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**PRESS RELEASE**

Contact: Victor Gulotta, 617-630-9286, [victor@booktours.com](mailto:victor@booktours.com)

## Putting the Psycho in Psychotherapy: *Shrunk*, a Satirical Novel about Mental Health

Dr. Albert Prendergast, one of the eminent psychiatrists in Christopher Hogart's new novel, *Shrunk* (Bickerstaff Press, paper, \$12.99), is everything you'd look for in a therapist. He's a titled clinician at a leading hospital. He has a thriving private practice and the respect of his patients and colleagues. He's also crazy as a loon, the sole occupant of a paranoid rabbit hole that Hogart pulls us into in his satiric—and scary—examination of the mental health of some of our mental health professionals.

Meet Henry and Helena Avalon. He's a psychiatrist. She's expecting. They've just moved to Adams Street in Cambridge, Massachusetts, right next door to Prendergast who methodically sets out to destroy Avalon, professionally and personally. Say what you will about Prendergast; he may be a self-righteous malcontent, but as a psychiatrist, he knows a thing or two about getting inside people's heads.

"There are things so perverse that only a professional, well-educated person . . . could think them up," explains Avalon to his wife as they struggle to defend themselves against Prendergast's diabolical pathology. Prendergast's casserole of envy and spite is delicately prepared in this

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delicious horror story-cum-satire. At times laugh-out-loud funny, Hogart skillfully manages to find the perfect balance between humor and suspense as he teases out his theme of how tricky getting to the truth can be—even for therapists trained in doing so. The visceral sense of injustice the author creates, not to mention the reader's desire for revenge, are palpable on these pages—as one might expect from a practicing psychotherapist skilled in eliciting feelings. There are times when only humor, which is not part of psychiatric training and practice, can tell the truth.

### **Therapist heal thyself**

In the world of *Shrunk*, the psychiatrists can be as petty, vain, backstabbing and blind to their shortcomings as the rest of us. The tools of their trade allow for some very sophisticated rationalizations. Should we use greater due diligence in choosing those to whom we give the keys to our head? They may not, Hogart winkingly reminds us, always be in a condition to drive.

Have we granted too much authority to psychiatry? Hogart asks. Do psychiatrists sometimes get it wrong? Do human factors sometimes override true science in the popularizing of trendy diagnoses? Contemporary psychiatry and its diagnoses have by and large been spared the sort of critical scrutiny endured by other professions. Articles raising this concern have only recently appeared in the *New York Times* and in the *New Yorker*. Hogart, a twenty-year faculty member at Harvard Medical School, is hardly indicting the entire profession, a necessary profession of which he is an

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esteemed member. But in the satirical tradition of Jonathan Swift, he holds up a much-needed mirror to his colleagues as he welcomes you next door to the psychiatrist from hell.

For more information, visit, [www.shrunkthenovel.com](http://www.shrunkthenovel.com).

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## About the Author

Christopher Hogart is the penname of a practicing psychotherapist who was on the faculty of Harvard Medical School for twenty years. Encouraged to write by Herbert Read and Lionel Trilling, now, years later, not wanting to be hasty, Hogart has published *Shrunk*. He lives with his wife and children in the Boston area.

## Suggested Questions for interviewers

1. What are some signs that your therapist may be disturbed or dangerous?
2. What accounts for the “trendiness” and appeal of certain diagnoses?
3. How robust is the psychoanalytic model these days in the battle between paradigms?
4. *Shrunk* elicits a palpable thirst for revenge. What’s the view on revenge from a psychiatric perspective?
5. How should an emotionally healthy person deal with injustice?
6. You paint a sometimes amusing picture of ego, vanity, territoriality, hunger for status, all wrapped in impenetrable self-virtue. Is it really like that?
7. There are a number of court-like setting in the novel—hearings and trials of various kinds. What are you getting at?