



**THE ROLE OF THE ARTISTIC DETAIL
IN DONNA TARTT'S NOVEL
«THE GOLDFINCH»**

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ABSTRACT

The Goldfinch is a story of a boy and later an adult Theodore Decker who accidentally obtains a masterpiece. The painting, thus, becomes one of the main characters of the novel and The Goldfinch in this light is seen as a novel about an artist: as not only the one who creates the masterpiece but also the one who accepts it as real artist. The basis of such a novel is the exacerbation of the conflict between art and society in which the lack of spirituality and immorality reigns. The business world is opposed to the world of beauty and art. The central figure of the novel, as a rule, is an artist in the broadest sense of the word, trying to defend his creative independence, seeking his place in the society.

The article is devoted to the analysis of second chapter of the novel. In this chapter the main character (10-year old boy) is waiting for his mother (he had been dead at that time) at home. The writer, as a surgeon, separates one second of expectation from the other, detail from detail. The reader is presented not just a frightened child but deep sorrow of the loss of the whole world. D.Tartt skillfully accustoms herself

to the inner state of the main character, with him she travels through the memories, tracks associative relationships he makes. The writer brilliantly follows all defence mechanisms of a human faced with the inevitability. The author uses gradation way of describing, visual and auditory details and retards time of the narration.

The writing of D. Tarrt is characterized by the unique skill in the detail describing. In case of such usage of the temporal and space detail the most suitable way of analysis is “in succession to the author”.

Key words: psychologism, narrator, visual detail, auditory detail, critical state, art, art space.

АНОТАЦІЯ

Роль художньої деталі в романі Донни Тартт «Щиголь»

«Щиголь» – це історія життя хлопчика, а потім дорослого чоловіка Теодора Деккера, що випадково отримує на зберігання шедевр живопису. Безцінний шедевр у такому контексті стає провідником, навіть поводитирем у житті для осиротілого Тео, тримає його на плаву, не дає його серцю закритися для прекрасного. Картина таким чином стає героєм твору, а сам роман «Щиголь» у цьому світлі може розглядатися у якості твору про митця, оскільки не лише той, що створює шедевр, а й той, хто його належно сприймає, є справжнім митцем. В основі такого твору зазвичай лежить загострення конфлікту між мистецтвом та суспільством, в якому панує занепад моральності та духовності. Діловий світ зазвичай протиставляється світу краси й мистецтва. Центральною постаттю твору переважно виступає митець у широкому сенсі, що, прагнучи захистити власну творчу незалежність, шукає своє місце у світі.

Дана розвідка присвячена одному розділу із великого роману Д.Тартт, в якому головний герой, тоді ще 10-річний хлопчик, чекає вдома на матір, яка (йому це невідомо) загинула під час вибуху у музеї. Письменниця, мов хірург, відділяє одну секунду очікування від іншої, деталей від деталі. Перед читачем постає не просто перелякана дитина, але глибокий жаль від втрати цілого світу – світу дитинства. Письменниця майстерно вживається у відчуття свого героя, разом із ним мандрує у часі спогадів, відстежує асоціативні зв'язки, які він вибудовує, просто геніально відчуває та змальовує захисні механізми психіки людини, що стикається із невідворотністю. Через таке дбайливе поводження

авторки із художнім часом і простором найдоцільнішим способом дослідження видається аналіз «услід за автором».

Ключові слова: психологізм, розповідач, художній час, художній простір, зорові деталі, слухові деталі, критичний стан, аналіз.

INTRODUCTION

Donna Tartt's novel *The Goldfinch* became a prominent literary event of 2013 when it was awarded the Pulitzer Prize. Donna Tartt wrote only three novels: *The Secret History* (1992), *The Little Friend* (2002) and *The Goldfinch* (2013), which brought her world fame. Therefore, this study is relevant and topical. Belgian weekly magazine *HUMO* called it the book of the year and the news website *NU.nl* praised Tartt as a "writing magician who is generous with detours, reflections and characters" (*NU*, 2013). Praise also comes from Elsevier notes "Donna Tartt's third novel is worth all the commotion. The master storyteller is back! Het puttertje is superior literary entertainment" (Elsevier, 2013).

The novel has been an international bestseller, spending over thirty weeks on the *New York Times* bestseller list in the U.S. and on the *Sunday Times* hardcover fiction bestseller list in the UK. It has had the same success in translation, debuting at number one in France in January 2014.

The novel is extremely deep and multifaceted and provides opportunities for analytic study. This research is devoted to the analysis of the second chapter of the novel in which the writer reveals herself as a good psychologist. That is why the theories of J. Mill (Mill, 1843; 1865) are to be taken into account while analysing.

METHODOLOGY

The research methodology is based on a combination of principles and methods of scientific work.

The writer, as a surgeon, separates one second of expectation from another, detail from detail. Because of such careful author's treatment to the art time and space the most appropriate way to study seems to be the analysis "following the author". This way of analysis is based upon the plot of the story, main events; it gives an opportunity to understand the reasons of actions. At the same time this

way of analysis gives an opportunity to see just the frame of a story or novel, but D. Tartt's novel is too deep for such a superficial look. That is why the analysis of visual and audio detail was chosen. The artistic world looks voluminous and alive. At the same time each detail is the reflection of the main character's inner world. Taking into account all the above, the main method used in the study appears as the combination of the analysis "following the author", the analysis of visual and audio detail and psychological insight. These ways of analysis are used to understand the main character's psychological condition and the way it changes.

RESULTS

The publishing of the Russian translation was followed by a detailed review of the translator V. Babytskaya (Babytskaya, 2014). Her analytical review places D. Tartt's novel among classical novels, such as of C. Dickens', F. Dostoyevskiy's, T. Mann's, J. Rowling's and others. The researcher traces the main problems of the novel and skilfully compares the characters of *The Goldfinch* with those of the world's most significant pieces of fiction.

The Goldfinch is a story of a boy and later an adult Theodore Decker who accidentally obtains a masterpiece. The framing of the work is a story about staying the protagonist in Amsterdam. Theo appears to the reader as an adult man, who at Christmas time came to Holland. The purpose of his stay is an intrigue, which the hero, who at the same time is a narrator, is gradually opening. The node of the novel is Theo's coming to the exhibition in a New York museum. The 13-year-old teenager leaves his mother to enjoy the works of old masters. His attention is mostly paid to two pictures: "The Anatomy Lesson" and "The Goldfinch". The boy is sirenized with a book-size canvas by Carel Fabritius, who was one of Rembrandt's pupils. Then accident explosion destroyed the museum and caused a lot of deaths. Fortunately Theo remained unwounded. Without knowing what has happened to his mother and according to some subconscious impetus the main character grabs the masterpiece and takes it home.

Then the priceless masterpiece, wrapped in a pillowcase and then into duct tape, became a guide for orphaned Theo, kept him it afloat and does not allow to close his heart towards beauty. The boy is not a thief: he takes the picture to save it from destruction, almost automatically goes home to wait for his mother. Theo does not

know whether she is dead or not and, hoping for better, waits in an empty apartment. Thus the following research is devoted to the analysis of novel's second chapter entitled "Anatomy Lesson". Rembrandt's picture which Theodore saw at the exhibition had the same name. Unlike "The Goldfinch" which depicted a small bird – alive and warm, enchained to the twig – "Anatomy Lesson" was a grim and terrible painting.

The painting, thus, becomes one of the main characters of the novel and The Goldfinch in this light is seen as a novel about an artist: as not only the one who creates the masterpiece but also the one who accepts it as real artist. The basis of such a novel is the exacerbation of the conflict between art and society in which the lack of spirituality and immorality reign. The business world is opposed to the world of beauty and art. The central figure of the novel, as a rule, is an artist in the broadest sense of the word, trying to defend his creative independence, seeking his place in the society. In revenge, the society "supplies the artist with complete disregard and lack of recognition, dooms him to all sorts of tests, often – to the brutal poverty and death in oblivion" (Bilyk, 1987). That is why such a hero is often in a state of crisis – ideological, moral, creative. The way out of this crisis can only be found in truly humanistic values of life and art, in a truly moral position. Along with the main motive (the artist and the society) there are a number of adjacent ones peculiar to this genre-thematic variety.

In the second chapter of the first part D. Tarrt reveals herself as a skilful psychologist. She skilfully accustoms herself to the inner state of the main character, with him she travels through the memories, tracks associative relationships he makes. The writer brilliantly follows all defence mechanisms of a man who is faced with the inevitability. The previous chapter concludes with an optimistic confidence of the protagonist that his mother may be alive as she has not been found among the dead. So Theo is returning home to wait for her there. This reaction at first glance seems illogical because the boy ought to look for her some more, to ask the people. However, in the state of emergency the psyche uses a protective mechanism – it tries to follow the established procedures. His automatical deeds save him from panic; the boy feels that in the case of keeping to usual routine the result will be familiar. Moreover, Theo's desire to wait for mother at home can be perceived as a kind of salvation in the memory of generations, the archetypes. In his apartment the boy is surrounded by objects that hold sensual, memorable imprint of his mother, as if she continues her existence in everything in the flat. The writer skilfully transmits herself

through the emotions of the main character in three ways: as an adult who is – again and again – going through the critical day of his life, a 13-year-old teenager who has just survived the shock, looked into the face of death, and a child who can not wait until his mother’s coming home. D. Tartt addresses (Tartt, 2013) to a number of psychological techniques in which people unconsciously manage to escape, to avoid panic in a difficult situation. The author embodies into two main hypostases of the main character – of a teenage boy and adult – simultaneously, in great detail the writer describes the rules of the game Theo Dekker played with himself.

The author leads the main character through the maze of his memory: as a little boy the protagonist of the novel was often feared, not even trying to think why, that the mother might not return from work. Evidently the situation can be interpreted as an archetype fear of being left without maternal care. As a teenager Theo reminds the games he played with his brain. The boy did arithmetic calculations taking away and adding, calculating minutes the mother needed to stay at work, then to get to the subway etc. A round clock turns into a symbol of expectation, accompanied by the fear.

The writer accentuates visual detail with auditory ones that result into vivid and living in the susception of a stressful psychological situation. Thus when the mother was much late the boy (as he mentioned), “like all abandoned puppy” (Tartt, 2013) was sitting at the front door listening whether the elevator was rising.

With the help of image and detail gradation the writer grows the tension of boy’s expectations: children’s fears that the mother cannot return because of something (a child does not need to establish the causation) in Theo’s memories turn into rather clearly represented. In primary school he (the author insists) feared for his mother almost every day. D. Tartt depicts a real child of a media century who, being over-informed without proper understanding of events, becomes an adult (but not psychologically) too quickly. Being under influence of what he has heard and seen and according to general media impact, the main character creates almost all possible tragic events that can happen with his mother.

The writer tries to explain Theo’s disquietude about mother’s fate via the words of the main character: “It was desperately horrible to think that something could happen to my mother and me, particularly because my father was so unreliable. Unreliable – it was even understatement” (Tartt, 2013). That is why all tragic scenes in boy’s imagination were also caused by fear of the future taking into account that

all his world was focused on the figure of the mother. However, recourse to Freudian theory (so fashionable nowadays) is not appropriate here as the Oedipus complex is out of the question: Theo has no emotion to his father, accepts him as a stranger, and occasionally – as in the implementation of children’s fears. He used to see his parent drunk, making scandals and scaring his wife and son.

The author describes the life of the family, in a few paragraphs skilfully depicting the pain of the child and the mother who had to suffer because of the alcoholic addict. Then there follows Theodor’s confession to himself of how his father left the family. The author notes that it was a great relief for the mother and son. The changes in the family hierarchy can be traced via detail: “The photo with a tanned young father on the slopes for skiing has quietly disappeared from the wall, while there was a photograph of my mother and me on the rink in Central Park” (Tartt, 2013).

Even before Theo learned the tragic news there suddenly comes the understanding of loneliness, futility and fragility of their (his mother and his own) microcosm. The author gives the main character her skill to transform, to accustom to the feelings and thoughts of the others. With the help of improper direct speech the author transfuses the boy’s ideas what father – wherever he was – would say and do when he learned of the tragedy. Theo’s imagination creates a series of images presented by the writer as rhetorical questions. The anticipation of tragedy fills thoughts of the main character and the details of his world perception. The writer retards the artistic time of the novel. It is stretched for the main character when he goes home, to the place that can protect him, which was the continuation of maternal hypostasis. Theo is sure mother has already come home but cannot abandon fear. Everything seems to scream to him about inevitability. Therefore, the street is seen not just gray and cold but “wrapped in shroud” (Tartt, 2013). The retarded artistic time for the main character is skilfully interwoven with highly localized art space. The writer intertwines the details of the real world with powerful metaphors: “Headache and rain pulled the whole world into a narrow circle of pain” (Tartt, 2013).

Reminding the long way home the grown-up Theo Dekker compares himself with a broken toy which was following a specified route. This metaphor accumulated frustration and confusion as the childhood, suddenly, just in a moment was over for the orphaned boy. Artistic time is stretched by the author due to adding visual and auditory details. She skilfully and meticulously describes everything that happens to Theo on the way home. The description of the rain dropping off the boy’s eyelashes

turns to be rather successful solution of the anticipation. Such a detail does not even require a metaphorical comparison with tears.

The emotional connection between the mother and the son is accentuated by the scenes in Theo's imagination (the mother who does not know what to do because of his absence) by improper direct speech (the mother reproaches herself for taking his cell phone) and some interesting mental image of the main character as a child and an adult man who tried to establish a kind of telepathic communication with the mother.

The writer skilfully conveys the depth of character and his experience, his various feelings, describing how the boy was trying to persuade himself that his mother had survived. Theodore "switched on" some other emotions, recollecting a red-haired girl from the exhibition. Pippa, whose face remained with the main character and was carried through his life, actually saved him, having kept him for a few minutes at the exhibition. Theo did not abandon hope that a wounded old man, whom he had seen in the museum with Pippa, survived. The writer depicts panic condition in which a person is trying to convince oneself that everything is in order.

The chosen way of analysis «in succession to the author» is the best way to follow all the details of writer's skill. She leads the main character (and the readers together with him) along the streets, dives into memories, shows his strained senses, makes him feel the smallest raindrops on the face, dizziness as a result of the accident. She makes Theo, with his very skin, feel and hear the sounds around: the cries of policemen and skirr of the elevator in the house. The image of the house, as it has been mentioned, has got a powerful archetype meaning. It is seen as a combination of artistic details – the author creates not only alive, relief image of the apartment, and even the corridor where appropriate smells and bleak colors surround the boy.

The emotional tension portrayed increases when the art world is localized in the flat of the character. Apparently, the most important semantic accent (combined with bitter irony) falls on the boy's appeal to his mother, especially because it becomes rhetorical: the boy calls his mother, but doesn't hear the answer. The mentioned appeal transforms into a question, then – into a tragic refrain accentuated by author remarks. After seeing the apartment, Theo calls his mother again: "Mom? – I called with visible panic crack in my voice" (Tartt, 2013). The author uses the method of internal call – not a monologue, but a conversation (inner) between the main character and his mother, represented by the messages left by the son. D. Tartt appeals to interesting

bitterly ironic comparison of the obsessive thoughts of a mother with a purple cow from a kid's rhyme.

The author uses gradation to describe while stringing visual and auditory details, retards artistic time when Theo comes into the room and freezes there. The author uses the method of a magnifying glass: she carefully examines all things, giving a special semantic loading to visual details with the particle «no»: those which were expected to be there (as they were an integral part of normal everyday life) but weren't, disappeared together with boy's tranquillity. So the detail transform routine image of the artistic space into a tragic one: "There were no keys of hers on the hook by the door, there was no bag on the table" (Tartt, 2013). A teenager, being panic-stricken, grabs the slightest traces of memory, for example, turns attention to mother's cup with print of her lipstick and the remnants of cold coffee. Such visual, as they may be called, non-details are accentuated by audio ones: there were no messages on the phone.

Emotional stress of the child is accentuated by physical pain he feels: as after the explosion Theo suffers from headaches.

The author uses gradation while describing the changing of the main character's emotional state, noting that he got home as if using internal reserves of hope. But when his expectations were not fulfilled he was caught by weakness: he could hardly move, it took him much pains to concentrate. Then fear and panic come. It was veiled by the mind that the gas had been left turned the kitchen.

The author points out the boy's boundary condition. Despite pain and weakness, all his senses and feelings were sharpened, he was tracing all the slightest sounds, the mind was trying to find some logical explanation of the situation and the ways solution.

The writing of D. Tartt is characterized by the unique skill in the detail describing: she makes the reader not only empathize Theo but feel what he feels. So the details become relief. The inner discomfort (if fear and panic can be summarized into such concept) of the main character is emphasized by physical discomfort: "I fell asleep as I was – in dirty and wet clothes, bed was also wet, where I lay there remained a wet hollow" (Tartt, 2013).

The increase panic results into the following effect: Theo is puttering around the apartment, turning on all the lights. The writer notices subtle features of a child psychology (because he was still a child): the fear of the unknown is transformed into

the fear of the dark with all the hidden horrors and challenges.

The message on the answering machine brings Theo bitter disappointment: the boy expected to hear a human voice to break the circle of his lonely silence. And then comes the painful disappointment because the voice does not belong to his mother.

The writer compares two artistic worlds within the artistic world of the novel: the microcosm of Theo's apartment with retarded artistic time and macrocosm (the world in general) with normal temporal characteristics. There are some remnants of hope for the boy to live within the microcosm of home (the place of defence) while the macro exists according to its own inexorable laws. The message not from his mother breaks a thin protective shell. At the same time, the main character, who already feels what has happened, destroys this protection completely. This destruction and the fusion of two worlds is traced due to the assistance of details: the boy opens the curtains, looks out and faces the world that continues to live, the world full of sounds and movement. Then the world breaks into the unreliable shelter of a lonely child brining vanity, sounds, smells of life, people, families, animals, events. The boy is surrounded by all these as before – by silence. Stringing visual and auditory images and details of syntax is represented in the form of period – a syntax construction, which is logically and intonationally divided into two unequal parts: the first is a list of grammatical phenomena, in which the tone gradually increases, the other – coming after a pause – is accompanied by a decrease in tone and is in some relations with the first (temporal, causal, opposite, etc.). The first part may be represented as a number of similar subordinate clauses, a number of similar members, and the parts are generally constructed using syntactical parallelism (Mel'nyk, 2005). The second part of the given period is a rhetorical question and refrain: "Where is she?" (Tartt, 2013).

The writer appeals to intertemporal overlapping memories in the form of opposition, as well as a small Theo invented tragedies that could happen to the mother, so Theo as a teenager was looking for reasons that could delay it. There is an internal dialogue between almost illusory hope and logic. D. Tartt skilfully depicts the boy who was overwhelmed with panic and almost hysterics using mentioned details: the noise of the evening bustle contrasts with the silence of the empty apartment, Theo was seeking for help at home, looking for hope to solving the situation, looking for a note, which mom could leave but did not find it. Theo was waiting for the mother, already knowing that it was useless. The boy obviously goes beyond the borders of

the microcosm in search of moral support, so he calls a concierge. Then he dare for more: he switches on the TV and understands the reality of recent events. He even notes the number of a telephone hotline and makes an agreement with himself to call if the mother does not appear in half an hour. The fact that he has made at least this step reassures Theo: he believes that due to his actions mom may return faster. The boy hopes that number will remain unused. But the mother did not come and after five minutes Theo dared to dial a number. The description of the call is characterized by the separation of artistic world of the novel: empty advertising heard from the TV – that's a world-background and a teenager with a handset becomes the embodiment of nervous expectation. Occasionally during a conversation with the social worker this background breaks into Theo's world by separate remarks, as if the big world tries to conduct a dialogue with the main character, strengthens the fluidity of life outside. However, the life stopped in the apartment. The news that the mother was not in the list of victims, initially encouraged Theo, but the tension did not leave the boy.

The writer again uses intertemporal parallelism: the boy makes some calculations. Having heard that twenty-one people were killed, Theo tries to estimate the measure of the tragedy. The boy tries to imagine that enormous quantity: "Twenty-one people – a half empty cinema, or, for example, a bus; in my English class there were three people more". Such calculations turn into panic that the boy can barely hold. The writer shows how a teenager who's wanted to be independent, becomes a frightened little child, ready to scream "Mom!" (Tartt, 2013).

He finds the rescue from panic within the planned actions, within the agreement between him and his mother: just after the accident he does not search for her but goes home to wait there, because it was customary in the family, it was their agreement. Main character's absorption in own thoughts and the remains of hope is emphasized by the retarded artistic time: the boy saves himself in the memories and everyday actions.

The picture of frozen artistic time and space is ruined by absurd dynamic element – which is the call to the hotline and talk with a social worker. Theo is trying to make his own corrections of this unreal reality, so while talking he was looking in search of unique psychological rescue boats – mother's things. He tries to move away from heavy anticipation and senseless talk with an indifferent person. The original rescue the boy finds is in the physical sensation when he realizes he is hungry. But he

doesn't stop thinking about mom so leaves meal for her, cleans the kitchen, because it will be pleasant for her, fixes the drawer. In the drawer he finds only some useless rubbish. He's wasted time trying to open so his waiting for mom was also fruitless.

Monotonous work promotes reflection and memories, so the boy, absorbed in them, builds a wall around himself, his own little world. The writer skilfully interweaves the outlook of a teenager and an adult who analyzes the past. But it is done so ably that it is almost impossible to differentiate, to distinguish these hypostases. A telephone call again breaks a protective shell, again there is a meaningless dialogue without answers, as a social worker does not want to inform terrible news to the child. The moment when the boy finally realises the tragedy is stretched by the writer again as she is looking, through the eyes of her character, about the room, which has become the locus of the former life, the life already gone. The tension of the situation is transfused through the personification of interior details: "All the furniture seemed stretched, began to tiptoe, waiting in suspense" (Tartt, 2013).

Art time is stretched, just as when Theo has just crossed the threshold of the house, he dives into sounds, immersed in himself, actually listening to the sounds of heartbeat of the house and the city. Again the writer resorts the contrast between two worlds: the main character notes fluidity, life of the world, day and night, everyday chores, people around, who seem almost aliens. At the time Theo himself seems to be frozen with a single question: "What will I do?" (Tartt, 2013).

With the help of artistic detail the author conveys the way the main character is prescinded beyond the objective perception of the world: "The flat was blurred, there was a circle of light around the lamp which was trembling like a halo" (Tartt, 2013).

The next element the author uses is a gradation, but descending: the boy, his heart fading, runs to open the door, shouting "Mom!". Having opened he faces inevitability. The writer approaches to bright metaphor to emphasize the descending gradation: "My heart flew down counting the floors" (Tartt, 2013).

Using detailed description of social workers who appeared on the doorstep to destroy what remained from boy's hope and expectation helps the author to retain associative narration: "Seeing them, I realized that my life as it was before that very minute was over" (Tartt, 2013).

DISCUSSION

Attention in the study is paid to the interconnection of visual and audible detail and the changes of the main character's inner world. Theo's focusing on the things that surround him emphasizes his artistic perception as only such a person could understand and "feel" the "life" of the picture, of art itself. The genre of the novel can be defined as the one devoted to art and its role in the life of a human, the one devoted to artist, the novel of the way to oneself, the novel of a self-creation.

CONCLUSION

D. Tartt reveals herself as a skillful psychologist, skillfully accustoms herself to the inner state of the main character, with him she travels through the memories, tracks associative relationships he makes. The writer brilliantly follows all defense mechanisms of a human faced with the inevitability. The author uses gradation way of describing, visual and auditory details and retards time of the narration.

The writing of D. Tartt is characterized by the unique skill in the detail describing. The role of artistic detail in the process of inner state depicting is investigated. The author touches upon the problem of the depicting of critical situation in the novel. The attention is paid to the writer's skills in showing main character's feelings, memories, thoughts, associative relations and human nocifensor in critical situations.

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