When The Corrections was published in the fall of 2001, Jonathan Franzen was probably better known for his nonfiction than for the two novels he had already published. In an essay he wrote for Harper’s in 1996, Franzen lamented the declining cultural authority of the American novel and described his personal search for reasons to persist as a fiction writer: “The novelist has more and more to say to readers who have less and less time to read;’ he wrote. “Where to find the energy to engage with a culture in crisis when the crisis consists in the impossibility of engaging with the culture?”

Five years after publishing the Harper’s essay, Franzen became fully engaged with his culture. The Corrections was an enormous international bestseller, with translations in 35 languages, American hardcover sales of nearly one million copies and nominations for nearly every major book prize in the country - Franzen was awarded the National Book Award for this novel. As if sales and critical acclaim weren’t enough to boost his profile, the author found himself in a public relations imbroglio over his conflicted reaction to his book’s endorsement by Oprah’s Book Club.

Jonathan Franzen’s first novel, The Twenty-Seventh City (1988), was a reimagination of his hometown, St. Louis, through the eyes of conspirators and terrorists from southern Asia. His second novel, Strong Motion (1992), was a thriller-cum-love-story set in the student slums of Boston. Both books displayed Franzen’s ability to connect the personal and the political, the emotional and the social, in compelling and richly textured narratives.

Born in Western Springs, Illinois, in 1959, Jonathan Franzen grew up in Webster Groves, Missouri, a suburb of St. Louis. After graduating from Swarthmore College in 1981 he studied in Berlin as a
Fulbright scholar and later worked in a seismology lab at Harvard. Franzen is also the author of a best-selling collection of essays, How to Be Alone and the memoir The Discomfort Zone. He recently published a new English translation of the play Spring Awakening by Frank Wedekind. He has written the New York chapter of Matt Weiland and Sean Wilsey’s 2008 collection State by State: A Panoramic Portrait of America, inspired by the state guides written for the WPA in the 1930s. His short stories and his essays, including political journalism, have most recently appeared in The New Yorker, The Best American Essays, The New York Times, and The Guardian. A new collection of his nonfiction, Farther Away, appeared in 2012. His most recent nonfiction book, is The Kraus Project, in which he translates and annotates essays by the satirist Karl Kraus. Jonathan Franzen is executive producer of a new documentary, Emptying the Skies, about the secret struggle to save the songbirds. The film is based on his New Yorker essay of the same name. His most recent novel, Purity, became an immediate bestseller and was named one of the New York Times 100 Notable Books of 2015.

When Franzen’s novel, Freedom, was published he was featured on the cover of Time Magazine — only the second time in the last decade that a living writer has been on the cover of this national magazine. Writing in the New York Times Book Review, the review’s editor, Sam Tanenhaus, declared Franzen’s Freedom, “a masterpiece of American fiction,” and the book debuted at # 1 on the Times bestseller list. Freedom was chosen as Oprah’s 64th Book Club pick, and Franzen and Oprah made up with each other on air in December. Freedom won the 2011 John Gardner Prize for fiction and the Heartland Prize. It was also chosen as one of the New York Times 10 Best Books of 2010 and as a finalist for National Book Critics Circle Award and the Los Angeles Times Book Prize. In March 2012 he was voted into the American Academy of Arts and Letters. In November 2012 he was awarded the first Carlos Fuentes Medal at the 26th Guadalajara International Book Fair.