

copyright: a novel

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Realisms Traditional, Tragic, Depressive and  
Moral: The changing fiction of Jonathan  
Franzen.

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## Certificate of Authorship/ Originality

I certify that the work in this thesis has not previously been submitted for a degree nor has it been submitted as part of requirements for a degree except as fully acknowledged within the text.

I also certify that thesis has been written by me. Any help that I have received in my research work and the preparation of the thesis itself has been acknowledged. In addition, I certify that all information sources and literature used are indicated in the thesis.

Annabel Stafford

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## **ABSTRACTS:**

### **copyright: a novel**

Phoebe Esther Valor is on the brink of middle age and in the middle of an existential crisis when she's offered a lifeline: a desperate editor at the *Sydney Tribune* notices the story that Phoebe has listed for the following day's paper could make the front page.

There's just one problem: the story he wants doesn't exist yet-or at least not quite. And to get it Phoebe will have to convince, cajole or trick her subject, Immigration Minister Calvin Delahunty, into saying what the editor wants him to. It's not so different from what reporters do every day. But on this particular day – desperate for a rare Page One and a final shot at significance – Phoebe goes a little bit further. When she can't get Delahunty to say exactly what she wants to hear, she convinces herself it was close enough and writes the words into his mouth. And when Delahunty goes along with her fraud, Phoebe realises she could be taking a much more active role in her career- and Delahunty's. And so, story by story, reporting what he says and does before he says and does it, Phoebe begins to create a very different Calvin Delahunty from the original. And a very different Phoebe.

### **Realisms Traditional, Tragic, Depressive and Moral: The changing fiction of Jonathan Franzen.**

This thesis examines the work of American author Jonathan Franzen and asks whether the oft-told narrative, that of a young postmodernist writer who abandons artistic

ambition and cultural critique for mainstream success, is sufficient to explain the major differences between Franzen's early novels and his later work.

I will contend that while Franzen's later work does not offer a postmodern critique in the same vein as his first two novels, neither is it a retreat into pre-modernist realism. Indeed, I will argue that Franzen abandoned postmodernism as a literary form partly because of what he perceives as its role in entrenching the existing capitalist hegemony. And instead of going back to pre-modernist forms, as though theory and its discoveries had never occurred, Franzen's later work moves beyond postmodernism in search of a new literary form that can maintain a critical distance from, and therefore offer an analysis of, the advanced capitalist society in which we find ourselves. As such, his more recent writing has much in common with the emerging literary genre that has been called post-postmodernism. To frame my argument, I will use close textual analysis of the Christian holidays—that is, Christmas, Easter and Thanksgiving—in Franzen's fiction due to their ubiquity and thematic importance in his work.