Bool Belles Review: The Goldfinch

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[box]**This edition we welcome a guest reviewer from the Bool Belles book club in Warrnambool, VICTORIA DUNN. Victoria tells us what they have been reading and what they thought of it…**[/box]

The Goldfinch, by Donna Tartt: winner of the 2014 Pulitzer Prize for Fiction (Little, Brown)

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[dropcap style="font-size: 60px; color: #DC943C;"] D [/dropcap]onna Tartt's highly anticipated new novel (her first in 11 years) is a coming-of-age odyssey that centres around a lad named Theo, who recounts the story of his life as he remembers it from the age of 13 to about 28.

Not long after the story opens, Theo is getting by on a diverse array of daily drug and alcohol concoctions. This tends to make him an unreliable witness, but it in some ways helps him manage the sometimes horrific and bizarre circumstances he becomes involved in.

The story draws on significant global events such as 9/11, and social issues such as drug use, and a brush with the criminal underworld. We are told the story completely from Theo's perspective. Characters and the contemporary American societies they inhabit are fleshed-out via Theo's immediate experience of them.

The Goldfinch, Carel Fabritius (1622-1654). Image: The Frick Collection

[dropcap style="font-size: 60px; color: #DC943C;"] D [/dropcap]uring a visit to the Metropolitan Museum of Art (New York) with his mother, Theo is separated from her and becomes a virtual orphan during a terrorist bomb attack. His mother dies, he survives.

While comforting the dying Weltie, a man he had seen earlier with a young girl about his own age, Theo is persuaded to steal the painting, *The Goldfinch*, which happens to have been a favourite painting of his mother's (the painting, by the way, does exist – see above).

The attack leaves Theo a virtual orphan and he is taken in by the family of a school friend, Andy Barbour, who live in a cavernous Fifth Avenue apartment. The dying Weltie had asked him to go to his partner, Hobie, in Greenwich Village, which Theo eventually does.

A great friendship and mentorship begins. Hobie is a craftsman; restoring American antiques is his life. Theo also sees the girl Pippa, who was with Weltie, and is now recovering at Hobie's house. Theo and Pippa recognise a resonance of emotional damage in each other.

US author Donna Tartt has drawn mixed reviews for her highly anticipated and very long novel, The

Goldfinch, which won the 2014 Pulitzer Prize for Fiction. Image: www.yle.fi

[dropcap style="font-size: 60px; color: #DC943C;"] U [/dropcap]pheaval again occurs, however, when Theo's father turns up. His father and girlfriend Xandra take Theo to Las Vegas, where he becomes a fringe dweller.

Enter Boris: the east European rogue. Theo and Boris begin a friendship initially because they are two adolescents who feel completely out of place in their families and surrounds. They embark on a complex and addictive consumption of various drugs, alcohol and petty crime.

Theo and Boris eventually part company and Theo escape's Las Vegas to return to Hobie in the Village, where he learns everything he can about antique restoration. Unbeknown to Hobie, however, Theo's exposure to the antique world reignites his criminal tendencies.

Enter Boris again, this time with some shady underworld figures. Through his reconnection with Boris, Theo learns that it is impossible to keep a secret – even one as big as stealing *The Goldfinch* – and he attempts to take a path of redemption.

Tartt (who's debut novel was the hugely successful *The Secret History)* has attracted mixed reviews for this book, which pivots on the profound effect the tragedy of a mother's death has on one so young.

There are some rather lengthy philosophical musings on life and redemption toward the end of the book, but overall the Bool Belles' consensus is that *The Goldfinch* is a "great read" and that doesn't apply only to its length – at over 700 pages!

– Victoria Dunn

Next month's book: *The Bird Watcher*, William McInnes

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