



The Separation

Thomas Duffy

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The Separation is an entertaining dystopian thriller centered in a repressed future America.

In Thomas Duffy's smart and timely Big Brother thriller *The Separation*, a mathematical genius is caught up in a dangerous game with the ruling elite.

In the distant future, college graduation rates are plunging, and teen pregnancies and student crimes are on the rise. The United States government has instituted a separation-of-sexes policy in order to restore financial stability. Children are separated from their parents at birth, forced to live in single-sex states until college graduation, and pushed to succeed and make money. After college, they are reintegrated into mixed-sex societies to reproduce and repeat the process.

Finn Parker is one such student. He excels academically and becomes a successful executive, marrying the equally intelligent Angela. But when Angela gives birth to Leonardo, Finn's misery at his son's separation and at his failing marriage cause him to question the separation policy. Soon he runs afoul of the authorities, and his actions have unintended consequences for him and his family.

Many of the book's running themes—a ruling elite implementing policies that benefit the richest people in the country, control of news sources and information flow, the separation policies, equality of the sexes—hyperbolically mirror modern politics. Situations in which Finn acts as a dissenter and critic all end with additional limits placed on his freedom and intrusions into his privacy. His refusal to accept the status quo results in him being a victim of government powers.

Events within the story proceed chronologically, following Finn as child and then into his life as a grownup. The writing is crisp, concise, and punchy. The setup of scenes provides context to the ensuing action and gives the story a steady pace. Finn's fate is determined in extended scenes; these drag—they are introduced in a repetitive loop with different players, and their developments strain believability.

This is a conceivable dystopian future, even if its elements are taken to extremes. The repressive atmosphere is well-detailed, and characters are relatable and complex. While Finn, as the primary point of view, experiences the most conflict and emotional turmoil, other characters are just as layered, particularly the morally ambiguous ruling elite. The rulers are the most villainous of the characters, but while they are unwilling to stray beyond their social and financial hierarchies, even they show moments of sympathy and understanding for Finn's predicament. The "good" characters suffer more in retribution; the "bad" characters go out of their way to keep things the way they are. This dichotomy between good and bad is one of the strongest elements in the book.

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NANCY POWELL (August 7, 2018)

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