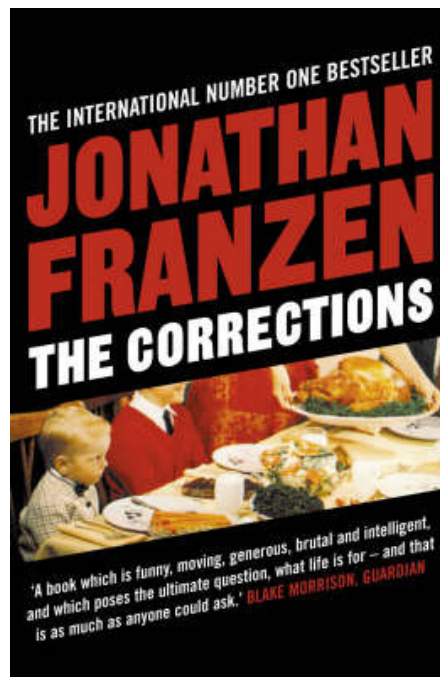




The Corrections

Jonathan Franzen

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Jonathan Franzen

The Corrections Jonathan Franzen

Winner of the National Book Award for Fiction

Nominated for the National Book Critics Circle Award

An American Library Association Notable Book

Jonathan Franzen's third novel, *The Corrections*, is a great work of art and a grandly entertaining overture to our new century: a bold, comic, tragic, deeply moving family drama that stretches from the Midwest at mid-century to Wall Street and Eastern Europe in the age of greed and globalism. Franzen brings an old-time America of freight trains and civic duty, of Cub Scouts and Christmas cookies and sexual inhibitions, into brilliant collision with the modern absurdities of brain science, home surveillance, hands-off parenting, do-it-yourself mental healthcare, and the anti-gravity New Economy. With *The Corrections*, Franzen emerges as one of our premier interpreters of American society and the American soul.

Enid Lambert is terribly, terribly anxious. Although she would never admit it to her neighbors or her three grown children, her husband, Alfred, is losing his grip on reality. Maybe it's the medication that Alfred takes for his Parkinson's disease, or maybe it's his negative attitude, but he spends his days brooding in the basement and committing shadowy, unspeakable acts. More and more often, he doesn't seem to understand a word Enid says.

Trouble is also brewing in the lives of Enid's children. Her older son, Gary, a banker in Philadelphia, has turned cruel and materialistic and is trying to force his parents out of their old house and into a tiny apartment. The middle child, Chip, has suddenly and for no good reason quit his exciting job as a professor at D----- College and moved to New York City, where he seems to be pursuing a "transgressive" lifestyle and writing some sort of screenplay. Meanwhile the baby of the family, Denise, has escaped her disastrous marriage only to pour her youth and beauty down the drain of an affair with a married man--or so Gary hints.

Enid, who loves to have fun, can still look forward to a final family Christmas and to the ten-day Nordic Pleasurelines Luxury Fall Color Cruise that she and Alfred are about to embark on. But even these few remaining joys are threatened by her husband's growing confusion and unsteadiness. As Alfred enters his final decline, the Lamberts must face the failures, secrets, and long-buried hurts that haunt them as a family if they are to make the corrections that each desperately needs.

The Corrections Details

Date : Published September 2nd 2002 by Fourth Estate Paperbacks (first published September 2001)

ISBN : 9781841156736

Author : Jonathan Franzen

Format : Paperback 653 pages

Genre : Fiction, Contemporary, Novels

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From Reader Review The Corrections for online ebook

Kate says

Conrad told me that Jonathan Franzen has been quoted as saying he deliberately rips off influential late-century American authors such as Pynchon, DeLillo and Roth, but tries to make the prose less difficult, more easily consumed.

Leaving aside for a moment the irony of that statement in light of his outrage over the Oprah thing, that is retarded. Those authors are not great because their writing is accessible when the complexity is removed.

It was when one of the main characters in *The Corrections* was talking to a hallucinated turd that I thought, I should just put this down and take a stab at *Against the Day*, or re-read *Gravity's Rainbow* where a (literal) shit scene can actually be hilarious and fascinating.

In addition to weak-pynchonian characters (human and fecal), this novel suffers from a lack of strict editing (too many peripheral characters, too many inconsequential sub-sub-subplots), from unsympathetic characters (I don't really know what the point is if everyone is horrible and always has and always will hate or be spiteful to everyone around them), from an inconsistent, sudden ending (last chapter: no one will ever change. epilogue: everyone changed and is now charitable of heart!), from an irritatingly-rendered main theme (we all try to CORRECT ourselves and one another but we are ultimately unable), and from its own determined effort to be Epic (even a glowing review I found of this book said Franzen might as well have called it "American (Something)"; he compares one of the settings to the rest of the country in the first paragraph, for god's sake).

The "misery of aging" theme was effective, and I appreciated the exploration of a marriage that was bad for no more complicated a reason than that the husband and wife weren't right for one another. Otherwise I had no use for Franzen and his truckloads of loathing.

Fabian says

On the other hand, there are IMPULSIVELY READABLE works of fiction. The much appreciated "The Corrections" is a prime example of what can occur if all you do is describe members of a family (it is not even all that dysfunctional--which is why the pathos is all too real). The Lamberts have a fallen patriarch, a mother who is on the verge of being taken under by her spouse (in other words, she's The Mother), a sibling who cares too much, another one too little, & a younger sister who may be a workaholic. These are fully-fleshed creations and the mother's only wish, that they all convene for one last Christmas dinner at their original nest, is also the reader's. One cannot help but root for them all to make it! Will the father survive his Parkinson's in one piece? Will Gary (Son #1) change for the better, be less of the older sibling, and therefore less of an asshole? Will Chip leave Lithuania just as civil unrest hits, in time for all 5 Lamberts to come together? Will the mother beat her new addiction to pills, let go of her husband? Will Denise embrace something other than work?

These people have very interesting points of view, have deviated briefly from their prime roost, sure. But once they come together in the climax that comes too soon (some 450 pages after all the character development! [why o why can't it extend until another holiday?!?:]), once we finally get to where we were supposed to get to all along---well, aren't we all at least one of the Lamberts? It hurts to realize that, as an older sibling, I am a Gary. And like him, some corrections could definitely be made...

Howard says

The critics loved **The Corrections**. Published in 2001, it won the National Book Award for fiction for that year and was a finalist for a Pulitzer Prize a year later. It also won or was nominated for a number of other prestigious literary prizes.

David Gates wrote in his glowing review in the New York Times that the book had “just enough novel-of-paranoia touches so Oprah won’t assign it and ruin Franzen’s street cred.”

Wrong, David. Oprah not only chose it for her book club but went so far as to proclaim it “the great American novel.” Franzen, who recognized that his book’s selection by Oprah meant that sales would sharply increase, was nevertheless ambivalent about the situation because he believed that heretofore her selections had been on the “schmaltzy” side. Consequently, when he voiced his feelings in several interviews Oprah withdrew her invitation to have him as a guest on her show (And the dust cover of my hardback copy does not feature her stamp of approval, which had been embossed on earlier copies of the book.). Of course, the publicity engendered by the tempest in a teapot may have had as much of a positive impact on sales as his appearance on her show would have had. But perhaps he did salvage his “street cred.” I hope so.

So how is it that I would give such a heralded book two out of five stars? I’ll answer that, but first here is another quote from David Gates’ review: “If you don’t end up liking each one of Franzen’s people, you probably just don’t like people.”

My answer for the two stars is I didn’t like any of the people. I didn’t like the father, the mother (I did feel some pity for her, but I can’t say I liked her.), the older son (or especially his wife), the younger son, or the daughter (At first I liked her, but only because I didn’t know her. When I did get to know her, I found her to be the most unlikable of the entire crew, except for the older son’s wife.).

Is this because, in Gates’ words, I “probably just don’t like people”? No, it is because I just don’t like THESE people or for that matter, any of their friends or associates. There was not a single person that I could pull for – not one. And after 568 pages, I not only don’t like the people, I don’t like the book either.

The two stars were for the writing (otherwise it would have been one), and even then, there were times I wasn’t crazy about the writing either. For example: “...Susy Ghosh asked the table in a voice like hair in a shampoo commercial.” (p. 326) I’m still trying to figure out what the hell that means.

Jason says

Franzen’s writing is impeccable. Not only does his understanding of complex, familial relationships fascinate me, but his ability to capture these characters—all five of them, I might add—with such depth...I think that is what really drew me in as a reader. I mean, these are people who are so flawed emotionally and so utterly selfish inherently, and yet each of them has this capacity for loving one another even while recognizing their inability to stand each other for more than five minutes at a time: in a sense they are more human than most humans. And Franzen knows how to write a sentence, my God. All this book did was remind me why I love to read.

Honestly, I try to give five stars sparingly, but this one I fully endorse. I think what makes it better than

Freedom is that I walked away from this with a knot in my stomach (I really *felt* something here!). Seven year-old Chip being left alone at the dinner table until it was late enough for him to fall asleep on his placemat bothered me. Juxtapose that with the tenderness Chip shows his dad toward the end of the novel, and you start to wonder whether this man was ever really the emotionally unavailable tyrant that you thought he was. Either way, this just serves as a huge reminder for me to appreciate the way things are now while my kids are still young, because it's probably not always going to be this simple.

Jeffrey Keeten says

“And when the event, the big change in your life, is simply an insight—isn't that a strange thing? That absolutely nothing changes except that you see things differently and you're less fearful and less anxious and generally stronger as a result: isn't it amazing that a completely invisible thing in your head can feel realer than anything you've experienced before? You see things more clearly and you know that you're seeing them more clearly. And it comes to you that this is what it means to love life, this is all anybody who talks seriously about God is ever talking about. Moments like this.”

The Lamberts are experiencing corrections. Not economic ones like the rest of the country, although money does underline everything they worry about. The whole family, in a myriad of ways, is each on the verge of their very own unique self-destruction.

“THE CORRECTION, when it finally came, was not an overnight bursting of a bubble but a much more gentle let down, a year-long leakage of value from key financial markets, a contraction too gradual to generate headlines and too predictable to seriously hurt anybody but fools and the working poor.”

There may be big events that finally shove us forward, backwards or sideways, but in the aftermath most of us can find, with some self-evaluation, that the crash in our lives was preceded by a series of miniature inadvisable decisions. Sometimes we have to crash to correct.

Alfred is the father, a Kansan, who believed in hard work and honest labor. He has always been moody, self-contained, in many ways... unknowable. At the age of 75 he has come down with Parkinson's and is quickly becoming a burden, impossible to bear, for his wife Enid and his kids. He has trouble controlling his bowels and this manifests itself in an almost comic, if it weren't so tragic, series of delusions of talking turds pursuing him relentlessly through the corridors of his own mind. He was an amateur chemist and made an important discovery that for unknowable reasons (it will be revealed later in the book) refuses to fight for his rights to be richly rewarded. It drives his oldest son Gary nuts.

“Gary didn't know which version of Alfred made him angrier: the spiteful old tyrant who'd made a brilliant discovery in the basement and cheated himself out of a fortune, or the clueless basement amateur who'd unwittingly replicated the work of real chemists, spent scarce family money to file and maintain a vaguely worded patent, and was now being tossed a scrap from the table.... Both versions incensed him.

I admit there are several moments when I too felt the urge to strangle Alfred. He is from a generation and geography where a man makes decisions, and never feels the need to explain himself. He doesn't care how angry or upset you are. Tears nor threats will move him to give you the reasons that led him to his decisions.

Gary is an investment banker in Philadelphia. He has a beautiful wife named Caroline and three sons. He is fighting with his wife more regularly than normal, and she insists that he is clinically depressed. He believes, and is not just paranoid about this issue, that his wife is manipulating events behind his back, subtly turning his sons against him. She denies everything, concedes nothing. He finds her in pain from her back and

realizes as angry as he is....

"That her face was beautiful and that the agony in it was mistakable for ecstasy--that the sight of her doubled-over and mud-spattered and red-cheeked and vanquished and wild-haired on the Persian rug turned him on; that some part of him believed her denials and was full of tenderness for her--only deepened his feeling of betrayal."

He has a haughty disdain for nearly everyone. He talks down to his mother. He is furious and almost unhinged with his father. He is dismissive of his siblings. His lust for his wife is inspired as much by his desire to try and control her as it is about physical contact. Her fights with him heightens all kinds of feelings of desire. He is almost snobbishly gleeful in his fidelity to her, but as he revels in his superiority there are also other issues knocking around in his head.

"It occurred to Gary, as the young estate planner leaned into him to let a raft of sweltering humanity leave the elevator, as she pressed her hennaed head against his ribs more intimately than seemed strictly necessary, that another reason he'd remained faithful to Caroline through twenty years of marriage was his steadily growing aversion to physical contact with other human beings. Certainly he was in love with fidelity; certainly he got an erotic kick out of adhering to principle; but somewhere between his brain and his balls a wire was also perhaps coming loose, because when he mentally undressed and violated this little redhaired girl his main thought was how stuffy and undisinfected he would find the site of his infidelity--a coliform-bacterial supply closet, a Courtyard Marriott with dried semen on the walls and bedspreads.... each site over warm and underventilated and suggestive of genital warts and chlamydia in its own unpleasant way--and what a struggle it would be to breath, how smothering her flesh, how squalid and foredoomed his efforts not to condescend..."

So really he is faithful because it is unhygienic to cheat.

Chip is the middle child, a teacher at a college when we first meet him. He involves himself with a student who pursued him relentless not so much out of sexual attractiveness, but that she needed his help on a paper for another class. Classic barter system; that unfortunately for Chip, is discovered. After he is fired he writes a breast obsessed first draft of a screenplay called The Academy Purple. It is really horrible. He loses yet another girlfriend, Julia who's boss decides that she needs to upgrade boyfriends. Julia has a husband from Lithuanian who needs someone with Chip's skills. (???) With zero prospects in NY Chip decides to fly to Lithuania to help defraud American investors; greed can always be exploited.

After cratering over the loss of his young college lover that left him snuffling his furniture for any residual essence of her nether regions, Chip is getting over lost girlfriends quicker helped by fantasy detours about a bartender he just met.

"If he couldn't get Julia back, he wanted in the worst way to have sex with the bartender. Who looked about thirty-nine herself. He wanted to fill his hands with her smoky hair. He imagined that she lived in a rehabbed tenement on East Fifth, he imagined that she drank a beer at bedtime and slept in faded sleeveless tops and gym shorts, that her posture was weary, her navel unassumingly pierced, her pussy like a seasoned baseball glove, her toenails painted the plainest basic red. He wanted to feel her legs across his back, he wanted to hear the story of her forty-odd years."

Things don't go well for Chip in Lithuania, but he was so **damn close**.

"He didn't understand what had happened to him. He felt like a piece of paper that had once had coherent writing on it but had been through the wash. He felt roughened, bleached, and worn out along the fold lines."

Denise is the youngest sibling, a successful chef who finds herself the main negotiator between her parents and her brothers. She has a history of being attracted to older men which probably has something to do with her uneasy relationship with her father. After her marriage to a colleague, twice her age, falls to pieces she is done with men and decides to try her luck with women.

With mixed results.

She gets an opportunity of a lifetime when she meets a young entrepreneur, a member of the recently wealthy who decides he wants to open a restaurant. He wants Denise to be his chef and he wants her in his bed. She resists, barely, intent on not letting sex destroy this opportunity for her. Kudos for trying to break a bad pattern. Good thinking...but sleeping with his wife nullifies all that careful arms length tango she carried out so well with the husband.

"Her car was like a tongue gliding down the melty asphalt streets, her feet like twin tongues licking the pavement, the front door of the house on Panama Street like a mouth that swallowed her, the Persian runner in the hall outside the master bedroom like a tongue beckoning, the bed in its cloak of comforter and pillows a big soft tongue begging to be depressed, and then."

The problem with Denise is she has a hard time resisting people who find her attractive. She enjoys the fact that older men really appreciate her shapely body. The sexual attraction that males and females have for her compels her forward in a relationship long past the time when any of it is still pleasurable for her. She loses everything for something she really didn't want in the first place.

I haven't even gotten to the mother Enid. She is at that point in her life where she is ready to go do things and finds her husband *"moldering and devaluing"* before her very eyes. He is an albatross around her neck; and yet, she still loves him. She desperately clings to the idea of the whole Lambert family coming together one more time in St. Jude for Christmas.

If you are someone who likes to read books where you like the characters you might struggle with this book. I find that a lot of people who say they don't like this book abandon it before completion.

It is natural to want someone in a story that you can root for.

As Jonathan Franzen unpacks these characters he exposes those things that are generally hidden beneath our clothes like a nasty wart near a nipple or cellulite on our butt cheeks. The type of flaws we would prefer to be seen in half-light, not the glaring brightness of daylight. I started out not liking any of these characters, their flaws were dominating their inherently good qualities, but as Franzen so deftly unspools more revelations I became more and more sympathetic.

What we have to remember is that none of us knows someone's whole history. We get pieces and sometimes those are the best pieces, and sometimes we only see someone at their worst moment. We never have the whole story that might make sense out of the senseless. We have a tendency to ignore our own flaws and castigate those same flaws in others. You might be starting to understand where I'm going with all this. These characters are human, maybe too human, but that could be because Jonathan Franzen may have wrote one of the most honest books you'll ever read.

If you wish to see more of my most recent book and movie reviews, visit <http://www.jeffreykeeten.com>
I also have a Facebook blogger page at: <https://www.facebook.com/JeffreyKeeten>

Perry says

"Gunter gleiben glauchen globen

All right

I got somethin' to say"

"no serenade, no fire brigade, just pyromania"

{{ Def Leppard, Rock of Ages, 1982 }}

Despite Herr Franzen's picturesque prose and stellar structuring, I could not get past the *gloomy, grating, grinding*, megalomaniacal, monomaniacal, hypochondriacal, nymphomaniacal **bitching, bemoaning, boo-hooing, bleating** and **bloated backbiting and bullshit** of this family full of neurotic whiners, stretching from the Midwest to the Northeast for an entire 653 pages.

If *The Corrections* is the Great American Novel, have mercy on U.S. all!!

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Books Ring Mah Bell says

My first Franzen.

Really I don't even know how to start this review. I could begin, I suppose, by discussing the pure perfection of his writing. It is REALLY DAMN GOOD. If I could break reviews down into little sections, he'd get 10 stars for his style/technique. Excellent.

On the other hand, I can't give this a full 5 stars. Or can I? Yeah, it was well written. The depth of the characters and the storyline maybe just a hair short of phenomenal. ???

Yet...

Why do I bother with fiction? I feel guilty, as if I should be learning something instead.

Is the desire to read this type of fiction some sort of voyeuristic fetish? Peek into some fictional character's life and say, "Hell, I've got it good!" Really, there is plenty of non-fiction out there to get you into an attitude of gratitude right quick. (see: books on holocaust, genocide, great depression, etc...)

Do I, as a reader, get anything out of it at all, beyond perhaps some mindless entertainment? Do I have to?

David Foster Wallace once said, "Fiction's about what it is to be a fucking human being."

And you know, he's right.

In *The Corrections*, Franzen absolutely nails (not literally) each member of a dysfunctional (average!??!) family. Mom borders on neurotic. Dad is demented. Kids all screwed up in their own way. The following excerpt: *"He'd had the sense moments earlier that Caroline was on the verge of accusing him of being depressed. and he was afraid that if the idea he was depressed gained currency, he would forfeit the right to*

his opinions. He would forfeit his moral certainties; every word he spoke would become a symptom of disease, he would never again win an argument." Fricking BRILLIANT. And real.

Somehow Franzen manages to put the "fun" in dysfunctional. Far from "mindless", The Corrections tunes you in to each family member and their flaws. In reading, you may recognize yourself in one of the characters, stop and think, "oh no! I'm that jerk!" Or, in a perhaps better scenario, say, "Ha! That bitch is just like my sister!"

Whatever the case, you KNOW these people Franzen writes about. You work with them. God forbid, you are related to them! But it is real. All the imperfections, the misunderstandings, the yearning, the love, the hate....

It **IS** about being a human being.

And it is done very damn well.

This is NOT my last Franzen.

Paul Bryant says

JONATHAN FRANZEN'S TOP TEN RULES FOR WRITERS (as given to The Guardian on 20 Feb 2010)

with additional commenty comments by me :

1. The reader is a friend, not an adversary, not a spectator.

Hmm, well, maybe. I can't think Hugh Selby had very friendly thoughts when he wrote his brilliant *Last Exit to Brooklyn*, it reads like he wants to shove all of us into a landfill site and have done with the human race. But quite often that's a good attitude for a writer to have. Some books you walk around and poke sticks at, they're designed that way; some books you take your machete and hack into the meat and the filth and the hell with any bystanders getting splattered, they shouldn't be bystanding so close if their fine suits mean that much to them. Some books you can have round for tea with mama. So I disagree with rule 1.

2 Fiction that isn't an author's personal adventure into the frightening or the unknown isn't worth writing for anything but money.

Garrison Keillor musta got a real fat wad for Lake Wobegon then. Likewise Dickens. I'm not sure what this rule really means. Maybe it's just like a tie with a drawing of a fish on it.

3 Never use the word "then" as a conjunction – we have "and" for this purpose. Substituting "then" is the lazy or tone-deaf writer's non-solution to the problem of too many "ands" on the page.

Okay JF okay. Deep breaths - put your head between your legs.

4 Write in the third person unless a really distinctive first-person voice offers itself irresistibly.

Agreed - I recently jacked in a novel because I found *to my horror* that it was written in the SECOND person. *You* do this, *you* say that. Nooooooooooooo! That's just wrong. Only one book gets away with that, which is *An American Tragedy* by Theodore Dreiser, which is quite brilliant. But after that one - no second person! You is fired!

(Now... E Annie Proulx - look away now!)

5 *When information becomes free and universally accessible, voluminous research for a novel is devalued along with it.*

Naw, I think I see what he's getting at but naw. If you marshall your research well, you create a world, you're doing good. Who was that woman who lived in a box in England and wrote about Alaska? I reviewed it too - my memory is going down the drain. Ah yes, *The Tenderness of Wolves*. Anyway, that was pretty good. So no to rule 5.

6 *The most purely autobiographical fiction requires pure invention. Nobody ever wrote a more autobiographical story than "The Metamorphosis".*

Sounds like bollocky bollocks to me. Does this actually mean anything?

7 *You see more sitting still than chasing after.*

Ah, grasshopper, you have much to learn. Come on, JF, you're a great writer, don't bullshit us.

8 *It's doubtful that anyone with an internet connection at his workplace is writing good fiction.*

Also wrong because these days employers can firewall all porn and gambling and social networking sites. (But here, they don't think of Goodreads as a social networking site, so shhhh, don't tell them....!)

9 *Interesting verbs are seldom very interesting.*

He's galumphing again.

10 *You have to love before you can be relentless*

That's from a Christmas cracker, i bet.

Anyway, *The Corrections* is one of the few books which made me want to find out what the guy wrote next, which was *Freedom* (what a crap title).

The Corrections has one really naff section, where it turns into a stupid farce about post-Soviet Lithuania and gangsters and stuff, really bad. Otherwise I thought it was tough, tender, relentless even, but sadly, full of interesting verbs. Fail yourself, Jonathan.

Brian says

An open letter to my former copy of *The Corrections*:

First I want to tell you that it isn't you, it's me. People and books grow apart just like people and people grow apart. I remember years ago when I read you that there were certain things about you that I really liked; but the truth is, I just wasn't really that into you. Yeah, that little stunt with Oprah was pretty cute, and I recall we had a laugh, but I'm just at that point in my life where I need to make space for new experiences –

open myself up to what other potentials are out there. And you're kinda crowding me a bit.

I know you asked me "Where did it all go wrong?" I could hear your muffled whine from the trunk as I drove you with the other books to Goodwill. At first, I wished that I had put you at the bottom of the bag beneath the crushing weight of the duplicate copy of Shaw's works and the crap translation of *Les Misérables*. But that's just being petty. I'll answer your question honestly. Some books, like people, have a character flaw. Yours, however, is an author flaw. I've just found myself more and more baffled by the man who crafted you. The tipping point came last week when I read Ben Marcus's piece referencing your author and that was really the final straw. Don't take this that you are terrible, because you're not. It's just that I personally think that your author is, and I don't want to live in the literary world he wishes to create. Thus, the breakup.

Over the years you've been with me, my friends have changed. I know that you've been less than happy about this. I've seen the way that you scoff at all of those Christine Brooke-Rose novels on the shelf near you. Across the library there are now two whole shelves of Vollmann, growing to three. I made it clear that none of your family will be welcome in my house, so you've been reduced to crossing your arms and pouting while I've invited in Pynchon, Joyce, Gaddis, Gass, McElroy, Marcus. You started claiming that I hate you, but I don't. Those three stars are really three.

So trust me, this is the best thing for both of us. Until you find a new home I think you'll like it here. Before leaving the Goodwill I browsed amongst their book selection and saw 27 of your identical twins here. Perhaps you'll be able to pass the time with them sharing stories about how each of you was dumped.

Jacob says

July 2012

Facts concerning Jonathan Franzen's novel *The Corrections*

- Print runs of Jonathan Franzen's novel *The Corrections* are believed to be the largest in recorded history.
- Although no reliable count exists, experts believe that the number of printed copies of Jonathan Franzen's novel *The Corrections* runs into the hundreds of millions in the United States alone, with perhaps more than one billion copies of Jonathan Franzen's novel *The Corrections* in existence worldwide.
- Jonathan Franzen's novel *The Corrections* was expected to be the Next Big Thing, but buyers became bored when they realized the book couldn't be tickled like Elmo, or fed like a Tamagotchi, or collected like Beanie Babies. The unprecedented print run, as well as low sale numbers and high return rates, led to overcrowding. Some bookstores resorted to giving away copies for free, but recipients usually passed them on to unsuspecting friends, like fruitcake.
- By 2004, it is believed that every used bookstore in the continental United States contained at least two dozen copies of Jonathan Franzen's novel *The Corrections* on its shelves.
- However, according to rumor, for every copy of Jonathan Franzen's novel *The Corrections* you can see, ten more are hiding inside the walls or beneath the floorboards.
- Professional ex-libris-terminators worry that the infestation has spread from used bookstores to private homes. In fact, you may have several copies of Jonathan Franzen's novel *The Corrections* on your bookshelves RIGHT NOW, and you may not even know it.
- In 2006, several bookstores along the East Coast and in and around Portland, OR, were found to contain nothing but copies of Jonathan Franzen's novel *The Corrections*, lying in their own filth in crowded stacks and boxes.
- Following this discovery, Congress passed legislation mandating population controls for Jonathan Franzen's

novel *The Corrections*. According to regulations, copies of Jonathan Franzen's novel *The Corrections* may not outnumber other books that are not Jonathan Franzen's novel *The Corrections* by more than 2 to 1. This keeps the copies of Jonathan Franzen's novel *The Corrections* from becoming too self-conscious.

- However, overcrowding persists, and some bookstores have been forced to destroy entire stacks of Jonathan Franzen's novel *The Corrections* to make room for books that are not Jonathan Franzen's novel *The Corrections*.

- To escape this fate, some of the more clever copies of Jonathan Franzen's novel *The Corrections* have taken to disguising themselves as books in Tim LaHaye's and Jerry B. Jenkins' *Left Behind* series. Few manage to find good homes. Some bolder, braver copies of Jonathan Franzen's novel *The Corrections* occasionally venture forth into the Ts, to hide among Tolstoy and Trollope, but are usually ambushed by gangs of Edith Wharton novels and never seen again.

- Sadly, due to gridlock in the current session of Congress, no action has been taken lately, causing tens of millions of copies of Jonathan Franzen's novel *The Corrections* to be rounded up and destroyed in the last two years.

- Although the world of books has developed many religious beliefs regarding what will happen in the after-life, Jonathan Franzen's novel *The Corrections* remains firmly agnostic.

- This is just as well, since all pulped and recycled copies of Jonathan Franzen's novel *The Corrections* are eventually reincarnated as copies of Jonathan Franzen's novel *Freedom*.

A friend gave me Jonathan Franzen's novel *The Corrections* a few years ago (hers had had a litter of baby Jonathan Franzen's novel *The Corrections*, free to a good home), and I've had it burrowed in the shelves ever since. Finally took steps to get rid of the infestation, but I decided to read it first.

And now it's time to put Jonathan Franzen's novel *The Corrections* out of its misery. Its characters range from dull to awful, the story takes way too long to go nowhere, and yet the writing--the goddamn writing!--is damn fucking good. Jonathan Franzen can craft a delicious sentence, I'll grant him that. But I had little desire to read this book and I have no desire to read his others, so I'm going to box up this copy of Jonathan Franzen's novel *The Corrections*, drop it at the back door of the nearest thrift store, and run like hell. Goodbye, little Jonathan Franzen's novel *The Corrections*. I hope you find a good home.

Now if you'll excuse me, Edith Wharton awaits.

Moira Russell says

Dear Mr. Franzen,

Please be so good as to kindly go unfug yourself.

Sincerely,

The fabulous Edith Wharton

Kemper says

While reading *The Corrections* I really understood the meaning of 'schadenfreude' because I despised almost every character in this book so much that the more miserable their lives got, the more enjoyment I took from it. And when a shotgun was introduced late in the novel, I read the rest of it with my fingers crossed while muttering "Please please please please please please..." in the hope that at least one of those pitiful shits would end up taking a load of buckshot to the face.

The Lambert's are a Midwestern family, and while the grown children have all moved to Philadelphia and New York, the parents have remained in St. Jude. The father, Alfred, was a workaholic middle manager for a railroad and he's the kind of joyless repressed bastard that considered all pleasures frivolous and taking a coffee break as a massive character flaw. Now retired, he's suffering from Parkinson's and dementia. He deserves it.

Enid is the mother. (Seriously, Franzen? Enid? I've lived in the Midwest all my life and have never met an Enid. I know you were making a point on how square the old school Midwesterners are, but that's pushing it.) She's a delusional nagging harpy from hell who aims her passive aggressive attacks at whichever family member has recently burst the bubble of whatever fantasy she is currently clinging to. Through most of the book, Enid has her heart set on one last family Christmas at the house in St. Jude, and the evil bitch will stop at nothing to get it.

Gary is the oldest and a successful investment adviser in Philly, but he married a woman who wants all ties severed with his family and has a special way of getting his sons to join her in her efforts. Torn between trying to placate his wife and his mother while letting their denials of reality make him crazy and trying to be 'the responsible one', Gary is running himself ragged to avoid admitting that he's depressed. Someone should pimp slap him so hard that his fillings fly out of his teeth.

Chip, the middle son, is a waste of skin with a special talent for self-destruction. He torched his academic career as a professor just as he was about to get tenure by having an affair with a student and then becoming obsessed with her. He's now a mooch in New York working on a screenplay so horrible that it'd make a Michael Bay movie look good by comparison. He's also the kind of douche bag who thinks that getting rivets put in his ears and wearing leather pants is cool even though he's over thirty.

Denise is the one character that I actually had some sympathy for. A daddy's girl who adopted Alfred's work ethic, she's a successful chef of an upscale restaurant, but she's also got a messy personal life, including trying to figure out her sexuality. At least she's the one member of this dysfunctional hellspawned family that knows she has issues and tries not to deceive herself any more than most people do.

The weird thing is that even though I loathed the Lamberts and almost every supporting character, too, that I actually enjoyed this book. I usually can't stand stories where all the characters' problems are self-inflicted emotional wounds due to a basic refusal to admit and face reality. However, I have to admit that I found this compelling reading. Maybe I was into it for all the wrong reasons. Namely, that I hated the Lamberts so much that their continued suffering brought sweet tears of joy to my eyes. That's probably not what Franzen intended, but he had to create some incredibly vivid characters and do justice to their pathetic lives to make me hate them so very, very much.

Angela says

4/19/17 update: I appreciate that so many people have "liked" this review and/or commented on it, whether we agree or not. Please know that I will not be interacting with any comments as I remember almost nothing about this novel other than the repulsion I felt toward it. I cannot add anything worthwhile to a discussion or engage in any intelligent discourse unless I read it again.... which I think we all know I am not going to do. That being said, anyone using the comments section to make a personal attack on my character or ability as a reader (a decade ago, mind you), will have their comment deleted. Kindly agree to disagree and move along.

A seemingly unending stream of word vomit.

I can think of no other way to describe this thing.

I really, really despised almost everything about The Corrections. I finished it solely so that I could write a horrible review and have it be valid.

At no single point before the last 10 pages of this 566-page monster did I feel a shred of sympathy with any of the characters. There were several moments where I thought Franzen would have been better off writing dialogue-for-the-average-Joe instead of the trumped up and out of place Dawson's Creek-esque vocabulary in almost every human interaction. His insistence on using the "25-cent word" at every turn made reading the story choppy at best... aggravating and unenjoyable.

I also couldn't help but see the author in a lot of his characters' worst personality traits. Annoying hipster-lecher I'm-better-than-capitalism-but-still-depend-on-it Chip. Whiny too-good-for-anyone Gary. Ungrateful I'm-a-bitch-but-require-all-your-love-and-attention Denise. The parents? Alfred is the only one for whom I felt any sympathy and that didn't happen until the last dregs of the book... and I think maybe even then it was a knee-jerk reaction at being so close to the book being over. Enid's issues rubbed me the wrong way for many reasons, not the least of which being that I could see my own mother in her... which means, I suppose, that Enid was probably the most well-represented character in the novel.

The secondary characters were almost entirely a sorry lot with personalities to the extreme in any number of directions - too smart, too stupid, too needy, too plain, too EVERYTHING.

I know that I'll never understand the praise this book received from critics and readers... and I'm ok with that. I do wish, however, that I could meet some of the people who relate it so easily to real life. Meeting them, perhaps, would truly terrify me.

Lyn says

Imagine owning a bonsai tree and snipping, cutting, making small corrections from the plant's growth, guiding it and making it become what you want it to be.

Imagine an engineer with a sharpened pencil making schematics and rigidly following mathematical, precise principles, forming a design that fits a specific purpose and allows for only infinitesimal error.

But these ways of making corrections are not ways to deal with humans, this is not how people exist, there are no hard fast rules, no black and white lines that distinguish right and wrong.

Jonathon Franzen, in his 2001 publication *The Corrections*, describes for us the Lambert family. Growing up and together in the fictional Midwestern city of St. Jude, the family consists of father and mother, Alfred and Enid, and there three children: Gary, Chip and Denise. If a family is a microcosm of a society, then Franzen has illustrated the strengths and weaknesses, the good the bad and the ugly of the Lamberts to be a reflection of Western culture's wins and losses, and maybe more, to show that to win or to lose, ultimately, is a poor measure for who we are and how we live.

In casting his characters, Franzen has demonstrated his mastery of both the language and for a descriptive characterization power that is Dickensian. A literary progeny of John Barth, Richard Ford and Walker Percy Franzen is well suited for this ambitious, epic and thought provoking examination of our society as exhibited by the Lamberts.

Alfred is a retired railroad engineer who is by nature cold and aloof, and has been a domestic tyrant over Enid for the length of their marriage. The story finds him suffering from Parkinson's and the early onset of dementia. Franzen shows us glimpses of the sad world he has inherited and the fruitless seclusion he has made for himself.

Enid is the hopelessly optimistic but haggard matriarch of the family and it is her desire to bring the family together for "one last Christmas" that forms the conflict and denouement of the narrative. Judgmental, paranoid, illusory, self-righteous and prone to self-aggrandizing hyperbole Enid is haunted by the family that she wanted but never attained. She poorly conceals her disappointment of her children and of her marriage.

Gary, the eldest son, is a successful Philadelphia banker and lives with his wife, Caroline, and their three children. Franzen has cast Gary in the role of villain, he and his wife epitomize all that is wrong and ugly with western civilization: narcissism, crass materialism, selfishness, elitism, banality, insincerity and a superficial ideal for the family that poorly conceals a pompous self interest. To Gary, and especially the deplorable Caroline, family is just the appearance, not the underlying love and affection.

Chip is a failed professor, and Denise a once successful restaurateur and both have stumbled because of underlying psychologically damaged self esteem manifested by sexually self-destructive behavior. Franzen illustrates their ups and downs, and ultimate redemption, through a dynamic exploration of the truly binding ties of family.

But to Franzen's credit, and to the eventual cathartic resolution of the story, he also shows some good to them all. Alfred and Enid, for all their conceits and failings, love each other and their family, even to the point of deep sacrifice. Chip and Denise are able to look into themselves and carefully examine their filial relationships and come away with a sense of self worth and meaning. Even Gary (who Franzen has fun with, making him and Caroline almost caricatures of despicable self importance) truly loves his boys. Deftly using subtle Biblical / C.S. Lewis Narnia references, Franzen carefully reveals that for all of our outward failings, there may be some hope for us yet.

Darkly humorous, intelligent, delicious, painful, outrageous, sad, thought provoking, aggravating, overwhelming, compelling, restorative and ultimately hopeful, Franzen's *The Corrections* is a very, very good read.

Kelly says

I love this novel as much for what it turned out that it wasn't as for what it actually was. The opening vignette was a deep dive into the subterranean conflicts of a middle class home in Middle America. We're immediately focused on the agony and resentment of the emasculated American male wrought by decades of marriage to a dutiful wife who dutifully domesticates the family and becomes an expert in polishing the façade. In our initial meeting, the retired Alfred has dug himself such a deep trench in his family's basement (and his existential ennui at the loss of his manly day job) that he hasn't been able to finish a chore in weeks that once would have taken him half an afternoon. Meanwhile, the wonderfully unromantically named Enid bustles around the home trying to prop both it and her husband's dignity up... but do so in a way that no one else would ever notice. Petty squabbles about money abound (the gun introduced the first act is a five thousand dollar check that drives the action), intergenerational embarrassment and sadness are the foundation of most of the action, and sexuality twists itself upwards through every crack it can find. It had all the props set up for a modern, literary version of the sort of mid-century Gruff, Male American Author treatise on the emptiness of the nuclear family experiment that I just can't possibly read one more of.

And you know what, it is that. Those books are certainly in its lineage. It takes that framework at the start, it uses its metaphors and wrings out its sentences to paint us such a minutely detailed picture we can't possibly mistake where we are and why. But here's the thing... this book is no purebred. It's the bastard child of a mixed family that slowly reveals that whatever its direct parentage, there's a Wonderland at the end of this rabbit hole. Once its got its feet under it, trust me, you do not want to miss this tea party. This book is Tolstoyan in its ambitions, and Dickensian in its scope. It's postmodern in its experiments with form, and very traditional in its choice of focus. The constant stream of its psychological examinations suggests the heights of modernist fancy, but episodes of amazingly straightforward vulgarity and uncomfortably direct descriptions peppered throughout the narrative reminds us that this book was written in a country that was about to produce the Jersey Shore and insist that grandmothers become aware who Paris Hilton is. I need all the literary labels my education has exposed me to to make sense of it. This isn't in the interest of dust-jacket advertising, but an attempt to nail down each of the tools that Franzen makes use of here.

The farther I got into this book, the more I penetrated into the heart of what makes this particular family tick, the more enthralling it became. The narrative reminded me of that Charlize Theron Dior commercial where she walks through the long, Versailles like hallway and strips off her couture as she goes. Only in this version, her makeup and her jewels would have gone as well, and her famous Turn Plain and Slightly Overweight for Oscar character from that movie would appear at the end. The more this book stripped down, the more I couldn't look away. Franzen's arrangement of his character's appearances and re-appearances is wonderfully stage managed. Despite the long and in depth trips inside the heads of each family members, in my view, the book is ultimately arranged to be an examination of the psyche of the Great American Male after all, the father of the family, Alfred. Alfred the engineer. Alfred the emotionally distant husband and father. Alfred the upright and uptight symbol of all that is Good and Right. His children are broken mirrors of their own reaction to growing up with this man, and his wife a terribly sad monument to how many different ways a human body and mind can possibly find to twist around and protect a piece of stone that can't see and then can't bear to admit just how many cracks it has developed.

Chip, the first child to appear, gives us what appears to be the real lay of the land at the start. His chosen persona is the biggest douchebag you could possibly imagine, of the sad college professor in a leather jacket variety. Complete with earring and Derrida tome attached to his hip (but of course). Every sentence about him is just gross, and gets grosser. Chip lives in gross. It's his identity and his philosophy as a teacher to reveal the grossness of society and corporate culture to the youngsters he teaches. But even that is much too time-honored a position (gross professors being the one thing each generation seems to produce enough of, no problem). Chip has to descend even further to pretending that he lives that life while in actuality living another one that depends even more on falsity. In a post-communist state. Online. With men living in the ruins of the sort of oppression he claims to fight. Then finally, finding a tiny bit of honesty in the most ethically horrifying, physically threatening place that he's ever been. Chip seems an unlikely candidate to be his father's favorite. But only on the surface. For all his douchebaggery, for all his poses and his (view

spoiler) Chip is the embodiment of the Future. He is so alien to his father, but his intelligence is such big part of his identity (just smart enough to figure out all those big, effete words and sound like he knows what he means), and that very alien-ness seems like such a logical progression to the future that, for Alfred, he is the son he feels like he can rely on as a guide to a time he doesn't know. He is the son he sees as being a part of the way things are now, which, as we'll find out, is gross and ugly, disguised with better clothes and shinier apartments. Chip is your best guide to that sort of world, because if nothing else, he's sure to know the password, and he is in absolutely no position to judge you for being there. It's sad, but less and less surprising, that the slowly deteriorating Alfred clings more and more to this son. He can show him things and know that shock will not overwhelm him. Besides, one thing mom-and-pop generation Alfred and anti-corporate World Bank/IMF protesting late-90s Chip can agree on is that corporations are basically the worst. For different reasons, yes. And the degree to which Alfred admits this is much less. But these two guys are in the same foxhole, however they want to dress it up.

Gary, the second son, is the next child, is apparently the Good Son. The son who stayed on the straight and narrow. He grew up fairly good looking, married a beautiful blonde wife, and became successful in that nebulous American Buisness-y sort of way that allows you to buy a house with a ridiculous amount of gadgets you don't need and to fight with your wife about nothing at all. His sexuality is not in question. He had children, boys even, and grilled in the back. He stayed faithful to his wife (if for fascinatingly sick reasons) and tried to make his parents happy by coming home for the holidays. He's focused on his career and Making It, and he wouldn't dream of having any art with any sort of genitalia in it. But, of course, this makes him his mother's son. Mothers are the guardians of tradition and the passers-on of small moments, and to believe they've done their jobs to the fullest this is what they need from their children. The fact that Gary and his wife clearly reject everything about his parents doesn't matter, because they do so far away and not in his mother's hearing. Their sex lives are disturbingly full of it, but their public life is not.

Unsurprisingly then, inevitably, our time with him is consumed by a revenge quest for his father. But because this is twentieth century America, on the verge of a twenty-first century of virtual lives and desk jobs, and not fifteenth century France, that revenge quest has to take place in the nebulous world of the corporate jungle. There's a delightfully absurd sequence in the middle where (view spoiler) Gary is a study in trying way too hard, and he was the first character I would have spent time with. His battles with his cruel, self-conscious/self-confident wife through their children were worth the price of admission to his chapters alone. If his story is the most obvious of all, it is touching for all that, because it would have been the easiest to solve very early on. If only daddy's attention hadn't been turned in a completely different direction.

Then Denise, the sole daughter of the family, is the last of the family to reveal herself. The choice is the most deliberate and necessary of them all. She appears many times earlier in the novel, but always as a projection of another member of the family- her mother or her two brothers. Our first trip inside of her head is an entirely different story. She is the beating heart of the novel and the child whose story is her father's undoing. Fathers and daughters- it couldn't have been otherwise. The gradual revelation of Denise's past and her present struggles are intersected with the ongoing trials and tribulations of her two brothers, which provide a context and a foil for her development. She has enough layers to unravel that it takes a long time to get to her core and therefore, this novel's, and we need some breaks to remember why it took her so long to peel them all back.

More importantly, she is the character with the most choices to make. She is a woman standing at a fascinating cusp of history for the options of American women. She's just old enough that if her story had ended, after a few more years of working than usual, with two kids and a dog in her hometown, it would have been more than understandable. She's also just young enough that there's more than a small chance that this won't be her story if she has any desire that it be otherwise (and it's clear from the beginning that she's too smart and driven to believe. She's young enough that she has choices about her sexuality that exist in a more straightforward and mentally acknowledge-able way than would have been the case even a decade earlier (lesbianism, bi-sexuality, adultery that isn't life ending, flings and not relationships), but she's old enough that those choices are still coded in a very unfortunate and twisted way (who is the butch one, guilt

about what she does and does not give to men and why). But it's all there, and, as with most choices that women make, there's guilt and to spare waiting for her for whatever choice she decides she wants.

We are introduced to a woman of apparently complete, decisive decision. A woman who is a model for the new generation of strong, working women who don't need to wear shoulder pads to be awesome at their job. She rolls her eyes at her brothers and kicks ass at work. She takes care of her parents and offers more kindness than anyone else we encounter. But it becomes clear, quickly, that, of course, she's nothing of the kind. We're taken through the horror house of mirrors that is her (and most other female teenagers') adolescence, meeting her insecurities and the misguided places that she channels her dreams. We see how this carries through for years afterwards into her adult life as she doubles down on the thing she knew she never should have done in the first place and understand exactly why. The more honesty we encounter, the more guilt, the more self-doubt comes up the surface. There's this beautifully handled part towards the end of the book where we see Denise reject one choice after another that could possibly have made her happy. Because she's not after happiness. She was taught that there's something more than happiness. That happiness is false and lesser than a God who accepts only the Shoulds, and scorns, secretly, offerings from those who are not worthy. And, of course, tells you that you are worthy, or doesn't tell you anything at all. Denise's last rejection of her best chance for self-acceptance and an end to her burdens confirms her fate as what she'll always be: her father's daughter.

When the family finally ends up together for "one last Christmas," I don't think that it will be a surprise to hear that it is a ridiculous hot mess, and full of big and small revelations of various kinds. It probably also won't be a surprise to hear that even at the crescendo of a moment where each family member has pretty much come to a place where they are the most themselves they've probably ever been with each other... there's a lot of both good and bad in that. I'm comfortable saying that people generally have at least one trait about them that's admirable/courageous/sympathetic/fascinating and generally have something that's going to be as petty, small, ridiculous, idiotic or plain mean about them. We get that in each of them. It makes sense, because this Christmas is the break point for the family. They fill it up full of everything they are and then the glass shatters when they hit just that right note. I love the way that Franzen used Christmas in this novel, and had it come back and back again, slowly driving everyone mad with its insistence on coming every year, and its urgency in being more important than anyone cares to admit.

I'm not sure I like the ultimate message. It seems to come too close, after everything it goes through to complicate things, to reverting to that rebellion of baby boomers that only once we free ourselves from our domestic poses, and the sacrifices demanded by the ideal of the happy nuclear family will we be free. I would agree that to a certain extent this is true, if your pose is as apparently false as these people's are, or as based on ridiculous motives. I don't agree with it in the world we live in now where our families are more about choice than ever before.

But ultimately I allowed it to pass because I think that Franzen complicates it enough that I don't think that his condemnation is this straightforward. Franzen attaches a tone of nostalgic elegy to the end of Alfred's life and his undignified final years that isn't just about the fact that this is about Dad and you kind of come off as a terrible person if you completely hate on well-meaning, limited by his time, morally upright Dad. Instead, Franzen finds something to genuinely mourn about the apparent loss of the expectations that the family puts on each other. Because while we spend a lot of time talking about how expectations limit our authenticity as people and how genuine our relationships can possibly be, we spend less time talking about how expectations means holding people to a standard. It means providing a motivation for each person involved to suit up, so to speak, and put their best foot forward, and be the best it can be. It tells us, gently, toward the end, that sometimes roles are necessary armor. Sometimes they help us become who we want to be, rather than who we are.(view spoiler). As long as we don't allow a role or the rejection of a role (which is a role in and of itself) to obsess us, to negate us, and to rule our lives (which is the mistake that this family makes), then there is a use for it. This is a message that is still relevant for me in an age where divorce is always an option and where family is more of a choice (at least in theory) than it ever was.

About the only other flaw I can find with this novel is that its choice to focus on this very specific man who is from a very specific time and place, with children who came of age in an era with a very specific societal context, and surrounded by the domestic, mass produced items of life in America in some particular years means that readers who cannot access that particular setting or time period are to some extent excluded from the emotional impact of it. While I was fascinated with how amazingly deliberate Franzen was in rendering these details, it was an appreciation for artistry that produced my trust that he knew what they could talk about. This book is for people who are about ten to fifty years older than I am. I don't say this in a terrible way. I'm saying that this book is for them, in the way that any other gift would be under a Christmas tree. It's a statement of sympathy, love and solidarity with a particular generation and the limits they labored under and the freedoms they struggled to negotiate. But their struggles were not mine. Even Denise, the closest I came to finding myself inside of this book, fought with self-identifications and phantom restrictions that came off as dated to me. Her earnestness and her anger reminded me of the older kids and the culture I idealized as a child, of the actors on *Felicity*, not of people I knew.

Thus, I can tell that this book is a masterwork. I can admire its craft and the clearly towering intellect behind it. I can laugh at its jokes and fall into its extended metaphors, but in the end it's a masterwork that just isn't for me. I'm peeking into the intimate conversation of slightly older strangers, and I just don't belong. It's strange, isn't it? I've felt perfectly at home in more countries and times than I can count, or even in worlds that never were, but just one generation away and it's alien nature pricks me on every page. For me, there's this odd continuum where God is in either in the very particular and known or in the completely removed and impossible to completely understand. *The Corrections* just had the misfortune to fall into the category of just-familiar-enough-that-it's-slightly-off. But you know what, it still did its job. Because it makes me wish that my generation will have something so particular, something that hits the tin ear of anyone years too young or far too old. Those sort of crafted, made-to-order narratives are rare, and as I said, a gift to anyone who encounters them. I want one, too!
