



# Jonathan Franzen: The Comedy of Rage

*Philip Weinstein*

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*Jonathan Franzen: The Comedy of Rage* is the first critical biography of one of today's most important novelists. Drawing on unpublished emails and both published and private interviews, Philip Weinstein conveys the feel and heft of Franzen's voice as he ponders the purposes and problems of his life and art, from his earliest fiction to his most recent novel, *Purity*.

Franzen's work raises major questions about the possibilities of contemporary fiction: how does one appeal to a wide audience of mainstream readers, on the one hand, while persuading connoisseurs, on the other, that one's fiction has staying power, is high art? More acutely, how did Franzen move from the rage that animates his first two novels to the more generous comic stance of the later novels on which his reputation rests?

Wrestling with these questions, *Jonathan Franzen: The Comedy of Rage* unpacks the becoming of Franzen as a person and a writer—from his ultra-sensitive Midwestern childhood, through his heady years at Swarthmore College, his marriage, and the alienating decade of the 1990s, up to his spectacular ascent and assimilation into pop culture as one of *the* literary figures of his generation. Weinstein joins biography and criticism in ways that fully respect their differences, but that also grant that the work comes, however unpredictably, out of the life.

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