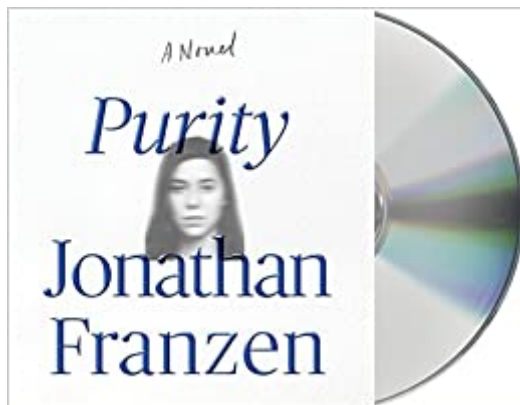


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Purity: A Novel



Synopsis

A magnum opus for our morally complex times from the author of *Freedom* Young Pip Tyler doesn't know who she is. She knows that her real name is Purity, that she's saddled with \$130,000 in student debt, that she's squatting with anarchists in Oakland, and that her relationship with her mother--her only family--is hazardous. But she doesn't have a clue who her father is, why her mother chose to live as a recluse with an invented name, or how she'll ever have a normal life. Enter the Germans. A glancing encounter with a German peace activist leads Pip to an internship in South America with The Sunlight Project, an organization that traffics in all the secrets of the world--including, Pip hopes, the secret of her origins. TSP is the brainchild of Andreas Wolf, a charismatic provocateur who rose to fame in the chaos following the fall of the Berlin Wall. Now on the lam in Bolivia, Andreas is drawn to Pip for reasons she doesn't understand, and the intensity of her response to him upends her conventional ideas of right and wrong. *Purity* is a grand story of youthful idealism, extreme fidelity, and murder. The author of *The Corrections* and *Freedom* has imagined a world of vividly original characters--Californians and East Germans, good parents and bad parents, journalists and leakers--and he follows their intertwining paths through landscapes as contemporary as the omnipresent Internet and as ancient as the war between the sexes. *Purity* is the most daring and penetrating book yet by one of the major writers of our time.

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Customer Reviews

An Best Book of September 2015: *Purity* takes many forms in Franzen's new novel "to begin with, it is the name of the book's title character. "Pip," as she is more commonly known, is

not fond of her given name, and when we first meet her she is living in a crowded Oakland house under the burden of colossal college debt. Pip soon becomes involved in the Sunlight Project, a WikiLeaks-style group that seeks to uncover secrets and expose them on the web. Run by Andreas Wolf, a charismatic man of renown, who grew up in socialist East Germany, the Sunlight Project becomes the jumping-off point of discovery for Pip, as well as a starting line for Franzen to jump back in time and explore the backgrounds of his primary and secondary characters. There is a point in the book where readers may wonder where this is all headed; but the thoughtfulness and polish of Franzen's prose should reassure that the journey isn't in vain. It eventually becomes clear that nearly every character is chasing purity in some form—whether pursuing Pip herself or some platonic ideal—and Franzen ties up the ends in a way that is clean and satisfying but will have you thinking about Purity long after you have finished the book. --Chris Schluep --This text refers to the Paperback edition.

At 23, Pip is trying to pay off her enormous student loan by working at a glorified call center job. She's so poor that she stays with other squatters in a dilapidated house in Oakland, CA—so maybe Pip can be forgiven for coming across a tiny bit hostile. Unfortunately, she has developed the qualities of an emotional leech, constantly seeking approval from father figures in a pathetic attempt to fill the void left by her own unidentified father. Then two Germans show up at her house, and Pip becomes part of a decades-old tangle of stories that link her mother to her father and to the enigmatic Andreas Wolf, an East German expat with a terrifying interior life. The individual tales are epic, nonlinear chronicles that brush up against one another, leaving tantalizing traces of what remains untold. Pip's mother is a mysterious personality despite her overbearing possessiveness. And Wolf has an obsession with a journalist named Tom Aberant. All of these people are vitally connected to Pip, whose youthful mix of intelligence, cynicism, and desperate yearning will hook teens. Readers with an interest in history, politics, and the implications of social media will enjoy the characters' intellectual discourse. Recommend this extraordinary novel to teens ready for a complex yet engaging read that delivers international events and trends with the same insight as the best nonfiction but is peopled with figures who will be impossible to forget. VERDICT An exceptional introduction to fine literature for mature teen readers. —Diane Colson, Nashville Public Library, TN --This text refers to the Paperback edition.

When an author names his main character Pip—a name immortalized in Charles Dickens masterwork, he is almost baiting the reader to make comparisons, so let's get those out of

the way first. Here, Pip is female, not male, although she's still mesmerized by a charismatic flame (Andreas, a Julian Assange type anti-hero who shines as brightly as Estella), and she, too, is in search of her birthright. The themes are every bit as compelling: love and rejection, wealth and poverty and the predestined triumph of pure over evil (except when it doesn't). Oh, and of course, the novel is BIG. Nearly 600 pages, to be exact. In a nod to Dickens, there are multiple plot lines, coincidences, and hold-on-to-your-seat dramatic twists. But make no mistake, while Franzen gives a nod to Dickens, this book cannot be construed as a homage to him. The book is summarized by its title: purity. On the surface, Purity is the birth-name of Pip. But is there such a thing as purity? Can there truly be pure motives, pure ideologies, pure goodness, pure connections, pure love? In this Franzenian universe, the answer seems to be *no*. Everything is tainted by a *moral hazard* (a term Pip learns in economics). Here we meet characters who are struggling with their own definition of *good*: Pip-the-pure, Andreas, a Snowden (or more aptly, Assange) leaker from East Germany (and later Bolivia) who is ostentatiously for transparency and yet commits a felonious deed for reasons that others might deem as pure, Anabel who forsakes *blood-tainted* family money to live a chaste-like, pure life of poverty, Tom, Anabel's ex-husband, a muckraker journalist who is a good, yet pliable person and isn't, by any means, ALL good. Woven into this tapestry are Important Themes: misguided state ideologies and lack of openness, the vacuity of some experimental films, the failings of feminism, the crush of student debt, the eternal quest for power and connection, the false lure of cults and social media, the narcissism of the famous, and all too often, the damage created by suffocating and often too eccentric parenting. (Parents don't fare too well in Franzen's world). One friend described this book as *flawless* and it's not quite that; some of Franzen's romantic dialogue (between Pip and Andreas, for example) made me groan just a bit and some of his female characters skirt a little too close to comfort with being well-written stereotypes (crazy moms, women who want to discuss their feelings ad nauseum, women who only feel lascivious during certain moon cycles). Then again, the men don't come out smelling like roses either: they are often testosterone-driven, narcissistic, love-phobic. These quibbles aside, this theme-driven book kept me engrossed well into the night, in ways that his last book, *Freedom*, did not. Ultimately, *Purity* is a paradox: an incredibly hopeful book about the folly of moral absolutism, the bequeathing of a broken world and the impossibility of being good.

Brief summary and review, no spoilers. I am going to be brief with the plot description because as

you progress from section to section, you do not know who's narrating or who's story you are going to be reading, and some of these are characters first mentioned in the previous chapter. I know many people don't care about these type spoilers, but for me, I don't want to know anything beforehand hence the brief summary. We are introduced to one of the main characters in this novel in the first chapter. Her name is Pip (short for Purity) Tyler and she's an attractive but terribly insecure young woman who is living in a run-down home in Oakland with an odd assortment of characters. Pip is in debt and is unhappily working at a telemarketing-type company. Pip had previously lived with her very strange, reclusive mother. We know that Pip is unsure of her birthdate or her real name and she has always wondered who her father was but her mother would never say anything. To say her mother is eccentric is an understatement and we are left wondering - as Pip does - why her mother keeps Pip's true identity such a secret and why she has chosen to live the life she has. Living temporarily at the home in Oakland are a German couple and the woman convinces Pip to try to get a job with the Sunlight Project, located in Bolivia. It is a powerful Internet Wiki-links type organization that exposes secrets and it's run by a mysterious and charismatic leader named Andreas Wolf. The story takes off from there as Pip joins hoping to find out the identity of her father. It took me a while to finish this book and that's not a criticism as much as a way to describe my experience with it. I am a huge fan of Franzen and was looking forward to this novel. The book in most ways did not disappoint, and I had huge expectations for it. When I was done I had to put the book down and think about it for a while and really felt like I had been through an experience. That's sort of the "reader's high" I get from books that I love. If you've never read Franzen, I think you're in for a treat. He's just an incredible writer and he can come up with phrases and descriptions that are just so perfect. I also think his characters are people we all know in real life and we can identify with the things they feel and do. But in some way that's where my criticism comes with this novel. I am just not sure I bought into some of characters in this story, especially that of the mother and other people's reactions to her. I understand that there are stranger things in real life than in fiction, but the things we read about in fiction still need to feel possible to us. In this book, certain behaviors from the mother and other characters - especially towards the end - just didn't feel realistic or consistent with what I knew about the character. Plus, I felt that the female characters were almost all.....annoying. I also felt that there were moments that dragged, albeit not often. I would still give this a thumbs up and I am very glad I read it. I think he is an extraordinary writer. Recommended. You're going to want to talk about it with someone when you're finished which is high compliment.

As described in the plot, this book too is a big novel. The author has a wonderful use of words, but the story is tedious and disjointed. It's rare that I don't finish a book, but this will be one of those times.

This was a really disappointing outing. I'm struggling to justify even two stars - especially considering Franzen's obvious talent. (I read and thoroughly enjoyed *The Corrections* and *Freedom*). But I did finish the book, and page-by-page the writing, as always for Franzen, is compelling and just about flawless. However, the story line is a hot mess of too many characters with too much back-story and an unnecessarily confusing chronology. I have to think that some good editing and an open mind on Franzen's part would have resulted in a pretty good story, though the point of which is still unclear.

Kind of a disappointment after all the critics' rave reviews. I'm a big Franzen fan but this was one of his weaker books. Too obsessed with male anatomy & hatred toward mothers. Also lost me when all of a sudden it went from 3rd person narrative to 1st person Tom Aberant. Then back to 3rd person.

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