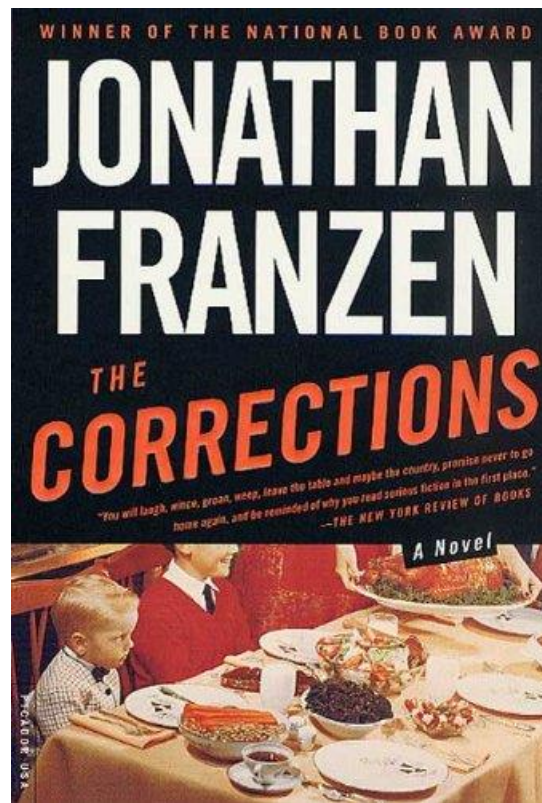


Womanism in Jonathan Franzen's *The Corrections*

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Abstract

Jonathan Earl Franzen, a renowned American novelist and essayist who won National Book Award and Pulitzer Prize for Fiction for his third novel *The Corrections*. His novels illustrate the American society through satirical elements. His novels are based on familial confrontations, societal disputations, feminist perspectives, corporate malfeasance and post-modern ideas. He gives equal importance for both male and female characters. This paper focuses the women characters and their contribution towards their family.

Keywords: Jonathan Franzen, *The Corrections*, satirical elements, confrontations, disputations, malfeasance.

American Literature

The United States of America is a confluence of people, language, tradition and culture from various parts of the world. As a result of this different dimensions America came with its own social and cultural features. This influence made the country as ethnic and developed country. Likewise, language is also influenced from Britain and Spain. The Midwestern accent of the United States is

considered as the standard language of America. So, the American Literary Tradition has become the substantial tradition of English Literature.

American Literature is highly influenced by English Literature. Benjamin Franklin, Alexander Hamilton and Thomas Paine are the political writers who pave way for other writers and it is notated as revolutionary period. Most of the literary works focus the American Dream; a set of standards includes democracy, liberty, equality and luxury. American Writers expose disenchantment after the World War I and at the end of World War II and many notable works written which gives form to American Literature.

Jonathan Franzen

Jonathan Franzen is the prominent writer of 21st Century. As his graduations are in German, he fluently speaks German. It is the reason that Franzen gives less importance for American Dream in his Works. Though he is the son of immigrant parents Franzen did not write about Diaspora. Franzen began his career as research assistant in Harvard University and only after marriage he started his life as a novelist. His first novel *The Twenty-Seventh City* has been considered as a masterly drama of 20th Century. Jonathan himself stated that “a conversation with the literary figures of my parents’ generation [,] the great sixties and seventies Post moderns”.

War and Natural Calamity

Franzen’s notable works are *The Corrections* and *Freedom*. He gives much importance for familial themes and social satire and all his novels have the background of war or natural calamity. His novel *The Corrections* made him as a Pulitzer Prize winner and National Book Award.

The Corrections is again a social satire which is set as the correction should be made by the characters for their family. As it early said this novel has also got a historical element that is the terrorist attack on September 11, 2001. Though his stories got familial confrontations Franzen cannot be considered as a domestic writer. *The Corrections* is the satire on the society after the terrorist attack. He criticizes the society through the Lamberts Family.

New Sincerity

Jonathan Franzen is also known for his literary movement New Sincerity. New Sincerity is narrowly related to Post Post-Modernism and *The Corrections* is the perfect example for it. The title *The Corrections* indicates the declination of technology which causes the economic roar at the end of the 19th century. And the significance is homage to *The Recognitions* by William Gaddis.

The Corrections

The Corrections is the story of the Lamberts family who are separated and suffered by the economic declination after the terrorist attack. The aged couple Alfred Lambert and Enid Lambert wishes to spend their life with their children and grandchildren which is not an easy task.

Enid is the gravitational force of the family who tries to depart the family again for the Christmas Eve. The story revolves the fictional city St. Jude where the old couple lives with their sons Chip and Gary and daughter Denise. This research paper analyses the female characters Enid, Julia, Melissa and Caroline. Enid the mother, Julia girlfriend of Chip, Melissa chip’s student and Caroline Gary’s wife. The aim of this paper is to show different aspects of Jonathan Franzen because he did not focus much about feminism in this novel but still the female characters involve Womanism.

Womanism

The theory Womanism came from the word Womanist which was coined by Alice Walker. This theory Womanism comes under the limitations of second wave feminism with the experience of the marginalized women of other community and the Black women. It may look like third wave feminism, but it is not. It is slightly differentiated from it. Usually the feminist theories explore the inequality and slavery of woman; Whereas Womanism is a kind of freedom.

According to Alice Walker, “Womanism is to Feminism as purple is to lavender” (1) on the whole feminism is against the male chauvinistic world but Womanism is an encounter the gender and race which is considered as the combined oppression. It does not simply concentrate on the struggles of the minorities; it obeys the spiritual ideas, tribute to the ancestors and moreover to sustain both the gender. Renee Martin says, “While Womanism at its heart is pro-women, it is also about understanding the communal value of all people of colour”. (3)

Enid

Franzen has given *The Corrections* which should be corrected by the characters for their family because his female characters allow the readers to understand what Womanism is and what is not. Enid and Denise stand for Womanism whereas Julia and Melisa stand against Womanism.

Enid is the mother of Chip, Denise, and Gary and the only character that cares about the family and its infrastructure because she is one who always makes adjustments with the other characters. Though Enid lives in America she does not follow the American culture; she follows the ancient tradition and culture and she wants her family to follow the same. For instance, she never drinks wine in the morning; she used to take wine in the night time that too very rare.

She sacrifices her life for her husband Alfred, who has been affected by the Parkinson disease, a type of hallucinating everything. And he also suffers from partial so he cannot handle things without Enid’s help. But still he does not give much importance to her wife. He used to stay in the basement in his blue chair and thinking about the incidents which does not happen. He talks to himself as if Enid could not understand his feelings. “He could have ended the crisis in a minute if all he’d had to do was forgive her; but to see mirrored in her eyes hoe repellent she found him – it made him crazy, it poisoned his hope”. (64)

Throughout the novel Enid is taken for granted by her family members. Alfred comments her speech as the ‘buzz of the wandering bee’. After all this Enid does not react for these commentaries. For her, family is everything; whatever happens she keeps on trying to gather her family, but all her sacrifice ends in vein. She does not know what freedom is and how to lead a life individually. So she plans to assemble her children and grandchildren for the Christmas Eve for the last time.

Anyhow her wish is blessed by the almighty. At the end of the novel, Enid is left alone after Alfred’s death. But this time she did not worry for her loneliness; actually, she enjoys it. Only at this point she realizes the identity and self respect. It is possible that she can break up her relationship with Alfred, but she thinks that she is responsible to take care of her family members without any partiality.

Denise

Denise, daughter of Alfred and Enid works as a chef in Midwestern America. Actually, she hates the tradition and culture which was followed by her mother. Because she knows that her family members did not treat her mother in a good manner. So, she voluntarily leads her life without any

attachment with people. Denise wants to live a luxurious life; does not care about the morality. She believes in lesbian culture and this that it is harmless. She becomes a good chef with her hard work and started working in a restaurant.

Brain is the owner of the hotel, with whom once she had a relationship. So, they both plan to begin a restaurant. Brain accepts this offer only to renew the relationship with Denise. But Denise started to sleep with Brain's wife and it is eventually found by Brain. He fired Denise from the job. So, Denise comes home to meet her parents. Franzen frames the character that is forced to follow the Western culture. In every occasion Denise tries to stay with somebody who will take care of her life that too out of loneliness. This is reason to have relationship with Brain's wife. However, she follows Western culture she did not leave her parents alone. She helps for Alfred to cure his disease; she arranges a rehabilitation centre for him. She is the only company for her mother Enid and financially helps Chip at his worst times.

She is highly in need of a relationship and it becomes a daydream for her; after when she got fired from Brain's restaurant she did not believe in relationship and stays with her parents. When the entire situation becomes worse again and again the author proves the character Denise with the Womanist nature that did not deviate till the end.

Julia Vrais

Julia Vrais is Chip's girlfriend who is a modern woman and the receptionist for the producer Eden Procuero. This is the only reason for Chip to accept her as his girlfriend. Though she is modern she adjusts many things for Chip. Chip lost her love by writing about a female character's body. To Julia it is most awkward thing to describe women like this.

"But for a woman reading it," said Julia obstinately, "it's sort of like the poultry department. Breast, breast, breast, thigh, leg." "I can remove some of those references," Chip said in a low voice. "I can also shorten the opening lecture. The thing is, though I want there to be a 'hump'---"
"Right, for the moviegoer to get over. That's a neat idea."
"I'm saying it's a tiny bit insulting to a person somehow." (30)

She comes to know that Chip is using her as an amusement instead of spending money outside. This grows hatred towards Chip, so she decides to leave Chip and when she is about to move Chip arrives there with his parents; surprisingly she whole heartedly welcomes them and shows her anger only to Chip. "Chip had grown up listening to his father pontificate on the topics of Men's Work and Women's Work and the importance of maintaining the distinction; in a spirit of correction, he stuck with Tori for nearly a decade." (19)

Finally, she left the house and breaks up her relationship with Chip. After this incident she marries the deputy prime minister of Luthania. Though she did not have any illegal relationships Julia deviated from the Womanist perspectives.

Melissa

Melissa is the only brilliant and active undergraduate student among the uninterested, Chip's student; truly speaking his second amusement. Chip does not care for true love, loyalty, respect and so on. But chip's relationship with Melissa lasted only for a short span of time. Franzen describes her as, "regal, theatrical person" (36). Chip and Melissa plan for a journey of self-discovery in Scotland; Melissa's parents had a sudden visit to her college. For her parents are her best friends which Chip

objects rudely. “I’m saying Melissa that children are not supposed to get along with their parents. Your parents are not supposed to be your best friends. There’s supposed to be some element of rebellion. That’s how you define yourself as a person. (37).

She convinces Chip to move for which Chip thinks that she is treating him as a slave. He takes the drugs along with him and breaks the relationship with her. In the case of Melissa, she simply uses Chip for pleasure. So Franzen shows the two characters Julia and Melissa who diverged from Womanist perspectives.

Girlish

Womanism is a straightway opposite to girlish; which usually refers to woman who is outrageous, courageous with wilful behaviour. Likewise, the characters in this novel symbolize the womanish attitude. Franzen shows Womanism through the characters Enid and Denise because they bend every situation whereas Julia and Melissa break up their relationship for futile reasons.

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