

THANATOPOETICS IN D. TARTT'S NOVEL "THE GOLDFINCH"

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ABSTRACT

The article is devoted to the analysis of the novel "The Goldfinch" from the point of view of thanatopoetics, that is, the study of the world of the dead and the themes of death and afterlife. The research material is the novel "The Goldfinch" by the author Donna Tartt. Thanatology was formed as an independent phenomenon in the 20th century, and in the 21st it gained great popularity and was transformed, and therefore the analysis of modern works of this genre seems relevant. The characters' perceptions of their lives and other people's deaths are analyzed. This aspect of the work is of great interest, since it is heterogeneous and has different characteristics inherent in the world of the living and the world of the dead.

KEYWORDS: Thanatopoetics, thanatology, D. Tartt, "The Goldfinch", death.

Introduction

The unbridled presence of the motive of death in the oral and written works of mankind is explained by the eternal desire of man to unravel the mystery of his finitude. Since the immemorial time, turning to mythology, religion, philosophy and science, great minds have tried to shed light on the mystery of death. This unquenchable thirst for understanding the inevitable invariably attracts the attention of writers and encourages researchers to delve deeper into the topic of death. Thanatopoetics is a branch of literary criticism that studies images of death and dying in literature. This movement explores how different aspects of death are reflected in literary works and how they influence story structure, character development, and thematic depth of the text.

The history of the term "thanatopoetics"

The 20th century was marked by fundamental shifts in the understanding and comprehension of the phenomenon of death in art, which led to the emergence of a new terminological apparatus. In particular, the concept of "thanatology" came into scientific use. Borrowed from medicine, this term has acquired special meaning in the humanities, reflecting philosophical attempts to provide a comprehensive description of death. The most important conceptual innovation of the 1990s was the introduction of the concept of "thanatopoetics" by the famous Austrian Slavist Aage Hansen-Löve [2, p. 22]. This term refers to the artistic depiction of death in a literary work. The main emphasis in thanatopoetics is on the analysis of specific techniques and means of implementing the motive of death within the framework of a specific work and the creativity of a specific author. Themes, motifs, images, their influence on the chronotope and the architectonics of the text are examined. It is not surprising that the motif of death acquires special significance and artistic functionality in those works where the authors refer to the tragic events of history [3, p. 56]. In such texts, it becomes one of the main means of emotional impact on the reader, causing fear, empathy and reflection on the price of human life and the fragility of existence.

The theme of death in the novel «The Goldfinch»

The action revolves around a small painting painted centuries ago by a little-known master. However, it was Fabricius's "The Goldfinch" that became the organizing principle for the author of the novel and his characters. Surprisingly, it was the painting and its possession that determined almost all the important events in the life of Theo, an ordinary teenager. The starting point for the development of the plot is a riddle: a dying stranger pushes a frightened boy to take a painting from a museum destroyed by a terrorist attack. Deep feelings about his dead mother, a chain of coincidences - and Theo remains with the canvas, although he is considering ways to return "The Goldfinch".

Thanatological motifs perform the most important meaning- and form-building functions in the novel "The Goldfinch". They correlate with the events of the novel, determining the specificity of the images of the characters in the work, the plot and compositional structure, and expanding its temporal and spatial boundaries. The life of the main character Theo is shattered on the day of his mother's death, the person he most loves dies. It is her death that is the core of both the plot and the image of the main character.

Along with other structural units of the text, they contribute to the inclusion of Tarrt's work in the historical cultural context and actualize the mythopoetic layer of the novel. Thus, the meeting of the main character of the novel by Theo with the painting "Boy with a Skull" by Frans Hals takes place in a New York Museum, symbolically denoting the space of the other world, where the museum marks the border between the world of the living and the world of the dead. This deviation from the intended path to school turns into a fatal test for the hero. The author emphasizes that the painting symbolizes the approaching tragedy in the life of the main character: "We spent some time in front of a Hals portrait of a boy holding a skull ("Don't be mad, Theo, but who do you think he looks like? Somebody"— tugging the back of my hair — "who could use a haircut?")" [5, p. 30] The hero's mother compares Theo and the image from the painting, hinting at the proximity of death and the further development of the plot and the fate of the hero.

Natures mortes, which they view in the museum, also play an important role in revealing the idea of death. Here a mother teaches her son: all living things do not last long. If you look closely, you can see microscopic traces of death, present everywhere. The point, however, is different. The fruits on the table and on the canvas have already begun to rot, but in the painting they will rot forever. The painting captures decaying flesh, but the depicted flesh does not decay: « "Whenever you see flies or insects in a still life—a wilted petal, a black spot on the apple—the painter is giving you a secret message. He's telling you that living things don't last—it's all temporary. Death in life. That's why they're called natures mortes. Maybe you don't see it at first with all the beauty and bloom, the little speck of rot. But if you look closer—there it is" [5, p.32]

To enhance the lost state of the main character, the author again resorts to ekphrasis, in particular, including Rembrandt's painting "The Anatomy Lesson of Dr. Tulp" in the plot "<...> we see it immediately, something very wrong—but by reversing the thumb he makes it look even more wrong, it registers subliminally even if we can't put our finger on it, something really out of order, not right. Very clever trick." [5, p. 31]. Rembrandt's painting also highlights the importance of thanatopoetics in the novel. The theme and image of death are presented here not only at the figurative and ideological levels of the text, it also performs a plot-forming function, determines the chronotope and narrative features of the novel.

Tartt has repeatedly noted that she deliberately chose the painting and biography of Fabritius to reveal the ideological component of the text. The artist's life, which was tragically cut short during the explosion of a gunpowder warehouse and a fire in Delft, in which almost all of his works burned, clearly echoes the fate of the main character's mother. It is no coincidence that it is Fabricius's painting that is her guide to the world of art ("This is just about the first painting I ever really loved" my mother was saying") [5, p. 32]. And this painting that indirectly becomes the cause of her death.

This connection is especially noticeable in the ekphrasis of the picture at the beginning of the novel, where Theo notes that the bird visually resembles his mother in childhood: and something about the neat, compact way it tucked down inside itself—its brightness, its alert watchful expression—made me think of pictures I'd seen of my mother when she was small: a dark-capped finch with steady eyes" [5, p. 33]. The main character from the very beginning connects the image of the picture and his mother, which in many ways becomes a portent of further events in his life. However, the image of the chained goldfinch later becomes a symbol of the hero's psychological state. For Theo, the chain that captures him is the feeling of guilt and the impossibility of finding peace in his soul.

Each time the ekphrasis of the picture occurs at the most significant and important moments of the plot, when the hero acutely feels the loss of his mother: « Her death the dividing mark: Before and After. And though it's a bleak thing to admit all these years later, still I've never met anyone who made me feel loved the way she did» [5, p. 22]. It is here that the ambivalence of the picture's influence on Theo is felt. On the one hand, it gives the hero peace and connection with his mother, but at the same time, every meeting with the painting reminds him of the tragedy he experienced and causes new trauma. It is the picture that becomes the personification of the internal conflict of the hero, who blames himself for the death of his mother and cannot come to terms with her death.

Fabricius's painting is the object of symbolic interpretation. It becomes a mysterious focal point around which the physical and symbolic course of events unfolds. All storylines are intertwined around "The Goldfinch": it survives two explosions, goes through severe life trials with the hero, but still returns to the museum in the end. Despite the fragility and vulnerability of works of art, the optimistic ending still confirms the author's belief in the power and immortality of art.

Conclusion

In modern literature, the motive of death continues to remain relevant and multifaceted. Contemporary writers use it as a tool to explore new social and psychological issues, including environmental disasters, terrorism and transhumanism. In conclusion, it should be noted that the motif of death in literature and folklore is an inexhaustible source for the study of human nature, existential anxiety and the desire to understand the inevitable. The constant presence of this motif in the works of great masters confirms man's ongoing struggle with his own mortality and his attempts to come to terms with the inevitable.

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