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From Amsterdam, this is Bright Minds, the podcast from the John Adams Institute, a treasure trove of the best and the brightest of American thinking, and this is the great American novelist Jonathan Franzen, who knows that life is full of tragicomic ironies.

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Jonathan Franzen: I really think that I can do better than my parents did. They made mistakes. I'm not going to make those mistakes. I'm going to fix all that. See, in the fact that while you might fix their mistakes, but you'll make some of your own. The tragedy of human existence. Or you can think how funny.

00:01:00

Jonathan Groubert: Back in 2002, Jonathan Franzen came to Amsterdam to discuss his novel; The Corrections. The corrections is about an American family, but it could be about any family in the Western world and beyond because it seems like all families these days are riddled with intrigue, intergenerational conflict, the pressures of consumerism and of pharmacology. Throw in the optimistic egalitarianism of the American Midwest and a dose of class and race hatred, and you have a description of Western family life that still holds true even 20 years since the corrections was published. He was interviewed for the John Adams by the late Dutch literary critic and journalist Michaël Zeeman. But first, Mr. Franzen stepped to the podium to read a passage from his novel The Corrections.

00:01:54

Jonathan Franzen: I'm really, really happy and slightly terrified to see so many people here tonight. Thank you all for coming out. In the United States it's become *de rigueur* in the last 15 years for authors of recently published books to go out and read from them, and indeed read from them while they're still in progress. It's kind of a plague. Most writers don't actually like reading from their work, and their reading shows it. And even worse are the ones who do like reading from their work and pick a particularly dense, rich sections of prose that they read in slow intoning voices. And I'm going to read from the very beginning of the first real section, which is called ‘the failure’.

Down the Long Concourse they came on steadily, Enid favoring her damaged hip, Alfred paddling at the air with loose hinged hands and slapping the airport carpeting with poorly controlled feet, both of them carrying Nordic Pleasurelines shoulder bags and concentrating on the floor in front of them, measuring out the hazardous distance three paces at a time. To anyone who saw them averting their eyes from the dark-haired New Yorkers careering past them, to anyone who caught a glimpse of Alfred straw fedora looming at the height of Iowa corn on Labor Day, or the yellow wall of the slack stretching over Enid's out slung hip, it was obvious that they were Midwestern and intimidated. But to Chip Lambert, who was waiting for them just beyond the security checkpoint, they were killers.

Chip had crossed his arms defensively and raised one hand to pull on the wrought-iron rivet in his ear. He worried that he might tear the rivet right out of his ear lobe, that the maximum pain his ear's nerves could generate was less pain than he needed now to steady himself. From his station by the metal detectors, he watched an azure-haired girl overtake his parents, an azure-haired girl of college age, a very wantable stranger with pierced lips and eyebrows. It struck him that if he could have sex with this girl for one second he could face his parents confidently, and that if he could keep on having sex with this girl once every minute for as long as his parents were in town he could survive their entire visit. Chip was a tall, gym built man with crow's feet and sparse buttery yellow hair; if the girl had noticed him, she might have thought he was a little too old for the leather he was wearing. As she hurried past him, he pulled harder on his rivet to offset the pain of her departure from his life forever and to focus attention on his father, whose face was brightening at the discovery of a son among so many strangers. In the lunging manner of a man floundering and water, Alfred fell upon chip and grabbed Chip's hand and wrist as if they were a rope he'd been thrown. “Well!” he said. “Well!”

Enid came limping up behind him. “Chip,” she cried, “what have you done to your ears?”

“Dad, Mom,” Chip murmured through his teeth, hoping the azure-haired girl was out of earshot. “Good to see you.” He had time for one subversive thought about his parents Nordic Pleasurelines shoulder bags, either Nordic Pleasurelines sent bags like these to every booker or of its cruises as a cynical means of getting inexpensive walk-about publicity or as a practical means of tagging the cruise participants for greater ease of handling at embarkation points or as a benign means of building esprit de corps; or else Enid and Alfred had deliberately saved the bags from some previous Nordic Pleasurelines. cruise and, out of the misguided sense of loyalty, had chosen to carry them on their upcoming cruise as well; and in either case Chip was appalled by his parents' willingness to make themselves vectors of corporate advertising before he shouldered the bags himself and assumed the burden of seeing LaGuardia Airport and New York City and his life and clothes and body through the disappointed eyes of his parents.

He noticed as if for the first time, the dirty linoleum, the assassin like chauffeur is holding up signs with other people's names on them, the snarl of wires dangling from a hole in the ceiling. Outside the big windows on the baggage level, two Bangladeshi men were pushing a disabled cab through rain and angry honking.

“We have to be at the pier by four,” Enid said to Chip. “And I think dad was hoping to see your desk at the *Wall Street Journal*.” She raised her voice. “Al? Al?”

Though stooped in the neck now, Alfred was still an imposing figure. His hair was white and thick and sleek, like a polar bear’s, and the powerful long muscles of his shoulders, which Chip remembered laboring in the spanking of a child, usually Chip himself, still filled the gray tweed shoulders of his sport coat.

“Al, didn't you say you wanted to see where Chip worked?” Enid shouted.

Alfred shook his head. “There is no time.”

“Did you take your pill?” Enid said.

“Yes,” Alfred said. He closed his eyes and repeated slowly. “I took my pill. I took my pill. I took my pill.”

“Dr. Hedgepeth has them on a new medication,” Enid explained to Chip, who was quite certain that his father had not, in fact, expressed interest in seeing his office. And since Chip had no association with the *Wall Street Journal*, the publication to which he made unpaid contributions was the *Warren Street Journal: a Monthly of the Transgressive Arts*. He'd also a very recently completed a screenplay, and he'd been working part-time as a legal proofreader at Bragg, Knutter & Speigh for the nearly two years since he'd lost his assistant professorship in Textual Artifacts at D-- College, in Connecticut, as a result of an offense involving a female undergraduate which had fallen just short of the legally actionable and which, though his parents never learned of it, had interrupted the parade of accomplishments that his mother could brag about back home in St. Jude; he'd told his parents that he'd quit teaching in order to pursue a career in writing ,and when, more recently, his mother had pressed him for details, he'd mentioned the *Warren Street Journal*, the name of which his mother had misheard and instantly began to trumpet to her friends Esther Roote and Bea Meisner and Mary Beth Shumpert, and though Chip in his monthly phone calls home had many opportunities to disabuse her he'd instead actively foster the misunderstanding, and he was thirty nine years old, and he blamed his parents for the person he had become, he was happy when his mother let the subject drop.

“His tremor is much better,” Enid added in a voice inaudible to Alfred. “The only side effect is that he *may* hallucinate.”

“That's quite a side effect,” Chip said.

“Dr. Hedgepath says that what he has is very mild and almost completely controllable with medication,”

Alfred was surveying the baggage-claim cavern while pale travelers angled for position at the carousel. The light was the color of car sickness. “New York City!” Alfred said.

Enid frowned at Chip's pants. “Those aren't leather, are they?”

“Yes.” he said.

"How do you wash them?"
"They're leather. They're like a second skin."
"We have to be at the pier no later than four o'clock," Enid said.
The carousel coughed up some suitcases.
"Chip, help me," his father said.
"We're doing a Luxury Fall Color Cruise," Enid said when the three of them were in a yellow cab, speeding through Queens. "We sail up to Quebec and then we enjoy the changing leaves all the way back down. Dad, so enjoyed the last cruise we were on, didn't you Al? Didn't you have a good time on that cruise?"
"We're excited about your new job," Enid said
"One of the great papers in the country," Alfred said "The Wall Street Journal!"
"Does anybody smell fish, though?"
"We're near the ocean," Chip said.
"No, it's you," Enid leaned and buried her face in Chip's leather sleeve. "Your jacket smells strongly of fish."
He wrenched free of her. "Mother. Please."

Chip's problem was a loss of confidence. Gone were the days when he could afford to *épater les bourgeois.* Except for his Manhattan apartment and his handsome girlfriend, Julia Vrais, he now had almost nothing to persuade himself that he was a functioning male adult, no accomplishments to compare with those of his brother, Gary, who is a banker and a father of three, or of his sister, Denise, who at the age of 32, was the executive chef at a successful new high-end restaurant in Philadelphia. Chip had hoped he might have sold his screenplay by now, but he hadn't finished a draft until after midnight on Tuesday, and then he'd had to work three 14 hour shifts at Bragg Knutter & Speigh to raise cash to pay his August rent and reassure the owner of his apartment about his September and October rent, and then there was a lunch to be shopped for and an apartment to be cleaned and, finally, sometime before dawn this morning, A long-hoarded Xanax to be swallowed. Meanwhile, nearly a week had gone by without his seeing Julia or speaking to her directly. In response to the many nervous messages he'd left on her voicemail in the last 48 hours, asking her to meet him and his parents at his apartment at noon on Saturday and also please, if possible, not to mention to his parents that she was married to someone else, Julia had maintained a total phone and email silence from which even a more stable man than Chip might have drawn disturbing conclusions.

It was raining so hard in Manhattan that water was streaming down façades and frothing at the mouths of sewers. Outside his building, on East Ninth Street, Chip took money from Enid and handed it through the cab's partition, and even as the turbine driver thanked him, he realized the tip was too small. From his own wallet he took two singles dollar bills and dangled them near the driver's shoulder.
"That's enough, that's enough," Enid squeaked, reaching for Chip's wrist. "He already said thank you."
But the money was gone. Alfred was trying to open the door by pulling on the window crank. "Here. Dad, it's this one," Chip said and leaned across him to pop the door. "How big a tip was that?" Enid asked Chip on the sidewalk, under his building's marquee, as the driver heaved luggage from the trunk.
"About 15 percent," Chip said.
"More like 20, I'd say," Enid said.
"Let's have a fight about this, why don't we."
"20 percent's too much, Chip" Alfred pronounced in a booming voice. "It's not reasonable."
"You all have a good day now," The taxi driver said, with no apparent irony.

00:14:23

Jonathan Groubert: And with that, the literary critic, Michaël Zeeman, took to the stage for an interview that was both literary and kind of critical. I don't know, judge for yourself. Here they are.

00:14:33

Michaël Zeeman: Now this is a novel about a family. And a family that has to a certain extent split up because the parents are in the Midwest and the children are away. So what you what you get immediately in the beginning of the novel already, when the parents come to New York and enter the world of Chip. The feeling of a gap, that is a gap to be bridged. This is a gap between regions, the Midwest and New York. But also between generations.

00:15:15
Jonathan Franzen: Absolutely, I grew up in an odd position in my family and I think maybe historically as well. My parents were quite old when I was born. I had two brothers who were much older than me and very much of the 60s; eligible for the Vietnam War and so forth. Also, my family was unusual politically was it was conservative in many ways. My father was a raging pacifist, if that's possible to say a raging pacifist. He was he, he was. He was made sick by the Vietnam War, and that was really the one point of agreement between him and my brothers. For the most part, there was conflict between my brothers, who were very much part of that new world that was happening in the sixties and my parents who were born in the teens and 1921, 15, 1915 and 21. And then there was I who everybody was nice too. And uh, I had this opportunity as I grew up to sort of sit on the sidelines and watch this generational conflict unfold. And then I myself left the Midwest when I was, I just turned 18, went to the East Coast and then Europe. Ultimately for three years and never went back there to live again. So those are those are splits that I have lived myself and I found myself, it was impossible because I spent so much time with my parents, it was impossible simply to take my brother's side because they were gone by the time I was, whatever, nine years old. I liked them. I lied to my parents. And yet here are these two really, I mean, they were constantly at loggerheads for pretty much all my life. And I was the one person everyone could talk to. And I kind of collected the stories.

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Michaël Zeeman: didn't you feel you were too late?

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Jonathan Franzen: Too late? You know, it's funny because...

00:17:27
Michaël Zeeman: For good conflict?

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Jonathan Franzen: Uh, yes, I personally was. I missed out on a lot of that. And then to avoid it, I lied constantly. From the earliest stage I'd seen what happened if you actually told parents what you were doing. So the best course of action seemed to be to just from the get go lie constantly the whole way until finally I was 22 and I'd finished college. And the truth came out when I didn't do any of the things that I was expected to do, but until that I had lied. And even indeed, after that, I lied as much as possible.

00:18:05
Michaël Zeeman: A strategy you give to (inaudible)

00:18:06
Jonathan Franzen: My Mother was actually right, You know, fiction is, it's about life in the work of at least the first..

00:18:13
Michaël Zeeman: you to give this this type of strategy to chip in a novel, who is both actively and passively lying. Actively, because he sometimes has to lie. Passively, because he is misunderstood by his parents and he doesn't correct them. One of the few things that doesn't get corrected is his lies. So this is a is a fruitful strategy, clearly

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Jonathan Franzen: I found it to be. So it bought me about 10 extra years.

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Michaël Zeeman: You recommend it?

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Jonathan Franzen: Well, I think pretty much everyone in the audience has missed their chance for it, but they've basically bought me years 12 through twenty two to kind of figure things out without having to give any accounting. If you have children, perhaps they're doing it for you. But it's my own experience that it's very hard to find anything to believe in. I was affected. The formative events for me were Vietnam and Watergate and the United States, and to a lesser extent, the Cold War. The first presidential election I was able to vote in and brought Ronald Reagan to power. So I had a sense, I certainly did not have any of the idealism that my brothers had politically. I basically been presented with example after example of the corruption or coercion of the political process. (I) wasn't very good at signing on to the doctrine of the church I grew up in.

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Michaël Zeeman: Which Was?

00:19:54

Jonathan Franzen: Which was a good sort of left leaning Protestant church called the Congregational Church. The original Puritan Church, actually, which in its Midwestern incarnation, became a rather liberal thing, in part because I had been encouraged to go so deeply into science. You know, the dogma seemed insupportable, and what I was left with religiously wasn't enough really to hang on to. One by one, the things that people used to believe in, and that used to give an organizing principle and meaning to life, seemed to be eliminated. At a certain point. Although I've been fortunate enough to have a kind of almost fundamentalist belief in the novel, just as passionate evangelical belief in

Zeeman [00:20:54] the word.

Franzen [20;55] in the word, in the beauty of the book, and it really in anesthetics in general. For a lot of people, I think family's the one thing you. That that cannot be taken away from you, really. You have a parent. And if you're a parent, you have a child. And that is whether you like it or not, whether you run from it or whether you embrace it. It is a it is a fact about you. It, it, establishes a connection to the world that in an atomized consumer society is otherwise not easily found. That's a long answer, but it's it's really the best I can do quickly. It's difficult. It's a little difficult for me to talk in these terms about the book because I see it in such story terms. And so it's you're kind of

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Michaël Zeeman: I make your evening difficult.

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Jonathan Franzen: That's right, because I don't want a physical sensation of stepping back and

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Michaël Zeeman: But still. Right so. There is, of course, this this very well-known, often used Tolstoy phrase about all happy families. It is as if a family can't be happy. In your book?. The secret is they'll never be.

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Jonathan Franzen: Oh, that's a little harsh.

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Michaël Zeeman: Defend them.

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Jonathan Franzen: It's a little misleading that the action of the book takes place. Basically, between late September and the end of December of one particular year when. The father of the family, the powerful Alfred, is going from a relatively functional, if shaky figure in the family to a mess, basically, that's how he would describe it himself. He has Parkinson's disease, he has increasing dementia and uh, that's a miserable time to pick up any family. We don't really. I mean, we get glimpses at other times when things don't look all that happy. But uh. It's, it's a skewed perspective, it's a perspective I chose because I was writing in the 90s when everything, the rhetoric, was all optimistic and I wasn't feeling so good myself and was drawn to

those unhappy moments. But I would agree that. Because so much of intergenerational family life now is pushed into these tiny little slices of time at the holidays, with at least one side usually having overwhelming and unrealistic expectations from those get togethers. It's almost automatically a recipe for unhappiness. We don't see so much of a family with little kids or so forth. I'm not so sure that what we see that, that these children don't seem to have had a deprived or unhappy childhood. It's sort of a mysterious unhappiness that comes in adulthood. I'll stop there. Feel free to redirect, as the lawyers say

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Michaël Zeeman: This, this Alfred in in his, in his history, has all the images of a strong person and also of a sort of sympathetic, old-fashionedness. I mean, you worked for the railroads. He is more interested in metal than in plastic. He is interested in doing research and inventing and having patents. These are quite sympathetic characteristics for somebody, but also characteristics belonging to the past. Certainly his past. But more than only his past. So the decline of the person, his Parkinson's disease, his dementia is more than only his individual decline. It's also the decline of a civilization.

00:25:19
Jonathan Franzen: Yes, and I. For better or worse, was self-conscious about that theme as I wrote the book, I had the strange experience among people of my generation, of knowing a lot of people who were born in the 19th century and felt my own father had grown up in a little town in northern Minnesota. His father and uncles, who were Swedes, had cleared the main street and built the buildings. They didn't get the electric light until he was nearly in college, so it didn't seem that long ago. The past didn't seem so far past, and the sophistication and sort of rootlessness of life, as I discovered it on the East Coast, just did not connect with that. And I felt not a nostalgia, but I felt as if we were rushing to discard the 60s and 70s. That essentially represented a repudiation of a lot of those old values of restraint, constraint, repression and much had been thrown out, and much of it had been thrown out for good reason. At the same time, you know, its, repression is good. That's what civilization is based on. And, uh. The three children of Alfred reject the ways in which he's closed, emotionally contained, rigidly moral, rigidly moral, really, to the point of being a moral thought itself. They reject that, but what they're left with is this kind of moral anarchy and worse in a way, they reject the rigid gender roles of the parents, which probably deserve to be rejected because Enid's life has been fairly miserable in many of her potential strengths of just gone by the board. At the same time, they're left without any sense of what? How do I? what am I now?

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Michaël Zeeman: But that is, of course, one of the painful experiences of reading the book that, without the book being a bashing, the 60s. All saying fashionable, critical things about the need of restoration of whatever educational family or whatever you still feel the distance between the world Alfred has come from and the world to his sturdy, fashionable, superficial, quick and swift world his children live in, whether it be banking or internet, industry and fraudulent actions as Chip has them, or whether it be even haute cuisine in New York nowadays, all very fashionable, quick and superficial. So without the novel being explicitly critical about it and making life easy for its reader, that is the sort of pain. What was wrong with the former world and what have we put instead of it?

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Jonathan Franzen: Yeah, uhm, yeah. I mean, you put these things so well, I feel like..

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Michaël Zeeman: No, no, no. I know your secondary reaction. This is an invitation to respond to this. Be serious.

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Jonathan Franzen: No, no, no, I understand that. But I really anything I would say would…

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Michaël Zeeman: No, but in your introduction say it is an entertaining and critical?

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Jonathan Franzen: Yeah, I don't, right. Did I say critical?

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Michaël Zeeman: I Yeah, you said (It was). I was present, so I took notes.

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Jonathan Franzen: Really, I use the word critical?

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Michaël Zeeman: Yeah, Critical it says.

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Jonathan Franzen: No. But I think that was the idea I had for the book and the first two books. That was kind of what I decided.

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Michaël Zeeman: Of course. But still, in depicting this family like this, there is some feeling of the entertainment of the story and the critical undertone.

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Jonathan Franzen: Yes. But now we'll add the writer to that agreement. I feel as if I'm laughing at a lot of stuff. And to me to laugh at something is different. There's, there's a some distinction there. I think I was more openly critical of my first two books. I feel as if what I've tried to do now is present things in their full ridiculousness. That is, that which can be criticized should be able to be mocked. And I don't really, I'm not so interested in satire. People describe the book as satiric, and I kind of, I don't like the word satire because I think that satire has a certain. An optimism that I don't share, I have a different kind of optimism, which I'm happy to explain, but it's not. It seems that the satirist is angry. At some fraudulent aspect of the world and feels that by exposing the fraudulent aspect to ridicule, it can be fixed. People will put the scales, will fall from people's eyes and they will see, Oh. These horrible, hypocritical people, you're right, you're our hero satirist. We're going to change all that. But I know that it doesn't actually have a full dream of agency in that way, but that seems that's implicit in satire is the idea that I'm right as the satirist and you are wrong and that perhaps I can show other people that you're wrong and good will come of that. And I actually don't feel that, that is. I feel that even though. Yes, there there's, there are excesses in chips attachment to critical theory, for instance, or in the excess of consumer goods in Gary's household or the, the sheer excess in the restaurants that Denise is involved with. I really understand why those characters are pursuing them. I actually, part of me really likes the theory that Chip likes, and I bought things in the same way and sort of looked with horror at the mounting pile of goods. As Gary has and Denise's pursuit of feeling cool, of wanting to be with the cool people and not with the uncool people, I mean, that's like definitive practically in my social life. That is my superficial social life. I can't walk into a into a crowded room and not feel all of those things and not feel an anxiety about, well, if someone sees my record collection, what are they going to think? However cool it is, there's always someone who can come in and tell you, Oh (scoff). And then begin talking about the original recording of something in nineteen thirty three that was, you know, it's like. And have you heard that this is beautiful new series being produced, but you can only get it online and you just kind of are shriveling into this, into this lump of the hopeless, uncool mess. You know, I know why she's doing that. And so to make fun of the person in that quandary is really is a little bit different from my standing out here and saying, Ha, those people who are so concerned with coolness, I'm going, to they're ridiculous. So there's a I think there's a little difference in emphasis, at least of I don't think of it quite as critical so much as comic.

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Michaël Zeeman: But you write a book called The Corrections.

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Jonathan Franzen: Well, yeah, there's some irony to the title.

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Michaël Zeeman: Yeah, of course, of course. But still, there is also the suggestion. I mean, of course, I see the distance to the satirist who knows better, right? But this ridicule is up to something. It's not just ridicule or mocking them and saying, Stand back now.

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Jonathan Zeeman: No, I work from the assumption nowadays that things that are tragic are also funny and pretty much for the same reasons. You know, you can take the circumstance that; I really think that I can do better than my parents did. They made mistakes. I'm not going to make those mistakes. I'm going to fix all that, and see in the fact that, well, you might fix their mistakes, but you'll make some of your own. The tragedy of human existence. Or you can think; "how funny." And it's really, you're responding to the same impossible, contradictory essence of human existence. And so, yes, I mean, it is up to something. And for me, a significance of the title is that I'm correcting my own more youthful tendency to come down on one side or the other is to make judgments.

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Michaël Zeeman: But that again makes a corrector. I mean, even if the superego corrects, there is still a corrector, and the corrected knows better.

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Jonathan Franzen: That's true. And so the joke is probably on me. And if I'm lucky, I'll find some way to repudiate this book and get another burst of energy for the next book. And that would be funny.

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Michaël Zeeman: Yeah, yeah. Although does that mean that the balance between entertainment and criticism has definitely changed?

00:35:57

Jonathan Franzen: For me? Oh, absolutely. No, no. I another thing I did right before that Mexican trip, that unjustifiable vacation, which I brought my girlfriend along on and ended up paying for it, even though I could afford not even to take myself. That's not true. I just sold the book. That's why we were going to Mexico. That's what it was. I just, I had cash. I hadn't been out of the country for five years. That's what it was. I'm sorry, I, I had quit smoking. And one of the reasons I'd gotten an idea for a novel that was about five novels high was that I never really sat down to fully write it, but I had a lot of ideas for how to write it. And the more I smoked, the better I functioned cognitively and was able to add new branches to that. And I reached a point shortly before the Mexican vacation where I, I, all I was doing was smoking.

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Michaël Zeeman: No writing.

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Jonathan Franzen: No writing whatsoever.

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Michaël Zeeman: Great ideas.

00:37:21

Jonathan Franzen: Not even great ideas anymore. And it's like the aid to thinking had spun off on its own and was just itself that the thinking had been left behind along with any shred of productivity. And so I quit, and I could no longer make myself right, my head was just thick. And when you can't make yourself right for me, it's like the whole work ethic I grown up with wasn't working anymore. I could no longer go in and say; "Work, it's good for you and it's good for the world." I actually had to go in and enjoy it or nothing got done. I just couldn't. I would just, I would just sit there if I didn't like it so well. So for me, at any rate, as a writer, I don't know. I mean, yeah, I was not going in there thinking, this is work. I'm going to do the work, the important work of being an important novelist. It was more like, how can I figure out some way to have fun with this? Where in the pages I've written in the last month, can I find something that's fun to reread? And I don't know if that translates to an expectation for the effect. The book is going to have a lot of people speak of it in terms of social criticism, and I'm busily, as I am doing now, saying No, no, no.

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Michaël Zeeman: But you're not surprised. Speaking of it? No, not really. Be serious.

00:39:07

Jonathan Franzen: No.

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Michaël Zeeman: You can't mock a teacher of literary theory, a banker and a chef de cuisine without realizing there is some vague, vain, sort of social criticism of professional minds. Or can you?

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Jonathan Franzen: Yes. And I will. I will deny that. I will actually propose a counter theory, which was I was merely describing what I was seeing all around me in New York. I was, in many cases, literally transcribing the, the conversations that I overheard at the ridiculously overpriced grocery store or.

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Michaël Zeeman: Each and any of them? Without selection, without reference?

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Jonathan Franzen: No, the things that particularly annoyed me or the things that struck me as particularly, particularly, amusingly, revelatory of the spirit of the times course. No, I hated I hated the 90s, and now I miss them. It's, you know, all it took was being alive on September 12th to miss that, you know, dumb optimism of of the late 90s in the USA. It suddenly looked incredibly sweet. No, OK, you're right. But. So I was selecting things based on what irritated me.

00:40:27

Jonathan Groubert: He late literary critic and journalist Michaël Zeeman interviewing the novelist Jonathan Franzen way back in 2002.
Did you know that you can go to our website? John-Adams.nl/videos where there's a link to the video of this extraordinary event. There's also a link in the show notes. Although in this case it's uncut audio of the interview, including an audience Q&A. So if you want more, there's more. We also have a newsletter you can sign up for and a veritable treasure trove of great American thinkers and speakers at john-adams.nl. Now, while you're there, why not become a member of the John Adams? Not only will you support what we do, you get a discount to future live events. In the meantime, you should go to wherever you get your podcasts and leave a review of this show. This will help get the word out. We can keep on sharing the very best of American thinkers with you, free of charge. That's it for this week's show. Our theme song is called La Prensa by the Fernando's. Our editor is Tracey Metz from Amsterdam. This was Bright Minds, the podcast from the John Adams Institute, I'm Jonathan Groubert. Thank you for listening!