

IDH2930: Spring 2024 (Un)Common Reads: *The Secret History*

Mondays, 5:10–6:00 p.m. (Period 10) • Little 119

Instructor

Name: Gregory D. Webster, Ph.D.
Office: o88 Psychology Building
Hours: Mondays 1–3 p.m.
E-mail: gdwebs@ufl.edu

Description, Purpose, and Policies

Author Donna Tartt is best known for her most-recent novel, *The Goldfinch* (2013), which garnered numerous literary awards, including the 2014 Pulitzer Prize for fiction. But it is her debut novel, *The Secret History* (1992), which has become a cult classic, and continues to generate the most interest among readers.

The Secret History is an inverted detective story, where readers are exposed to a murder in the opening pages. Readers are told about the victim, the murderers, and their means, but their motives remain a mystery. The story is told by protagonist Richard Pape, a first-year student at small-but-elite Hampden College in Vermont. Coming from a working-class family, Richard feels out of place at Hampden until he meets a mysterious group of five wealthy and eccentric students—Henry, Bunny, Francis, and Charles and Camilla (twins)—that share his interest in classics (i.e., Greek, Latin). Richard is elusive about his working-class background, but over time, Henry and his group grow to accept Richard into their fold. But when the rest of the group—without Richard—attempts to translate their academic interests into ritual practice by recreating an ancient Dionysian rite deep in the Vermont woods, the story takes multiple unexpected turns.

The Secret History's broad themes include envy, guilt, isolation, manipulation, social class, and the link between beauty and terror. Donna Tartt began writing *The Secret History* as a student at Bennington College in Vermont in the 1980s, and several of the characters in the novel are based on her friends, acquaintances, and experiences there.

The purpose of this course is to expose readers to a modern murder mystery masterpiece set in a college town and written by a Pulitzer Prize-winning author who was a student herself at the novel's outset. Attendance, participation, reactions papers (RPs), and leading group discussions will determine grades. RPs will focus on plots and themes that are present in the book. Students will uphold the University of Florida Honor Code in all aspects of this course. Class attendance is mandatory. Students requesting classroom accommodation must first register with the Dean of Students Office. The Dean of Students Office will provide documentation to the student who must then provide this documentation to the instructor when requesting accommodation.

Book

Tartt, Donna. (1992). *The Secret History*. New York: Vintage Books/Random House. (559 pp.; \$6.99 paperback).

Grading

Item and Description	No.	Points	Total
Attendance and Participation	14	2	28
Reaction Papers (RPs; 250 words)	4	12	48
Leading Group Discussions (6 groups of 2–3 people)	2	12	24
			100

Schedule and Readings

Date	Chapters (pages)	Topic or Discussion	Due
1/08	—	Syllabus & Expectations	
1/15	—	No Class: MLK, Jr. Day	
1/22	BOOK I: Prologue & Chapter 1 (1–45)	Group: Instructor	
1/29	Chapter 2 (46–103)	Group: Richard	
2/05	Chapter 3 (104–135)	Group: Henry	RP#1: Chs. 1–3
2/12	Chapter 4 (136–171)	Group: Bunny	
2/19	Chapter 5, Part I (172–222)	Group: Francis	
2/26	Chapter 5, Part II (222–269)	Group: Charles	RP#2: Chs. 4–5
3/04	BOOK II: Chapter 6, Part I (275–326)	Group: Camilla	
3/11	—	No Class: Spring Break	
3/18	Chapter 6, Part II (326–376)	Group: Richard	
3/25	Chapter 7 (377–420)	Group: Henry	RP#3: Chs. 6–7
4/01	Chapter 8, Part I (421–454)	Group: Bunny	
4/08	Chapter 8, Part II (454–489)	Group: Francis	
4/15	Chapter 8, Part III (489–524)	Group: Charles	
4/22	Chapter 8, Part IV & Epilogue (524–559)	Group: Camilla	RP#4: Ch. 8

Course Grading Scale

Letter	Percent	Letter	Percent	Letter	Percent
A	≥ 93.33	B-	≥ 80.00	D+	≥ 66.67
A-	≥ 90.00	C+	≥ 76.67	D	≥ 63.33
B+	≥ 86.67	C	≥ 73.33	D-	≥ 60.00
B	≥ 83.33	C-	≥ 70.00	E	< 60.00

The Fine Print: UF Course Syllabus Policies and Resources

Online Course Evaluation

Students are expected to provide professional and respectful feedback on the quality of instruction in this course by completing course evaluations online via GatorEvals. Guidance on how to give feedback in a professional and respectful manner is available at <https://gatorevals.aa.ufl.edu/students>. Students will be notified when the evaluation period opens, and can complete evaluations through the email they receive from GatorEvals, in their Canvas course menu under GatorEvals, or via <https://ufl.bluera.com/ufl>. Summaries of course evaluation results are available to students at <https://gatorevals.aa.ufl.edu/public-results>.

Honor Pledge

UF students are bound by The Honor Pledge which states, “We, the members of the University of Florida community, pledge to hold ourselves and our peers to the highest standards of honor and integrity by abiding by the Honor Code.” On all work submitted for credit by students at the University of Florida, the following pledge is either required or implied: “On my honor, I have neither given nor received unauthorized aid in doing this assignment.” The Conduct Code specifies a number of behaviors that are in violation of this code and the possible sanctions. If you have any questions or concerns, please consult with the instructor or TAs in this class.

In-Class Recording

Students are allowed to record video or audio of class lectures. However, the purposes for which these recordings may be used are strictly controlled. The only allowable purposes are (1) for personal educational use, (2) in connection with a complaint to the university, or (3) as evidence in, or in preparation for, a criminal or civil proceeding. All other purposes are prohibited. Specifically, students may not publish recorded lectures without the written consent of the instructor. A “class lecture” is an educational presentation intended to inform or teach enrolled students about a particular subject, including any instructor-led discussions that form part of the presentation, and delivered by any instructor hired or appointed by the University, or by a guest instructor, as part of a University of Florida course. A class lecture does not include lab sessions, student presentations, clinical presentations such as patient history, academic exercises involving solely student participation, assessments (quizzes, tests, exams), field trips, private conversations between students in the class or between a student and the faculty or lecturer during a class session. Publication without permission of the instructor is prohibited. To “publish” means to share, transmit, circulate, distribute, or provide access to a recording, regardless of format or medium, to another person (or persons), including but not limited to another student within the same class section. Additionally, a recording, or transcript of a recording, is considered published if it is posted on or uploaded to, in whole or in part, any media platform, including but not limited to social media, book, magazine, newspaper, leaflet, or third party note/tutoring services. A student who publishes a recording without written consent may be subject to a civil cause of action insti-

tuted by a person injured by the publication and/or discipline under UF Regulation 4.040 Student Honor Code and Student Conduct Code.

Health and Wellness

U Matter, We Care: If you or someone you know is in distress, please contact umatter@ufl.edu, 352-392-1575, or visit U Matter, We Care [website](#) to refer or report a concern and a team member will reach out to the student in distress.

Counseling and Wellness Center: Visit the Counseling and Wellness Center [website](#) or call 352-392-1575 for information on crisis services as well as non-crisis services.

Student Health Care Center: Call 352-392-1161 for 24/7 information to help you find the care you need, or visit the Student Health Care Center [website](#).

University Police Department: Visit UF Police Department [website](#) or call 352-392-1111 (or 9-1-1 for emergencies).

UF Health Shands Emergency Room/Trauma Center: For immediate medical care call 352-733-0111 or go to the emergency room at 1515 SW Archer Road, Gainesville, FL 32608.

GatorWell Health Promotion Services: For prevention services focused on optimal wellbeing, including Wellness Coaching for Academic Success, visit the GatorWell [website](#) or call 352-273-4450.

Academic Resources

E-learning technical support: Contact the UF Computing Help Desk at 352-392-4357 or via e-mail at helpdesk@ufl.edu.

Career Connections Center: Reitz Union Suite 1300, 352-392-1601. Career assistance and counseling services. ([website](#))

Library Support: Various ways to receive assistance with respect to using the libraries or finding resources. ([website](#))

Teaching Center: Broward Hall, 352-392-2010 or to make an appointment 352-392-6420. General study skills and tutoring. ([website](#))

Writing Studio: 2215 Turlington Hall, 352-846-1138. Help brainstorming, formatting, and writing papers. ([website](#))

Student Complaints On-Campus: Visit the Student Honor Code and Student Conduct Code [webpage](#) for more information.

On-Line Students Complaints: Distance Learning Student Complaint Process ([webpage](#))