

**Creative Writing 6166**  
**Spring 2015**  
**David Leavitt**

**Class meetings:** Wednesdays, Periods E1-E3, CBD 224

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A significant difference between literary fiction and the other arts—painting, acting, dance, music—is that its practitioners are often its critics; increasingly so, as the number of dedicated book critics diminishes. In print publications such as *The New York Times Book Review*, *The New York Review of Books*, and *Bookforum*, not to mention numerous online journals, fiction writers routinely review the work of their fellow fiction writers. Not only that, over the course of the last couple of centuries, many fiction writers have become as famous, if not more so, for their critical writing as for their novels and stories.

In this course we will investigate the writer as critic in several different ways. First, we will read examples of critical writing by fiction writers such as E. M. Forster, Virginia Woolf, John Updike, Cynthia Ozick, Francine Prose, Lorrie Moore, Joyce Carol Oates, and recent MFA@FLA graduate Aaron Thier. Second, we will consider a couple of recent novels that have proven to be flashpoints for disagreement among critics. In the case of Donna Tartt's *The Goldfinch*, we will compare reviews by Francine Prose, James Wood, Stephen King, and Michiko Kakutani; in the case of Karl Ove Knausgaard's *My Struggle*, reviews by Dwight Garner, Zadie Smith, James Wood, and William Deresiewicz. Finally, you will write reviews of your own. I will choose and order ARCs (advance reading copies) of six first novels or story collections due to be published in either May or April 2015. These in turn you will be assigned, at random, to review, with two of you reviewing each of the six.

Questions to be considered include the following:

What is the difference between a piece of literary criticism and a book review?

In writing a review or a piece of criticism, is your ultimate responsibility to the author, to the reader of the future, or to the reader of today—the consumer?

In light of the surfeit of “reader reviews” now available on the internet, has the professional reviewer’s voice been diluted? Is it more important? Less important?

Is the book review, as we have traditionally defined it, dead? (On this, we shall read Lee Siegel’s important essay “Burying the Hatchet.”)

**Boilerplate**

Requirements for class attendance and make-up exams, assignments, and other work in this course are consistent with university policies that can be found at:

<https://catalog.ufl.edu/ugrad/current/regulations/info/attendance.aspx>

Students with disabilities requesting accommodations should first register with the Disability Resource Center (352-392-8565, [www.dso.ufl.edu/drc/](http://www.dso.ufl.edu/drc/)) by providing appropriate documentation. Once registered, students will receive an accommodation letter which must be presented to the instructor when requesting accommodation. Students with disabilities should follow this procedure as early as possible in the semester.

Information on current UF grading policies for assigning grade points can be found at

<https://catalog.ufl.edu/ugrad/current/regulations/info/grades.aspx>.

Students are expected to provide feedback on the quality of instruction in this course by completing online evaluations at <https://evaluations.ufl.edu>. Evaluations are typically open during the last two or three weeks of the semester, but students will be given specific times when they are open. Summary results of these assessments are available to students at <https://evaluations.ufl.edu/results/>.

### **Schedule of Readings.**

These will be determined as the class takes shape and finds its direction. To start with:

1/7

Introductory

1/14

Lee Siegel, "Burying the Hatchet," *The New Yorker*, September 25, 2013.

Lee Siegel, "Should Literature Be Useful?" *The New Yorker*, November 6, 2013.

Rebecca Mead, "The Scourge of Relatability," *The New Yorker*, August 1, 2014.

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Michael Hofmann, "Torch Song in Vienna," *The New York Review of Books*, 24 October 2013.

Edmund Fawcett, "No Faith in Progress," *The New York Times Book Review*, 11 October 2013.

Dwight Garner, "A Translation and a Soapbox," *The New York Times (Daily)*, 1 October 2013.

Allan Hollinghurst, "The Victory of Penelope Fitzgerald," *The New York Review of Books*, 4 December 2014.

Stacy Schiff, "Penelope Fitzgerald: A Life by Hermione Lee," *The New York Times Book Review*, 21 November 2014.

1/28

2/4

2/11

2/18

2/25

3/3

**No class, spring break.**

3/10

3/17

3/24

3/31

4/8

4/15

4/22