

FLORIDA INTERNATIONAL, UNIVERSITY

Miami, Florida

PROPOSAL FOR CREATIVE THESIS

DR. HARPER'S DIG

by  
George V. Tucker

MASTER OF FINE ARTS IN CREATIVE WRITING  
COLLEGE OF ARTS AND SCIENCES  
DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

2003

DR. HARPER'S DIG is a comic novel set against the contemporary debates about fact and faith in science, history, and religion. In rural Arkansas, Dr. David Harper, a young archeologist, discovers a strange human skeleton which might be real (and if so would overturn existing theories in this field) or might be fraudulent. As his find becomes public it incites the interest and opposition of an array of characters, including the venal property owner, local fundamentalists, an alien visitation proponent, a Satanist, and other members of the community, as well as David's academic rivals. As a media circus develops, with his reputation and job at stake, David is compelled to join forces with a colleague, Dr. Paula Swiftfoot, to solve the academic mystery and to resolve the personal and professional conflicts which have sent them at odds.

This novel borrows from detective fiction a reliance on material clues to reveal elements of plot and past. Multiple third-person points of view are employed to add to the panoramic effect, showing the various forms of orthodoxy, irrationality, science and doubt which clash over the skeleton's authenticity and significance. The overall structure of the novel is comedic, with the rise of the protagonist and two new couples formed at the end, in the tradition of academic comedies like Kingsley Amis's *Lucky Jim* and A.S. Byatt's *Possession*. Thematically, David learns blind adherence to orthodoxy is as bad as complete irrationality. He must learn to discern not just facts but the true motives and nature of others in order to forge a new role in the scientific world and in his relationships.