PRINCIPLES OF COMPLICATION IN *"THE CORRECTIONS"* BY JONATHAN FRANZEN

S. Murugesan[1] & M. Karthigeyan[2]

[1.] Mr. S. Murugesan, Ph.D., Department of English, Annamalai University, Annamalai Nagar.

[2.] Mr. M.Karthigeyan Department of English, Mahender Engeneering College, Namakkal,

ABSTRACT

This article aims at Jonathan Franzen's concept of realism in The Corrections in terms of a variety of key issues, including ethical discourse, cognition, and social minds. Jonathan Franzen, a postmodern writer, conflates contemporaneity, timelessness, placelessness, and non-belonging to his time with naturalism's determinism and realism's thorough description to produce a new kind of realism known as neorealism, or tragic realism, in his own words. The depiction of a complex network of community, geography, and the person is central to this new type of realistic fiction. In this way, The Corrections is a novel whose humanistic parts demonstrate Franzen's belief in the potential of certain sorts of 'corrections,' and hence improvements in the characters' ethical and moral situations. Despite depicting the sad and deterministic parts of life, Franzen's tragic realism inspires his readers and characters to reevaluate what has long been assumed about familial, communal, and generational ties. As a result, it reawakens hope in the potential of reciprocal ethical recognition of the other, which may be achieved through retroactive questioning enabled by people' oscillations between conviction and doubt (i.e. epistemic imbalance). By expressing the characters' grasp of the ethics of complexity, Franzen achieves these effects by revealing the complexity of common parts of ordinary people's lives in order to reinvigorate trust in ethical, humanistic, and even empathetic responsibility. As the juxtaposition of tragedy and reality reveals, these relationships frequently include embracing or tolerating human imperfections.

Keywords: Ethics; Postmodernism; Tragic Realism/Neorealism; Recognition.

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INTRODUCTION

This article examines Jonathan Franzen's specific interpretation of realism in The Corrections in terms of a variety of important topics, such as ethical discourse, cognition, and social minds. As a postmodern writer, Franzen critiques his contemporary authors for their disappointed and gloomy attitudes, which have alienated and distracted the novelist and his audience. He wishes to reestablish readers' trust and confidence by engaging them in his works. To accomplish this, he chooses realism as the main mode and genre of his writing; however, realism in the twenty-first and twenty-first centuries, in an era when it is extremely difficult to distinguish reality from illusion, necessitates him presenting an updated version, which he himself calls tragic realism (Franzen, 2002, p. 91). As the rubric suggests, this new form is neither entirely consistent with the style of Franzen's realism forefathers, in that it lacks the explicitly political elements.As the summative assessment suggests, this new mode is neither completely in line with the style of Franzen's realist forefathers' in that it lacks the overtly optimistic viewpoint found in many realistic works, nor does the modifying adjective 'tragic' make Franzen's style completely identical with traditional naturalism. If naturalism in its traditional form usually implies environmental, class, and hereditary determinism, undermining cognition and emphasising the importance of coercion, these issues have been subtly embedded in different narrative layers in Franzen's The Corrections, entailing a kind of complicated system of cognitive involvement presented in relationships (ethical, humanistic, and even empathic). As the combination of tragedy and reality implies, these relationships frequently entail accepting or tolerating human imperfections and even downfall (shown in the beginning actions of almost all characters in the narrative).

Because a genre, as a prototype, reflects specific archetypal and assumed notions, the major characters in the story's universe are generally simple to recognise, empathise with, or despise. Knowing this, Franzen chooses neorealism to gradually complete the "gestalt structure of conscious experience" (Palmer, 2004, p. 101), demonstrating that our "conceptual integration" (Kristiansen, 2006, p. 203) emerges not only from stored inputs to understand and appreciate novels, but also from new structures and loads of meaning. Thus, his use of extremely familiar and stereotypical themes and motifs such as (dysfunctional) families, generation gap, depression, and (business) failure initially boosts readers' confidence in that the storey is predictable for its initial accord with their schematic structures, while later in the novel, at startling moments, they laugh uneasily at their employing readymade strategies.

The neorealistic style combines the sad, funny, and ironic elements. This results in a "blended space" that invites "the observer to deconstruct [the representation] into its inputs" (2010, p. 197) and redefine the goal. This may allow the reader/character to consider the idea of constructing new domains through "regressive inquiry" (Palmer, 2004, p. 228). (which is, in practice, by no means unproblematic). Franzen's neorealism, which advocates situated consciousness (p.165) and human relationships that appear to be impossible at first, significantly contributes to the creation of a space that presents a kind of "compression to human scale" (Palmer, 2010, p. 197) and the possibility of approaching a normal life rather than the characters' initial fruitless longing for perfection, which is visible in the novel's earlier parts in the form of highly ambitious characters).

In doing so, Franzen offers a new version of the realistic novel, one whose humanistic aspects (in the form of hopes, fears, dilemmas, and indeterminacies) make us hesitant to apply the terms'realism' – associated with

optimism – or 'naturalism' – inextricably linked to determinism – instead opting for a modified version of realism and naturalism (i.e. the more flexible and ethically-laden genre of neorealism).

Owing to its neorealistic mode of presentation, Franzen's *The Corrections* is heavily referential and situated. However, as a degree of independence is embodied in the characters' moments of decision-makings, homecomings and career alterations, the novel can simultaneously approve and challenge traditional naturalism's concept of determinism. It is here that a more humanistic and complicated picture of individuals rather than one-dimensionally positive or negative individuals is presented. This equivocal aspect of situatedness (i.e. a simultaneously destructive and productive image) helps Franzen show individuals in different sorts of relationship with intermental units (like family, friends, colleagues, and society all presented in *The Corrections*) ranging from complete assimilation, to tenuous inclusion, to oppositional exclusion, and so on (Palmer, 2010, p. 64). The representation of these relationships, in turn, provides *The Corrections* with a more complicated aspect of human life.

RECOGNITION AND DETERMINISM IN THE MIDWEST

In his writings and interviews, Franzen criticises the gloomy manner and artificially detached method of writing of postmodernist authors, claiming that they give the reader nothing but misery and emptiness. Despite its tragic and naturalistic tone, The Corrections appears to be more humanistic in that it depicts the day-to-day lives of members of a Midwestern family who are torn between being a part of the community – i.e. St. Jude and family – and freeing themselves from its intellectual, moral, and even ethical shackles. This, as expressed in The Corrections by hesitations, indecisions, obsessions, discontent, and the motif of search, departures, and homecomings, generates cognitive vertigo, to borrow Zunshine's word, (p. 31), and leads characters/readers to both perplexity and (re)cognition. The utilisation of a modern family, round personalities, and accurate and well-located geographical regions corresponding to Franzen's own hometown helps the reader feel at ease.

The Corrections' neorealistic method provides extensive contextual description that is both a mirror of current American society and its people (depicted in their private as well as social lives), which helps drive the reader away from apathy and toward engagement. This also allows characters to be depicted as having a more mature regard for each other after their initial judgemental and preoccupied attitudes. Careful reading of *The Corrections*, then, uncovers a subtle oxymoron: consciousness gained here is the consciousness resulted from humanistic retrospection and ethics in a deterministic context of cosmic irony of the Midwest (i.e. the characters and the Midwest are set in both a syntagmatic and paradigmatic relationship implying that the individual is not only an object located in a context but also a subject with a varying degree of independence best exemplified in characters' simultaneous lack of control and will to power, and in their at-times-complete exhaustion and also determination).

The representation of the physical location and its people by Franzen is suggestive of the complexities of human connections and the ethics of recognition that exists within them. As a figure, the place suffers (the image of rape in Strong Motion and the image of degradation in The Twenty-Seventh City and Freedom), judges (the image of superego in The Corrections and the policing policy and aggressive propaganda in The Twenty-Seventh City), and requires care (as in Freedom and The Corrections). There are various occasions when St. Jude is analogous to parents, particularly the father role, while the expanding borders are analogous to newer generations seeking to shed the burden of the (communal and individual) past. As a result, the Midwest is more than just a deterministic force; it is a very serious and influential entity that houses several generations and ethnicities, while also being the location of a pervasive aura of conspiracy and insecurity.

A century of automotive safety. Block after block of taxing text. What gary hated most about the midwest was how unpampered and unprivileged he felt in it. St. Jude in its optimistic egalitarianism consistently failed to accord him the respect to which his gifts and attainments entitled him. (p. 175).

Franzen's modified realism necessitates a strong and thorough feeling of locatedness in terms of time and location. To do this, he not only provides his audience with thorough descriptions of the scene, but he also employs a recognised location in the modern age, albeit with a fake name. His Midwest, more than just a name, represents several "value codes" of the "middle-class mentality" (Poole, 2007, p. 271). However, it appears that Franzen has discovered something far deeper underneath certain simplistically displayed codes, sudden solutions and dénouements, and melodramatic twists in his writings. He deftly employs his readers' various schemata to supply them with certain habitual responses that he may subsequently break. This is a type of metaphysical game that Franzen, as a postmodern realist, performs with his readers in order to mix their prior knowledge and stored inputs about the Midwest with changes and 'corrections.' As a consequence, the consequent ethical and cognitive judgements that reinforce each other lead to a distinct kind of judgement, one connected to Franzen's specific pragmatism (as opposed to postmodernists' blank irony), which puts aesthetics and pragmatism together. This is why it is impossible to interpret The Corrections on a symbolic level. The Midwest in the narrative is an actual location, not merely a deterministic power. Alfred Lambert is more than a dying father or a symbol of the American Dream; Enid Lambert is more than a tragic creature or mad-woman-in-the-attic type; and Chip is more than a forlorn artist. They are Midwesterners and complex everyday individuals who are difficult to define in a few paragraphs. It is not enough, according to Franzen, to rely on expectancies and generalisations; rather, a deeper appreciation through pensive engagement and interpretative reflections fueled by shocks and interrupted default assumptions is required. Similarly, Franzen's protagonists are encouraged to revise, visit other types of people from different classes, engage in failed relationships, and see actual complexity through living a life both inside and beyond the Midwest/family. Franzen's readers, like his characters, are allowed to leave the Midwest, to transcend countries, and to embark on unfinished but cognitively and ethically valuable missions. The person oscillates between two realms in virtually all

of these quests: the birthplace and a new destination. In The Corrections, place or environment is more than just a restricting force that prevents humans from taking measures or activities. St. Jude/the Midwest, for which Alfred Lambert, the family's strict father, symbolises symbolically, is definitely strong; it is a crippling superego and a figure capable of enacting punitive measures and tormenting the minds of its occupants. However, this is not the end of the story. Because each location offers its occupants with spatial schemas, Lamberts' three children, who are at least permitted to cross geographical borders, are also given diverse conceptual frameworks. "Mental spaces," argues Kristiansen (2006), paraphrasing Fauconnier.

> can be thought of as temporary containers for relevant information about a particular domain […] Frames are hierarchically structured attribute-value pairs that can either be integrated with perceptual information, or used to activate generic knowledge about people and objects assumed by default. (p. 189)

In the case of the novel under consideration, judgments are always reached following such journeys. That is, a shift in spatial schemas alters the way the characters perceive things. After his trip to Lithuania, Chip realises that writing a thriller is pointless and resolves to create a farce instead or Denise learns to quit "passing like a wonderfully responsible and conscientious daughter" (Franzen, 2001, p. 522-534).

ETHICS REVIVED IN THE COMPLEXITY OF THE OTHER IN EPISTEMIC IMBALANCE

Although the moniker "Midwest" might indicate balance and stability, once a character leaves the region, he or she is plagued with misgivings about its traditions and beliefs, best shown by Enid and Alfred. Going outside the borders through missions is not to showcase romantic/heroic actions, but to emphasise each character's desire to attain some mental/financial independence. The lamberts, who come from two Midwestern generations, are torn between modernity and tradition: Alfred, an engineer with a manual occupation, and his children, who have a different mentality, demonstrate the disparity between an agrarian background and the expansion of cities: a movement from the natural to the artificial. These disparities, which serve as the major cause of internal and external conflicts for the characters, are eventually tolerated as a source of complexity and knowledge. According to Franzen, the Midwest is also a place where people "may moderate between the extremes [and] see all sides of the issue" (Poole, 2007, p. 266). As a result, being a Midwesterner may contribute to residents' pride and guilt complexes, especially when they wish to leave or be different. This explains why the term guilt – which appears repeatedly in Franzen's writings - elicits both societal and personal elements, as well as a sense of imposition and obligation capable of enhancing characters' connections and acceptance of each other's ethics. viii The author paints the lives of individuals in a familiar and diverse surroundings, demonstrating the diversity of life itself, which may both paralyse and revive one's critical thinking. This is how characters find it difficult to determine whether to stay or go, to love or to hate, and to live alone or with others. As a result, Franzen emphasises the interdependence of the individual and his surroundings. He understands "mental functioning cannot be understood just by dissecting what goes on within the skull, but can only be properly realised once it has been observed in its social and physical environment," according to neorealism (Palmer, 2010, p. 43). The many references to existentialist philosophers and allusions to Hamlet and tragic heroes, on the one hand, and the meticulous depiction of his fiction's social environment, on the other, plainly suggest that Franzen's "view on the mind" is both "internalist" and "externalist" (p. 39). This results in the substitution of ordinary individuals for classic heroes, emphasising the ethics of ordinariness.

> purged the Marxists from his bookshelves […] Jürgen Habermas's *Reason and the Rationalization of Society*, which he'd found too difficult to read, let alone annotate, was in mint condition […] But Jürgen Habermas didn't have Julia's long, cool, pear-tree limbs, Theodor Adorno didn't have Julia's grapy smell of lecherous pliability, Fred Jameson didn't have Julia's artful tongue […] [he] sold his feminists, his formalists, his structuralists, his poststructuralists, his Freudians, and his queers . . . he piled his Foucault and Greenblatt and hooks and Poovey into shopping bags and sold them all. (Franzen, 2001, p. 92)

It is in this return to life, corporality, and everyday reality that an ordinary man's reason and rationalisation can replace jaw-breaking ideas that are "too difficult" and "too detached" to be understood, because emphatic relationship results from understanding, which is attainable by removing the mask of sophistication and intellectualism (Burn, 2008, p.120). The return of Alfred Lambert's children to the Midwest and their endeavour to renovate the run-down house might be seen as a celebration of the ethics of cohabitation and tolerance.

While not completely dismissing the naturalistic theory of environmental determinism, Franzen favours situated awareness with an ambiguous connotation. Place or situatedness may elicit both familiarity and alienation. People who are familiar with something can perform better and be more focused and directed. The Corrections' awareness of this cognitive reality is subtle and slow. To use Palmer's definition, Franzen's characters and other humans become acutely aware that "consciousness never gravitates toward itself but is always found in intimate interaction with another consciousness" (2010, p. 164). Franzen depicts individuals who are bound in a web of ties manifested as family, geographical location, and community reliance. He shows his protagonists engaged in half-hearted or pseudo-quests as estranged from their surroundings, demonstrating the negative side of situatedness. Palmer cites Daniel Dennett on this point: "Taking individuals out of their houses means actually isolating them from substantial areas of their minds"x (p. 171).

That is, leaving one's environment means losing access to much of what has long been taken for granted. After leaving the Midwest, the characters strive to replace habits with attitudes - a word with a higher cognitive burden regardless of success or failure. As a result, while Franzen depicts a caricature of a family, a group of individuals in a state of departure, belonging and aloofness, and judgement, he also depicts characters struggling through normalised and standardised truths, as well as socio-existential truths, in order to have a more ethical form of existence. At first, the personal and the social do not appear to reconcile.

Thanks to neorealism, Franzen succeeds in putting people in a complex system of connections in The Corrections, such that success or failure in one impacts the other on a different scale (i.e. social, familial, or personal). Franzen depicts these connections deftly in his characters' social and private lives. His microcosm of family, given in the full setting of the Midwest's values, conventions, and impositions, elicits contradicting states of feeling and cognition, resulting in characters' indecision, sense of shame and duty, and even their seeking sanctuary other than the Midwest. This renders the absolute dichotomy between society and the individual long practised by postmodernism, naturalism, and even realism oversimplistic, because there is always a degree of consciousness and dialectic for family members concretized in different decision-making moments, performing deliberate antisocial and anti-patriarchal activities, and even their regrets. Thus, the subject-object dyad of society-person relationship is questioned. Hence, the novel which initially seems to be "obscure enough and simple enough to be mistaken for" an easily accessible novel is one with an ethical mission (Franzen, 2001, p. 36).

In The Corrections, the ethics of otherness might therefore be realised in unexpected and transformative situations. As previously stated, by providing the characters' and readers' "prototype schemas" (Palmer, 2010, p. 197) and seemingly useful assumptions about society and other people, the individuals make generalisations that may be described as over-reliant on their schematized repertoire. In order to challenge these schemas, Franzen employs the "epistemic imbalance" (p. 208) via the characters' misconceptions, disappointments, and misjudgments based on their presuppositions about the other. These interruptions are seen in the protagonists' lonely admissions to themselves. Denise, for example, adjusts her mental picture of Alfred when she discovers how he has kept her secret for so long, or when Alfred, speaking to his 'Turd,' learns about his vanity. All these moments, despite questioning characters' habits and cognitive passivism, add to a great deal to their humanity and understandability.

REMEMBRANCES, REFLECTION, AND RECOGNISING MORALITY

To achieve his version of realism, Franzen juxtaposes the notion of contemporaneity in the form of a paralysing calm and the futility of syntagmatic departures characters experience in their careers (Gary is a banker, Denise is an international chef, and Chip is a playwright and university professor in American metropolitan cities) and trips (usually to a European country) with the paradigmatic Bergsonian concept of time in which every moment is lived and the budding Along with their immersion in the present moment and their effort to live, the Lamberts will never be able to shake their memories. Don Armour's carved writings beneath Alfred's chair, which he cannot separate himself from, are one of the greatest instances here: "The chair was a monument and a symbol and could not be split with Alfred" (2001, p. 10). In The Corrections, the past is not just something that has happened and is over, but it also has an impact on the present. Traumas are at issue, which are painful but can also elicit empathy. As the characters piece together the puzzle, they become aware of the causes of their family members' conduct. As a result, they reach a new degree of ethics. Unlike postmodern contemporaneity, the substantiality of the ego is evoked in connection to time and place, in memories and future ambitions indicative of characters' humanity, in Franzen's turn to neorealism in The Corrections. Furthermore, despite depicting a dark and tragic realism, primarily through his choice of Bildungsroman (a novel that focuses on temporality and spatiality) rather than simply adhering to "spatial form," Franzen resists the notion of contemporaneity and timelessness induced by the late-capitalistic context embodied in vicious circles in which characters are trapped, as Burn claims (p. 62).

As Americans and Midwesterners, the Lamberts are also obsessed with the myth/curse of *Americanness*. It seems that this deep sense of dividedness rooted in characters and Franzen himself, as he admits in "Meet Me in St Louis" contributes to the formation of "the distortions in the construction of individual identity" (Palmer, 2010, p. 92). In *The Corrections*, generations search for perfection and "omnicompetence" embodied in different ways (in Denise's attempt to become a perfect chef, in Alfred's puritanical attitudes, and in Chip's rewritings of his play) – to fulfill the imposed requirements of the myth. The resulting angst makes them leave the Midwest. Although there are many authors, like Henry James, who seminally incorporate patterns of departures and returns in their fiction, in Franzen, arguably, these departures are not only to create some space between characters and the system but also to give them an opportunity to rearrange the forgotten stretches of time to arrive at a deeper understanding of other characters and their real motives. In this sense, Franzen does not merely want to confront one place with another in a symbolic way but to explore the cognitive alterations of individuals in these spatial and temporal arrivals and departures.

Like characters presented in naturalistic genres, Franzen's characters are also affected by place and time, in particular by their past. There are numerous moments when a trivial event triggers a traumatic experience in the past. Enid's Christmas invitation leaves her children with their dark memories and makes them anxious about homecoming. However, this does not mean that deterministic forces do not let them think or make decisions, for (re)cognition[xv] itself is always related to spatiotemporal dimensions. Characters leave their birthplace, even though not permanently, and once they are away from their families and the Midwest, their past, in the form of memories, looms larger and, cognitively speaking, helps them make revisions. Thus, all those abstractions and hatred, or even love, in this process of *retrospective questioning* make sense and become humanized. The bygones, then, are not nostalgic but omnipresent replacing liquidity with substantiality. This pushes characters towards their home, society,

and relatives which they do not know whether to flee from or return to. The process of give and take is always there, between characters and their surroundings, between now and then, and hence between determinism and cognition creating “multiple drafts” rather than dualistic worldviews (Burn, 2008, p.114).

Franzen replaces the abstract with the concrete through these extemporisation linkages, demonstrating that there is no singular centre of awareness or irreversibly deterministic power. Identity, for him, is not a fixed, monolithic, or preconceived entity produced in a vacuum, but a constantly changing entity in "flux," suggesting that "the self rewrites itself" (p. 114) in genuine encounters with ordinariness and ordinary people. At the close of the twentieth century, Franzen selects neo-realism because it promotes the author's transition from individuality to community, which is mirrored in the characters' homecoming, though this occurs at Christmas and in winter when death and birth collide.

This neorealism genre gives Franzen a setting in which to portray persons in society as "'net' people" (Burn, 2008, p.54) with the capacity for development and mutual understanding. Despite the novel's existentialist themes, which are embodied in the characters' struggles and sufferings, and Alfred Lambert's frequent quotations of existential philosophers such as Schopenhauer, Franzen situates individuals in society; the Lambert family becomes a microcosm reflecting what is going on outside. As a result, The Corrections does not withdraw "from the task of the politically engaged and really experimental social novel" to seek refuge in the narrower constraints of "individual crises," existentialism, and stoicism (Green, 2005, p. 188). The ‘corrections’ Franzen depicts are more constructive than destructively rebellious and this may account for the reason why unlike what we expect from novels, characters here move from radicalism towards conservatism or more mature reactions. Crolius’ topic of lecture “Surviving the Corrections” (2001, p. 332) can be interpreted as an attempt made by characters to survive “the mega ruins in micro times” (p. 383). The time when “any meaningful distinction between private and public sectors had disappeared” (p. 441). This survival is not through characters’ rudimentary transformation but through their hesitant returns to values, slightly modified attitudes, and uncertainties. The uncertainties and tensions prevalent in the novel and different levels of communications make the individual hesitate about arriving at a verdict about *others*. To achieve these ‘corrective’ and punitive measures, characters are not stable but are depicted as disoriented creatures zigzagging between sympathy and antipathy. This could in part come from neorealism which provides Franzen with a chance to pay due attention to all characters and their development in time. What Franzen presents is a *Buildungsroman* of “micro-collectives” (Franzen, 2016, p. 30) rather than one about a single invincible hero or person, and accordingly, he subtly shows how all the major characters continually position and reposition themselves and their attitudes towards the people other than themselves.

The realistic and naturalistic novels' presentation of a single actualized ontological and epistemological world is thus replaced in The Corrections by Franzen's complex depiction of ontological uncertainties that encourage other possibilities and readers' active cognitive involvement by undermining their expectations formed based on their preexisting schemata (Phelan, 2009, pp. 29-30). By no means does Franzen's neorealism negate the concept of neocapitalism's suffocating situation, as reflected by many postmodern writers; however, it appears that through his preference to show the complexity of human relationships and lives, Franzen can speak of individuals' grandeur in a social context. As a result, Franzen uses The Corrections to demonstrate ethics based on intricate interrelationships. His novel depicts individuals from a dysfunctional family who recognise it is time to stop blaming others for victimising them, to stop viewing matters in black and white, and to value virtues in the formation of interrelationships. Franzen’s notion of tragic realism, emphasizing the painful process of ethical maturity, negates the simplistic notions of superficial optimism as well as determinism. It shows the complexity of his characters in their movement from a symbolic and two- dimensional pole towards the mimetic pole (character as person) (Phelan, 2009, pp. 29-30) in the course of the novel. The movement itself results from proper (mutual) understanding rather than adherence to an idealistic version of *the other* made in the mind of each character."Acknowledgment [...] requires the finding of an extra identity or character relationships as opposed to the basic recognition of identity in the fortuitous meeting," Dannenberg (2008) argues (p. 98). Recognition and acknowledgment of characters' humanity produce additional disruption and uncertainty since they activate diverse emotional states in other characters, leading to responsibility and pangs of conscience. Denise suddenly realises her father's greatness and her own stupidity during one of these dramatic moments. When she learns that her father, knowing about her affair with the company's employee working under him, decided to give up his position and promotion, she realises that things are much more complicated than her ironic prediction of how the table is set at home or her mother letting her into the house using the same repetitious words.

As mentioned, in *The Corrections*, characters’ zigzag from radicalism to conservatism which is different from the typical movement of the typical protagonists from a state of compliance to that of disobedience. The characters’ uncertainties regarding disobedience or reunion (e.g. the Lamberts’ reunion in St Jude for Christmas on Enid’s request and the children’s ethical dilemma of ignoring or fulfilling her final wish) not only have deepened their humanity but also indicate that the relationship between individuals and different social units is considerably more complex than it may appear. In *The Corrections*, Franzen cruelly lets individuals be beguiled and suffer while they are torn between self and family/society. Perhaps this is why Carroll blames Franzen believing that the novel’s “moral and emotional dichotomy” and Franzen’s dilemma of authority and responsibility have led to nothing but tension and implausibility (pp. 95-96). While this is mainly attributable to Franzen’s ironic depiction of society, his humanistic undertones, and Darwinism in the form of rivalry evident even in the relationship of siblings, it also reflects his work’s complexity as well as the complexity of the real human relationships often disregarded in realistic, naturalistic, and even postmodern novels. As Burn notes, Franzen’s novel addresses “the idea of a real world beyond the problem raised by nonreferential systems of discourse” (p. 21). *The Corrections* as a novel of

relationships shows the major characters' needs to redefine their relationship with other people as well as the system they are working for or harassed by. Although, at the end of the novel, nothing is resolved but Alfred's crisis with his suicide, characters achieve a considerably better understanding of each other. If in the earlier parts of the novel, everything is empty and characters are aloof and lonely ("THE MADNESS of an autumn prairie cold front coming through[….] No children in the yards here [….] Storm windows shuddered in the empty bedrooms" (Franzen, 2001, p. 3)), the last pages, despite Alfred's painful but still heroic death, show a different and warmer picture: "when she'd pressed her lips to his forehead and walked out with Denise and Gary into the warm spring night, she felt that nothing could kill her hope now, nothing" (p. 566). *The Corrections*, thus, is the transcendence of the ordinary (of Alfred and his ordinary family), one different from idealistic transcendentalism, "to establish intriguing dialectics between a discourse of dehumanization and a nostalgia for more traditional forms of identity" (p. 335). Franzen, thus, accomplishes his moral mission as an author; in the face of rampant universalism, he calls for a new kind of realism and naturalism based on locatedness, multileveled relationships, and prejudice to revive hopes in the possibility of *the other's* ethics despite his confirming the fact that environment and nature can have deterministic and demoralizing effects on people.

Finally, neorealism allows Franzen to rely on several domains to show a "social catastrophe" occurring in a "home context" (Green, 2005, p. 91). For our purposes, Franzen's use of the phrase "family ecosystem" (Franzen, 2001, p. 176), as well as a complex mosaic of micro and macro levels in his works, can provide fascinating insights into issues such as the various layers of interaction between intermind and intramind. Near their decrepit house in St. Jude, Franzen depicts a family's generation gap, obsessions, failures, differences, and shifting ideals, which are parallel to American culture. The very detailed account of each member's life depicts how, after lengthy years of suffering, anger, misunderstanding, and helplessness, they grudgingly return home to renovate it. Characters suffering painful (pseudo-)transformations and internal struggles best embody the idea of change and dynamism utilised – which is called into question by naturalistic determinism. Here is where Franzen lets individuals explore the possibility of liberation of ego (his main concern in his essays and novels) in the Midwest – a community located in the cosmopolitan American society, which is, in turn, stuck in the universally homogenizing policies made by "info-sphere" (Berardi, 2009, pp. 39-43) of post-postmodernism. Franzen, as he points out in several essays, intends to seek philosophical and liberating discomfort produced in the long-forgotten "private spaces," not in the "therapeutic optimism" resulting from disappointing and ineffectual postmodern non-human and symbolic spheres (Franzen, 2002, p. 78). Franzen's version of tragic realism has contradictorily brought together naturalistic and behavioristic implications and ethics. The result is a double and contradictory expression of change.

On the one hand, characters are trapped in the timelessness induced by society, as evidenced by their repetitive actions and circular movements, while on the other, they exhibit slight changes in mood and attitude in terms of humanistic and ethical values, presenting a glimmer of hope in the form of a weak but rekindling internal dynamism. To redeem himself, his audiences, and his characters from liquidation caused by liquid identity and non-belonging, Franzen seeks to reconcile individuals with necessities, prejudice (vs. apathy), belonging, and "infinitude of human life," a "being-in-the-world." As a result, he might request "effective historical consciousness," to borrow Gadamer's phrase (Holub, 2008, p. 269). Substantiality is regained here, and necessitates will result in (mutual) comprehension.

This is why, despite its pessimistic tone, The Corrections is replete with "deciding, wanting, and regretting" moments that, according to Palmer's account of the sociality of the human mind, exemplify "the mental events and states that provide the causal network behind the physical events" (2010, p. 222) reminiscent of the individual's existence and being (readers and characters). This is how Franzen stimulates the folks to engage in "regressive inquiry" (p. 228) in order to find the root cause of their plights rather than the simple misery with which they are preoccupied. Although the explanation supplied by Franzen in the shape of the characters' final melodramatic reunite appears to be shallow, this naive hopefulness appears to be the only option at the end of the novel.

Although the characters are ordinary people living as typical Midwesterners, Franzen's allusions to classical tragedies like Hamlet and his frequent mentions of existentialist thinkers like Schopenhauer imply that, in the face of all the external controlling forces debilitating human being and his pride, he seeks reality with all its complexities rather than depression. In the narrative's deeper layers, there is a special kind of hope and fear best attainable through Franzen's simultaneous use of neorealism with its emphasis on time and place, as well as his detailed presentation of characters tortured in a state of mixed feelings ranging from hatred to love, threat to security, and departure to arrival.

CONCLUSION

For novels, Franzen identifies two models: the Status model and the Contract model. The first category comprises canons and major works of art, but the second category "represents a compact" number of books and "entails a balance of self-expression and communication within a community" (Franzen, 2002, p. 240). While difficulty is crucial for the first group, the capacity to generate serious thinking is vital for the latter. As a close reading of The Corrections reveals, pleasure derives painfully from experience. The work depicts how abstractions and negative prejudices are transformed into tangible and situated consciousness via the protagonists' human-scaled ambitions and experiences such as being sacked, falling in love, suffering, and even betrayals. Even the names of characters in Franzen's writings reflect this situating and allocating or the link between person and location, inter mental and intramural. This is one of the reasons Adam Begley considers Franzen to be a part of "the everything-is-connected school of fiction" (Burn, 2008, p. 108). Franzen's choice of neorealism allows him to pay tribute to the multidimensionality and complexity of everyday but simultaneously profound situations, and to help his characters

and the reader comprehend the ethics of otherness in concrete daily issues.

Franzen, who lives in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, is well aware of the challenges that plague literature and society. He is aware of these needs and claims, "For every individual who has a need, there is a somebody someplace who wants to take care of that need," making it "essential to suffer" (2007, p. 484). He believes in sharing one's pain with other animals, in replacing misanthropy with charity, and in replacing judgemental bias with ethics and (re)cognition. The guilt complexes of his characters, their interrelationships, and their experience of being divided between their own emotions and the preferences of others are all examples of oscillations between these two poles. Understanding and communication, according to Franzen, are just as vital as self-expression and should be preserved in society. " He now realised why no one, including himself, had ever loved his screenplay:he'd written a thriller where he should have written farce," we read about Chip in *The Corrections* (p. 534). This is Franzen expressing why comedy and tragedy like life itself coexist.

Drawing on his naturalist and realist predecessors, Franzen writes a conventional novel highlighting the importance of "characterization, of traditional plots (family crises, coming of-age stories, and so on)," and of "resolution rather than indeterminacy" (Burn, 2008, p. 49). Admittedly, there are numerous Foucauldian elements in his works; however, there is also a gleam of slender hope obtained through ethics, emotion and, above all, recognition. This may explain why in *The Corrections* initial depictions and descriptions encouraging aloofness and judgment gradually transform into empathy enhancing the sense of identification and affection. Here is where both readers and characters are to discard the initial negative prejudice and try to acquire more mature-but-still-contextual attitudes, as for Franzen nothing happens in a vacuum. To Franzen, the existence of an individual is defined in his connections, decisions, and sufferings since basically it is impossible to separate intermind and intramind, and since recognition entails relationship, contradiction, opposition, and dilemma. This can explain why after depicting the lonely life of each character and the aftermath of this loneliness, Franzen brings them together at Christmas the moment of rebirth. As long as characters have not decided to replace their old habits, to *temporarily* move away from the Midwest, to change their career, and to finally come back home, they cannot be ethical creatures as (re)cognition is interwoven with involvement and disengagement, empathy and vicarious pleasure, suffering or satisfaction.

In postmodernism, "the mass media converts political and social movements into simple pictures that can be digested by the public in a safe and reinforcing fashion," according to Franzen (Samuels, 2009, p. 66). He sees how posthumanistic virtual spheres and persons with "virtual identities" (p. 66) represent a state in which the novel has lost its humanistic ideals, subjectivity, communication, creative inquiry, and purpose. In a world of pessimism, the World Wide Web, and non-belonging, Franzen and a group of thinkers and novelists have opted to adhere to the hope that the postmodern novel's withering ego and faith may be resurrected through a new form of realism and spiritualism. To oppose both conventional forms of idealism and the alienating technology world, he prefers to "appear prosaic or melodramatic, naive or mushy, and to ask the reader to genuinely feel something" than to leave the individual with *blank irony* and ontological uncertainties. (quoted in Giles, 2007, p. 323)

In this light, novel can be a forum to appreciate the dialectic of authority and marginality, aesthetics and influence, and a return to ethics and philanthropy. When Franzen satirically observes in Strong Motion that "Americans are wanted and necessary irresponsible" (p. 273), he urges for social duty and action in the face of passive opposition and intellectually-masked inactivity. He claims that societal problems are too deep and nuanced to be addressed superficially and optimistically; he criticises the "therapeutic optimism" of symptom novels. According to Franzen in How to Be Alone, the problem with our book is that it is seen as "medicine" (p. 73). He goes on to say that social novels should deal with "manners," "mystery" (p. 71), and responsibility. It should be a place where regular people's disputes, concerns, and challenges are really exposed and discussed a place where ethics is reignited.

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