

[Novel about Israel gets rave reviews](#)

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In his office in Norman Mayer Hall, creative writing professor Zachary Lazar advocates for the importance of language. “Language is still the best tool to convey what consciousness is like,” he said. (Photo by Paula Burch-Celentano)

A novelist gets to create characters and imagine their inner lives. And then the writer puts the book out into the world to see if readers ? and critics ? will understand how he or she has put things together.

That's why [Zachary Lazar](#), associate professor of English at Tulane University and author of *I Pity the Poor Immigrant* (Little, Brown, 2014), is so pleased with the reviews his book has received in [The New Yorker](#), [The New York Times](#), [Los Angeles](#)

[Times](#) and other publications.

"*The New Yorker* review was the review that I've always dreamed of getting," said Lazar, who spent four years writing the novel about Israel, real-life Jewish gangster Meyer Lanksy, Lanksy's fictional mistress and a female narrator who is a journalist.

Sounds complicated. And it is, sort of. But it works. As James Wood, *The New Yorker* reviewer writes, "More than most novelists, Lazar cherishes, even hoards, enigma, so that theme emerges as a kind of rhythmic implication; perhaps his novel can be thought of as working through a progression of musical movements."

Lazar appreciates what readers have taken from his work. "I think the interest in my work is not usually the subject so much as what I do with the subject," he said.

A novel can reveal "everything important about the human experience," he said. "I think the mystery of why people do what they do is one of the main reasons we need stories."

The Tulane community and the general public are invited to hear Lazar and other Tulane creative writing faculty members ? Tom Beller, Peter Cooley and Jesmyn Ward ? read from their work on [Monday, Nov. 3](#), from 7â? 9 p.m. in the Freeman Auditorium of Woldenberg Art Center.

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