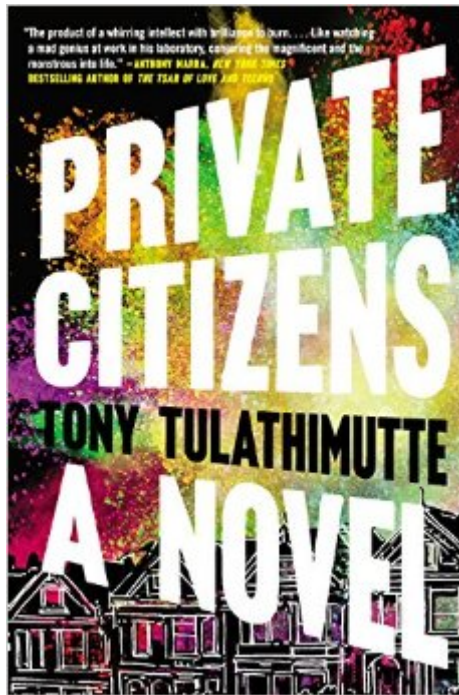


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# Private Citizens: A Novel



## Synopsis

An Best Book of the Month in the Literature & Fiction Category • A BuzzFeed "Most Exciting" Book of 2016 • A Flavorwire "Most Anticipated" Book of 2016 • New York Magazine calls *Private Citizens* "the first great millennial novel." Emma Cline calls it "brilliant." From a brilliant new literary talent comes a sweeping comic portrait of privilege, ambition, and friendship in millennial San Francisco. With the social acuity of Adelle Waldman and the murderous wit of Martin Amis, Tony Tulathimutte's *Private Citizens* is a brainy, irreverent debut "This Side of Paradise" for a new era. Capturing the anxious, self-aware mood of young college grads in the aughts, *Private Citizens* embraces the contradictions of our new century: call it a loving satire. A gleefully rude comedy of manners. Middlemarch for Millennials. The novel's four whip-smart narrators "idealistic Cory, Internet-lurking Will, awkward Henrik, and vicious Linda" are torn between fixing the world and cannibalizing it. In boisterous prose that ricochets between humor and pain, the four estranged friends stagger through the Bay Area's maze of tech startups, protestors, gentrifiers, karaoke bars, house parties, and cultish self-help seminars, washing up in each other's lives once again. A wise and searching depiction of a generation grappling with privilege and finding grace in failure, *Private Citizens* is as expansively intelligent as it is full of heart.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

*Private Citizens* is a novel that reads as though it is trying to evoke Edith Wharton and instead hits closer to an episode of *Sex in the City* that should have been left on the editing floor. Its premise has a great deal of promise: it follows four Millennials making their way in life and love in contemporary

San Francisco. It is one of the first coming of age novels to feature that generation and that city, both of which have become culturally very important and interesting. The novel falls short in the execution phase. Readers are presented with a disabled entrepreneur who never reflects on her disability, a mentally ill main character without any insights into his mental illness, and a victim of childhood rape who is so completely defended that we (and her closest friends) are never sure of the veracity of her origin story. Instead of emotion and self-reflection, the characters interact in lengthy paragraphs about literary deconstructionism, postmodern philosophy, transcultural racism, feminist theory, and a host of other liberal-arts-senior-seminar-worthy topics for which most of us would no longer sign up. Some readers might interpret those vast swaths of the book as satire, or funny, or impressive. But good editing is most helpful when it involves gently steering enthusiastic authors away from that sort of self-congratulatory intellectual muscle-flexing, and a more active editor would have served the novel very well. Ultimately, readers who are taken with the play on words in the title of this novel (something about defended personalities despite the transparency of the constructed self among Millennials) are likely to find the rest of the book clever and revelatory. If that's not you, keep on moving: there's nothing to see here.

This is a brilliant novel, ingeniously structured and masterfully written. Tulathimutte's prose is full of the kind of playful, punning erudition of writers like David Foster Wallace and Nabokov. The book circles around four "friends" living in the Bay Area, and it devotes attention to each of the four points of view with almost surgical symmetry. I was most impressed by the author's thoroughly convincing inhabitation of various vocabularies/jargons--he's as fluent in the nuances of tech-speak as he is with the economic and logistical demands of running a non-profit company, and his grasp of porn lingo is hysterically funny. In some ways, the book covers terrain similar to that in Jonathan Franzen's *Purity* but succeeds where that overhyped tome flounders. Franzen obviously did not grasp the ins and outs of Internet technology so he built up his Assange-like hacker character through fairly programmatic and unconvincing Freudian stuff. Tulathimutte's characters are so vibrant and convincing because he knows seemingly everything about them and what they devote their lives to. And while I can understand to some degree the reasons why other reviewers have pointed up the unlikeable nature of these four millennials, I a) found them quite sympathetic and morally complex, and b) don't think unsavory characters are any kind of impediment to great fiction anyway--look no further than *Lolita* for proof of this, and *Lolita* is clearly a major influence on this novel (not thematically but stylistically). I laughed out loud on about every other page of this book, and on every single page I felt the urge to underline at least one sentence for its dazzle, its truth, its

accuracy, a quality I hadn't felt since I read DeLillo's Underworld. This is, straight up, a great novel.

3.5 stars People complaining about how terrible the characters behaved in this novel was actually what made me want to pick it up. Yes, I like fckd up fictional characters. When there's a point, which there certainly was. This isn't people just being crappy to be crappy, the author was making a point/observing our society--sometimes representing it absurdly which led to moments of me laughing while thinking I should not be laughing at this. You have four main characters living in San Francisco whose lives intersected in college and are once again going to intersect told in different blocks of time. They each range from struggling to be to holy-hotmess. Their actions, interactions, lives, thoughts take us through identity issues, substance abuse, disability, racism, mental illness, social activism, the weight of our choices/beliefs... as they each try and make sense of their current life or try and accomplish their goals.

Ugh, I'm getting really tired of these contemporary coming-of-age stories where privileged, over-educated kids don't learn until their 20's what most of learnt in middle-school: no, we're not all special snowflakes; yes, the rules of life do apply to us. The author uses an excess of verbal diarrhea and word gymnastics, which I guess was necessary to cover for the fact that there is no "there" there.

Not sure what I was expecting when I started to read this book but it captures the social satire of our current society, esp some of the youth portrayed herein. A Bonfire of the Vanities for Stanford grads, possibly. Not kind to its characters. Come for the snark, stay for the excellent writing. Even tho I enjoyed it, and learned a lot of new vocab, I was not sure I was supposed to 'enjoy' reading it as it is dark and captures stereotypes to a tee. But there is sympathy woven in at the end, a bit. I did think about the book and its characters afterwards and still do.

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