

Jonathan Franzen delivers "Freedom" reading

March 06, 2012 12:15 PM Mary Ann Travis
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Jonathan Franzen, best-selling novelist and Great Writers Series speaker, carried his worn briefcase on stage at McAlister Auditorium on Monday (March 6). In front of nearly a thousand people, he pulled out his book *Freedom* and began reading from page 191. No preliminaries were necessary.



A thousand people in McAlister Auditorium hear Great Writers Series author Jonathan Franzen read from his work and discuss the creation of his novels. (Photos by Sally Asher)

[Franzen](#) plunged into the story of Richard Katz, a one-time Grammy-nominated musician, who is broke and depressed and has returned to manual labor, building decks for affluent people.

With asides such as “some sentences are easy to write” after he read the line, “Darkness had fallen,” Franzen presented his work with good humor and rapid-fire delivery.

When Zachary, the teenage son of the family for whom Katz is constructing the deck, learns that the broke musician led the post-punk band The Traumatix, he

asks to interview Katz so that he can impress a girl.

The interview is painful, with questions such as “What about when Dylan went electric?” In another digression, Franzen said, “That's my joke to myself.”

Franzen's novels are tragicomedies, with running commentary on culture, society, politics and family relations.



Students have the opportunity to chat with Franzen before he appears in McAlister Auditorium.

After reading from the book, Franzen sat down at a table on stage to be interviewed before he took questions from the audience.

In an ironic twist of life imitating art, Franzen's interviewer for the evening also was named Zachary ? Tulane creative writing assistant professor [Zachary Lazar](#).

In the real interview, Franzen said, “Writing a novel is an experience. The process is more important than the product. Everything is meaningful when I'm working on a novel. I can put everything in, even something I heard on the subway.”

Franzen said that he likes to mitigate bleakness and mitigate happiness. “I am committed to endings.”

Much of the work of the novelist, he said, should be establishing trust with a reader.

The [Creative Writing Fund](#) of the Department of English sponsors the Great Writer Series.

