel like short story character sketches, with little sense of how they tie in to the rest of the narrative plot.

Another frustrating aspect of this book is its failure to examine the underlying motives for any of the characters' actions. Dee may be trying to express the lack of inner life or emotional complexity possessed by Adam and Cynthia, but what about the other characters?

Overall, this book is well written and examines an interesting idea. But it tries too hard and would have been better as a short story or character sketch. I felt let down by the anticlimactic ending and wished I could have had my last two hours' of reading back.

karen says

this is my best goodreads.com win so far. i entered to win this one because i really liked *palladio*, even though i can't remember anything about it, really. just flashes: advertising, a woman, secrets... but i remember being really impressed with it all those years ago. (someone else should read it and refresh my memory, please)and i have the feeling the same thing will happen to me with this one. it's not that there's no story; although it is more of a character(s) study than a huge event-riddled tale. the om. narr. just sort of flits from one character to another like a butterfly, lingering momentarily to capture one or the other's restlessness, dissatisfaction, discomfort or yearning. ah, the struggle for the idle rich to fill their days... it's not that i'm not sympathetic; it must be really shitty having a private jet ferrying the kids to and fro - it just rankles a little to see these people at loose ends because they have nothing to do with their time - while i resent not having enough time to do everything i need to do because that pesky job keeps getting in the way. if i had enough money for a jet, i tell you i would buy myself some really great shelving units. focus: the book's strongest part is the beginning - the whole wedding storyline could have stood alone as a short story and been satisfying all by itself, and i would have been fine with it.it's really wonderful - the pacing of that first part had me really excited to keep reading. his writing is just luminous. (i have never used that word in my life, and i never shall again, but this time, it's apt.)reading the back of this, i was like "why did i want to read this again?", and it's just because of the strength of his writing. give it a chance. particularly if you are a young heiress with too few distractions.
