



The Goldfinch

Donna Tartt

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WINNER OF THE PULITZER PRIZE

"*The Goldfinch* is a rarity that comes along perhaps half a dozen times per decade, a smartly written literary novel that connects with the heart as well as the mind....Donna Tartt has delivered an extraordinary work of fiction."--Stephen King, *New York Times Book Review*

Theo Decker, a 13-year-old New Yorker, miraculously survives an accident that kills his mother. Abandoned by his father, Theo is taken in by the family of a wealthy friend. Bewildered by his strange new home on Park Avenue, disturbed by schoolmates who don't know how to talk to him, and tormented above all by his longing for his mother, he clings to the one thing that reminds him of her: a small, mysteriously captivating painting that ultimately draws Theo into the underworld of art.

As an adult, Theo moves silkily between the drawing rooms of the rich and the dusty labyrinth of an antiques store where he works. He is alienated and in love--and at the center of a narrowing, ever more dangerous circle.

The Goldfinch is a mesmerizing, stay-up-all-night and tell-all-your-friends triumph, an old-fashioned story of loss and obsession, survival and self-invention, and the ruthless machinations of fate.

The Goldfinch Details

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From Reader Review The Goldfinch for online ebook

Rick says

I have not read Tartt's two previous, and by most accounts, superior novels. In *The Goldfinch* you can see that the talent is there but something is drastically off in the storytelling. The book drags and drags. It exasperates with unnecessary detail that calls annoyed attention to a critical lack of credibility throughout. The narrator is like one of those panhandlers who stop you on the street and provides too long a story about some travail: my mom and I were just mugged they took her to the hospital and I need to get to New Jersey to tell my dad who's deaf but first I have to get to the hospital which is like a thirty minute cab ride away in Brooklyn and she needs this medication that was in her purse which got stolen but I didn't get a chance to tell the EMTs about so I have to find a Duane Reade and get the prescription filled which costs about fifteen dollars if you could just help me out with part of it I'll pay you back like tomorrow I have my address and phone number written down here I am really embarrassed and would never ever ask a stranger for help like this but this was our first ever trip to New York City and we never thought anything like this still happened but.... They are telling you so much because they want more than the average panhandler, not quarters or a buck but a ten or twenty. They hope the detail dazzles or distracts. However the more they tell you the more you know it's all a lie. The extra details only betray.

In *The Goldfinch* the betraying detail is in things large and small. Theo, the narrator, notices and remembers everything but no one else seems capable of noticing anything in the moment even when it's their job to. As a reader you are left wondering, for example, would a teenager struggling in shock through a scene of devastation have noticed and remembered fourteen years later the names on office doors as he is trying to find his way out of a bombed building? You never believe that Theo could have left the museum without anyone noticing him, but he has to. So an immense amount of detail is added to provide a masking confusion. But if he was in the building long enough following the explosion for emergency personnel to arrive, begin rescue efforts, and then leave the building because of fear of another bomb, would there have been a door within the cordoned off perimeter that didn't have police and emergency workers watching it?

Reduced to a plot line everything in the story can be made plausible; transformed into 771 pages of excessive description and your skepticism is teased and taunted from the beginning and at every turn of the page.

A book this long needs to be put down frequently: you are at your stop on the subway, it's time to move a load of laundry from the washer to the dryer, time for a meal or bed. Only once did I put *The Goldfinch* down with regret that I couldn't continue reading. Every other time I was relieved. At page 100, 200, and even at page 700 I wasn't sure I was going to continue reading until the end. This isn't to say the Tartt can't craft a sentence, isn't well-read or a capable researcher, or smart as a whip. She can and is. But in execution this is tied for the most tedious and disappointing reading experience in 2013.

The Goldfinch is the story of a stolen painting and a lost boy and the many bad decisions he makes, influenced by bad genetics and the bad example of his father, by the trauma of violence of the worst kind, and several kinds of dislocation. At no point does Tartt convince you that Theo is something other than a poorly realized grand idea and that the plot, character and actions are more than an academic exercise. The novel has been called Dickensian in its marketing campaign and by some critics. It has also made *The New York Times*'s list of five best works of fiction in 2013. Both facts baffle me beyond words.

Jennie Menke says

Audible. OH MY GAWD! Who ARE you people giving this 5 star raves? I'm not even half way yet and I'm wondering if I will be able to weather this ridiculously long book that keeps getting sidetracked by just about every teenage pothole you can think of.

And can we talk about motherless orphans? I've lost track of how many motherless main characters are in this book. How can I be this far out of touch with other reviewers?

Halfway thru now. Spending lots of energy trying to be less harsh and trying to enjoy the ride tartt is taking me on. But I am not succeeding. This book is utter ridiculousness. Not believable at ALL. and this morning my friend informed me it was named Book of the Year. I'm speechless.

Three quarters done. Bottom line: Theo has become a very unlikeable guy. The pages and pages of minutia detail -- often building intrigue and suspense -- are pointless and often left unresolved. Reading this book reminds me of watching the tv show Lost. You think "MAN. I wonder how they are going to explain that polar bear!" Only to wait four more years and find out that they never do.

Oh. My. Gosh. I just finished. The ending does not disappoint. What a diaphanous extravaganza of words. Of lists. Of never-ending stream of consciousness pompoonery. Yes. I made that word up. It's the merging of pompous and tom-foolery. Is Tartt serious? Can she really be seriously presenting up this book with a straight face? The ending is... Utterly astonishingly perfectly awful. If you are reading this and wondering if you should finish the book. Yes. Do it. Then report back here. I need the company.

****Update on 4/1/14**

After 400+ comments to this review that was never meant for any purpose other than my own entertainment so that I might remember the book, I feel the need to add the following:

To anyone wondering if they should still read this book, since reviewers are so divided (eg you either LOVE it or HATE it) : by all means, YES. Read it! But: if you find you are hating it within 100 pages, just put it down and walk away. Because it won't ever get better for you (Really. do as I say and not as I do: Put. It. Down.). For those who LOVE this book: Good for you! I am truly happy for you. There is nothing better than a book you love! ---Now move along, because the 9+ pages of comments here are for those who don't and will just make you mad. :)

Jeanette "Astute Crabbist" says

1.5 stars

The Mysterious Case of the Shrinking Rating

Oh, kiddies. I don't know where to start in describing my experience of this enormous hunk of enormousness. I came within less than 200 pages of finishing it, but I cannot go on.

A brief (and crabby) synopsis of my experience with this book:

First 200 pages = This is outrageously excellent! Five stars for sure.

Next 200 pages = Getting really sick of Theo and Boris and substance abuse. Four stars, but only if it improves soon.

Next 170+ pages = Drudgery. Author has written herself into a corner but trudges doggedly on. Three stars, dropping to two stars, and finally 1.5 stars because I cannot force myself to finish. The days go by, I'm reading 8 or 10 pages a day at most. I hate the characters, hate the book, and come to hate the author because she took 10 years to write a book and wants us to take another 10 years to read it.

Pffffffft...

karen says

okay. so i read it. and i don't want to be all gloaty-gus for those of you who still have to wait three whole months to get your hands on a copy, but i will say, in brief, that it is worth waiting for. it is worth waiting three months for, as you knew it would be, but i don't know if i can wait another eleven years for another book.

because she's still got it. it is beautifully written. it is everything you hoped it would be: characters as complicated and nuanced as real people. situations alternately lovely and bleak. story that tightens up as you are nearing the finish line, ripping you into two parts "must find out what happens," and "must read slowly or it will be over too soon."

i read the synopsis of the book pretty much as soon as it was announced, and then carefully forgot what it said, because i didn't want to have anything in my head as i read it. i wanted a complete discovery.

and the synopsis copy was very careful in what it revealed.

so i am going to have to, for now, be as respectfully careful. and maybe i will come back closer to the release date and give more specifics, but i really just want to squee here and be enthusiastic and say: there is so much to like about this book!

for example, there is something that is announced at the beginning of the book: one of the Very Big Things that happens in life. and the scene that culminates in this Very Big Thing is excruciating. in a good way. you know what is going to happen, but you don't know when, or how, and there is such delicious tension and you wait for that other shoe to drop, marveling both at her prose, and her ability to tease you during the whole of that opening chapter. wonderful.

and then after that, there's another 700 pages of wonderful.

quickies:

boris is perfect and i love him.

the "art underworld" mentioned is way cooler than what you probably usually think of when those words are mentioned. no bored sneers, asymmetrical haircuts and avant-garde attitude here!

everything else i try to write, i just keep deleting. i can't. not yet. i meant to write a "proper" review of this, but everything keeps coming out too specific, too fraught with danger.

just - continue to be excited about this one for now, because it is staggeringly good and i don't want to ruin it with any of my clumsy words just yet.

.....
i have been promised an ARC of this.

who wants to be my friend *now*???

IT IS HEEEEEEERE!!!!

well, hello there, lovely...

771 pages of MINE!

come to my blog!

Stephen King says

Theo Decker's mother is killed in a bombing that rocks the Metropolitan Museum of Art; Theo, unharmed, escapes with a valuable painting called *The Goldfinch*. He carries this symbol of grief and loss from early adolescence into an adulthood fraught with danger and beset by addiction. The long middle sequence, set in a housing development on the seedy, sand-blown outskirts of Las Vegas, is a standout. Tartt proves that the Dickensian novel—expansive and bursting with incident—is alive and well.

Diane says

Never have I been so conflicted about a book. Parts of it I loved. Parts of it I hated. Sometimes I wanted to praise it. Other times I wanted to abandon it.

I'm relieved I've finally finished this novel (771 pages! Good grief!) because I can stop debating whether or not to keep reading it.

It's difficult to talk about *The Goldfinch* without being spoiler-y, but I shall try. What I appreciated most was the lovely prose — some sections are truly beautiful. Donna Tartt can write an arresting paragraph, to be sure. Here is one that gave me pause:

"I don't care what anyone says or how often or winningly they say it: no one will ever, ever be able to persuade me that life is some awesome, rewarding treat. Because, here's the truth: life is catastrophe. The basic fact of existence -- of walking around trying to feed ourselves and find friends and whatever else we do -- is catastrophe. Forget all this ridiculous 'Our Town' nonsense everyone talks: the miracle of a newborn babe, the joy of one simple blossom, Life You Are Too Wonderful To Grasp, &c. For me -- and I'll keep repeating it doggedly till I die, till I fall over on my ungrateful nihilistic face and am too weak to say it: better never born, than born into this cesspool."

So, yeah, this book is depressing. The story opens with a young boy, Theo, surviving a terrorist bombing in a museum, but his mother died and he feels responsible. Meanwhile, Theo steals a famous painting, one that shows a goldfinch chained to a perch, because his mother had loved the painting and he wanted to keep it safe. For the rest of the novel, the fate of the painting hangs in the balance. Theo agonizes over how and when to return it, and what crime he'll face. Eventually he ends up in the art underworld, caught in a complex scam.

The Goldfinch by Carel Fabritius

So the plot is rich and detailed, but my complaint was with the characters: I didn't like Theo, or his dad, or his dad's girlfriend, or his friend Boris, or Boris' girlfriend, etc. And Theo makes so many bad choices throughout the novel that it was difficult for me to care about what happened to him. Spending more than 700 pages without caring about the main character was a bit punishing. (And yet I kept reading! It's like I was that poor goldfinch chained to the book.)

There was also too much written about repairing furniture, and WAY too much coverage of Theo's drug and alcohol abuse. I understand that he had post-traumatic stress disorder and that he was anxious and fearful, but I didn't need to read dozens of pages on how drunk and high he was. I don't think this novel had anything new to say about altered realities or making dumb decisions when you're bombed.

While reading, I frequently made comparisons to Tom Wolfe's *Bonfire of the Vanities*, a similarly long novel with an unlikable main character who gets caught in a dark web. Bonfire was considered the book that defined the '80s decade, and it seems like Goldfinch is poised to be the book that defines the post-9/11 era. I'm glad I've read it, but I'm even more glad I'm done with it.

Update January 2014

I finished this book about two weeks ago and when I talk about it with other readers, my most salient feeling is how anxious it made me. I was anxious about the painting. I was worried about Theo's survival. Boris and his kamikaze behavior made me jittery. The section in Amsterdam made me so uneasy I had to skim to get through it. I say this as a caution to other readers: This book is not a carefree or an easy read. You have been warned.

Update February 2015

It's been a year since I read *The Goldfinch*, and every time I see a copy of this book, I shudder. I cannot think of another novel I've read that made me feel more relieved to have finished it. I have heard friends say they had to abandon this book because it made them too anxious. Can you suffer PTSD from a book? If so, this

one caused it.

LeeAnne says

The Goldfinch

by Donna Tartt

This is more than a beautifully written novel. It is a life philosophy, a love letter to great art and a literary version of a painting. Humans make art, but art makes us human. Life is full of struggle but the beauty we encounter in this life might be what makes it all worth living.

Three Medlars and a Butterfly

by Adrian Coort

*“The Dutch invented the microscope,” she said. “They were jewelers, grinders of lenses. They want it all as detailed as possible because **even the tiniest things mean something**. Whenever you see flies or insects in a still life—a wilted petal, a black spot on the apple—the painter is giving you a secret message. He’s telling you that **living things don’t last—it’s all temporary**. Death in life. That’s why they’re called *natures mortes*. Maybe you don’t see it at first with all the beauty and bloom, the little speck of rot. But if you look closer—there it is.”* The Goldfinch

One of many the joys of this novel are the visually striking and timeless descriptions of New York City. When the scene shifts to the barren wasteland of suburban Las Vegas, it is a striking contrast. The characters and their stories are conveyed with such beautifully rich detail, they've become real people to me.

Gapstow Bridge in Central Park, Manhattan, New York City

The isolation and sprawl of tract housing in the outer suburbs of Las Vegas.

There are numerous references and allusions to classic literature woven throughout this book. The most explicit ones are to Dickens (Tartt is a huge fan) and to 19th Century Russian Literature, also known as the "Golden Era" of Russian literature. Theo is a modern day Pip (Great Expectations). His artsy mother is named Audrey (Holly Golightly of Breakfast At Tiffany's). A favorite Central Park bench Theo visits with his mom happens to be the same famous bench that Holden Caulfield visits in "The Catcher in the Rye". Hobie, a modern day Joe Gargery (Great Expectations), is a kind, gentle man who rehabilitates furniture in a charming antique shop (The Old Curiosity Shop). Theo's streetwise partner in crime, Boris, is a character reminiscent of The Artful Dodger from "Oliver". An entire part of the book is named after Dostoevsky's novel, "The Idiot". Boris spends several paragraphs analyzing "The Idiot" and it's dark message about life. Boris nicknames our bespectacled protagonist "Potter" and this reference creates a sharp contrast between the cute, wholesomeness of Harry Potter with the bleak realism of Theo's life as a lost orphan.

An old, wealthy Manhattan family, the Barbours, personify New York's posh, seemingly ideal upper-class life. They live in a richly decorated Upper West Side apartment stuffed with priceless furniture and large, dark oil paintings of naval battles. (The Age of Innocence, Great Gatsby).

Art in almost every form is represented in the book: fine art, music, film, cinematography, literature, even antique furniture restoration. I counted 36 works of classic literature referenced in The Goldfinch, 24 classic films, 20 iconic paintings, and a dozen iconic musicians and pieces of music. Characters in the book find meaning in their life through art and the creative process: Hobie through furniture restoration, Pippa through her music, Fabritius through his painting, Donna Tartt through prose.

This is more than a great story. It's a philosophy about life. The last 10 pages of the novel gathers all of the understated subtext about life, love and art, and pulls it up to the surface. What if you do the wrong things in life, but for the right reasons? How does one differentiate the value v/s price of a work of art? Or an authentic work v/s a counterfeit? Can a work of art capture the soul, essence and spirit of life? Life is harsh, cruel and short; what's the point? Can art give us hope and make life worth living?

Maybe there is no ultimate truth, no transcendent divine experience. Maybe the acts we commit out of love, are beyond good and evil. Perhaps the artist's job is, not to surrender to the emptiness of existence, but to find an antidote to counteract that feeling of emptiness. Maybe hope, even if it is just an illusion, is a reason to continue. Maybe the beauty we encounter in life is what makes it all worth living.

It took ten years for Donna Tartt to finish this book. It was worth the wait.

Raeleen Lemay says

I finished it.

And it was awesome.

(Review to come)

Rick Riordan says

Adult contemporary fiction. The Goldfinch was the book to read last year, so I didn't read it. Happily I corrected that over the last few weeks! It's the story of young Theo whose mother dies in a terrorist explosion at the Metropolitan Museum in New York. In the ensuing chaos, Theo escapes with his mother's favorite painting, The Goldfinch, a priceless Dutch masterpiece that becomes Theo's secret treasure and also the albatross around his neck. The story follows Theo into adulthood, through a series of tragedies and misadventures, until at last, he must face the music in regards to the missing painting. The novel is part coming-of-age story, part mystery, part rumination on the value of a human life versus the value of art. The writing is evocative yet accessible. The characters are wonderfully evoked. Tarrt knows how to keep readers engaged with a compelling plot, yet the story is about much more than what happens to Theo and the painting. It's about loss and grief and loyalty. It's a remarkable read. I almost had to stop reading the book when Theo's ne'er-do-well father came on the scene because he was such an ass I wanted to strangle him, but later in the book, Tarrt made even that character seem understandable, if not sympathetic. And Boris . . . what a creation! If nothing else, read this book to meet Boris.

Lisa Kelsey says

As I read the reviews I am fascinated by the fact that I agree with aspects of many of them, whether they rate the book one, two, three, or even four stars. Even the positive reviews point out the very many flaws. I suppose it all comes down to what you are willing to tolerate in a novel. I found Tarrt's writing to be at times quite lovely, but I got the feeling she is a little too enamored with her own skill. I am surprised to see the novel described as "dense." It was very, very (unnecessarily, in my opinion) long, but it was the opposite of dense. More like bloated--with lots of pretty fluff. When Theo is making his (again, long and mysteriously uninterrupted) way out of the Met in the beginning, I knew right away I was in for a severely under-edited read, and suspension of disbelief of inordinate proportions would be called upon.

I am not a reader who must like or identify with the main character, or even any of them, but I do require them to at least be interesting or representative of a larger idea in some way, if not, then I at least want to be able to root for them. Here, I found the characters unlikable (except for Hobie and Pippa, but they just fade in and out) and with no real emotional resonance. Theo's mourning for his mother in particular, felt vaguely like a lovesick teenager's rendition of grief in a creative writing class. His relationships with women are so shallow and unconvincing as to suggest that he is deeply closeted. But with his lecturing at the end (pursuing what your heart desires, etc), I would think he would come clean on this point if that were the case.

Even the discussion of the eponymous painting is lacking. It's as if the author didn't bother to research the piece--does she not know that Google exists? All the muddled philosophizing at the end left me unimpressed. In the end it was, in the words of Bart Simpson, "just a bunch of stuff that happened." A long, mostly tedious read with very little (or no) payoff.

If you are like me and finish a book you start no matter what, I would seriously give the reviews here a read

before committing to it.

Jeffrey Keeten says

Winner of the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction 2014. Congratulations Donna Tartt!

"And I'm hoping there's some larger truth about suffering here, or at least my understanding of it-- although I've come to realize that the only truths that matter to me are the ones I don't, and can't, understand. What's mysterious, ambiguous, inexplicable. What doesn't fit into a story, what doesn't have a story....

Because--what if that particular goldfinch (and it is very particular) had never been captured or born into captivity, displayed in some household where the painter Fabritius was able to see it? It can never have understood why it was forced to live in such misery: bewildered by noise (as I imagine), distressed by smoke, barking dogs, cooking smells, teased by drunkards and children, tethered to fly on the shortest of chains. Yet even a child can see its dignity; thimble of bravery, all fluff and brittle bone. Not timid, not even hopeless, but steady and holding its place. Refusing to pull back from the world."

The Goldfinch by Carel Fabritius 1654

This story begins with an act of terror in modern day New York, but this story could also be said to have started in 1654 when Fabritius, with deft hand, painted his masterpiece, a luminescent bird, a Goldfinch. Theo Decker is a child, with a mother obsessed with art. She frequently would skip buying lunch to have enough money to go to a museum. It is easy to give up food when one is about to nourish the soul. She in particular wants to see **The Goldfinch** and she wants to share that experience with Theo.

"She'd never seen a great painting in person until she was eighteen and moved to New York and she was eager to make up for lost time-- 'pure bliss, perfect heaven,' she'd said, up to the neck in art books and poring over the same old slides (Manet, Vuillard) until her vision started to blur, ('It's crazy', she'd said, 'but I'd be perfectly happy if I could sit looking at the same half dozen paintings for the rest of my life. I can't think of a better way to go insane.')"

"We have art in order not to die from the truth."

----Nietzsche

In 1992 Donna Tartt had a pixie cuteness that inspired literary crushes from coast to coast.

Donna Tartt is a master of language, but she really excels when she is composing people. This description of Theo's mother manifested her before me as if she were flesh and blood in the room with me.

"She had black hair, fair skin that freckled in summer, china-blue eyes with a lot of light in them, and in the

slant of her cheekbones there was such an eccentric mixture of the tribal and the Celtic Twilight that sometimes people guessed she was Icelandic. In fact she was half Irish, half Cherokee, from a town in Kansas near the Oklahoma border; and she liked to make me laugh by calling herself an Okie even though she was as glossy and nervy and stylish as a racehorse."

The Dead Goldfinch by George Elgar Hicks

While at the museum a terrorist bomb explodes at a moment when Theo is separated from his mother. He never sees her again. Somehow in the confusion he walks out with an antique dealer's ring that was placed in his hands by the dying owner, and the painting, **The Goldfinch**.

Theo is placed with his friend Andy's family for a time. They live on Park Avenue, and though they try their best to make him feel welcome it is impossible for him to ever feel like anything other than a charity case.

"Mrs. Barbour was from a society family with an old Dutch name, so cool and blonde and monotone that sometimes she seemed partially drained of blood. She was a masterpiece of composure; nothing ever ruffled her or made her upset, and though she was not beautiful her calmness had the magnetic pull of beauty--a stillness so powerful that the molecules realigned themselves around her when she came into a room."

For all Mrs. Barbour's money and perceived social power she can not trump one thing...a blood relative. She feels guilty and relieved when Theo's long gone, long lost, father appears. He has the scent of insurance money in his nose. He has a gambling addiction that rains money when he wins, but when he loses the vig requires a blizzard of money to fix. He sells off everything of his wife's possessions that can be sold, and hauls Theo out to Las Vegas.

NOOOOOOOOOO!!!!

His father acted in a handful of bit parts in Hollywood for a few years before washing out.

"From the genial cursing, his infrequent shaving, the relaxed way he talked around the cigarette in the corner of his mouth, it was almost as if he were playing a character: some cool guy from the fifties noir or maybe Ocean's Eleven, a lazy, sated gangster with not much to lose. Yet even in the midst of his laid-backness he still had that crazed and slightly heroic look of schoolboy insolence, all the more stirring since it was drifting toward autumn, half-ruined and careless of itself."

I wouldn't have thought it was possible to make Donna Tartt look like Gertrude Stein. Seriously who do I need to talk to about this?

Theo's father is not interested in parenting any more now than he was when he lived with Theo and his wife. In other words Theo is turned loose allowed to roam, and do whatever he wants to do. Theo meets Boris, a Russian kid with even less supervision than Theo, and falls into a hedonistic lifestyle of drugs and alcohol abuse that will haunt him for the rest of his life. The need to escape becomes a pattern that by necessity has to become more and more creative as he swims his way through a sea of pills and booze into adulthood.

"On the marble top of the dresser I crushed one of my hoarded old-style Oxycontin, cut it and drew it into lines with my Christie's card and--rolling the crispest bill in my wallet--leaned to the tables, eyes damp with anticipation: ground zero, bam, bitter taste in the back of the throat and then the gust of relief, falling

backward on the bed as the sweet old punch hit me square in the heart: pure pleasure, aching and bright; far from the tin-can clatter of misery.”

I wonder if Tartt’s writing buddy, Bret Easton Ellis, was a consultant for the descriptions of drug use that are sprinkled throughout the novel.

Bret Easton Ellis: drug, party, sex consultant.

Meanwhile **The Goldfinch** follows along with Theo.

Before leaving New York Theo returns the ring, that he was given at the museum, to a man named Hobie who turns out to be a business partner of the deceased man. Hobie is a furniture restoring expert. He keeps parts from unsalvageable antiques and uses those pieces to replace damaged sections on salvageable antiques. He also creates new pieces of furniture by marrying filigree to a plain piece as long as the wood dates from the same period. He is an artist. He calls these pieces of furniture his changelings. Theo soon realizes that most people are looking for a deal/steal and he has no difficulty acting the rube to play on their greed. He begins selling these changelings as real antiques. If someone complains he gives their money back and at the same time creates provenance that the antique came from their collection. He uses that provenance to sell the next person. Brilliant, illegal, but brilliant.

He meets Pippa, who stays with Hobie from time to time. She was also hurt in the blast at the museum. When circumstances allow him to escape, the hell-hole called Las Vegas, he lands back on Hobie’s doorstep or should I say in much better proximity to Pippa.

”Terrified she was going to catch me staring, unable to wrench my eyes away, I watched her studying my iPod with bent head: ears rosy-pink, raised line of scar tissue slightly puckered underneath the scalding-red hair. In profile her downcast eyes were long, heavy-lidded, with a tenderness that reminded me of the angels and page boys in the Northern European Masterworks book I’d checked and re-checked from the library.”

Oh yeah, he’s got it bad...for life. Pippa is forever linked with his mother, not because she knew his mother, but because she entered his life at the very moment his mother left it.

”You can look at a picture for a week and never think of it again. You can also look at a picture for a second and think of it all your life.”

Theo hasn’t been able to bear looking at **The Goldfinch** for a long time. It is an overwhelming cauldron of pain, guilt, beauty, loss, and lust on the order of Gollum’s passion for the One-Ring. If he looks at it too often he will become totally possessed.

”I thought of all the places I’d been and all the places I hadn’t, a world lost and vast and unknowable, dingy maze of cities and alleyways, far-drifting ash and hostile immensities, connections missed, things lost and never found, and my painting swept away on the powerful current and drifting out there somewhere: a tiny fragment of spirit, faint spark bobbing on a dark sea.”

Fabritius Self-Portrait

So there is a painting, stolen, carried all over the country, lost, found, stolen again, and finally found once

more. So there is a boy blown up, lost, found, lost, lost, lost, and dare we to hope he is to be found once more? This book is full of beautiful, lyrical language, and a cast of characters that could have competed with a book from the Victorian era. I couldn't help rooting for Theo in the same way that I rooted for David Copperfield and Oliver Twist. Even when he is surrounded by people, even people that would gladly offer him whatever help he could desire, he is lonely, caught in a cycle of grief that can't be shared or unburdened. The life he was supposed to have was taken from him, and now he is chained to a bastardized life like Fabletius's Goldfinch. A life that can never quite be understood, and a life made nearly unbearable by the memory of flight.

"For if disaster and oblivion have followed this painting down through time--so too has love. Insofar as it is immortal (and it is) I have a small, bright, immutable part in that immortality. It exists; and it keeps on existing. And I add my own love to the history of people who have loved beautiful things, and looked out for them, and pulled them from the fire, and sought them when they were lost, and tried to preserve them and save them while passing them along literally from hand to hand, singing out brilliantly from the wreck of time to the next generation of lovers, and the next."

See more of my writing at <http://www.jeffreykeeten.com>

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Gene Schmidt says

This was a huge disappointment for me. The opening New York sections were excellent, the description of the museum bombing and the whole Mansfield Park thing Tarrt has going with Theo and the Barbour family, all of this works beautifully. I was excited to keep on reading to see where it all ended up, but once things move to Las Vegas the story takes a seriously wrong turn. I seem to be a minority opinion here, but there you have it. I do remember sitting up all night in 1992 reading *The Secret History*. But this is something else...

I have to wonder for whom Tarrt thinks she's writing. Does she really imagine that intelligent adult readers are going to be enthralled with hundreds of pages detailing the antics of a pair of burned-out druggie teenagers who spend their time smoking weed, swilling vodka, and dining on packets of sugar and whatever junk food delicacies they can boost from the local supermarket? Well, perhaps they will, the book *is* on the NYT bestseller list. But once all the hype and interviews die down...who knows?

The comparisons to Dickens are particularly inappropriate. Dickens wrote about orphans and other unfortunates who are on the receiving end of undeserved bad luck, but his characters struggle *against* degradation and dissipation. Poor little Joe the crossing sweeper sleeps in *Tom All Alone's* because he has no other choice. But here Theo and Boris revel in their squalor and dissipation. (Boris is the kind of character who seems to exist only in books and movies: the burn-out loser druggie who is failing all his classes in school but is really a secret genius who reads Dostoevsky and Thoreau in his rare sober and lucid moments. Yeah...right. I've been to high school. Burn outs are burn outs).

Nor is there any hint of Dickens' rollicking and life-affirming humor in the book. In fact there is no humor of any kind whatsoever (at least not as far as I read). Not a drop of wit. No one even cracks a halfway decent dirty joke.

And then there is Theo's father, an inveterate gambler deep into the loan sharks, and his aging sexpot girlfriend Xandra...both potentially interesting characters, except they are presented in one-dimensional

terms throughout their stay in the novel, and really exist for no other purpose than to end up the way they do (at least in the case of Theo's dad). Wasted opportunity.

Too bad. I gave up halfway though the book. There is just such an incredible ugliness about all (or almost all) of the characters that I found I didn't care a damn what happened to them and certainly didn't want to spend any more time with them. The ironic part is that Tarrt is an incredible writer, a master of descriptive prose, attentive to detail and able to create a truly believable world on the page. Too bad it's such a rotten world.

Peggy says

I, Boris, character in this book will give you honest opinion. Very honest. If you are reading this, asking yourself, should I read this book which is 771 pages? Very heavy, not that The Idiot was not 656 pages, so not length I am afraid of. If you are wondering, should I read? I answer for you already and say no! I am one of best things in book, at least not all the time moody, gloomy and so stupid I do not not even look in package. Even though I am very important character I must tell you, not worth your time to read this. (Okay to read beginning, some middle, end) but if was me, better to be having a pop than all the time reading about depressed guy who wastes so many good drugs. Bad things happen. All the time bad things. Does not mean cannot enjoy life. Does not mean should make many people spend very much money on depressing book. Not to say is not masterpiece to some people but why spend money on this misery. Cannot all own masterpiece. Potter think he is only one lose mother. In book we none of us have mother. Does not take 771 pages to figure this out. I would maybe read this if just 400 pages, as long as there would not be such long stretches without me. Potter needs me all the time. Not good without me. His one girl, Pippa, is smart not to let him make her into mother. If I was my good friend Theodore Decker and could not enjoy life at all I would do better job at killing self.

Also honest opinion on how they say everyone is reading this book. If I tell you jump off cliff, you do it? Many times I drag Potter from middle of road where he claims to be waiting for car. Did I tell him lie in street? No. So I tell you. Only good thing can come from reading this book (maybe not even need to finish) is lots to talk about with people. Much discussion. Maybe if book from library or stolen worth it? But to buy own heavy copy? Could not even drop in canal without Dutch police all over you. Is better this way. "Trust me."

Alan Wolk says

The Goldfinch is a brilliant story with memorable characters and most of the book is incredibly well done and fun to read.

"Most" being the operative word.

Tarrt needed an editor to cut out a lot of the repetitive detail (Like several other reviewers, I too found myself page skimming -- sometimes the detail is fascinating, oftentimes it's unnecessary and just slows down the story.)

There are a few other nits a good editor could have fixed, e.g. the internet makes cameo appearances but it's

inconsistent - characters will make use of it in the way people do in 2013 but then later in the same scene they seem to forget it exists (and there's much more of the latter than the former-- Tartt recently did an interview with the New York Times where she admits to only using the web "to look up phone numbers" and her unfamiliarity is pretty evident, which is a problem in a novel whose main protagonists are 20somethings), a number of key plot points are telegraphed way in advance in a manner that feels more heavy-handed than than skillful, there are minor-but-critical unexplained plot points (e.g. why Theo's mother never considered leaving his father) whose omission seems curious in a novel that goes into such minute detail about everything else. And then of course there are the adult Theo's relationships with women, all of which seem overly chaste and prim and bloodless (especially compared to his relationship with Boris)-- even when he professes otherwise.

There's a lot of Great Expectations in this novel-- I can't imagine it's coincidence that one of the main characters is called Pippa-- and Tartt frequently uses Dickens beloved device of the happy coincidence to move the plot forward. Usually Tartt makes the device work, but there are other times where the plot twists seem plucked from a forgettable TV movie of the week.

The final chapter could also have used some heavier editing--" philosophizing" is a great way to end Theo's story, but the chapter just drags on forever, like a well meaning guest who won't stop saying goodbye.

I gave it 4 stars because it's a really masterful story and the fairy tale quality makes it markedly different from so much of modern fiction. I just wish the editors would have had a heavier hand.

Oriana says

So listen. Look. I am a READER, right? I mean, I read all the time, everywhere, every day, a book a week. But most of the time the book I'm reading is a dull throb beneath my fingers, a soft hum behind my eyes, a lovely way to spend a bit of time in between things as I meander through my life. You know? It's something I adore, but softly, passively, and often forgetfully—very nice while it's happening, but flitting away quickly after I'm on to the next.

And then sometimes there is a book that is more like a red hot fucking coal, a thrum nearly audible whenever I'm close to it, a magnetic pull that stops me doing anything else and zings me back so strongly that I just want to bury myself in its tinnitus at all times—five minutes in line at the bank, two minutes in the elevator, thirty seconds while my coffee date checks her email—gorging myself with sentences and paragraphs until the whole world recedes and shrivels into flat black-and-white nothing.

This, this, this is one of those books. It's a book that bracingly reaffirms my faith in literature, making me endlessly astonished by its power and poise and brilliance. I know I am constantly chided for hyperbole, but this is truly one of the greatest books I've ever read.

Probably it's a result of the endless march of mediocre books that plague the publishing industry these days—self-pub and traditional; I'm holding the major presses hell-a accountable too—but a book like this, so full and deep and flawlessly constructed, is just such a shock, such a pure clear joy. Every element is fucking perfect. Every element, truly! The plot, the characters, the pacing, the tone, all the little details, so so many tiny details, all perfectly, astonishingly slotted into place; the patois and the slang and the dialogue and the descriptions, oh my god the descriptions, from a smile to a chandelier to a mood; even the goddamn chapter epigraphs, which, who even reads those? But they're perfect, she's perfect, this book is just a knock-down,

drag-out wonder.

And it covers *so much ground*, with no shortcuts: from the Upper West Side moneyed elite to gambling addicts in the suburbs of Vegas, from a Lower East Side drug den for decadents gone to seed to the charming Christmastime streets of Amsterdam. Nothing is two-dimensional: if a character restores furniture, you will learn so goddamn much about wood and veneers and myriad adherents; if another is a sailor, you will feel the wind in your hair and the goddamn spray of surf on your cheeks.

Philosophy, art history, baccarat, heroin. Proust, childhood bullies, Russian drug-dealers. The cut of a jewel, the play of light through a crooked blind. The way a small dog remembers someone it hasn't seen in ten years. The way the very rich handle mental illness in the family. The way a teenage boy feels after taking acid for the first time. The bonds between people that last a lifetime, many lifetimes. The power of art to change a life, to change a million lives; the immortality of a work of art and the line of beauty that connects generation after generation of appreciators. How it feels to be always and ever in love with the wrong person—and how perfect and perfectly flawed she is, or he is, all the same. The way people age. The way people cling to each other at the wrongest of times, in the unlikeliest ways. The way people *talk*, my god, there is a Russian character (probably the best character in the book) who learned to speak English in Australia and you can *really hear* that fucking incomprehensible accent, the hitch of verbs mis-conjugated in just the right ways, the tossing out of slang words in four different languages, so casual and so perfectly apt. The way a life is made of recurrences, circlings back and back, openings out and out and out.

What if one happens to be possessed of a heart that can't be trusted—? What if the heart, for its own unfathomable reasons, leads one willfully and in a cloud of unspeakable radiance away from health, domesticity, civic responsibility and strong social connections and all that blandly held common virtues and instead straight toward a beautiful flare of ruin, self-immolation, disaster? If your deepest self is singing and coaxing you straight toward the bonfire, is it better to run away? Ignore all the perverse glory your heart is screaming at you? Or is it better to throw yourself headfirst and laughing into the holy rage calling your name?

Five stars, five hundred stars, five million. ALL THE GODDAMN STARS FOR DONNA TARTT FOREVER.
