

**From Postmodernism to Post-postmodernism:
A Study of Jonathan Franzen's *Freedom***

A Paper

by

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Abstract

The catastrophic September 11, 2001 events did not only mark a new epoch in contemporary world history, but also ushered in the beginning of a new phase in literary history. It signaled the demise of postmodernism, which flourished during the period from 1960s to 1990s, and inaugurated a new phase in American fiction referred to by some critics as post-postmodernism, late postmodernism or new realism. A study of Franzen's *Freedom* (2010) reveals it as a post-postmodernist novel which attempts to depict the post 9/11 American society. This paper attempts to show that the black irony or cynical detachment of the long acclaimed postmodernism can no longer represent the post 9/11 reality. It also tries to show that human experience could no longer be rendered through fragmented characters or plotless narrative. A study of *Freedom* reveals Franzen's adoption of several devices that are characteristic of post-postmodernism in addition to employing other devices that pertain to postmodernism.

Keywords: Postmodernism. Post-postmodernism. Franzen. *Freedom*. Technique

The catastrophic September 11, 2001 events did not only mark a new epoch in contemporary world history, but also ushered in the beginning of a new phase in literary history. It signaled the demise of postmodernism, which flourished during the period from 1960s to 1990s, and inaugurated a new phase in American fiction referred to by some critics as post-postmodernism, late postmodernism or new realism. In their introduction to *Fiction's Present: Situating Contemporary Narrative Innovation* (2008), Berry and R.D. Leo argue that "[m]any felt that recent military, economic, and environmental threats demand more direct forms of verbal intervention" (2). Illuminating the causes that necessitated the search for a new form of expression, they state that

the war in Iraq, the September 11, 2001 attacks, the rise of globalization, resurgent neoconservatism, and ubiquitous religious conflicts all hold the potential to energize or enervate literary practice, transforming fiction's present from a natural juncture of past and future into a question: to the present, what must fiction now do? Should the novel engage the politically and economically pressing issues of the day, in this way hoping to secure its relevance, or will effort to mirror contemporary history absent itself, dispelling what has made fiction distinctive. (2)

Describing the general reaction of the whole West toward the September attacks as "hysteria," Cowley argues that the response of the writers, in particular, was "catastrophist-eschatological anxiety and an unconvincing sudden seriousness, as if human nature itself changes the day the towers collapsed" (qtd. in Nelson 2008. 57). Nelson adds that "it was merely that in the relatively benign, affluent West has forgotten that the world has always been a spectacular carnival of suffering" (57). Fish argues that postmodernists "deny the possibility of describing matters of facts objectively" (n. pag.). Their failure to represent the new reality of post 9/11 world, in Fish's view, may be attributed to the fact that postmodernism itself

maintained only that there can be no independent standard for determining which of many rival interpretations of an event is the true one. The only thing postmodern thought argues against is the hope of justifying our responses to the

attacks in universal terms that would be persuasive to everyone, including our enemies. (n. pag.)

Instead, Americans should, as Fish puts it, "invoke the particular lived values that unite us and inform the institutions we cherish and wish to defend" (n. pag), because, after all, "our adversaries have emerged not from some primordial darkness, but from a history that has equipped them with reasons and motives and even with a perverted version of some virtues" (n. pag.).

It is remarkable that the first critics who declare the demise of postmodernism were its major exponents. Hassan, for example, who used to defend postmodernism in the 1970s, argues, in "From Postmodernism to Postmodernity: The Local/ Global Context" (2002) , that since 1987 he has been wondering "like others, how to recover the creative impulse of postmodernism without a atavism or reversion, without relapse into enervated forms or truculent dogmas, without cynicism or fanaticism" (10). In his famous "Beyond Postmodernism: Toward an Aesthetic of Trust" (2003), Hassan suggests a move "beyond postmodernism" which could be attempted by establishing "a postmodernism not of suspicion but of trust" (3). McHale, the famous postmodern critic, also expected the end of postmodernism. According to McHale,

postmodernism was self-conscious about its identity as a period, conscious of its own historicity, because it conceived itself as historical, coming after something namely modernism. ... Postmodernism periodized itself ... since it conceived itself as coming after something, it also imagined itself being superseded by something yet to come. (n. pag.)

Similarly, in the second edition of her famous book *The Politics of Postmodernism* (2002), Linda Hutcheon adds an Epilogue in which she declares that the "postmodernism moment has passed, even if its discursive strategies and its ideological critique continue to live on – as those of modernism – in our contemporary twenty-first century world" (Hutcheon 181). Harris, too, has declared the end of postmodernism in "PoMo's Wake, I" (2002). He states that

Postmodernism is dead. Long live postmodernism. Although PoMo's wake has dragged on for several years now, the

corpse remains suspiciously lively. [...] It continues to walk among us, not only prompting frequent sightings ... but producing offspring, another generation of novelists whose fiction, while bearing clear family resemblances, has staked out new directions of its own following in the wake of the wake, as it were. (1)

Green uses the term, "late postmodernism" to describe the fiction of the 1990s and 2000s. Seen as an "aesthetic strategy," late postmodernism has been affected by

the generative pressures on contemporary writing that include the cultural and economic forces of the last decade of the twentieth century, such as the rise of television, film, and internet and their marginalization of the printed book, the novel's and the novelist's loss of cultural authority in the face of a culture of entertainment and consumerism; the obituaries for the novel, the reader, and postmodernism itself. (5)

Furthermore, in *The Passing of Postmodernism: A Spectroanalysis of the Contemporary* (2010), Toth confirms that the death of postmodernism is inevitable as it is an example of epochal "shifts" or "breaks" (5). Consequently, it leads to the emergence of "renewalist narratives" that abandoned the "nihilistic trajectory of postmodern metafiction while simultaneously and perhaps paradoxically embracing the postmodern rejection of a distinctly modernist form of idealism" such as "desire for meaning, truth, historical progress, and so on" (88-89). What distinguishes renewalist novels is "their insistence on the possibility of what they paradoxically continue to expose as impossible: meaning, truth, mimesis, telos, communal understanding, and communication" (Toth 103). Besides, according to Toth, "what is most significant about this apparent return to realism – a realism, we need to stress, that is informed by postmodern formalism– is that it signals the end of metafiction as privileged aesthetic style" (Toth 123).

Burn, too, uses the term "post-postmodernism" to describe the emerging American fiction of the 21st century. Post-postmodern writers

use both postmodern and conventional narrative in their works. However, Burn is keen to distinguish the rising fiction of post-postmodern writers from their ancestors. According to Burn, the new writers focus on both form and content. The works of Powers, Wallace and Franzen, in Burn's view, show that "the balance between the importance of form and something closer to a conventional plot grounded in a recognizable world is weighted toward plot to a much greater degree than the work of the postmodernists" (20). In addition, Burn argues that

Post-postmodern novels are informed by the postmodernist critique of the naïve realist belief that language can be a true mirror of reality and yet they are suspicious of the logical climax: Derrida's famous statement that 'there is nothing outside the text.' The consequences of this are both aesthetic and political. From an aesthetic standpoint, this means that metafictional techniques are employed with less regularity and toward different ends by post-postmodernists, and so their fiction tends to produce hybrid novelistic forms. From a political point of view, this means that the younger novelists *more obviously* address the idea of a real world beyond the problems raised by nonreferential systems of discourse. (20-21 Emphasis is Burn's).

Besides focusing on more conventional plot, post-postmodern novelists are distinguished, according to Burn, by their political and social engagement. Their fiction displays a variety of issues, ranging from politics to ecology.

Basic tenets of postmodernism such as irony, self-referentiality subjectivity and representation, to cite as examples, are also questioned for failing to cope with contemporary issues. The dominance of irony in the American culture of the new epoch, according to Magill, for example, leads to further "disdain, contempt and disparagement of American values" (133). Magill also argues that the biggest problem that the Americans face today is that "fundamental Christian institutions – family, church, nation – were being eroded by a liberal, secularist culture and media bent on selling their version of anti-American relativism and moral free-for-allism" that were "accelerated by the decadent days of the 1960s" (130). Instead of self-centeredness, decline of moral values, and cynic

nihilism promoted by postmodernism, Magill proposes "some version of a renewed respect for moral authority and social hierarchy, seriousness of purpose, renewed civic and religious belief and patriotism" (131) to counteract the "narcissistic and self-obsessed, materialistic ... loss of values and an undermining of moral authority "that distinguished postmodern culture", (Magill 143). Predicting a "seismic change", Carter too declares that "it is end of the age of irony. [...]. Things that were considered fringe and frivolous are going to disappear" (Carter. qtd in Magill 17). Like Carter, Magill thinks that "September 11's concrete horror, its piercing reality and unrelenting moral weight, in total effect, its seriousness, was supposed to have spelled the end of ironic disengagement in America" (16).

Rejecting the concept of subjectivity, hailed prominent by postmodernists, the works of the new writers, to use Timmer's words, display the

emphatic expression of feelings and sentiment, a drive towards inter-subjective connection and communication, and also a sense of 'presence' and 'sameness'. Their texts critique on certain aspects of postmodern subjectivity, especially on the perceived solipsistic quality of the subjective postmodern experience world, and envision possible reconfiguration of subjectivity, that can no longer be framed, I believe, as 'postmodern.' (13)

Furthermore, Timmer argues that the new 'reconfiguration' of subjectivity should not be perceived as an escape from postmodernism. Rather, he maintains that "as a cluster of ideas and assumptions, postmodern thinking and writing functions as a 'background', or cultural setting in many of the texts written by writers of this generation. It is against this background that a new sense of self is becoming manifest in this fiction" (13).

In their preoccupation with self-referentiality and the issue of representation, postmodernism has neglected several aspects of the human experience. On the contrary, post-postmodernist fiction, to use Timmer's words, displays a "'re-humanizing' tendency as Rimmon-Kenan

called it, in fiction and theory both, marks a transformation of postmodern practices of narration and conceptualizing the self" (51). Though rejecting the fragmentation and de-centering of the self distinguishing postmodernism, the focus on the fiction of post-postmodernism, according to Timmer,

does not amount to a naïve return to the more traditional view of the self as centered and autonomous meaning-maker, ..., but neither is the absence of an 'inner center' any longer uncritically reiterated, and 'systems' are taken to be less deterministic than in (post) structural theories. The self resurfaces in these novels as a vague 'presence', undefined by itself but not absent in the way that it was perceived in postmodern texts; and systems or structures certainly still have an influence on the construction of the self but they are no longer conceived of as 'impersonal' but rather as *interpersonally* constructed. (52)

Similarly, the post-postmodernists' employment of conventional omniscient narration represents, according to Dawson, "a further development and refinement of some of the technical experiments of postmodern fiction" (143). Moreover, it can be "understood as one way in which authors have responded to a perceived decline in the cultural authority of the novel over the last two decades" (143). The new fiction, according to Dawson, employs "all the formal elements we typically associate with literary omniscience: an all-knowing heterodiegetic narrator who addresses the reader directly, offers intrusive commentary on the events being narrated, provides access to the consciousness of a range of characters, and generally asserts a palpable presence written the fictional world" (143). The revival of omniscient narration, from Dawson's point of view, may be due to the attempt of the new writers to establish themselves as public intellectuals. He argues that "operating as public intellectual, novelists seek to establish their cultural authority through a range of genres, while still promoting the central significance of fiction as their source of 'knowledge'" (151).

Post-postmodern literature is also characterized by preoccupation with storytelling. Wood, for example, remarks that "stories and substories

sprout on every page" (178). He adds that "inseparable from this culture of permanent story telling is the pursuit of vitality at all costs" (178). Wood argues that also that "an excess of storytelling has become the contemporary way of shrouding, in majesty, a lack [of] the human" (181). Characters, in wood's view, should be endowed with depth. Otherwise, they will be "all shiny exteriority, a caricature" (182-183). He even criticizes novelists who fail to represent the depth of human consciousness in refined language. For, according to Wood, "some of the more impressive novelistic minds of our age do not think that language and the representation of consciousness are the novelist's quarries anymore. Information has become the new character" (185).

Excessive length of the novel is another important feature of post-postmodern and contemporary fiction in general. Greif criticizes contemporary novels for their excessive length and lack of character depth. Distinguished by illogical plots and numerous inhuman characters, long novels or "mega novels," as Grief describes them, "draw a circle around a particular form of the novel, if not quite a genre, that has emerged after 1945 in direct response to 'the death of novel' arguments which "existed in modernist discussion before World War 11, but its hardening after 1945 changed critical expectations for the American novel" (12). Contemporary novelists, according to Greif, write long novels to dispel the assumed notion of the "death of the novel" fear and the need to disprove it" (25). Greif also argues that the genre of the "American mega novel" of the decades from 1970s to the present may be considered "American's most significant, though certainly not [the] most plentiful, distinct novelistic form" (28). In addition to their lengthy size, contemporary novels show "a feeling of spread, multifariousness, or open-endedness. They feel stuffed, overfull, or total; they feel longer than their straightforward story would require, and bigger than other books of similar length or complexity of plot" (27). They depict more than "the microcosm of a single family or the allegorization of a single "problem within the American scene" (27).

A study of Franzen's *Freedom* (2010) reveals it as a post-postmodernist novel which attempts to depict the post 9/11 American society. The novel takes place in the last decades of the 20th century

which covers the reigns of both Bush and Obama. It narrates the story of the Berglund family: Walter, the husband, Patty, his wife, and their children, Joey and Jessica. The novel introduces the Berglunds, who used to live in St. Paul, Minnesota, as an ideal image of an American family. Walter, a lawyer, is a kind, decent man who is interested in environmental issues and goes to work on bike. His wife, a dedicated mother, likes baking and gives cookies to her neighbours. The happiness of the family is disrupted when Joey, the 16 years old son, decides to leave the family house and live with Connie, the daughter of one of the Berglunds' neighbors, Carol. Advised by her therapist, Patty writes her autobiography to overcome her grief. She recollects her early life as a university student and a famous basketball player. She also narrates the story of her marriage to Walter. According to Patty, she was married to Walter in spite of her love for his friend, Richard Katz. The marriage of Walter and Patty collapses when Patty betrays him with Katz. They are separated. Walter works in a project for preserving endangered species. He is involved in a relationship with his assistance Lalitha who dies in a car accident. Walter shuns himself from the whole world in his house near a lake in Minnesota. His obsession with birds leads him to several problems with his neighbours. Later, Patty feels lonely. She regrets destroying her marriage. She goes to Walter and both are reconciled. They go back to Patty's house in Brooklyn. Walter turns the Lakehouse into a bird sanctuary.

As its title suggests, the novel questions the concept of freedom and its practice both on the private and public levels. Franzen condemns the abuse of freedom by the members of society and policy makers to justify self-centeredness, lack of moral values and even invading other countries and violating their rights in the name of freedom. The novel depicts several forms of such abuse and its tragic consequences on society and its members through intersecting the private and public life of a Midwestern white American family during the early 21st century which is involved in the political turmoil of post September 11th, 2011 events.

An example of "limitless freedom," Patty's character is depicted from various perspectives. The first part of the novel shows Patty as viewed by her neighbours. She is a kind neighbor, a "sunny carrier of

sociocultural pollen, an affable bee" (F. 5) She is dedicated to her husband and children. In other words, she embodies the perfect image of an American housewife. The neighbours sympathize with her when her son, Joey, decides to leave the house and live with Connie. They consider Joey's decision the cause of the misery and disintegration of the Berglunds. However, Patty's autobiography shows that the marriage collapses because of certain mistakes that were made in the past. The autobiography sheds lights on several aspects of Patty's early life. For example, in spite of being an intelligent student and a famous basketball player, Patty is forced to end her athletic career due to an accident. The reader also knows that she was raped when she was a student. Though belonging to a rich and politically ambitious family, Patty was denied her family's support because the rapist's family was their friends.

The autobiography, furthermore, unfolds Patty's real feelings towards Walter and the mistakes that she made and led to their separation. Unlike Walter, she is selfish, rootless and disloyal. She agrees to marry Walter though she is in love with his close friend, Richard. Due to his deep love for Patty, Walter is blind to see through Patty's real nature. Patty herself acknowledges that. She

knew, in her heart, that he was wrong in his impression of her. And the mistake she went on to make, the really big life mistake, was to go along with Walter's version of her in spite of knowing that wasn't right. He seemed so certain of her goodness that eventually he wore her down. (F. 74-75)

The autobiography also reveals that Patty's devotion and dedication to her family is due to her attempt to make up for the cracking image of her own family. The writer enables the reader to have an insight into Patty's real motivations. For example, unlike Patty, her mother is obsessed with pursuing her political ambition which she considers an excuse to neglect her duties toward her family. Patty's father, too, is a "mean" person who used to mock her all the time. Patty wants to have a better family of her own:

"I want to live in a beautiful old house and have two children," she told Walter, "I want to be a really, really great mom."

"Do you want a career, too?"

"Raising children would be my career." (*F.* 95)

She also married Walter to defeat her own family:

The way to win – her obvious best shot at defeating her sisters' and her mother – was to marry the nicest guy in Minnesota, live in a bigger and better and more interesting house than anybody else in her family, pop out the babies and do everything as a parent that [her mother] hadn't. (*F.* 118-119)

She dedicates her life to raising her own children. Cannella argues that "Patty strives to be the perfect mother and loses any semblances of individual identity with the exception of ferociously championing her children. She lives a fairly passive life" (18). According to Cannella, "Patty pours all her energy into her children so that she can provide them with an upbringing superior to her own." (18)

Other aspects of Patty's character are also delineated. For example, she admits that she suffers from "morbid competitiveness and low self-esteem" (*F.* 29). She makes Walter sacrifice his own dreams for her sake and gives her the support she was denied before. Because her marriage to Walter is not based on true love, Patty's life has been one of frustration and unhappiness. She recollects that

she had all day every day to figure out some decent and satisfying way to live, and yet all she ever seemed to get for all her choices and her freedom was more miserable. [She] is forced to the conclusion that she pitied herself for being so free. (*F.* 181)

Longing for more freedom, Patty finally manages to fulfill her lust for Richard. Both betray Walter, thus bringing about their own misery. Instead of enjoying her freedom, Patty is imprisoned by her deep sense of guilt. To avoid that feeling, she indulges in drinking and taking sedatives. When Walter reads her confessions and confronts her, she is unable to defend herself. He kicks her out of the house for six years through which she learns how to fix her life again.

To start with, she regains her relation to her father. She learns to forgive him and feel sympathy for his illness. She goes home to spend the last days with him. This experience has a great effect on Patty. She

allowed herself to love him. She could almost physically feel her emotional organs rearranging themselves, bringing her self-pity plainly into view at last.... Spending so much time listening to her father make fun of everything, albeit a little more feebly each day, she was disturbed to see how much like him she was, and why her children weren't more amused by her capacity for amusement, and why it would have been better to have forced herself to see more of her parents in the critical years of her own parenthood, so as to better understand her kid's response to her. (*F.* 513-514)

Reconsidering her life as a mother, Patty realizes not only the great affinities with her father, but she also realizes her own mistake:

Her dream of creating a fresh life, entirely from scratch, entirely independent, had been just that: a dream. She was her father's daughter. Neither he nor she had ever really wanted to grow up, and know they worked at it together. ... As a girl, she'd wanted to believe that he loved her more than anything, and now, as she squeezed his hand in hers, it becomes true, they made it true, and it changed her. (*F.* 515)

The new born feelings in Patty's heart toward her father suggest that despite the great impact of the past on one's life, there is always the possibility of changing oneself and therefore avoiding the negative feelings that destroy his/her life.

Patty's next goal is to reconcile herself to her mother and end their long enmity. Joyce, the mother, too confesses her guilt in raising her children as exceptional characters with unsurpassed talents while neglecting other more important values such as moral responsibility, hard work and independence, just because they were Emersons. Indeed, Joyce's confession of her guilt has deeply affected Patty:

Now Patty has the interesting satisfaction of seeing her liberal politics, applied to her own children in broad

daylight. "I don't know what Daddy and I did," she said "I guess we did something. That three of our four children are not quite ready to ... to quite ready to, well. Fully support themselves. (*F.* 517)

When Joyce asks Patty why she is different from and more independent than her other sisters, Patty replies that "Walter was a great provider" (*F.* 517). She also remarks proudly that her children are independent too: "They're like Walter. They know how to work. And Joey's about the most independent kid in North America. I guess he got some of that from me" (*F.* 517).

To avoid repeating her mother's mistake when she denied Patty full support and love in the past, Patty bestows both on her daughter, Jessica. Despite the lack of proper communication between Patty and Jessica in the past – as Joey was closer to his mother than Jessica – both Patty and Jessica become best friends:

Once Patty left Richard and regained a degree of moral responsibility Jessica had made a project of fixing up her mother's life. Many of her suggestions were fairly obvious, but Patty in her gratitude and contrition meekly presented progress reports at their regular Monday-evening dinners. Although she knew a lot more about life than Jessica did, she'd also made a lot more mistakes. It costs her very little to let her daughter feel important and useful. (*F.* 532).

Patty is keen on supporting her daughter. For example, when Jessica lost her heart to a musician, the

little drummer who'd dropped out of NYL, Patty had to forget everything she knew about musicians, and endorse, at least tacitly, Jessica's belief that human nature had lately undergone a fundamental change: that people her own age, even male musicians, were very very different from people Patty's age. And when Jessica's heart was broken, slowly but thoroughly, Patty had to manufacture shock at the singular unforeseeable outrage of it. Although this was difficult, she was happy to make the effort, in part because Jessica and her friends really are somewhat different from Patty and her

generation – the world looks scarier to them – the road to adulthood harder and less obviously rewarding – but mostly because she depends on Jessica's love now and would do just about anything to keep her in her life. (*F.* 533)

Forgoing her old self-pity, self-interest and competitiveness, Patty volunteers with city parks departments and helps kids. According to the narrator, "it's a struggle to interest herself in activity purely for activity's sake" (*F.* 532) which reflects the great development in Patty's character.

Patty's greatest victory is to restore her husband and her family once more. She goes to Walter and insists on talking with him. Despite his refusal to see her or even let her in his house, her persistence, patience and love for Walter help her to win him back. Moreover, she succeeds in reconciling Walter to his neighbours and mostly to himself.

If Patty's earlier life represents a negative image of practicing freedom, Walter's character represents the positive one. Freedom, for Walter, is not an escape from duty. It is a commitment, an ethical stance and a sense of responsibility. The driving force in his life is his ethics. He feels not only morally responsible for supporting his parents or his own family but also for preserving nature. Patty's autobiography offers a good image of Walter as a young man. He is contrasted with his friend, Richard Katz. Whereas Richard is known for his irresponsibility, laziness and coolness, Walter is hardworking, uncool and has moral principles. Walter, unlike Richard, does not drink wine or take drugs.

Furthermore, Walter is admired and respected by everyone for his kindness and good manners. However, both Walter and Richard have one thing in common, i.e., "both were struggling, albeit in very different ways, to be good people" (*F.* 67). The reader also knows through the autobiography that Walter was born to a drunken father. His older brother used to beat him. His younger brother "studiously copied the older brother's ridicule him" (*F.* 77). Mistreated by his father, Walter is forced to perform the meanest tasks in their motel. His mother is physically handicapped. She has a weak character and is ill-treated by her husband. Despite Walter's attempts to win his father's approval, he fails, according

to Walter's friends, because Walter is "too sensitive and intellectual and not enough into hunting and trucks and bear (which the brothers were)" (*F. 77*).

Despite the difficulties he goes through, Walter has been a successful student and a devoted friend:

Walter had also managed to star in school plays and musicals, inspire life-long devotion in numerous childhood friends, learn cooking and basic sewing from his mother, pursue his interest in nature (tropical fish; ant forms; emergency care for orphaned nestlings; flower pressing), and graduate valedictorian. (*F. 77*)

Though he got an Ivy league scholarship offers Walter preferred to go to Macalester "close enough to Hibbing to take a bus up on weekends and help his mom combat the motel's encroaching decay (the dad apparently had emphysema and was useless)" (*F. 77*). Dedicating most of his early life to helping his parents, Walter has to sacrifice his own dreams to be close to them. Instead of being a film director or an actor, he works as a lawyer to support them; "some body in the family needs to have an actual income" (*F. 77*)

The image created about Walter's early life represents a perfect example of an ideal American hero who adopts the American dream. Walter's life embodies an example of the hardworking, honest, loyal and dedicated individual who is committed to his ideals and code of ethics. Knowing about these circumstances, Patty "learn[s] how miraculously worthy Walter was" (*F. 77*), hence her decision to marry him. Walter is not only a dedicated son but also a devoted father and a faithful husband. He tries to instill his ethics in the minds of his children. Trying to avoid repeating his father's mistakes, he brings up his children on discipline, commitment and moral values. Though Jessica adopts Walter's principles, Joey rejects them and defies his father's authority. He is convinced that his father's ethics are ineffective in the material world he lives in.

Motivated by his sense of responsibility, Walter also devotes himself to save the planet by cooperating with successful businessmen such as Vin Haven, who are anxious to preserve the environment. By so

doing, Walter thinks he is encouraging good business and preserving natural resources at the same time. It happens that Haven is a close friend of both Bush and Dick Cheney. In this way, Franzen has managed to intersect both public and private life in his novel. Haven is depicted in the novel as "a big oil-and-gas guy" (F. 209) who is also a "passionate bird-lover" (F. 210). Together with Walter and his assistance Lalitha, Haven establishes the Cerulean Mountain Trust which is dedicated to preserve the cerulean warbler, "the fastest-declining song bird in North America" (F. 210). The project enables coal companies to extract a third of the coal by removing mountain tops and later leaving vast areas of land to preserving birds. They begin with Wyoming County in West Virginia.

However, the committed and devoted Walter fails to realize the effects of removing the mountain tops on the inhabitants of Wyoming County. He fails to realize their rights to enjoy their life on the mountains like the birds. Like rich businessmen, he denies them the right he gives to other species. For Walter, those residents are "just two hundred or so families, most of them very poor, who owned houses or trailers on small or smallish parcels of land with in the Warbler Park's proposed boundaries" (F. 294). Coyle Mathis represents one of those residents who refuses to leave his land. He

embodied the pure negative spirit of backcountry West Virginia. He was consistent in disliking absolutely everybody. Being the enemy of Mathis's enemy only made you another of his enemies. Big coal, the United Mine Workers, environments, all forms of government, black people, meddling white Yankees: he hated all equally. His philosophy of life was *Back the fuck off or live to regret it.* (F. 295)

Mathis, unlike other residents of the mountain of the mountain, is deeply rooted in his land: "Six generations of surly Mathises had been buried on the steep creek-side hill that would be among the first sites blasted when the coal companies came in" (F. 295).

Franzen is keen on depicting Walter's anger as hereditary. He dedicates a lengthy part of the novel to illuminate Walter's upbringing

showing how his father's drunkenness and lack of ambition has developed "a kind of happiness in unhappiness" (*F.* 447). Light is also shed on Walter's grandfather who embodies the American dream that was adopted by the early immigrant generations. Einar, Walter's grandfather, is described as a great success who "having achieved, through his native intelligence and hard labor, a degree of affluence and independence, but not nearly enough of either, he became a study in anger and disappointment" (*F.* 444).

Mathis's resentment "had offended Walter's very being: had blinded him with rage" (*F.* 298). Blinded with rage, Walter persists on carrying out his plans of removing mountain tops. Moreover, he supports the republican defense contractors in Bush administration. Despite his opposition to the War on Iraq, Walter convinces the mountain residents to work in body-armor factory. The new jobs will provide them with health insurance, good retirement and certainly better houses. Their life will be completely changed as "various members of Bush administration [states] that America could be defending itself in the Middle East for generations to come. There was no foreseeable end to the war on terror and, ergo, no end to the demand for body armor" (*F.* 301). Such justification does not only reflect a compromise or a betrayal of Walter's ideals but also shows how Franzen's characters are engaged in the social and political context of contemporary America. There is a sharp abuse of freedom both on the private and public levels. Just as businessmen have abused the residents' rights to live a decent life to justify their self-interests and promote their industry, the Bush administration has violated the Iraqi people's human rights by invading their country, destroying their life in the name of freedom to justify usurping their resources.

Such a betrayal of his ideals results in a great conflict in Walter:

He didn't know what to do, he didn't know how to live. Each new thing he encountered in life impelled him in a direction that fully convinced him of its rightness, but then the next new thing loomed up and impelled him in the opposite direction, which he felt right. There was no controlling narrative: he seemed to himself a purely reactive pinball in a

game whose only object was to stay alive for staying alive's sake. (*F.* 318)

His involvement with the trust, despite "the soundness of his argument and the rightness of his mission" has been "nothing but horrible mistakes" (*F.* 319). His doubts are confirmed once he is told by his son about his involvement in selling defective truck parts to the army through LBI, one of the companies of Vin Haven himself. He decides to uncover the whole business to the public. Instead of celebrating the success of the foundation in maintaining new jobs for the residents, Walter tells them:

I welcome you all to working for one of the most corrupt and savage corporations in the world! Do you hear me? LBI doesn't give a shit about your sons and daughters bleeding in Iraq, as long as they get their thousand-percent profit! ... Now that you're working for LBI, you can finally make enough money to keep your kids from joining the Army and dying in LBI's broken down trucks and shoddy body armor. (*F.* 484)

The discovery of Patty's betrayal, too, has a great effect on Walter. "Tired of being Mr. Good" (*F.* 480), Walter decides to change his life as a reaction towards the several forms of frustration and betrayals he has experienced. He is involved in a love relationship with his assistant Lalitha. He quits his job at the foundation and decides to drive his van with Lalitha across the country to warn people against overpopulation and transgressing endangered species. His short lived happiness is disrupted by the death of Lalitha in a car accident. He decides to shun himself completely from the whole world and lives in his house by the Nameless Lake. Dedicating himself to preserving birds, he thinks that cats are responsible for their extinction. He starts visiting his neighbours asking them to keep their cats indoors which results in many problems for him. Satirized by his neighbours as an "animal nut" (*F.* 544), Walter also fails to convince them with his own perspective. He steals his neighbour's cat, Bobby, and takes it to an animal shelter to avenge the death of birds. Strangely he felt sad after the disappearance of Bobby. He even identifies himself with Bobby: "loss and waste and sorrow: the feeling that he and Bobby had in some way been married to each other, and that even a horrible marriage was less lonely than no marriage at all" (*F.* 550).

However, Walter "didn't regret having removed a menace from the ecosystem, and thereby saved many birds lives, but the small animal vulnerability in Bobby's face made him aware of a fatal defect in his own makeup, the defect of pitying even the beings he most hated" (F. 551) which would include his father, friends, brothers and also his wife. Walter realizes that in protecting nature from those transgressors, he is protecting himself against them. Imprisoned within these feelings of hatred and rage, he identifies himself with the birds which are under constant danger. He realizes that he should not feel sorry for them for at least they fly freely and return to a fixed place whereas he himself lacks such place. His freedom is thus unfulfilled. He resumes his human feelings. Though refusing to let Patty in his house, he feels pity for her lying there in the snowy weather. He forgives her and both are reunited together. His misanthropy and rage subside. He manages to restore his good relation with his neighbours with Patty's help. The lakehouse is turned into a bird sanctuary and the whole family goes back to New York.

In drawing the character of Joey, Franzen is not only interested in depicting him as a negative example of the abuse of freedom. Rather, the focus is on presenting Joey as a typical young man, whose main goal is to prove his independence by defying all forms of authority, seeking wealth and impressing young girls. From his early childhood Patty has taught him as lesson, "that children were compelled to obey parents because parents had the money" (F. 12) Therefore, "in his quest" to liberate himself from Walter, he was drawn to entrepreneurship" (F. 12) Thus, he shovels snow and rakes leaves for his neighbours. He buys cheap watches and sell custom-made watches to school girls which infuriates Walter who considers it a mere act of deception and tries to convince his son that "making money is not a *right*" (F. 13). But Joey has inherited his own mother's self-interest and competitiveness. Because they are close friends, Patty tells Joey everything about her life and spends hours with him, unlike Jessica who "didn't understand her the way he did" (F. 250). Patty even tells Joey about her rape. Joey's relationship to his father is also illuminated. Joey:

actually had a fair amount of respect for his dad for the consistency of his disapproval; for the strictness of his principles – and he might have had even more if his dad

hadn't been so deferential to his mother. Joey could have used some manly backup, but instead his dad kept passing him off to his mom and washing his hands of them. (*F.* 265)

The development of Joey's character, his initiation into society, in fact, renders *Freedom* a perfect Bildungsroman. In order to prove the invalidity of his father's ideals, Joey has to work hard to earn money which becomes his ultimate goal. He adopts the dictum of Jonathan's father: "there is nothing wrong with wanting to make money" (*F.* 270) which is completely different from his father's but which is also a salient concept of the American dream. Joey is impressed by Jonathan's father who tells him:

I have done a pretty good job of managing what I was given. I owe a lot to my great grandfather in Cincinnati, who came over here with nothing. He was given an opportunity in this country, which gave him the freedom to make the most of his abilities. That's why I've chosen to spend my life the way I have – to honor that freedom and try to ensure that the next American century be similarly blessed. (*F.* 270)

Joey rejects his father's help though he still takes money from his mother. He chooses to work for Jonathan's father during his summer vacation despite Walter's objections particularly when Walter discovers that Jonathan's father is "a corrupt little start-up-backed financially ... by Vin Haven's friends at LBI- that had won the no-bid contract to privatize the bread-baking industry in newly liberated Iraq" (*F.* 326).

To prove his independence too, Joey marries Connie. The writer provides various reasons that motivate Joey to marry at such an early age. For example, Jonathan's admiration for Connie makes Joey "for the first time, proud of her. He stopped thinking of her so much as a weakness of his, a problem to be solved at his earliest convenience, and more as a girl friend whose existence he didn't mind owing up to with his other friends" (*F.* 341). He also rejects his mother's "implacable hostility" to Connie (*F.* 391). In spite of Connie's attempt to win Patty's approval, she fails. Connie, from Joey's perspective, "was purehearted and his mother spat on her. The unfairness of it was another reason he had married her" (*F.* 393). Most of all, he marries Connie because he loves her.

Joey's marriage to Connie marks his first emergence into adulthood. When she was sick, he spends a week in her house with her family which has a great effect on him. It was

the first truly adulthood week of his life. Sitting with Blake in the great room, the dimensions of which were more modest than he remembered, he watched Fox News's coverage of the assault on Baghdad and felt his long standing resentment of 9/11 beginning to dissolve.... He regaled Blake with tales from the think tank, the brushes he'd had with figures in the news, the post-invasion planning he was party to. The house was small and he was big in it. He learned how to hold a baby and how to tilt a nipple bottle. (F. 396)

As he sees his old family house from one of Connie's windows, "Joey was pleased to by how little the sight of his old house moved him. For as long as he could remember, he'd wanted to outgrow it, and it seemed as if he really had" (F. 396).

Joey's involvement in the Iraqi war business marks another path towards his development. In addition, it provides a good example of how Franzen creates characters that are engaged in the political and social context of post 9/11 America to refute the postmodern alienation of the individual from the problems of his society. The dialogue between Joey and Jonathan, for example, reflects the different attitudes of Americans towards such involvement. Discussing the looting of the Iraqi National Museum, Jonathan was "sourer than ever. He was fixated" (F 399), whereas Joey, like many politicians, considers it "one little mistake," "shits happens, right?" (F.399). Similarly, both disagree on the possibility of finding the presumed WMD. Jonathan argues that they will never find them "because it was all bullshit, all trumped-up bulls hit because the people who started this thing are incomplete clowns" (F. 399), whereas Joey thinks that "everybody says there's WMDS. Even *The New Yorker* says there are" (F. 399).

For Joey, his involvement in war business is another mark of his success. He is proud of himself when he goes to Paraguay to buy trucks

parts for the army which proves to him that he actually got a talent for business: "he suspects that he got his instincts from his mother, who was a born competitor" (F. 436). He has won "obscene profit" (F. 437). Yet, he felt unhappy. "He began to feel fear that he couldn't do it. Could not send such arrantly near-worthless craps to American forces trying to win a tough unconventional war" (F. 437). Yet, it crippled him for her owed a lot to Connie who gave him all her money to make such a deal.

Troubled with his conscience Joey wishes that "there were some different world he could belong to, some simpler world in which a good life could be had at nobody else's expense" (F. 438). He recognizes the necessity of having moral responsibility to safeguard freedom which shows that Joey has not only inherited his mother's competitiveness but begins to develop his father's moral values too. Joey tries to cancel the deal. He goes to Kenny Bartles to cancel it despite his financial loss, but Bartles insists on sending the defective parts: "I can make it work. You just need to send me thirty tons, and then you can go back to reading poetry or whatever" (F. 439). When Joey talks to Bartles' heads at LBI, he is told by the VP "Not your worry. If Bartles accepts them, you're off the hook." (F. 440). He even warns Joey that he may be sued for delaying the shipment. He reminds him that "this is not a perfect war in a perfect world" (F. 440). Similarly Jonathan advises him not to tell the press because he will be smeared. He will be "the perfect scapegoat. The pretty-faced college Kiel with the rusty truck part? The *Post* will eat it up." (F. 441)

Completely depressed, Joey felt the necessity of calling his father seeking his advice. Instead of reproaching or blaming Joey, Walter listens to his son carefully while he unfolds his misery, which turns out to be Walter's too. Walter realizes that the vice president Joey has been talking to works for Vin Haven who runs a body army factory in West Virginia. Thinking it is too hard "to ask a twenty-year-old kid with problematic parents to take full moral responsibility and endure smearing, may be prosecution" (F. 471), Walter advises Joey to donate the money to charity and move on with his life.

The outpouring of Joey's concerns to his father marks not only the beginning of a new phase in Joey's life in which he gains moral and social responsibility, but also the beginning of a reconciliation between the father and his son. Walter also welcomes Joey's marriage to Connie and even invites them to his house. He even felt grateful to his son for accepting his relationship with Lalitha. For the first time, Walter approves Joey's actions. Joey, too, is anxious to seek his father's advice before doing anything. Both have become friends. When Joey tells him that he will give the extra money away if Walter thinks it is "Ok", Walter says "It's fine with me. I know how ambitious you are, I know how hard it must be to give away all that money. That's a lot to do right there" (*F.* 478). Moreover, Joey thinks of "taking a year off to work and let Connie "catch up with [him]" (*F.* 478), which reflects his willingness to sacrifice his self interest for the sake of Connie. That's why his father says "It's great to see the two of you taking care of each other like that" (*F.* 478). The father is proud of his son who has gained world experience and shows moral and social responsibility at such an early age. Moreover, though Walter decides to shun himself from the world after Lalitha's death and even refuses to answer Jessica's calls, Joey could still be with him, for "Joey was not only a man but a Berglund man, too cool and tactful to intrude" (*F.* 550).

In depicting the characters of his novel, Franzen aims to present not only their most distinguishing traits, but also he allows his readers to view them from different perspectives. The effect of this technique is twofold. First, it helps the reader perceive the characters in a more objective way. Second, it enables the writer to provide a realistic depiction of his characters by showing the complexities and contradictions inherent in human nature, the motivations urging characters and provides enough information on the personal history of the characters which mark post-postmodern fiction. Like post-postmodernists Franzen also draws on 19th century naturalism which confirms the effects of both heredity and environment on determining the characters' actions. Thus, Patty has inherited her father's self-pity and cynicism. Walter's anger has been an inherent quality of both his father and his grandfather. His conflict with Joey echoes that with his own father. Joey himself has inherited his mother's self-interest and competitiveness but later adopts

his father's ethics. At the end of the novel, Joey has become a Berglund man whereas Jessica's voice has become like her mother's too.

Franzen is also interested to show each of his characters suffering from a certain defect or flaw. Hidalgo, for example, argues that

Franzen's protagonists are debased by different types of selfishness, dishonesty or self-delusion until an epiphany-like moment in which they humbly come to terms with themselves. It is therefore an epiphany related to self-recognition. Franzen's heroes are redeemed by rejection of their previous pretension as well as by ethical commitment to the closest community of family or lovers. (n. pag.)

Franzen endows his characters their human flaws that enable them to practice their moral choices and develop themselves later. Thus Walter manages to tame his anger. Patty succeeds in overcoming her competitiveness by indulging in public service and teamwork. Joey realizes that making money should not be the ultimate goal of his life or the expression of his limitless freedom. Rather, moral responsibility and social commitment can make his life better. However, the novel does not show the characters as submissive victims of their fate. Despite the fact that the past exerts a great influence on all the characters who try to rebel against it, according to the narrator "we make our heaven and hell" (*F.* 526). Consequently, nearly all the characters of *Freedom* have gone through drastic transformations which result in their change; hence the happy ending of the novel. They have acquired enough self-knowledge and therefore can now learn how to live.

Unlike postmodern fiction, *Freedom* does not focus on the crisis of identity. Rather, it focuses on developing new relations "between selves and others, margins and centers, fragments and wholes – indeed, new relations between selves and selves, margins and margins, centers and centers", to quote Hassan's (5-6).

Freedom refutes the concept of subjectivity, hailed by postmodernists, by its emphasis on feelings and sentiments, communication and "sameness" which Trimmer considers major features of post-postmodern fiction. In fact, *Freedom* is more concerned with

uncovering other aspects of human experience and other values that are essential to maintain society. The characters are no longer alienated, fragmented subjects but human beings with complex feelings and motivations who are engaged in the moral and political issues of their society. In their quest for freedom, the Berglunds have gone through several experiences that help to reconstruct their identities and reshape their own perspective. They realize that true freedom involves a deep sense of responsibility not only towards each other but also towards their society, other countries, fellow human beings and other species in the universe. The several forms of abuse of freedom are shown as natural outcome of selfishness, greed and political corruption. Instead there is a deep need for meaningful communication, love, sympathy, human solidarity and self sacrifice. It is also important to reconsider one's own values, the basis of marriage and the tenets of family and parenthood. Love, gratitude, forgiveness, moral and social commitment are necessary for successful and meaningful life. By reconstructing his characters' identities, the novelist also refutes the old concept of fixed identity which denies the possibility of change. The crisis of identity is thus resolved by confirming basic human qualities such as truth, spirit, respect, sympathy and empathy.

In addition, Franzen's characters are also engaged in the social and political issues of their society. Like post-postmodern fiction, *Freedom* is concerned with ecological issues. For example, Walter embodies Franzen's vehement arguments against global warming, overpopulation and endangered species. His initiation of the Cerulean Mountain Trust, his persistence on raising the consciousness of his neighbours about the necessity of preserving endangered species and his decision to turn his house by the Nameless Lake into a bird sanctuary reflects not only his ecological interests but also his engagement in the social and ecological issues of his day – an aspect which was neglected in postmodern fiction. Furthermore, the government is criticized for failing to deal with ecological issue such as that of overpopulation as a matter of national concern. Walter says:

The problem is that nobody dares make overpopulation part of the national conversation. And why not? Because the subject is a downer. Because it seems like old news.

Because, like with global warming, we haven't quite reached the point where the consequences become undeniable. And because we sound like elitists if we try to tell poor people and uneducated people not to have so many babies. (*F.* 360)

The whole discourse on overpopulation and saving the endangered species of birds is also related to the main focus of the novel, that is, the practice of freedom by the individual and its effect on both society and nature as well.

Furthermore, the involvement of his characters in the political turmoil of post 9/11 events reflects Franzen's own interest in relating the private life to the public one and enhancing the characters' involvement in the political milieu of the post-9/11 American society which also marks a great departure from postmodernism. Nelson, for example, remarks:

Indeed, George Bush broods over the novel like a menacing public Enemy Number One. He serves as a figure that tethers the moral anarchy of the fictional world to the larger American experience, and particularly American construction of individualism, happiness and freedom. (6-7)

The whole novel is set against the background of 9/11 events. Most of the characters are involved in the traumatic events whether directly or indirectly. The intricate relationship between the individual and the public spheres suggests the inability to isolate the individual from the sociopolitical or cultural contexts of his age. Beck argues that

the salient point about Franzen's characters is not that they have too much freedom; it's that, as one character puts it, they don't know 'how to live' that is not an indictment of freedom, which is stubbornly neutral, but of the unmooring of self-control and humility that comes of being too convinced of one's own significance. (32)

Robson adds that

the collapse of the Berglunds' family is set against an elaborate cultural and historical backdrop. But, for the most

part, the book's sociological concerns, do not crowd out its central question, 'How to live?', just as the book's stateliness does not spoil Franzen's appetite for the emotionally scuzzy. This is a generational saga in which frustration deepens like a coastal shelf, and a family anti-romance in which being 'like an older sister' to someone means being much kinder and warmer than an older sister. (74)

The intricate relation between Vin Haven who pretends to be interested in preserving nature and endangered species while he is involved in war business whether by building the body armor or selling defective parts to the American forces fighting in Iraq shows the ugly relation between politics and business. It condemns the American involvement in Iraq in the name of freedom by uncovering the fact that it is actually motivated by greed and self-centeredness.

Closely related to the concept of freedom as perceived by most Americans is the ideal of the American dream which embodies limitless freedom and limitless opportunities granted to hard work and wealth. However, Franzen is intelligent enough to endow the American dream with social and moral responsibility which makes life more meaningful.

On the other hand, the intersection of both private and public life has been a major concern of Franzen himself. In his famous *Harper* essay (1996) Franzen criticizes novels that fail to connect "the personal and the social" (36). He also expresses the same idea in his interview with Antrim: "I continued to be interested in the dramatic intersection of personal domestic stories with larger social stories" (n. pag.) In addition, such intersection promotes the identification of the reader with the characters and enhances the realism of the novel. The novel presents recognizable American types comprising American society such as the conventional dedicated house wife and loving mother, the environment activist, the famous rock musician, the rebellious independent young man, the greedy businessman and corrupt politician in addition to other characters that complete the image of the American society as a melting pot such as the Swedish grandfather of Walter and Jonathan's Jewish grandfather who represent the first immigrant generation who came to

America inspired by the American dream to fulfill their own. There is also the Indian girl, Lalitha, who manages to integrate successfully within American.

By putting his characters within the sociopolitical context of the post 9/11 events world of globalization and delineating his characters' attitude towards the critical issues of the day, Franzen does not only maintain the recognizability of his characters, their identification by the readers and the realism of his setting and characters. Like post-postmodern writers, Franzen manages to represent the world, to use McLaughlin's words, "we all more or less share" (66-67).

Freedom employs "tragic realism." Franzen explains the meaning of "tragic realism" in the *Harper* essay saying: "by 'tragic' I mean just about any fiction that raises more questions than it answers: anything in which conflict does not resolve into cant" (53). A critique of contemporary culture, *Freedom* - to use Franzen's words- "preserves access to the dirt behind the dream of closeness to the human difficulty beneath the technological ease, to the sorrow behind the pop. Cultural narcosis: to all those portents on the margins of our existence" (53). Myers argues that

Franzen uses facile tricks to tart up the story as a total account of American life: the main news events of the past quarter century each get a nod in the appropriate chapter. Brands are identified whenever possible; we go from parliament butts in the first chapter to Glad-wrapped cookies in the last, countless pop-cultural artifacts are name-checked, in the most minimal sense of the term. (118)

In this way Franzen has succeeded in creating a recognizable milieu for his readers to identify with.

Furthermore, he succeeds in bridging the writer/reader gap which hinders communication. He revives traditional narrative and promotes interest in serious literature. Instead of adopting cynical nihilism, black irony or detachment, *Freedom* shows Franzen as a committed writer. Such turn in contemporary fiction marks a great departure from postmodernism. In his essay "Mr. Difficult" (2003), Franzen expresses

his deep concern about maintaining a strong relationship with his reader. He argues that

the deepest purpose of reading and writing fiction is to sustain a sense of connectedness, to resist existential loneliness; and so a novel deserves a reader's attention only as long as the author sustains the reader's trust. This is the contract model. The discourse here is one of pleasure and connection. (n. pag.)

Thus, instead of confirming the death of the novel and the loss of the cultural authority of literature, Franzen manages to make his novel “ a form of inquiry, representation, cognition, and critique integral to their projects” to borrow Green’s words (13).

Freedom may also be considered a "contract" novel as it appeals to the reader both aesthetically and intellectually. The reader is also engaged in the ethical and sociopolitical concerns of the characters. The prologue of the novel, for example, promotes the reader's engagement. In this context Myer states:

the prologue raises expectations for a socially engaged, or at least social narrative that are left unmet. Too much of it takes place in high school, college, or suburbia; how odd that a kind of fiction allegedly made necessary by America's unique vitality always return to the places that change the least. (118)

Like 19th conventional fiction, *Freedom* employs omniscient narrator, the all-knowing reliable narrator who introduces characters to his readers and comments on their actions sometimes. The employment of omniscient narration, from Dawson's point of view, is not only a revival of a conventional technique but also an attempt by the new writers to establish themselves as public intellectuals.

The omniscient narrator often comments on the characters’ actions. For example, the narrator comments on Walter’s character saying:

A great thing about young Walter was how much he wanted Patty to win. [...] Walter gave her full-bore infusions of hostility toward anybody (her parents, her siblings) who made her feel bad. And since he was so intellectually honest

in other areas of life, he had excellent credibility when he criticized her family and signed on with her questionable programs of competing with it. He may not have been exactly what she wanted in a man, but he was unsurpassable in providing the rabid fandom which, at the time, she needed more than romance. (F. 118-119)

To illuminate the hereditary nature of Walter's anger, the narrator, commenting on Einar's character, states that "the personality susceptible to the dream of limitless freedom is a personality also prone, should the dream ever sour, to misanthropy and rage" (F. 445) which Walter turns out to be by the end of the novel.

Similarly, the narrator comments on the new development in Patty's life when she succeeds in her new job as a school teacher:

Almost every day of the school year, after class, for a few hours, she gets to disappear and forget herself and be one of the girls again, to be wedded by love to the cause of winning games, and yearn pure heartedly for her players to succeed. A universe that permits her to do this, at this relatively late point in her life, in spite of her not having been the best person, cannot be a wholly cruel one. (F. 532).

Commenting on the strong bond between Patty and Joey, the narrator says:

There was her, and then there was the rest of the world, and by the way she chose to speak to him she was reproaching him for placing his allegiance with the rest of the world. And who could fault him for preferring the world? He had his own life to try to live! (F. 250)

The comments provided by the narrator help the reader to form a better opinion on the characters.

Freedom is distinguished with its non-linear structure and narrative shifts. It is divided into three parts which are also divided into chapters. The first part of the novel, entitled "Good Neighbours," offers an overview of the Berglunds from their neighbours' perspective. Narration moves back to the past in the second part "Mistakes Were Made," which is written in the form of an autobiography, yet narrated also in the 3rd

person. Presented as a story-within-a story, Patty's autobiography recounts her past life and relations, her marriage to Walter, moving to Ramsy Hill in Minnesota and their final departure after September 11th events when they move to Washington D.C. where Walter starts his new business. The real causes of the collapse of the Berglunds' marriage are uncovered for the reader in this part. The next part of the novel, entitled "2004", displays the story from the perspectives of Richard Katz, Joey and then Walter in three chapters in which the 3rd person narrative is also used. The personal history of Katz is provided in the first chapter, his success as a rock musician, his collapse, is marked before he is invited by Walter to work with him in his campaign for the trust. The narrative moves in the following chapter to record Joey's career as student, his involvement in working for Jonathan's father and his unstable relation to Connie. However, Joey's narrative is cut in the following chapter which sheds more light on Walter's new career. The conflict between Walter and the mountain residents brings about his rage. The action is cut again and the narrative shifts to Katz moving to Washington trying to seduce Patty again. She rejects his temptation and gives him her autobiography to read, which he, in turn, leaves on Walter's desk. Once Walter reads it he kicks Patty out of the house. As she goes to live with Katz, Walter is involved in a love relationship with Lalitha.

The narrative shifts again in the following chapter to narrate Joey's success as a businessman and his involvement in selling defective truck parts to the army. It ends with Joey calling his father to ask for his advice. However, instead of narrating the outcome of Joey's visit or dialogue with his father, the narrative dwells, in the following chapter, on the story of Walter's ancestors to find out about the origin of his anger. Time moves once more to the present where we see the confrontation and later reconciliation between Joey and his father. The "2004" part ends with Lalitha's death in a car accident. The last part of the novel takes place six years later. Entitled "Conclusion," Patty writes a letter to her reader, and Walter, narrating, also in the 3rd person, her life during the last six years, her visit to her family house, her reconciliation to her mother and her daughter and her success as a school teacher. This part also marks the reconciliation between Patty and Walter and grants the happy ending of the novel.

As a post-postmodern novel, *Freedom* is preoccupied with storytelling which Wood remarks a main feature of post-postmodern fiction. *Freedom*, to quote Wood, "stories and substories sprout on every page" (178). *Freedom* abounds with stories that are narrated within other stories. The main story is that of Walter and Patty from which other stories emerge such as those of Patty's parents, sisters and brother. There is also the story of Patty's friend, Eliza. Similarly, there are the stories of Walter's relation to his brothers, his parents and his grandfather, Einar. Light is also shed on the stories of Jonathan's father and grandfather who immigrated to America, Connie and her family in addition to other neighbours of the Berglunds. Despite the fact that such excessive use of stories might distract the attention of the reader, they enable the reader to have a better insight into the characters by providing enough background information about the personal history of the characters.

Freedom is also distinguished with its excessive length which is an important feature of post-postmodern fiction. The novel is written in 562 pages. It depicts more than "the microcosm of a single family or the allegorization of a single problem within the American scene" (Greif 27), but it also represents its author's attempt to refute the marginalization of literature or the death of the novel in contemporary age.

Though adopting several post-postmodern techniques such as conventional characterization, setting, narrative voice, etc, Franzen in his characterization reinforces an important element in postmodernism, i.e., representation. The representation of reality about the characters or life can never be confined to one perspective. *Freedom* itself confirms more than once that there is another side for every story. For example, the collapse of the Berglunds, from their neighbours' point of view at the beginning of the novel, is mainly caused by Joey's decision to leave his family and live with Connie. However, Patty's autobiography in the second part of the novel shows that the collapse was due to Patty's own infidelity to Walter. Similarly, Patty has always blamed her mother for being more interested in pursuing her political career than supporting her children. However, by the end of the novel, Patty realizes that Joyce's political career "hadn't just caused or aggravated her family problems: it

had also been her escape from those problems" (F. 528). Instead of hating her mother, Patty admires her. Patty "could see that Joyce wasn't just lucky to have a daughter like her: that she was also lucky to have had a mother like Joyce" (F. 528).

In addition to adopting non-linear structure, and moving backward and forward in time, Franzen also employs other postmodern devices such as intertextuality, flashback and digression. For instance, *Freedom* invokes famous philosophical and literary works. The Berglunds are known for their liberal ideas. The novel itself illuminates the concept of freedom and the transgression of freedom by the individual and the state power. When Joey was walking in his dormitory, he saw his friend, Jonathan, reading John Stuart Mill. Nelson argues that "the allusion to Mill invites the reader to speculate that it is Mill's work that is at the centre of the novel's concerns – and indeed, Mill's brand of liberal individualism is not a bad lens through which the meaning of the novel can be viewed" (2). The title of the novel is itself symbolic. The novel is a critique of American long acclaimed liberalism particularly as practiced by the Americans themselves. Nelson argues that "It is an excess of freedom, accompanied by an excess of affluence, which causes the novel's character to lurch between anger and desperation" (5). In spite of its mighty power, America does not have the right to deprive other countries of their own freedom. Despite its claims to adopt the American ideals of freedom, equality and justice, the American administration does not practice what it preaches.

Patty's reading of Tolstoy's *War and Peace*, which is suggested by Walter, is another example of intertextuality. The choice of Tolstoy's novel draws the reader's attention to the parallelism in the relation between Natasha, Andrea and Pierre in *War and Peace* and the one between Patty, Walter and Richard in *Freedom*. Furthermore, the preoccupation of Franzen's characters with finding out "how to live" is also shared by Tolstoy's. Nelson remarks that

Like Franzen, Tolstoy is constantly aware of the tension between freedom and happiness. Tolstoy is continually at pains to demonstrate that freedom is something that diminishes the more character is entangled in the affairs of

another, but he also makes clear that this is because individual and collective sense of freedom and happiness are tied together. (9)

Both Tolstoy and Franzen show that "freedom recklessly spent on the self is utterly meaningless, and the conflict between freedom and happiness is mostly contrived" (9).

Freedom may be also considered a parody of Arthur Miller's *All My Sons*. In her renowned book *The Politics of Postmodernism* (1989, 2003), Hutcheon defines parody as a "repetition with critical distance that allows ironic signaling of difference at the very heart of similarity" (185). *Freedom* may be read as a parody of *All My Sons*. In Miller's play, it is the father who transgresses legal and moral values. He prefers his own self-interests to those of his society. In order to be rich, Keller, whose name is symbolic as it can be pronounced as killer, sells defective parts to the army only to discover at the end of the play that his son was the first victim of his greed. Thanks to his ethically committed son, Keller realizes that all those who died at war were also his sons. The main conflict in the play is between the father's self-interestedness and moral and social responsibility represented by his son.

In *Freedom*, the conflict is reversed. Walter, the father, embodies the ethical values that are advocated by Franzen himself. Motivated by greed, self-interest and his wish to defy his father's authority, Joey is involved in selling defective parts to the army fighting in Iraq. Like Keller, Joey realizes at the end that he has been adopting the wrong values. Joey asks for his father's guidance and is saved by Joey at the end of the novel. Unlike *All My Sons'* hero, the young man is given another chance to change his life and is forgiven.

The allusion to *All My Sons* has thematic significance in addition to its technical one. Franzen condemns the American involvement in the Iraqi War. The American reader is reminded of the Second World War and its aftermath which are echoed by the invocation of the parody of *Ally My Sons*. Besides, Franzen recalls Miller's own concerns, that is, to strengthen the relationship between the individual and his society and to confirm the necessity of advocating the basic human values such as

compassion, sympathy, freedom, solidarity and ethical and social commitment that could guarantee the welfare of the whole world.

Digression is among the postmodern techniques Franzen uses in *Freedom*. A clear example for digression can be seen when Joey was anxious about swallowing his marriage ring, he lies down on the bed waiting for it to come up. The main action is then cut and the narrator describes Joey's relation to Jonathan, his friend, comments on his character, illuminates the causes of Joey's marriage to Connie, his relation to his mother, his development as a mature man in addition to commenting on Connie's character. Such lengthy digression takes about thirty pages before the main action is resumed. Similarly, Patty's autobiography, entitled "Mistakes Were Made," is also another example of digression that is presented as a story within a story. Patty's autobiography helps the reader to understand the real causes for the collapse of the Berglunds. Furthermore, it sheds light on the personal history of Patty in the past which makes clear her mistakes. It also gives Patty the chance to present her own account of the story. The dialogue is sometimes cut and the character dwells on other issues by means of digression. For example, while Walter and Richard are discussing Richard's participation in the campaign to save the cerulean bird, Walter starts to speak vehemently about his new project on overpopulation. Walter gives lengthy details on the history of overpopulation in different countries such as the Arab region and China. He also dwells on the discourse of overpopulation during the eighties and nineties in America (*F.* 219-224).

Digression is also used to intensify the reader's suspense. For example, when Joey feels he is in deep trouble after buying the defective parts in Paraguay, he thinks of calling his father on phone to ask for his advice. However, instead of pursuing the course of events to know what his father is going to tell him and what Joey is going to do, the writer gives a whole chapter on Walter's ancestors, the story of his grandfather coming to America, Walter's first visit to the house on the Nameless lake and his love of nature. Such delayed exposition, which is presented also as stories within the main story, helps the reader realize the causes of Walter's anger. The information delivered in this part shows that Walter

has inherited his rage from his own father and grandfather which has a great effect on his character.

The significance of lengthy digression is twofold. In addition to increasing the reader's suspense when the main action is cut and he/she moves with the characters through flashback to their past trying to figure out more information that would justify their behavior, the narration of Walter's ancestors, which forms a story within a story that is paralleled to Patty's own account of her family's history, conveys the novel's idea that it is very difficult for the character to escape from the past. Moreover, it shows that despite the children's objection to their parents' actions, they willingly or unwillingly repeat the same mistakes made by their parents. Walter's defiance of his father's authority is repeated by Joey. Similarly, Patty has been repeating her parents' mistakes.

In order to present the personal history of the characters, Franzen relies heavily on flashback. The characters' reactions to each other also remind them of their past. For example, when he was talking with Coyle Mathis, Walter suddenly remembers his own father. Mathis's character has a deep effect on Walter. His stubbornness and most of all his anger remind Walter of his own father:

He said, "No, N-O," and added that he intended to be buried in the family cemetery and no man was going to stop him. And suddenly Walter was sixteen again and dizzy with anger. Anger not only with Mathis, for his lack of manners and good sense, but also, paradoxically, with Vin Haven, for pitting him against a man whose economic irrationality he at some level recognized and admired. (*F.* 295)

A scrutiny of Franzen's *Freedom* shows it as a perfect example of post-postmodern fiction. It displays the major features of post-postmodern fiction such as conventional plot and characterization, storytelling, use of omniscient narration, realistic setting and language, excessive length, etc. Though adopting several post-postmodern Franzen's also draws on important postmodern techniques such as intertextuality, digression and parody. By putting his characters within the sociopolitical context of the post 9/11 events world of globalization

and delineating his characters' attitude towards the critical issues of the day, Franzen manages not only to present the post9/11 reality from a different perspective but he also maintains the recognizability of his characters, their identification by the readers and the realism of his setting and characters. By employing "tragic realism," Franzen raises questions and helps the reader to assume answers to the moral and socio-political dilemmas of the day. A critique of contemporary culture, Franzen rejects the postmodern detachment and restores the writer's involvement in the pressing needs of his society. Instead of confirming the death of the novel and the loss of the cultural authority of literature, Franzen succeeds in bridging the writer/reader gap which hinders communication. He revives traditional narrative and promotes interest in serious literature.

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ملخص البحث

"From Postmodernism to Post-postmodernism: A Study of Jonathan Franzen's *Freedom*"

By Dr. Waleed Samir Ali

The catastrophic September 11, 2001 events did not only mark a new epoch in contemporary world history, but also ushered in the beginning of a new phase in literary history. It signaled the demise of postmodernism, which flourished during the period from 1960s to 1990s, and inaugurated a new phase in American fiction referred to by some critics as post-postmodernism, late postmodernism or new realism. A study of Franzen's *Freedom* (2010) reveals it as a post-postmodernist novel which attempts to depict the post 9/11 American society. This paper attempts to show that the black irony or cynical detachment of the long acclaimed postmodernism can no longer represent the post 9/11 reality. It also tries to show that human experience could no longer be rendered through fragmented characters or plotless narrative. A study of *Freedom* reveals Franzen's adoption of several devices that are characteristic of post-postmodernism in addition to employing other devices that pertain to postmodernism.

Keywords: Postmodernism. Post-postmodernism. Franzen. *Freedom*.
Technique

ملخص البحث

"من ما بعد الحداثة الى ما بعد بعد الحداثة: دراسة لرواية الحرية للكاتب جوناثان فرانزن"
د/ وليد سمير على

تمثل أحداث ١١ سبتمبر ٢٠٠١ حقبة جديدة فى تاريخ العالم المعاصر بل وأيضا فى التاريخ الأدبى حيث تعبر بداية لنهاية فترة ما بعد الحداثة والتي ازدهرت فى الفترة من ١٩٦٠ وحتى ١٩٩٠ كما تعتبر بداية لمرحلة جديدة فى الأدب القصصى الأمريكى والتي أطلق عليها بعض النقاد اسم مرحلة ما بعد بعد الحداثة أو مابعد الحداثة الأخيرة أو الواقعية الجديدة. إن دراسة رواية الحرية للكاتب الأمريكى جوناثان فرانزن (٢٠١٠) تظهر أنه يمكن اعتبارها تجسيدا لرواية مابعد بعد الحداثة التي تصور المجتمع الامريكى بعد أحداث ١١ سبتمبر . وتحاول هذه الورقة البحثية بيان كيف أن المفارقة السوداء والانعزال الساخر الذى تميزت به فترة ما بعد الحداثة لم يعد كافيا لتصوير حقيقة ما حدث بعد أحداث ١١ سبتمبر. كما توضح الورقة البحثية كيف أن التجربة الانسانية لا يمكن تصويرها من خلال الشخصيات المفككة والسرد الذى يفتقد الى الحكمة كما هو ذائع فى أدب ما بعد الحداثة. ان دراسة رواية الحرية لفرانزن توضح ايضا استخدامه لعدد من الاساليب الادبية الفنية لأدب ما بعد بعد الحداثة بالاضافة الى اساليب ادبية اخرى تميز بها أدب ما بعد الحداثة.