

BOOK REVIEW

Join ranks of New England elite in 'The Secret History'

LEXIE BROEMMER
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Long before Donna Tartt won the Pulitzer Prize for fiction for her novel "The Goldfinch" and subsequently became one of the most renowned authors of recent times, she wrote "The Secret History."

"The Secret History," Tartt's first novel was published in 1992. Though the novel has been a cult favorite among college-aged readers for years -- basically since its publication -- it has the same effect on everyone. Readers, regardless of age or way of life, will want to move to New England, enroll in a small, elite college and study the classics.

In the prologue, readers immediately discover the climatic event, a murder that has taken place within the small, central group of characters. However, this does not take away at all from the story. Even though the actual murder occurs approximately two-thirds of the way into the story, readers are never bored with the events leading up to it, as Tartt creates palpable tension between the characters who

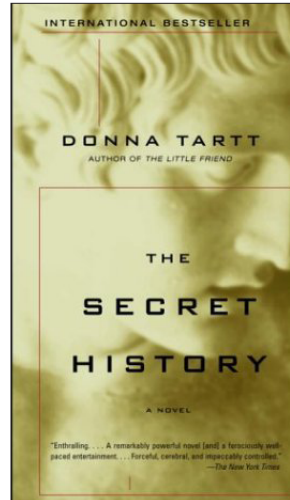
seem to be having a battle of the wills, or with the events after it, since readers finally get to see the effects the climax has on all the characters.

"The Secret History" revolves around six students who study the classics, particularly ancient Greek history, language, philosophy and religion, at the fictional Hampden College, which is in a small town in Vermont. It is narrated by Richard Papen, who tells the story in retrospect. At the outset of the novel, he is an outsider to the classics program. When he finally convinces the enigmatic classics professor Julian Morrow to let him study the classics with the other students, Richard quickly finds himself an integral part of the group.

There is good reason that "The Secret History" is a cult classic.

First, the classics students, like their professor, are mysterious and

unnerving. Henry Winter, an intellectual genius, is the leader of the group and one of the foremost characters in



the novel. Twins Charles and Camilla Macaulay are both charming and though Camilla appears to be delicate, she can hold her own. Francis Abernathy is very attractive in a severe sort of way and is the easiest character to sympathize with besides Richard. Edmund "Bunny" Corcoran, the final original member of the group, is a bigot and one of the most loathsome characters readers may ever encounter. No matter how secretive or frustrating the characters are,

they are magnetic and make readers want to join their elite, little group, thus making it easy to see why Richard so desperately wanted to join their ranks.

Second, Aristotle, "The Iliad," "The Bacchae," religious ecstasy, the condition of human nature and the idea that beauty is terror are all explored in

varying degrees.

Third, hints of the supernatural and evil are found throughout the novel.

Fourth, the New England town, the college and the country home that are the background for the story are sleepy and idyllic, at once seeming to be too serene and just right for such a story.

Richard's narrative voice is somewhat reminiscent of Holden Caulfield's in "The Catcher in the Rye," though the stories are only similar in the way that both Richard and Holden are lost, young people.

Because "The Secret History" is dense and highly intellectual, it requires readers to actively read. It's all consuming and demands readers' attention in order to understand and properly appreciate it.

Tartt has, with "The Secret History," created one of the most aesthetically pleasing novels readers will ever have the chance to read. Most pleasing of all is the thrill readers will feel at learning the secrets of the classics majors and, henceforth, becoming one of the few members of their group.

MUSIC REVIEW

Bastille hits all the right notes with new album

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Indie pop band Bastille, best known for its mega-hit "Pompeii," has finally released its highly anticipated sophomore album, "Wild World."

The album was released earlier this month, almost three years to the day since the band's U.S. release of its debut album, "Bad Blood." Though Bastille released music and toured extensively in the three years after the release of its debut, fans were eager to hear more new music from the band.

Many music critics talk about the dreadful sophomore slump that every band must try to avoid; fans of Bastille will be happy to know that "Wild World" is far from a sophomore slump. With the album, Bastille continues to explore sonically but not so much that fans will find the band unrecognizable. Rather than creating a whole new per-

sona with "Wild World," as some bands do, Bastille furthers its sound so that its essence- its Bastille-ness- is never lost.

The entire album is a smattering of glittery synth-pop, which lends itself well to both upbeat, triumphant songs and those that are heavier and slower.

"Good Grief," the lead single off "Wild World," is the perfect example of a summer anthem, which is fitting since it was played endlessly on the radio during the latter part of the summer. It is, so far, the most well-known song off the album, but it is far from the best.

"Way Beyond" is one of the most

fun and catchiest songs on the album, even though it is an outcry against media- social and news- and its effect on the human condition.

Almost the entire album is a commentary on the human condition or rather, it seems, the decline of humanity, as lead singer Dan Smith feels passionately about it. While he tackles the media in "Way Beyond," he addresses gangs in "Blame," which is about the relationship

between two gang members. It is an intense song with violent imagery and a violent, forceful sound.

"Winter of Our Youth" is a melancholy song, lyrically and sonically.

It induces in the listener a nostalgic feeling, a longing for a past to which the listener cannot return.

In "Four Walls (The Ballad of Perry Smith)," which was inspired by a criminal, who was convicted and executed for his crimes, Smith speaks out against capital punishment.

In "Campus," a fitting song for college students, Smith voices a problem that all college students have gone through, trying to distinguish themselves from every other student and convincing themselves that they are worth the world's time and attention. While the song is not exactly uplifting, it is much more positive than several of the songs on the album.

Overall, Bastille has crafted another thought-provoking, fascinating masterpiece. Fans will not be disappointed by it, and they may even understand why it took the band so long to finish it.

