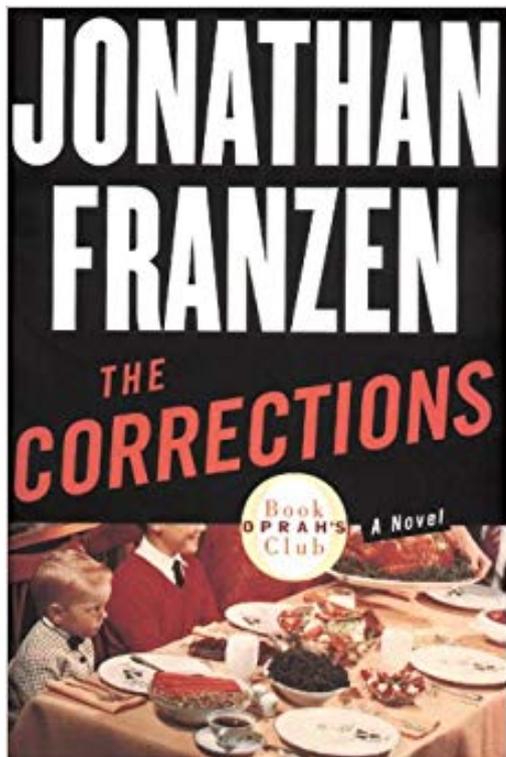


## THE CORRECTIONS. *by* Jonathan. Franzen



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**Author:** Jonathan. Franzen

**Book title:** THE CORRECTIONS.

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"Funny and deeply sad, large-hearted and merciless. The Corrections is a testament to the range and depth of pleasures great fiction affords." - David Foster Wallace > 1st Edition > Copyright 2001 by Jonathan Franzen > Published 2001 by Farrar Straus Giroux, New York > Measures 9.25 x 6.5 x 1.75 inches thick > 568 pages > Weighs 32 ounces



## Reviews of the **THE CORRECTIONS.** *by* Jonathan. Franzen

Tojahn

So I've read a lot of contradictory opinions regarding Franzen's books, this novel in particular, and the man himself. Some say Franzen is a genius and The Corrections is the best novel they've ever read. Others dismiss the dude as elitist blowhard and his prose as bloated and self-indulgent. While I can't comment on the qualities of Jonathan Franzen's character, having never met the man, I can at least offer the opinion that The Corrections is a very, very good book, although with some quirks that may prove off-putting for some readers.

The central premise of the novel - a dysfunctional family of five trying to gather together for one last

Christmas - serves as a kind of frame story, with every individual chapter delving into the backstory of a main character. Individual stories are not as cleanly separated as in Decameron or Canterbury Tales, though; author often switches to a different POV to show us same situation from different angles, and the narrative often shifts between past and present, showing us how this or that character's formative years made them what they are today. That Corrections is so character-focused can prove a big problem for some people, because all major and most of minor characters are extremely unlikable. They are paranoid, delusional, self-centered, unfaithful, manipulative, domineering (the list could go on forever, really), and their redeeming qualities are few. Nevertheless, none of them are bland or uninteresting, and you will quickly discover that although all of important characters are A-holes, there are actually many different degrees of A-hollery; who knows, maybe you'll even end up rooting for some of characters (or at least hate them less than others). The author even plays a little bait-and-switch where a seemingly most well-rounded and nice member of the family later turns out to be one of the worst human beings in the book.

A lot of people here and elsewhere complained that the absence of sympathetic characters made the book unreadable for them. I beg to differ. Franzen's characters are unlikable, but they are hardly unsympathetic. Numerous flashbacks help us understand that they are hardly to blame for most of their shortcomings; in most cases no one is really to blame. Also, they are not quite unrealistic, and while Franzen is often extremely satirical in their depictions (for example, one of the family members thinks "At least I didn't become a religious fundamentalist like my father"; his sons are named Caleb, Jonah, and Aaron), they still don't devolve into outright caricatures. Speaking of caricatures, Franzen dishes out a lot of criticism aimed both left and right: academic feminists and racist bigots, Midwestern traditionalists and coastal elites, capitalists and socialists all get their due portion of witty barbs. On the other hand, while Franzen steps on a lot of toes, he is unlikely to continue stomping on any particular foot; his criticism is aimed at society in general, and the way it twists and corrupts individuals.

Last, but not least, I've found Franzen's writing style to be pleasantly witty and well-flowing. I've had to re-read a couple of complex passages to actually get them, but the writing in general is not ponderous or self-indulging at all. I'd recommend Corrections to anyone interested in fiction with realistic and complex characters.

Meri

Confession: I've resisted this book for years, in part because its author, Jonathan Franzen, has a reputation (deserved or not) for being something of a jerk. He's not exactly Mr. Warmth and Cheer on his talk-show appearances, and then there was that little issue with Oprah Winfrey.

Also, reviews informed me that "The Corrections'" plot concerns a middle-class family of five in the late-twentieth-century Midwest, with Depression-era parents and grown kids who flew the coop. I happen to hail from a middle-class family of five in the late-twentieth-century Midwest, with Depression-era parents and grown kids who flew the coop. I thought the book might hit a little too close to home, and so I took a pass.

My mistake.

Franzen is a spectacularly gifted writer. His insights and prose are endlessly inventive. He deftly mixes elements of Shakespearean tragedy with humor straight out of Kurt Vonnegut. He chooses the perfect word, the perfect phrase to illustrate his scenes. The major theme, in which members of The Greatest Generation and The Me Generation collide with societal change and with each other, is important to many Americans. National Book Award voters honored "The Corrections" in 2001, and justifiably so.

However ... this was a novel that I admired more than I enjoyed. The characters, although fully realized and recognizable, are not what I'd call endearing, and the reader is asked to spend 566 pages with them. Unless you grew up in a family much like the Lamberts - (ahem) - "The Corrections" might engage your mind but not so much your soul. -- grouchyeditor.com  
Cezel

This is a brilliant novel about the end of life of the parents and the intricate details of how this develops and ends around a final Christmas get-together. The writing is over the top in its investigation of the minutiae of the main players which includes a total of five, two parents and three children in adult mid-life. At the core is the father who is crumbling with Alzheimers and other old age limitations the novel delves into the psychological history of the grown children, two sons and a daughter. It's sad, pathetic and linguistically overcooked; there are difficult scenes and wretched excess that disgusts the delicate reader; fact is the end of life with mental failure and loss of bodily control is not a pretty painting by any means and the Lutheran like Midwest darkness of the viewpoint is depressing and seemingly hopeless although by the collapse of the seniors of the family the great father figure has oozed into infancy and as often true the mother figure saddles up and keeps on riding into the future of the optimistic healing nature of long livers who just don't take prisoners and keep on going to the final end whoever that turns out to survive. Writing style is truly psychologically intricate and worthy of remark but the overall mindscape is bleak and promises little hope unless you're one of the "tough" pioneer survivors of American middle class moneyed life and its inevitable petty familial cruelties due to rapacious capitalist meanness. It was overwritten and probably needed to have a third cut, trimmed and honed toward a leaner less baroque verbal display more in the tradition of Nathaniel West's cinematic leanness in Day of the Locust. Bergman would have enjoyed making a gray B&W film of this dreary novel. Beckett could have written a shorter, more humorously existential account with a little Irish tap room relief from the grinding deterioration of an American Humpty Dumpty clueless father figure.

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