



How to Be Alone: Essays

By Jonathan Franzen

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From the National Book Award-winning author of *The Corrections*, a collection of essays that reveal him to be one of our sharpest, toughest, and most entertaining social critics

While the essays in this collection range in subject matter from the sex-advice industry to the way a supermax prison works, each one wrestles with the essential themes of Franzen's writing: the erosion of civil life and private dignity; and the hidden persistence of loneliness in postmodern, imperial America. Reprinted here for the first time is Franzen's controversial 1996 investigation of the fate of the American novel in what became known as "the Harper's essay," as well as his award-winning narrative of his father's struggle with Alzheimer's disease, and a rueful account of his brief tenure as an Oprah Winfrey author.

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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

Jonathan Franzen is smart and brash, the kind of person you want as your social critic but not as a brother-in-law. Many of the 14 essays in *How to Be Alone*, by the author of the critically acclaimed novel *The Corrections*, first appeared in *The New Yorker*, *Harper's*, and elsewhere. A long, much-discussed rumination on the American novel, (newly) titled "Why Bother?," is included, as well as essays on privacy obsession, the U.S. post office, New York City, big tobacco, and new prisons. At his best, as in "My Father's Brain," a piece on his father's struggle with Alzheimer's, Franzen can make the ordinary world utterly riveting. But at times, it can be difficult to discern where Franzen stands on any particular subject, as he often takes both sides of an argument. Valid attempts to reflect ambiguity sometimes lead to obfuscation, especially in his essays on privacy and tobacco, although his belief that small-town America of years gone by offered the individual little privacy certainly rings true. Franzen can write with panache, as in this comment after he watched, without headphones, a TV show during a flight: "(It) became an exposé of the hydraulics of insincere smiles." A few of the shorter pieces appear to be filler. Franzen shines brightest when he gets edgy and a little angry, as in "The Reader in Exile": "Instead of Manassas battlefield, a historical theme park. Instead of organizing narratives, a map of the world as complex as the world itself. Instead of a soul, membership in a crowd. Instead of wisdom, data." --Mark Frutkin, *Amazon.ca*

From Publishers Weekly

Bestselling and National Book Award-winning novelist Franzen (*The Corrections*) urges readers to say no to drugs, but not the pharmaceutical kind; his opiates are those "technology offers in the form of TV, pop culture, and endless gadgetry," soporifics that "are addictive and in the long run only make society's problems worse." Franzen's just as hard on intellectual conformity-on academe's canonization of third-rate but politically correct novels, for example. As a serious artist, he knows that the deck is stacked against him; after all, a great novel is a kind of antiproduct, one that is "inexpensive, infinitely reusable, and, worst of all, unimprovable." The problem, he says, is that instead of being allowed to enjoy our solitary uniqueness we are all being turned into one gigantic corporate-created entity, a point Franzen makes tellingly when he says that while a black lesbian New Yorker and a Southern Baptist Georgian might appear totally different, the truth is that both "watch Letterman every night, both are struggling to find health insurance... both play Lotto, both dream of fifteen minutes of fame, both are taking a serotonin reuptake inhibitor, and both have a guilty crush on Uma Thurman." These canny, well-researched essays (which have appeared in the *New Yorker*, *Harper's* and elsewhere) range over a variety of subjects, from the antiquated and bizarrely inefficient Chicago postal system to the bizarrely efficient new privatized federal prisons, but they are united by a single passionate insistence that, in a cookie-cutter world, people who want simply to be themselves should have the right to do so.

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From Library Journal

In this collection of 12 essays, Franzen, the author of the most-written-about novel of 2001, *The Corrections*, focuses on the growing commercialism and alienation in postmodern America. Presenting a number of variations on that theme, he addresses such personal topics as his smoking habit, an interview for the Oprah show, and his father's battle with Alzheimer's, a poignant account of the disease's impact on his family. In addition, pieces on the shortcomings of the Chicago post office, the supermax prison in Colorado, and the isolating effects of an increasingly computerized society show Franzen's skill as a journalist and social critic. Also included is "Why Bother?," a revision of his 1996 critique of the American novel. He has cut this version considerably and softened its strident tone, although, as he points out, "there's still plenty to be mad

and scared about." This book will appeal to serious readers who appreciate penetrating yet entertaining social commentary. Enthusiastically recommended for public and academic libraries. Nancy R. Ives, SUNY at Geneseo
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Users Review

From reader reviews:

Andre Rosier:

The feeling that you get from How to Be Alone: Essays is the more deep you excavating the information that hide into the words the more you get interested in reading it. It doesn't mean that this book is hard to recognise but How to Be Alone: Essays giving you joy feeling of reading. The writer conveys their point in certain way that can be understood by simply anyone who read this because the author of this e-book is well-known enough. This particular book also makes your vocabulary increase well. So it is easy to understand then can go with you, both in printed or e-book style are available. We advise you for having this How to Be Alone: Essays instantly.

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