



***The Goldfinch*, by Donna Tartt
Reviewed by Cindy Kennedy, April 2014**

The star of the Frick Museum's recent Dutch masters exhibit undoubtedly was Vermeer's "Girl with a Pearl Earring," the basis for the popular novel and movie. However, around the corner, another painting, "The Goldfinch," by Fabritius, also generated considerable interest. That painting is the touchstone of Donna Tartt's acclaimed new novel, *The Goldfinch*.

In Tartt's story, "The Goldfinch" painting is exhibited at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, instead of the Frick. Thirteen-year-old Theo Decker was visiting the museum with his mother, when a catastrophic explosion occurs. Searching in vain for her, Theo encounters an injured man who gives him a ring and a cryptic message before dying. In the chaos that follows, Theo takes "The Goldfinch" painting, which was a favorite of his mother, out of the blackened museum and wanders home.

Now motherless, Theo is taken in by a classmate's Park Avenue family. The ring and mysterious message lead him to a Greenwich Village antique restorer, Hobie. Then Theo's estranged father reclaims him and brings him to live in Las Vegas. There, he is befriended by Boris, an enigmatic Russian teenager who will play an important part in Theo's life. All the while, Theo keeps the painting with him, unable to part with this last memory of his mother.

When Theo eventually gets back in New York, he reconnects with Hobie and the Barbour family, the family that had provided for him after the explosion. The story, with its twists and turns, has a Dickensian feel to it. Indeed, like *Great Expectations*, there is a mysterious benefactor and an unrequited love. And Theo, like Pip, has to navigate an uncertain and often dangerous world.

At a hefty 750+ pages, *The Goldfinch* is not a quick read, by any means. However, the story is so carefully plotted and intriguing that readers will keep turning the page, wanting to know what just happens to Theo—and to the purloined painting.