

“Realism and Socialism in the Novels of Jonathan Franzen’s *Freedom* and *The Corrections*.”

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ABSTRACT

Jonathan Franzen’s idea of realism in the one of the national award-winning novels “*The Corrections*” in terms of seminal concerns including the discourse of ethics, cognition, and social minds. As a post-postmodern writer, Jonathan Franzen’s a new version of realism called neorealism or tragic realism. Franzen’s tragic realism, despite showing the tragic and inevitable aspects of life, makes his followers and characters rethink what has been taken for granted about familial, communal, and generational relationships. Realism always has the tendency to transmit into cliché, in its eagerness to depict the average; it is when we move beyond realism that we typically get monumental characters able to get their arms around the defining problems of the day. And the novel *Freedom* ends up being a series of clichés held together by a superficially seductive narrative—quite readable, as we are told a definitive tale about the culture at large by an authority we must accept for his superior moral worth.

Key Words: Realism, Neorealism, familial, monumental characters, general relationship

Jonathan Franzen is a famous popular American novelist in this era, who really focuses on specific eras of American history in his novels and criticizes that era’s society by using his words as a mirror of that period. His immigrant roots and journey to Europe for his education, have made him realize the corruption of American myth and forced him through his writing career. He has published many works since 1988, but the prominent works of his success are *The Corrections*, *Freedom*, and his latest novel, *Crossroads*.

The Novel ‘*The Corrections*’ made Jonathan Franzen to get success in his Career *was* Published in 2011, the novel is primarily spoken about the dark side of the 21st century. By the dark side, it means issues like globalization, excess population, and capitalism. In this novel Franzen used family dynamics as a tool to criticize society. Franzen clearly said about broken home image, Franzen tries to tell us how hard it is to maintain with old family traditions in this continuously changing, modern world. Fractured families that got lost in the shadow of modern-day problems were one of the major changes in the American culture back then.

‘*The corrections*’ is a novel whose humanistic features show Franzen’s trust in the possibility of certain kinds of ‘corrections’ and hence changes in the ethical and moral conditions of the characters. Jonathan Franzen executes these effects through displaying the difficulty of the ordinary lives of ordinary people to restore trust in ethical, humanistic, and even empathic responsibility, through framing the characters’ appreciation of the ethics of complexity. These relations often involve accepting or tolerating human defects as the juxtaposition of tragic and realism.

The Corrections was not the only novel to bring Jonathan Franzen great success, of course. Before the publication of *Freedom*, Franzen was highlighted on Time Magazine’s cover and with that, he appeared the first American writer on Time’s cover, since Stephen King, many years before. Time Magazine even gave him the title “**Great American Novelist**.” Now it is a time to talk about this beautiful novel, as like *The Corrections*, a family issue in the novel ‘*Freedom*’. As for *Freedom*, which accommodates similar ambitions, it fails to deliver on Franzen’s promise after *The Corrections* and is in fact a step backward from his final novel, as Franzen totally loses his stake on the capacity of his brand of social realism to capture American reality in the 2000s.

Realism today can be successful only to the extent that it continuously searches to go beyond realism: into the mis proportioned, the sensational and violent, the sentimental, or narrative defined by language. Franzen, more than in his previous novels, is determined to discard these tendencies; just as the exploded media holds on to a belief in “objectivity” as a value that can yet be attained despite the demonstrated pricking of

ideology into every point of view, so does Franzen believe in the truth claims of the classical realist novel, in the power of description itself to somehow convert into transcendent criticism.

Franzen's novel fails to be a transcendent critique, deteriorating into utter incredibility, as characters form themselves into clichés, situations beggar belief, and pervasive determinism gives the lie to the very title itself. 'Freedom' is Franzen's final strive with the realist novel's basic formal characteristic, which is that it is a style of narrative where characters can discover freedom. But Franzen comes away defeated, because realism as Franzen understands is not to do the job or not even in formal terms.

In the first part of *Freedom* centers on the Berglund's marriage--Patty and Walter, who live in the gentrified St. Paul neighborhood of Ramsey Hill, with their two children, Joey, and Jessica. Patty is a former basketball star from the University of Minnesota, but by origin she is from Westchester County, the daughter of Ray and Joyce Emerson, the former great successful lawyerspends a little time for his children, and the latter a New York state assembly person; the Emersons are wealthy family, with August Emerson, the patriarch, owning an estate that will later become the cause of dispute among Patty's siblings. Patty was unexpectedly raped as a teenager by the son of a powerful political friend of her parents; she gets little sympathy from her parents, which explains her decision to get as far away from them as possible.

As beyond the bounds of credibility that Patty and Walter would permit to their teenage son Joey to move in with the neighbors, and that they would be the only ones unaware in the neighborhood that Joey is having sex with the older Connie. It's difficult to believe, despite Franzen's hard efforts, that Walter would cook up the Faustian bargain he does, becoming complicit in large-scale summit removal for the sake of getting some amount to feed his lifelong obsession with overpopulation. It's hard to believe that Richard--who was not found into oblivion, building decks for the Manhattan elite, when his band first beatsgrand success--would overcome his allergy about publicity enough to contribute his name and time to Richard's mission against overpopulation among the nation's elite liberal arts college students; neither Walter's friendship nor Lalitha's impressive magnetism, nor even the attraction of getting close to Patty again, prepares us for Richard's turnaround: "Compared to manufacturing Chiclets, or building decks for the contemptible, it seemed *interesting*."

Another exciting factor is Joey's college adventures--the family must be replacednear to or in Washington D.C., because that is where, generally, the primary social action of the 2000s was happening--are completely unbelievable; he is apparently at the spindle of the neoconservative conspiracy, both excited to and repelled by the obscene imperialistic effort in Iraq. Joey becomes all but a Republican, teased by his mate who is in his room Jonathan's father, a think tank luminary propagating the neoconservative gospel, and more so by Jonathan's sister Jenna, apparently the most beautiful girl in Virginia, compared to whom Connie appears scruffy and rustic. Not that this prevents Joey from marrying Connie at the age of twenty--without interest or informing his parents--and making this marriage *work*, as Walter and Patty never were able to make their marriage work.

In the regard of structural problem here. Realism discloses to give us the average, the representative, the typical, the stuff of everyday life and confirmable empiricism, we can observe the things on regular basis yet are too busy to record or it is not that important to record, lack the ability to do so. To recountal the average doings of the average person would be dreadfully suffocating, however; so, to make up the scarcity in readability, the realist novelist must compensate with events that oppose belief, even if he must make single effort to lend them the aura of legitimacy.

The reason for this project is unlucky to fail today, in the postmodern information environment, because, clashing to Franzen's belief, the main purpose of the novel is not to be the precursor of reality (we know that already we understand what reality is, in fact, we have lot of information and even knowledge about its substance) but to know how to handle and come out of it, to transcend it, to move beyond it to a posture of deniability and discarding, not complete assimilation. This is where Don DeLillo comes in, or Thomas Pynchon, or William Gaddis. As for Franzen, he is committed to prolonging the myth that he represents the averageness of the average middle-class American fighting his average familial and social battles; in fact, he was unable to show the requirements of the myth on every count.

Franzen was unable to capture the reality of the last tenner in conceptual terms; the novel, how it was called significantly, *Freedom* Franzen is into high notions--viz., *The Corrections*, exciting, for example, *War and Peace*, or *The Possessed*, not the individualized titles of Dickens and Balzac. Was "freedom" the major social problem of the last ten years? This argument is sustainable if we say that economic deprivation produced freedom of choice more difficult; or that America chose security over freedom and threw overboard much of its

legacy of civil liberties; or even that freedom was debased, in imperial adventures abroad, to stand in for gross violations of human rights. The above-mentioned explanations can be justified.

The concern with freedom emerges in *Freedom is*. Joey thinks to be independent, to get ready in his early adulthood, without confines from his parents. Patty searches her own freedom of the sexual thrill, knowing she can't have it. Walter freedom in the sense of invest a large sum of money in his favorite ideological cause. Richard wants the freedom not to be wanted by groupies and just make his music. Jessica, the normal daughter--well, she and Lalitha are so efficient and attainment-oriented that no contradiction of freedom would seem to be of relevance to them.

Franzen is anxious with is the freedom of the middle class--or more accurately, the upper middle class, the geometrical Franzen is most comfortable with--to renovate itself, often in its insignificant preoccupations, regardless of global changes, to regress to how it used to be last four decades ago, at the height of the liberal conformity. It is a peculiarly restricted claim to freedom, and Franzen should not suffer from any delusions about the initiative of his superficially broad canvas.

At the final conclusion of *Freedom*, Franzen in fact tries to convince reconstitute the upper middle class at its finest: he gets Lalitha accessibly out of the way because she dies in an accident in West Virginia--which is very close to the situation, because without her death the Midwestern "family" couldn't have been relocated--and Patty and Walter get back together; Joey becomes get success in every moment of the word, reflecting Franzen's sincere judgement that the younger generation is better than the destroyers--there is much of evidence that Franzen opinions the generations, rather than degenerating, keep getting better, in the form of their authenticity, hard work, logic sense, efficiency, and certainly coolness; Patty shows herself together to act as a model Mom to Joey and Jessica, finds satisfaction in work "for the last five years, Patty had been living in Brooklyn and working as a teacher's assistant in a private school, helping first-grade children with their language skills and giving coach for softball and basketball in the secondary school", and she knows composes a second autobiographical segment, wherein not only mistakes are acknowledged but responsibility is accepted; and even Richard modifies himself to success (much like Franzen himself, agreeing to appear on *Oprah* and happy to have her endorsement, after dissing her in 2001, or proposing that Time put him on their cover?), enchanting part in mainstream projects that the NPR-loving crowd could easily receive.

The difficulty with Franzen's condemnation about realism is that they don't allow him to be passionate about anything. Franzen's nonfiction, that his politics is of the weakest liberal variety; he normally accepts the conventional narrative about jihad, 9/11, globalization, terrorism, foreign policy threats, and climate change. His ideas on, environmentalism and overpopulation in common, fairly closely with Walter's; the most touching scene of *Freedom* comes at the final conclusion part, where Walter is isolated, because the reason is the death of Lalitha and the separation from Patty, in their Nameless Lake house, trying to stop the missionary neighbor Linda's cat Bobby from killing the birds on his property--except that Franzen has an experience dealt with the birdwatching material much more respectably in *The Discomfort Zone*.

Franzen doesn't have any intension particularly on strong beliefs to argue one way or the other; this is absolutely clear from his essays for *Harper's*, such as the one on privacy included in 'How To Be Alone,' where Franzen doesn't want attacks on it as too much of a problem; his development liberal outlook steeps *Freedom*, as it includes all his fiction, but it is a small area of American ideological belief, and should not expect claim to universality. Moreover, there is at least a case to be made for skepticism toward high enthusiasm about overpopulation and global warming; but Franzen is too stable in his "objectivity" to throw radical doubt on any of the myths of the liberal consensus. Had the *New York Times* editorial board--as feeble an assemblage of human minds as it is possible to imagine--delegated someone to fictionalize their collective point of view, it would undoubtedly have been Franzen.

Freedom shows number of times that, contrary to the realist's faith, it is not sufficient to simply describe social relations as they are and expect that the job of critique will be more power in the interpretation itself. Franzen greatly worried in his 1996 *Harper's* essay, "Perchance to Dream", that the social novel has lost connection to the culture at large; having been given huge chance, especially after *The Corrections*, to convert this situation, he has moved perhaps the last nail in its coffin, since execution and competence are not in question in *Freedom*.

Franzen doesn't have the courage of his persuasions to aspire to critical realism, since he doesn't really have anything to criticize. He often casually reproduces the culture's superficial emotions like loves and hates, such as feelings toward the New York people. He is good with high school and college education as it exists in American, young people generally seem and focus on enlightened and progressive and humane to him, civilization has its pleasures and prosperity offers enough to balance for hard work and trouble, and if the back years were a bit of an imperfection on the new ideas.

Realism is at home in social institutions--family life, schooling, work--but Franzen is convincing try to speak in his works only when he writes about schooling (though there is all too much juvenile talk about masturbation and porn and MILFs). He is less convincing about family, and least convincing about work. This is an influential point, and one possible explanation is that for Franzen is as for other outstanding American realist writers the bildungsroman typically embodied in the struggle of the alienated soul against formal schooling fills the same gap of apprehending the "middle distance" that it had for Goethe. Goethe had a difficult time with institutions; Dickens, Balzac, Stendhal, Flaubert, and Tolstoy, not to mention Joyce, Proust, Musil and Mann, didn't.

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