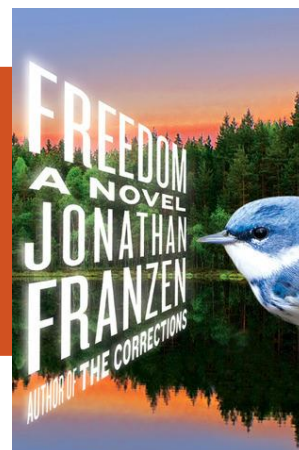




Freedom

Jonathan Franzen



Author Background

Jonathan Franzen is an American novelist and essayist. He was born in Western Springs, Illinois, USA. Franzen grew up in an affluent neighbourhood and graduated with high honours from Swarthmore College, with a degree in German. While studying in Germany in 1979-80 he met Michael A. Martone, on whom he would later base the character Walter Berglund in *Freedom*.

Franzen was married in 1982 and moved with his wife to Somerville, Massachusetts to pursue a career as a novelist. Whilst writing his first novel, *The Twenty-seventh City*, he worked as a research assistant at Harvard University in the Department of Earth and Planetary Sciences, co-authoring several dozen papers.

His 2001 novel *The Corrections* earned Franzen a National Book Award for fiction and the 2002 James Tait Black Memorial Prize for fiction.

He now lives in Santa Cruz, California with his partner, writer Kathy Chetkovich.

Book Summary

Patty and Walter Berglund were the new pioneers of old St. Paul, Minnesota—the gentrifiers, the hands-on parents, the avant-garde of the Baby Boomers. Patty was the ideal sort of neighbour who could tell you where to recycle your batteries and how to get the local cops to actually do their job. She was an enviably perfect mother and the wife of Walter's dreams. Together with Walter—environmental lawyer, commuter cyclist, total family man—she was doing her small part to build a better world.

But now, in the new millennium, the Berglunds have become a mystery. Why is Walter working away from home so much? What has happened to their teenage son? Why has Patty, the bright star of Barrier Street, become "a very different kind of neighbour," coming unhinged before the street's attentive eyes? And what exactly is eccentric rocker Richard Katz—Walter's college best friend and rival—still doing in the picture?

As the story explores the nature of love, it also tackles our tenuous relationship with nature. When Walter fights to preserve a habitat for an endangered bird, the troubled history between Patty, Richard and himself threatens to topple the deal, along with everything he believes about truth and illusion.

Discussion Questions

- ❖ How would you characterise Patty's writing? How does her storytelling style compare to the narrator's voice in the rest of the novel?
- ❖ If you were Patty, would you have made the road trip with Richard?
- ❖ In the novel and in your own experience, how do couples sustain intense attraction for each other over the many phases of their lives?
- ❖ What accounts for the differences between Joey and Jessica? Is it simply a matter of genes and temperament, or does gender matter in their situation?
- ❖ What does Joey want and get from Jenna and Connie? What do they want and get from him?
- ❖ How is Lalitha different from the other characters in the novel?
- ❖ How would you answer the essential question raised by Walter's deal with the Texas rancher Vin Haven: What is the best way to achieve environmental conservation?
- ❖ If Walter had written a memoir, what might he have said about his victories and his suffering?
- ❖ Which characters elicited continual sadness and sympathy in you and why?

References

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