

Samenvatting Engels The house of sleep



Samenvatting door een scholier

569 woorden

6 jaar geleden

★ 6,2

6 keer beoordeeld

Vak

Engels

Methode

Unicom Finals

Jonathan Coe is one of those English authors I've been meaning to read for years, so I was delighted when *The House of Sleep*, his fifth novel — and winner of the Writers' Guild Best Fiction Award for 1997 — was recently selected for my book group.

The central story is a rather complicated one about a set of friends who meet at university, drift apart and then meet up again, by accident, some dozen years later. By some bizarre coincidence — and there are a lot of them in this novel — all of them are obsessed by sleep, hence the title.

For instance, Boudewijn is narcoleptic and cannot distinguish reality from her incredibly vivid dreams, which means she is prone to mistaking imagined events for real ones; Lars, a film obsessive, drinks copious amounts of caffeine so he can stay awake to watch more movies, a condition which is mistaken for insomnia; and Joris Flipsen, a sleep specialist, is researching ways to eradicate sleep so that humans no longer need to do it.

Second storyline

There's a second narrative thread in the form of Robert, who falls in love with Sarah when they are students, and the extraordinary lengths he will go to in order to win her affections.

These divergent storylines are brought together by a "huge, grey and imposing" house called Ashdown on the English coast. This is where Sarah, Robert, Terry and Gregory live as students. Fast forward 12 years and it is now a sleep clinic where Sarah and Terry are treated and where Gregory conducts his medical experiments.

The student days and the medical treatment days are told in alternate chapters — the odd-numbered chapters are set in 1983-4, while the even-numbered are set in the last two weeks of June, 1996.

Hilarious and menacing

The House of Sleep is, by turn, darkly comic — in fact, I'd rate this as one of the funniest books I've ever had the pleasure of reading — and strangely sinister. It is part campus novel and part medical novel. In many ways it probably shouldn't work — and, indeed, without all the uncanny coincidences that occur to the characters it probably wouldn't.

But it's so hugely entertaining — laugh out loud funny one minute, quite sad and sobering the next — you can forgive it's ever-so-slight failings.

While there are some set pieces shoehorned in purely for their wit factor — the feature article "ghosted" by Terry that results in 12 libel suits and the closure of the magazine in which it was published is particularly hilarious, but the book would be no less of an achievement without it — I appreciated the way in which they broke up the narrative and provided a bit of light relief.

And there does need to be some relief, because while there are moments which are truly shocking — Gregory's penchant for poking Sarah's eyes out during sex, for instance, and the drastic no-going-back way in which Robert changes himself in order to appeal to Sarah — the reader is left feeling quietly devastated by the time the last page is reached.

The House of Sleep is a very good novel peopled with three-dimensional characters, punchy dialogue and a well crafted plot. It's stylish, funny and edgy, and has made me more determined to read more of Jonathan Coe's work — which is nine novels at last count.