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The Art of Mourning: Verbal Pentimento in Donna Tartt's *The Goldfinch*

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Abstract

The present MA paper aims to examine Donna Tartt's *The Goldfinch* (2013), a novel which is primarily preoccupied with the themes of art and death. Seeing as one of the purposes of this thesis is to establish relevant connections between the logic of still life paintings, the protagonist's life choices and, consequently, his way of constructing the narrative, the analysis of this novel is based primarily on Norman Bryson's examinations of still life paintings and Hans Belting's anthropological observations about the connections between the concepts of art and death. Furthermore, an examination of the narrative relevance of 17th century Dutch paintings and the way these works by Carel Fabritius, Frans Hals, and Rembrandt Harmensz. van Rijn foreshadow certain plot twists will also be presented in the analysis part. Seeing as the novel addresses the relationship between the verbal and the visual, the analysis will also be based on Liliane Louvel and her notion of the *iconotext* and the typology of *pictorial saturation*. By employing Louvel's terminology, I will argue that the visually saturated verbal descriptions of Theo's romantic interest Pippa in fact reveals his obsession and even objectification of the female character.

*Caring too much for objects can destroy you.
Only – if you care for a thing enough,
it takes on a life of its own, doesn't it?
And isn't the whole point of things – beautiful things –
that they connect you to some larger beauty?*

Donna Tartt, *The Goldfinch*

1. Introduction

The quote from American author Donna Tartt's latest novel and the object of this MA thesis draws the reader's attention towards an undeniable truth that we live in the world of things. Whether we are always fully aware of it or not, we are surrounded by material objects that we ourselves make, use, and invest with meaning. The use of things is based not only on necessity; the kinds of things we surround ourselves with, the memories and experiences we attach to them and the ways we treat them can provide useful insights into our culture and the social relations among people that are often governed by relations with things. The development of these special relations to inanimate objects already has its roots in early childhood, an illustration of which is "The Philosophy of Toys" (1853), an essay by French poet Charles Baudelaire in which he discusses children's 'overriding desire' to destroy their toys in order to get to their souls (Baudelaire in Mayne 1964: 203). However, when a child breaks his toys, he obviously does not find their souls and is consequently left with feelings of melancholy and gloom. Although it seems that we deal here only with the power of children's imagination, this example nevertheless suggests a certain attitude towards inanimate objects and the belief that they can, as Tartt writes, take on lives of their own. Not surprisingly Baudelaire himself saw a child's relationship with his toy as an analogy of the relationship between an adult and a work of art (ibid., p. 201). Although one cannot deny that any artwork is a manmade thing, there is still that sense that there is some hidden significance in the thing itself.

Regardless of the nature of an object in question, whether it is a work of art or a mundane thing, that particular item cannot shed its 'thingly' quality, which means that it is part of material culture. In order to study material culture one requires knowledge from a range of different disciplines, including history, anthropology, sociology, etc. Thus, it is not surprising that arts and literature explore this issue as well. The significance of material culture is closely

ted to the mid-18th century, which marked the beginning of the Industrial Revolution, the period considered to have minimised the distinction between luxury and necessity (Bryson 1990: 97). In England, people who probably valued luxury items to the fullest were the Victorians. In *Portable Property: Victorian Culture on the Move* (2008) literary scholar John Plotz focuses on English literature produced during the period between 1830 and 1870 and notes that those forty years were marked with an ‘obsession with objects represented as problematically endowed with sentimental and fiscal value simultaneously’ (2008: 7). The Victorians were fascinated with objects, whether it was a piece of jewellery, a piece of clothing, a toy or a piece of furniture, they all constituted part of their identities. As the title of Plotz’s work suggests, this attachment to material things was especially felt during travels, or in other words, on the move. When one becomes detached from familiar places and people, certain things transform from merely material objects to sentimental possessions endowed with memories and experiences (ibid., p. xv). It is not surprising, then, that portable property gained such significance in the Victorian era, during the Imperial expansion. Plotz argues that such attachment and identification with one’s possessions can be explained by tracing a shift in the meanings attributed to the words ‘portable’ and ‘portability’. The scholar notes that around the 1830’s novelists began to use objects in English literature in ways which were new at the time. The words ‘portable’ and ‘portability’ acquired looser meanings and began to be used not only literally, but metaphorically as well. Plotz argues that precisely this duality of meaning attributed to portable property is one of the defining aspects of Victorian literature (ibid., p. 4). While providing illustrations from the works by novelists George Eliot, Richard Doddridge Blackmore, Frances Hodgson Burnett, Thomas Hardy and others, the scholar suggests reading ‘Victorian novels as a series of works *about* portable property that were also meditations on their own status *as* pieces of portable property’ (ibid., p. xv). However, it is striking that one of the most convincing illustrations of the duality of meaning of portable property in Plotz’s work comes from non-fiction, namely Harriet Tytler’s story recorded in her memoirs written in India. Plotz argues that English strawberries were the objects that helped her identify as an English woman: ‘[b]orn in what she cannot conceive as her own land, raised to idolize an England known only through words, pictures, and stories, Tytler cannot resist the chance literally to ingest England’ (ibid., p. 45). English strawberries, therefore, is portable property both literally and metaphorically. They were once brought to India and planted there, which suggests their portability in the literal sense. For Tytler, however, they also became the carriers of stories and memories of the distant homeland, of everything that was English.

Of course the Victorians were not the only ones charmed by objects. The same phenomenon which spread in the 19th century is evident in the French literature of this period. In her work *Literature and Material Culture from Balzac to Proust: The Collection and Consumption of Curiosities* (1999) Janell Watson addresses the issues of collecting and consuming curiosities, or to use the modern French word, *bibelots*. Watson argues that the use of the *bibelot* quickly increased in French literary works by Honoré de Balzac, the Goncourt brothers, Stéphane Mallarmé, Guy de Maupassant, Gustave Flaubert, Émile Zola, and Marcel Proust, which signified a change in the way people viewed material objects. They were no longer mere informants about the habits of their users; more and more narrative space was given to the objects themselves. The scholar acknowledges that although she works primarily in the context of 19th century French literature, the interest in material goods is evident in the works produced in other European countries, North America, and many former European colonies (Watson 2004: 1). Watson suggests that the use of the *bibelot*, an object without use-value, increased in French literary texts of the above mentioned authors because the *bibelot* started to appear in the home interiors of the 19th century and this phenomenon was therefore recorded by the artists of that time. For Balzac, for example, ‘the objects of decor are related to sociology (...), to scenes of seduction (...), or to the collector’s passion (...) rather than to the splenetic disposition of the aesthete’ (ibid., p. 68). Thus, it seems that *bibelots* in Balzac’s descriptions of interiors were used in order to reflect the inner world of their owners. Proust, who is on the other end of the long list of French authors Watson deals with, ‘announces the end of the Balzacian-style interior (...). Proust does not give up describing interiors, however, though he must learn to do so differently’ (ibid., p. 148). Watson argues that the Balzacian interior reflects the status of its inhabitants; their class, profession, tastes and other personal details can be decoded by paying attention to the furnishings of their homes (ibid., p. 150). In Proust’s case, objects are no longer meaningful in the sense that they do not provide information about their owners: ‘[t]hese historic, artistic, and literary interiors are inhabited by non-historians, by non-readers, and by non-art lovers (...). The furnishings and *bibelots* of the 1890s have become what Baudrillard might call empty signifiers, signifying fashion itself’ (ibid., p. 152). Thus, it seems that at the beginning of the 19th century, as in the case of Balzac, people were privileged over objects; things were valued for their usefulness and they were used in literature to provide information about their owners. Over the course of time, however, the distinction between what is useful and useless became less obvious and the objects gained more significance of their own, thus limiting the gap between people and things.

Outside Europe, one of the seminal critical works dealing with object-oriented fascination in literature is *A Sense of Things: The Object Matter of American Literature* (2003) by Bill Brown, a leading scholar in the field of American culture, who is known for his conceptualisation of Thing Theory, which was developed on the grounds of German philosopher Martin Heidegger's work. *A Sense of Things: The Object Matter of American Literature* is Brown's critical exploration of the roots of passion for material culture in modern American literature. He refers to the works of such writers as Mark Twain, Frank Norris, and Henry James and tries to explain the significance of things in their novels. Similarly to Plotz and Watson, Brown argues that thinking about things strictly in terms of consumerism is an over-simplification and he tries to show how people's relations with things cannot be explained only according to the logic of capitalism, which was the idea advocated by Marxism (2003: 5). More than anything else Brown is interested in the way objects in fiction become subjectified and subjects become objectified, he tries to understand how objects are used to make sense of the world and of oneself, and how certain of our wishes and dreams, fears and anxieties are projected onto or expressed through objects. At the heart of this lies the dichotomy between 'having' and 'being', between owning a material object and identifying oneself or someone else with it (ibid., p. 13). One of the ways in which a character identifies with the objects he is surrounded by on a daily basis is introduced in the second chapter of Brown's book titled "The Nature of Things". By providing examples from Norris's novel *Vandover and the Brute* (1914), Brown puts forward the idea that our relations with things are based on habits:

Our habitual interactions with objects both bring them to life and impose order on that life; our habits both mark time and allow us to escape from time, as we perform the present in concert with the future and the past. By doing the same thing with the same things you create the illusion of sameness and continuity over and against the facts of disorder and change. (2003: 64)

Repetition, thus, plays an extremely important role not only in the transformation from merely material objects to priceless possessions, but also to substitutes of the self. One might become so attached to certain things that their loss could result in an existential crisis (ibid., p. 65), an idea which also finds its place in Tartt's novel as conveyed in the extract quoted in the epigraph: 'caring too much for objects can destroy you' (Tartt 2014: 848). What fascinates me most in Brown's work, however, is not the analysis of the relationships between characters and their possessions in various works of American literature, even though this study is extremely thorough, but the quite simple and yet at the same time intriguing view that a book itself, in being a piece of literature, is also a material thing with ideas in it (Brown 2003: 9-11).

This is how I read Donna Tartt's novel *The Goldfinch* (2013): both as a work of art and as a material object that I can carry with me and that carries within itself a variety of intertextual references ranging from a tribute to Charles Dickens and realist literature to associations with Harry Potter, embracing classical music and the likes of Lady Gaga, and championing 17th century Dutch painting as well as American modernism. Seen in this light, it may not be surprising that Tartt, a contemporary American writer, who received critical acclaim for her first two novels, *The Secret History* (1992) and *The Little Friend* (2002), in 2014 was awarded the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction for *The Goldfinch*, a story about Theodor Decker, a thirteen-year-old boy, who survives an explosion at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York during which his mother dies. Theo manages to escape from the museum unnoticed carrying two precious possessions, a Dutch masterwork called "The Goldfinch" and a ring, given to him by a mysterious old man. The tragic loss of his mother sets his fate to wonder off without a permanent place in life. After staying with a family of his wealthy friend, Theo is temporarily taken in by his drunken father and his girlfriend in Las Vegas, later on is forced to go back to New York to a generous and caring owner of an antiques shop, and finally even ends up with a criminal underground world in Amsterdam. In the whirlpool of all this torment Theo clings to the small painting of a goldfinch which reminds him of his mother and, therefore, is valued by Theo not as a priceless work of art, but as the only thing linking his past and future. By giving so much narrative space to this missing link, the famous painting around which the story revolves, Tartt raises the issue of value. Is this painting, and art in general, valuable for its technique and the artist's reputation or for something very individual and subjective for each of us? And, in the latter case, is there a difference then between a well known-work of art and a mundane thing?

The question of value, which is articulated through the narrative's intertextual references to numerous works of art, allows us to make an analogy between Tartt's novel and a museum. The novel can be read as a metaphorical museum, since the formal structure of the book invites us to interpret the reader's hermeneutic path from one chapter to another as a course of pictorial appreciation evoked in the narrative by means of language that configures the narrative space as that of a gallery filled with artworks. It is thus worth mentioning that critics writing on museum culture seem to agree upon the idea that besides being a public building which preserves artistic and/or scientific artefacts in the literal sense, a museum, an institution of knowledge, can also be read as a metaphor for a text, or as some prefer, for a map, which constructs knowledge and guides the viewer/reader according to certain logics (Fritsch 2011:

54, Lumley 2005: 1-2, Watson, 2007: 466). This means that there are barriers, either spatial or temporal, that restrict the visitor. Robert Lumley, therefore, claims that museum architecture ‘stands metaphorically as well as physically for the structures that define the boundaries between ‘inside’ and ‘outside’ (2005: 8). An idea later also advocated by Juliette Fritsch who argues that ‘the museum (...) functions as a defining frame’ (2011: 58), a definition convenient for this MA thesis since framing devices in the novel help to explain the reasoning behind the protagonist’s life choices and his mode of storytelling, which will be discussed in the analysis part.

Framing devices have played a major role in postmodern fiction, where they usually expressed the idea of the plurality of visions. In her work *Metafiction: The Theory and Practice of Self-Conscious Fiction* (1984) literary critic Patricia Waugh discusses the aspect of framing in modern and postmodern fiction and points out that ‘both the historical world and the world of art are organized and perceived through (...) ‘frames’ (...). Everything is framed, whether in life or in novels’ (2001: 28). Even though framing is still highly relevant in Tarrt’s recent work, I would argue that this novel already marks a shift towards a new literary paradigm, which Italian scholar Maurizio Ferraris has called New Realism. His *Manifesto of New Realism* (2012) is an exploration as well as a conceptualisation of this contemporary philosophical and literary sensibility. Ferraris explains that Postmodernism came into philosophy in 1979 when French sociologist and literary critic Jean-François Lyotard published his work *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* which marked the end of *grand narratives*. People ceased to believe in the idea of a universal truth and, consequently, in the idea of progress. Illusion gained preference over truth; there were no longer any facts, only multiple interpretations (Ferraris 2014: 2). Ferraris argues that the postmodern approach is an approach of distancing oneself from the world under the disguise of irony or by viewing everything as a never-ending masquerade: ‘we never deal with things in themselves but forever and only with mediated, distorted, improper phenomena that are therefore placeable between quotation marks’ (ibid., p. 6). On this view, everything is subjective, debatable, and constructive. New Realism, on the other hand, critiques the idea that everything is a man-made construct and once again turns to the belief in reality, stability, and truth independent of the thinking subject (ibid., p. 8-9). I would argue that Tarrt’s latest novel broaches the paradigm of New Realism, since it not only highlights, but seemingly calls for a new validity of the old values of truth, morality, and integrity in the contemporary world, while still maintaining certain aspects of postmodern literature, such as playing with the reader’s expectations.

This richness of ideas and literary approaches allows me to interpret *The Goldfinch* in the light of scholarly discourse varying from the text/image theories to art history, to anthropology. The analysis of the novel is dedicated to certain works of art and to the ways in which visuality is conveyed to the reader in verbal terms. Here I refer to French scholar Liliane Louvel's theorising about verbal and visual discourses, make use of her notion of the *iconotext*, and apply her typology of *pictorial saturation* to highlight the emphasis given to visual representations. Seeing as Tartt's novel brings to light art's relation to life and death, my reading of *The Goldfinch* will also be relaying on Norman Bryson's study of the genre of still life painting. Bryson's insights are pivotal to my analysis of the narrative because I aim to show the significance of the iconic paintings of the Dutch Golden Age, the most prominent one being "The Goldfinch" (1654), a still life by Dutch painter Carel Fabritius (1622-1654). Finally, I will make use of German scholar Hans Belting's anthropological approach towards pictures and image-making practices associated with the experience of death. His research, being an anthropological enquiry, also allows me to draw on Brown's thing theory as his considerations about the human-object interactions coincide with Belting's observations about early societies' relations with their cult relics. Through my reading of the aforementioned works, I aim to establish relevant connections between the logic of still life paintings and the protagonist's life choices and his way of storytelling. My analysis of Tartt's novel, titled "The Denial of Death: Art and the Illusion of Presence", focuses on the way a psychoanalytical phenomenon of the "in-between" space is created and manifested in the novel as the only way for Theo to be able to cope with his mother's death. By becoming addicted to the only thing reminding him of his mother, a still-life "The Goldfinch", Theo starts perceiving life as a still life which, in turn, affects his way of storytelling as the only means of control he has. In addition to this, an examination of the narrative relevance of 17th century Dutch paintings and the way these works of art foreshadow certain plot twists will also be presented in the analysis part.

2. The Matter of Matter: A Theoretical Frame

The two-millennia-old tension between image and text, which historically always privileged one over the other, finds balance in French scholar Liliane Louvel's seminal work *Poetics of the Iconotext* (2011), an extensive exploration of the various modes of image-text interactions which take place in Ancient poetry as much as in contemporary fiction. Karen Jacobs, the translator of the English edition, draws the reader's attention to that fact that even though Louvel earned her place among prominent European scholars, her work is still less known in the Anglo-American context even though *Poetics of the Iconotext* is the only work so far which has proposed a typology in order to study different ways in which images appear in literary texts. Notably, Louvel takes a post-structuralist stance, that way providing a framework with concrete stages for studying image/text relations in comparison to previous more theoretical works in this field (Louvel 2011: 3). In the aforementioned work the scholar introduces the *iconotext*, a notion which best describes a zone of contact between image and text (ibid., p. 2). In effect, then, a narrative that includes descriptions of visual works of art is an *iconotext*. The kinds of visual descriptions, however, can vary greatly depending on their nature, whether the reference is real or imaginary, and location, whether it is in or outside the text. Louvel categorises such descriptions in reference to Gérard Genette's notion of *transtextuality* developed in his work *Palimpsests: Literature in the Second Degree* (1982) and instead renames it *transpictoriality*, and *interpictoriality*, *parapictoriality*, *metapictoriality*, and *hypopictoriality* accordingly. *Transpictoriality* is the broadest category, constituting all possible interactions between image and text, while other notions already refer to specific cases, a couple of which, *interpictoriality* and *parapictoriality* in particular, I would like to highlight since both are notable cases in Tartt's novel.

Interpictoriality is a mode of insertion where the image appears in the text as an explicit quotation, which is usually the case with *ekphrasis*. Here, one must consider the narrative strategies for choosing real works of art instead of fictitious ones; a choice which obviously has certain implications (ibid., p. 56-61). Louvel names the image the "extra-text", since it adds an additional message to the text, and argues that the reference to a real work of art has an informative function because 'the referential context serves to create the illusion of reality, to authenticate and "anchor" the text within a "real", easily identifiable space and time for the reader; hence its connection with one of the functions of rhetoric: persuasion, *persuasio*' (ibid., p. 103). Since the real work of art belongs to the world of the reader, the text becomes

more convincing. The same effect is created and/or strengthened by displaying the work of art in a real gallery or museum (Louvel 2011: 104). The use of references to real artworks and real places, therefore, intensifies the illusion that the story one reads is true.

Parapictoriality is yet another type of insertion when the image appears, as the prefix entails, in the paratext, or, in other words, anywhere besides the actual text, for instance, in the title, the preface, the chapter titles, etc. Louvel acknowledges that even though the cover is usually chosen for commercial purposes by the editor, it can still be analysed if the actual image on the cover also appears as a pictorial image in the text (ibid., p. 68-69). This is precisely the case with Tarrt's novel, the cover image of which is a reproduction of Fabritius' "The Goldfinch". The cover shows only a detail of the painting which is visible through a torn paper wrapping. Such visual representation suggests mystery and uncovers its full potential when the reader connects the cover image to the painting Theo wraps up and hides away. There is a link, then, between the outside and the inside, the form and the content, the parapictorial and the inter pictorial (ibid., p. 69). I would argue that this idea, again, evokes an analogy between the real and the fictional and aims to persuade the reader that the story in question is true.

The tie between the real and the fictional is not a straightforward one which can be explained only in terms of the abovementioned categories of visual descriptions. Following the logic of visual arts, fiction makes use of nuances of the pictorial which obviously intensifies the relationship between two distinct mediums. In order to study these nuances, Louvel proposes the typology of increasing *pictorial saturation*. The French scholar lists verbal markers which help to identify the degrees of pictoriality in a text:

[T]he technical vocabulary (colours, nuances, perspective, glaze, varnish, forms, layers, lines, etc.); the reference to pictorial genres (still lifes, portraits, seascapes); the use of framing effects; the staging of the opening and closing operators of pictorial descriptions (deictics, textual frames such as embedded narratives, punctuation signs, typographic blanks, the repetition of the structure "It was"); the staging of focalisation and vision operators; the use of the explicit comparisons "as if in a painting"; the suspension of time as indicated by the gerund "-ING" (...). (ibid., p. 90)

The type and number of these pictorial markers determine which stage of pictorial saturation is evident in the text; however, it is obviously up to the reader to notice these markers and identify a certain stage of the typology of *pictorial saturation* which goes from the most subjective to the least. The reader's ability to pinpoint a particular stage depends on his

competence because if the reference to the visual work is puzzling, the reader is to argue for a particular interpretation and significance of the pictorial description.

According to Louvel, the first and the most subjective stage of *pictorial saturation* is the *painting-effect*. The identification of the *painting-effect* depends entirely on the reader because there is no reference to a particular work of art as this stage creates only an illusion wherein the reader seems to feel as though standing in front of a real work of art: ‘the pictorial imposes itself, mimicking the return of the repressed’ (Louvel 2011: 90). Seeing as certain pictorial markers create only the impression of a painting in the mind of the reader, this feeling quite quickly fades away (ibid., p. 91). The second stage is a *picturesque view* which received its name from a genre in painting and which, according to Louvel, is a verbal description presented as though it were painted. In this case, the reader usually faces picturesque descriptions of landscapes. The third stage, *hypotyposis*, is usually distinguishable by deictic markers and imperatives, as ‘imagine this’ or ‘picture this’. Although in the case of *hypotyposis* there are no references to particular works of art, this type of pictorial description is mostly linked with historical painting because ‘it is the *storia* made real by the verb’ (ibid. p. 94). Louvel argues that this *energia* or potential movement is what mostly links *hypotyposis* to painting (ibid., p. 94). *Tableaux vivant* is the fourth category in the typology and the first to include references to painters or their works. In the case of *tableaux vivant* the descriptions mostly spring from the narrator’s will, which means that the narrator does or says something or comments on other characters’ actions which evoke, for example, a certain scene from a painting or a play (ibid., p. 94). The fifth category is the *aesthetic* or *artistic arrangement* which ‘pertains to the gaze of the subject, the character and/or narrator whose intention to produce an artistic effect it thus reveals’ (ibid., p. 96). In most of the cases this results in the formation of a still life. The sixth stage of the typology of *pictorial saturation* is *pictorial description*, which ‘constitutes the highest degree of pictorial saturation of the text before the *ekphrasis*’ without direct reference to a work of art (ibid., p. 97). Finally, there is *ekphrasis*, the last stage of Louvel’s typology in which the text provides a clear reference to a real painting and the language is mostly pictorially saturated. The reader is thus no longer allowed to question the visual reference since it is clearly indicated by the text, but is invited to speculate about new interpretations arising from its inclusion. The essence of *ekphrasis*, which excludes it from other types of pictorial descriptions discussed above, is that of self-reflexivity: ‘the representation of a representation, *ekphrasis* shows itself through this distance as a theoretical act of self-reflexivity from an art form which discloses another art form’

(Louvel 2011: 45). The use of this self-reflexive form of description in Tartt's novel, then, raises the questions of the protagonist's self-awareness and the honesty of his storytelling.

Seeing as one of the main arguments of this thesis is that the protagonist thinks in terms of still life and that his narrative is then constructed according to the logic of still life painting, I feel the need to overview Norman Bryson's study *Looking at the Overlooked: Four Essays on Still Life Painting* (1990) which will provide the conceptual basis for my analysis. The art historian suggests treating still lifes not as a genre, as they are usually studied, but rather as a series which is not linear and 'has no essence, only a variety of family resemblances' (Bryson 1990: 11). This means that, for Bryson, still life is not a coherent pictorial category as it is traditionally described by art criticism; however, it is a coherent intellectual category in the sense that the objects portrayed are used and valued by different cultures in different historical periods:

The objects shown on the tables of seventeenth-century Dutch interiors (...) belong to a further series of artefacts that is not fundamentally discontinuous with the corresponding objects which appear in Pompeian painting. The things which occupy still life's attention belong to a long cultural span that goes back beyond modern Europe to antiquity and pre-antiquity. (ibid., p. 12)

The repetitive subject matter suggests a longstanding continuity which Bryson traces back to Antiquity, to Roman wall paintings called *xenia* which can be considered to be ancient still lifes. Even though chronological overview is not of utmost importance to this thesis, striking similarities between *xenia* and modern still lifes allow new interpretations to be taken into consideration while analysing 17th-century Dutch still life paintings and new meanings arising from their ekphrastic descriptions in Tartt's novel.

Bryson interprets Greek sophist Philostratus' ekphrastic descriptions of two Roman wall paintings, *xenia* I and *xenia* II presented in his work *Imagines*. Even though it is questionable whether these wall paintings in fact existed, their vivid verbal renderings are nevertheless significant for the development and understanding of later still lifes. In Bryson's view, Philostratus proposes that imitation of real objects presented in the form of *xenia* is important, however, the focus on imitation is not a mature reading of a painting: '[t]he admiration that a painting provokes is not related principally or only to the material objects it represents, but to the ideas it is able to suggest to the reflective observer (...)' (ibid., p. 20). The conceptual essence of the work is more important than its form and the artist's ability to duplicate reality on a canvas, or a wall in the case of the Roman wall paintings.

Conceptually, both *xenia* depict different types of power relations between host and guest that are revealed through the process of gift-exchange. The first *xenia* portrays nature's goods, over-ripe figs, chestnuts, pears, apples, cherries, grapes and other fruits and berries, all created by the natural world with no help of human beings: '[i]n a sense what is described is not *human* food at all, food that marks out humanity as different, as needing a diet that is 'species specific' (Bryson 1990: 21). The ekphrastic description of the second *xenia* illustrates a hare in a cage and one hanging on an oak tree, ducks and geese that have been plucked, as well as bread that is already baked. Although these are also edible things, in Bryson's reasoning, they already suggest man's intrusion into the realm of nature since all of them are not gifts of nature, but dishes of the table (ibid., p. 27). There is a conceptual opposition then between *xenia* I and *xenia* II. The first one emphasises the equality between the host and the guest in the form of hospitality. Since the production of all of those goods requires no human labour, it suggests that the guest and the host who enjoy them are equals in the sharing of this raw food, which in turn points to the personal freedom given to the stranger as he is to prepare his share of food as he pleases (ibid., p. 23). While the first *xenia* is about the lack of cultural activities, there 'stands an idea of collective abundance, the fantasy of the wealth of nature shared equally by all, regardless of social hierarchy' (ibid., p. 24). The second *xenia*, alternatively, highlights the importance of man's power over nature. Hospitality here is overturned by social relations since food is offered only to the wealthy: 'the picture therefore acts as a mirror of affluence, a multiplying mirror that now adds to the wealth of the farm the representation of that wealth in the form of the painting (ibid., p. 28). *Xenia* I and *xenia* II, however, are not simply different types of pictorial representations of goods; by portraying inanimate objects both exemplify man's relationship and attitude to the material world:

[T]he life of the table, of the household interior, of the basic creaturely acts of eating and drinking, of the artefacts which surround the subject in her or his domestic space, of the everyday world of routine and repetition, at a level of existence where events are not at all the large-scale, momentous events of History, but the small-scale, trivial, forgettable acts of bodily survival and self-maintenance. (ibid., p. 14)

For centuries precisely this lack of grandeur was the cause of unappreciation of still lifes in comparison, for instance, to historical paintings. For Bryson, the story, *le grand récit*, to use Lyotard's terminology, was the essential element that defined such hierarchical terms: '[w]hile historical painting is constructed around narrative, still life is the world minus its narrative or, better, the world minus its capacity for generating narrative interest' (ibid., p. 60). Here, it appears, Bryson's and Louvel's reasonings coincide. The female scholar pays close attention to language and experiments with the phrase *ut pictura poesis* by reversing it

into *ut poesis pictura* which then explains the longstanding tradition of placing historical paintings at the top because ‘painting must be like poetry (...), it must draw its inspiration from a text (mythological, biblical, historical, etc.)’ (Louvel 2011: 35). By eliminating human presence and disclosing minuscule objects, still life, in this respect, lacks story. Such contradictory approaches to the world as expressed in historical paintings and still lifes can be categorised in terms of *megalography*, or the strive to represent greatness, and its opposite, *rhopography*, from the Greek word *rhopos* meaning trivial objects (Bryson 1990: 60-61). Both concepts are obviously intertwined since they raise the question of importance. With regard to this, still life paintings put forth that which ‘importance constantly overlooks’ (ibid., p. 61) and invites us to rethink our ways of seeing that which is truly valuable.

Such critical thinking and self-reflexivity is demanded of a very specific category of still life paintings called *vanitas*. The message of *vanitas* is that of world-rejection. The inanimate objects often used in such paintings (skulls, books, glasses, watches, rotten food, etc.) are symbolic reminders of the transience of life and the unavoidability of death thus, thus pointing to the vanity humans are full of from all the worldly pleasures which no longer have any meaning after death. Here, however, lies an internal contradiction Bryson highlights: it is one thing to read about vanity in the scripture or hear a sermon about it in the church, but it is quite different to read the same message in a work of art, which is saleable and which gives aesthetic pleasure to the viewer and owner of that work (ibid., p. 115-116). The art historian argues that this paradox of *vanitas* painting is not a drawback but a governing principle: ‘the struggle between the ‘what’ and the ‘how’ of *vanitas*, between the constative message of world-rejection and the performance of that message as a costly work of art caught in the toils of worldliness, is not then simply a rhetorical misfortune, or the work of hypocrisy’ (ibid., p. 120). The governing principle of *vanitas* then is that its form coincides with its subject matter: ‘[t]he constative statement ‘all is vanity’ can only be performed by an image which, paradoxically, is itself a vanity, a bauble’ (ibid., p. 150). A painting, in this sense, replaces that which it represents and, therefore, works as a constant reminder of death to the living.

An endeavour to research pictorial replacements of the dead that preserve both personal and collective memories were undertaken by German scholar Hans Belting whose anthropological approach towards image-making practices concludes the theoretical overview which serves as a conceptual foundation for my analysis of Tarrt’s novel. The reasoning behind such an approach presented in his work titled *An Anthropology of Images: Picture, Medium, Body* (2001) is justified by the idea that the meaning of images is culturally determined (Belting

2001: 1). By reading images through an anthropological perspective, Belting focuses primarily on the social practices governed by the experience of death. In this respect Belting's insights resonate with those of Bryson in the sense that still lifes portray life that is "stilled", dead; *vanitas* paintings in particular highlight the encounter with death. Belting aims to explain such an encounter by operating with three key terms, namely *image*, *medium*, and *body*, which together form a complex tripartite system. Here it is crucial to distinguish the difference between "image" and "picture" and not to use them as synonyms since 'it [the image] may live in a work of art, but the image does not necessarily coincide with the work of art' (Belting 2001: 2). Even though both words are quite often used simultaneously, Belting draws a clear distinction between the two terms and emphasizes that the quest of his research is an image rather than a work of art, be it a photograph, a print, or a painting, etc. This discrepancy is pertinent because it also incorporates the second and third elements of Belting's system, *medium* and *body*: 'we must address the image not only as a product of a given medium (...), but also as a product of our selves, for we generate images of our own (dreams, imaginings, personal perceptions) that we play out against other images in the visible world' (ibid., p. 2). In effect, then, *image* stands as a mental construct, *medium* as a material form, and *body* as a site in which those mental constructs are produced. Belting's premise here is that our bodies are the ones capable of turning a work of art into a meaningful image. The anthropologist refers to French philosopher Jules Régis Debray who insisted that in fact the *gaze* is: 'the force that turns a picture into an image and an image into a picture. The image draws its meaning from the gaze, much as the text lives from reading. The gaze, rather than being a mere tool, implies the living body as a whole' (ibid., p. 4). The idea that the body is an essential element is also acknowledged by Louvel and Bryson respectively. In *Poetics of the Iconotext* Louvel extends the observations of French phenomenologist Maurice Merleau-Ponty:

Because of its dual nature, our body, which is both a visible "object" and a feeling "subject", "unveils, between the two orders, largely unexpected relationships." Its participation in the world of the visible and of the tangible is possible only because it is "part of it". (Louvel 2011: 21)

In his work titled *Vision and Painting: The Logic of the Gaze* (1983) Bryson, similarly to Debray, focuses precisely on the *gaze* and even draws a distinction between the *gaze* and the *glance* as two different ways of looking:

[A] division separates the activity of the gaze, prolonged, contemplative, yet regarding the field of vision with a certain aloofness and disengagement, across a tranquil interval, from that of the glance, a furtive or sideways look whose attention is always elsewhere (...). (Bryson 1983: 94)

It appears, then, that the *gaze* is active, regular, and especially concerned with time and the aim to have control over it while, in comparison, the *glance* is passive, unpredictable, and unconcerned with time. Whatever the case may be, looking is not a neutral but rather a predetermined act. This duality of vision is especially relevant for my analysis of the construction of narrative in Tartt's novel since I argue that the protagonist's way of looking, which mirrors the logic of still life paintings, shapes his way of storytelling.

Even though the act of looking is of particular importance to all the aforementioned scholars, alongside Belting also emphasizes the role of the body as a whole. The image, according to him, 'is more than just a product of perception' (Belting 2001: 9). With the help of sight and imagination, one is able to connect external pictures with personal experiences and memories, thus becoming a kind of a living medium:

We endow them [pictures] with personal meaning, pass them through the filter of what might be termed our personal censorship. As perceived pictures they turn into remembered images that henceforth become part of the archive of our memory. When external pictures are re-embodied as our own images, we substitute for their fabricated medium our own body, which, when it serves in this capacity, turns into a living or natural medium. (ibid., p. 16)

The phenomenon of the body as a living medium becomes especially relevant in cases of embodiment when a person after death is replaced by his image. Belting argues that from an anthropological perspective, embodiment is 'an old-age urge to transcend, by means of the image, the boundaries of space and time that confine the human body' (ibid., p. 61). Such social practices were particularly common among early societies in cult rituals. Here, however, lies a paradox in that the image represents something that is in fact invisible. Louvel also ponders over this internal contradiction between presence and absence that the image conveys and concludes that 'representation necessarily implies absence' (Louvel 2011: 20) and the only way to overcome it is 'to make absence present and replace it by illusion' (ibid., p. 36). This is precisely the case with ancient cult rituals Belting investigates:

The image was given the power to act in the name and place of the body. (...) The image was no longer merely a compensation for a loss but had, in the very act of representing a body, acquired "Being" in the name of that body. Its presence, precisely because it was delegated to the image, surpassed that of an ordinary body (...). (Belting 2001: 86-87)

For the anthropologist, the illusion the image creates is not that of a straightforward resemblance to the deceased but the feeling of continuity. Since death destroys duration, the image works as a substitute creating a deception of life without disruptions and loss (ibid., p.

88-89). The reasoning behind such social practices of image-making is, therefore, simply the aim to make death comprehensible to the living' (Belting 2001: 130).

Notably, the present MA paper is an attempt to analyse art's therapeutic powers against death as embodied in the protagonist of Donna Tartt's novel *The Goldfinch*. By relying on Louvel's considerations about verbal and visual discourses, Bryson's insights about still life paintings, and Belting's study of image-making practices as remedies to bereavement, I will try to explain the complex interconnections between art, death, deception, and acceptance, as all these themes are part of the tragic life story of Theodor Decker.

*Why am I made the way I am?
Why do I care about all the wrong things, and nothing at all for the right ones?
Or, to tip it another way:
how can I see so clearly that everything I love or care about is illusion,
and yet – for me, anyway – all that’s worth living for lies in that charm?*

Donna Tartt, *The Goldfinch*

3. The Denial of Death: Art and the Illusion of Presence

This part of the present MA thesis explores the significance art has for the protagonist in his extended act of mourning. The following analysis is based on the premise that art is the creative force which enables the protagonist to conceive a sort of “in-between” space that is neither pure reality nor pure fantasy, the space that helps Theo to cope with the trauma caused by the loss of his mother. Aiming to gather the shattered pieces of his life, Theo goes through life applying the logic of still life painting. For him, the titular painting “The Goldfinch” becomes a transitional object enabling him to create and maintain an illusion of a steadier life, the “in-between” space. Thus, throughout the analysis part of the present MA paper I will look at the ways in which that “in-between” space is created and manifested in the novel by examining the structure of the narrative and inspecting the most prominent pictorial references in the text, especially in relation to Theo’s relationships with two main female characters, the absent mother and the still present Pippa. My reading of Tartt’s novel is developed primarily on the grounds of Bryson’s examination of still life painting and Belting’s anthropological explanations of the links between the concepts of art and death.

Here I feel the need to explain the terms “transitional object” and “transitional” or “in-between” space which I borrowed from psychoanalysis. Even though I do not read Tartt’s novel through an exclusively psychoanalytical perspective, I have observed that the aforementioned terms illustrate perfectly the protagonist’s state of mind and the phenomena of subject and object relations present in *The Goldfinch*. Both terms were introduced by British pediatrician and psychoanalyst D. W. Winnicott (1906-1971) and are used primarily to refer to relations with objects in infancy. Psychoanalysts explain that for a certain period of time the infant does not have a sense of subjectivity and understands himself as part of his mother. In her publication “The Nature of the “In-Between” in D. W. Winnicott’s Concept of Transitional Space and in Martin Buber’s *das Zwischenmenschliche*” Laura Praglin, a scholar

specialising in social work, explains that according to Winnicott, later on the infant feels the need to obtain a transitional object which allows him to access transitional space, partly real and partly illusionary space crucial for the infant's psychic development:

Transitional objects, the infant's first "not-me" possession(s), are universal and of infinite variety. They come into play from about four to twelve months (...). Although they are actual objects (e.g. a blanket or thumb), these transitional objects are not yet perceived by the infant as having a fully external reality. They are symbolic of a third reality, a resting place that exists "in between" subject and object – between that which is merged with the mother, and that which is outside and separate. The transitional objects preserve the illusion of symbiosis with the mother (...). (Praglin, L. 2006: 3)

Gradually, the infant develops a sense of himself and starts differentiating between himself, the mother and the surrounding world which results in losing interest in his childhood transitional objects. The attachment to transitional objects and the creation of transitional space is, however, not limited to infancy or childhood. Winnicott observed that the same phenomenon can also be attributed to adults; the stimulating areas in which one seeks comfort are created in adulthood by art or religion: '[c]ultural life is the adult equivalent of transitional phenomena of infancy, wherein communication is not referred to as subjective or objective' (Young 2005). In his online article "Potential Space: Transitional Phenomena" American professor Robert M. Young seconds Winnicott's view that the discussion of subject and object relations while strictly differentiating between the two is too simplistic (Young 2005). Rather, that which exists between them 'is an *area* or space. It is not the sharp boundary-maintenance referred to as reality-testing. It is intermediate: *illusion*, that which is allowed to the infant, and which in adult life is inherent in art and religion' (Young 2005). Nonetheless, one has to bear in mind, as Praglin insists, that whether in childhood or adulthood, the "in-between" space, however comforting, can substitute neither for the inner nor the outer world: 'we cannot stay in this realm of creative possibility and transformation forever, even if it is the most real and authentic part of our existence' (Praglin, L. 2006: 4). A mentally healthy individual, thus, combines all three worlds, the inner world, the outer world, and the "in-between" world which is related mostly to the artistic realm (ibid., p. 6).

From Winnicott's groundbreaking ideas at the end of the 20th century, the use of concepts "transitional object" and "transitional space" in recent years has grown in cultural context. Already in 2010, Bonnie Bright, a founder of a global organization Depth Psychology Alliance, published an article "When a Mirror is Warped: The Benefit of Applying Transitional Space and Play in a Cultural Context" which examines the benefits of the cultural realm in the creation of transitional space for the building of self-stability. Bright points out

two stimulating factors which she sees as transitional spaces - image as transitional space and nature as transitional space. For the purpose of this thesis I will only consider image as transitional space. Bright comments upon the dialogue between a subject and an image as follows:

Dialogue and interaction with images create narratives in which an individual can locate herself, can test options and integrate outcomes in relationship to the image. She can bring the story back with her to the inner reality knowing she can navigate through what life throws at her from outside herself, allowing her to digest what she sees as challenging or frightening and empowering her and creating continuity and security through experience. Imaginal work allows more digestive space to work with the connection; more “play” space. (Bright, B. 2010: 7-8)

An image from the outside world, e.g. a painting or a photograph, thus triggers internal images and in effect allows an individual to access transitional space, an illusionary zone between reality and fantasy which helps the individual to cope with any outside hardships. Hence, transitional or the “in-between” space invests an individual with strength and enables one to experiment with his creativity.

With regard to *The Goldfinch*, the reader is first and foremost positioned in the “in-between” by the title. Seeing as it is both the painting by Dutch artist Carel Fabritius and the novel by American author Donna Tartt, or in more abstract terms the image and the text, it thus becomes, to use Louvel’s terminology, ‘a permeable zone of contact’ (Louvel 2011: 02), the analysis of which involves two different interpretive activities that nevertheless share an undeniable similarity – the steps towards the comprehension of the two, since in both cases ‘(...) one has to see the whole thing, and then parts, and then the whole thing again (...). The difference between the two experiences is apparently in the order of the two operations: we first see a painting, then we “read” it; we read a text, and then we “see” it (in the sense of “understanding”)’ (ibid., p. 38-39). Consequently, the meaning and significance of both the painting and the novel are gained only when the whole process of interpretation is complete. Since that is the case, I will begin by analysing the titular painting by Carel Fabritius (1622-1654), who together with two aforementioned artists Frans Hals (1581-1666) and Rembrandt Harmensz. van Rijn (1606-1669), belongs to the Dutch Golden Age, a period in the Netherlands that span from 1600 to 1660 and saw the production of more than five million paintings commissioned by an emerging wealthy middle class that preferred still lifes, portraits, landscapes, and domestic interiors over historical paintings or scenes from the Bible (Farthing 2010: 222). Although subject matter and styles of different Dutch painters at the time varied significantly, ‘what united artistic production in this era was a desire to look at

the surroundings and immediate world for inspiration and to aspire to a high degree of realism in painting' (Farthing, 2010: 223). According to art historians David Freedberg and Jan de Vries the realism of the 17th century Netherlandish art cannot be analysed and explained only in terms of photographic-like representations of actual situations. Rather, 'in the creative process that took the study of the real as its point of departure, accents were shifted, contrasts intensified, combinations invented, and models manipulated. Bits of reality were used as material for an interpretative illustration of this reality' (Freedberg and Vries, 1991: 221). Thus, it seems that artists of the time questioned the representations of reality, thereby playing with the viewer's perception.

During the 1640s, Fabritius studied in Amsterdam under Rembrandt's guidance in the master's studio. In 1650, Fabritius moved to Johannes Vermeer's home town Delft where he died in his thirties in a gunpowder store explosion where most of his work was also destroyed leaving intact just about a dozen along with "The Goldfinch"¹ (see Appendix Fig. 1). The eponymous painting which, to use Tartt's words, is 'the guiding spirit of the book'², depicts a small finch, a popular domestic pet at the time, perched, presumably, on its feeding box to which it is tied by a delicate string. Already in antiquity, goldfinches were common pets known for their ability to learn tricks, for example, drawing water from a bowl with a tiny bucket on a chain. Such behaviour earned the little tricksters their nickname which translated from the original Dutch 'het puttertje' means water-drawer. Suggested interpretations of the bird's meaning involve resourcefulness, artfulness, dexterity, or alternatively, captive love. Fabritius's painting is considered to be an exceptional case of paintings of similar subject matter because unlike birds in genre paintings, landscapes, and still lifes, Fabritius's bird, due to the way it is isolated and lifelike, resembles a portrait rather than the common representations of birds.³ Since the bird is portrayed so convincingly that it seems to be life-like, the painting can be said to be illusionistic. Fabritius painted this still life using the technique known as *trompe l'oeil* (French for 'deception of the eye') in order to play with the

¹ Biographical information about Carel Fabritius taken from the official website of the BBC, accessed 02 May 2017, available from: <http://www.bbc.com/culture/story/20161207-the-intriguing-mystery-of-the-goldfinch?ocid=fbcu>

² Charlie Rose's interview with Donna Tartt on CBS This Morning 14 November 2013, accessed 02 May 2017, available from: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RmZ_92v9D_E

³ Information about the painting "The Goldfinch" taken from the official website of the BBC, accessed 02 May 2017, available from: <http://www.bbc.com/culture/story/20161207-the-intriguing-mystery-of-the-goldfinch?ocid=fbcu> and from the official website of Scotland's National Gallery where the painting was exhibited from 4th November 2016 to 18th December 2016, accessed 02 May 2017, available from: <https://www.nationalgalleries.org/exhibition/goldfinch>

viewer's perception and expectations.⁴ While commenting on the painter's ability to master the *trompe l'oeil*, art historian Linda Stone-Ferrier quotes Walter Liedke who observed that Fabritius goes 'beyond the imitation of solid forms and textures (...) to suggest the behavior of light and an actual movement - a twitching response - of the bird. In a manner less coy than that of Vermeer's girl with a pearl earring the goldfinch seems to suddenly turn and look at us' (Liedke in Stone-Ferrier 2016: 2). X-ray analysis of the painting revealed that it was painted in two stages:

*In the first phase, he [Fabritius] painted the feeding box, the bird and the upper perch, and then added the background. (...) [H]e also added the lower semi-circular perch, which strongly reinforces the trompe l'oeil effect. The low view point, which is emphasised by the second perch, conflicts with the seemingly higher viewpoint of the upper perch and the box lid – an optical ambiguity which Fabritius decided to leave unresolved.*⁵

Even though an extended one, this glimpse into psychology and art history provides a conceptual backdrop against which I am able to start developing my interpretation of Tartt's novel. Since I read "The Goldfinch" as a story that revolves around the concept of the "in-between", for example, "in-between" past and present, reality and illusion, denial and acceptance, I find it significant to start the analysis from the beginning of Theo's narrative. It opens *in medias res* at the climax of the story fourteen years after the death of Theo's mother when the protagonist is in one of Amsterdam's hotel rooms: '[w]hile I was still in Amsterdam, I dreamed about my mother for the first time in years' (Tartt 2014: 5). Theo, already an adult man, is reminiscing about his mother who died when he was thirteen years old. The reader, from the beginning of the story positioned in the "in-between", is yet unaware of the significance of this episode and only having read the whole novel is able to interpret Theo's dream in the context of all the previous events in his life. Three key words then can be distinguished from the rest of the first sentence of the novel: 'still', 'dreamed', and 'mother'. The word 'still' may be understood as an adverb simply meaning that Theo is in Amsterdam at the time of speaking. However, I would like to suggest that 'still' here also works as an adjective pointing to a lack of movement. It implies complete stillness of Theo's story in the sense that at first it seems to be a retrospective narrative told from an adult's

⁴ 'With certain exceptions, Western art was mainly representational until the twentieth century. **Representational**, or **figurative**, art depicts recognizable natural forms or created objects. When the subjects of representational pictures and sculptures are so convincingly portrayed that they may be mistaken for the real thing, they are said to be **illusionistic**. Where the artist's purpose is to fool the eye, the effect is described by the French term **trompe l'oeil**' (Adams, L. 2010: 5).

⁵ The quote about the painting's technique taken from the official website of Scotland's National Gallery where the painting was exhibited from 4th November 2016 to 18th December 2016, accessed 02 May 2017, available from: <https://www.nationalgalleries.org/exhibition/goldfinch>

perspective. Nevertheless, Theo's story is, in fact, a very carefully structured narrative. Since he is both the narrator and the focaliser, the reader is allowed to know only the details Theo reveals at certain points in the narrative while other details of his life and his story remain withheld. Having in mind that he is the only agent controlling the narrative, I find it significant to trace the etymology of the protagonist's name because Theo comes from the Greek word meaning 'God'.⁶ I suggest that from the first pages of the novel the reader is misled to believe that Theo's narrative is retrospective: 'It happened in New York, April 10th, fourteen years ago. (Even my hand balks at the date; I had to push to write it down, just to keep the pen moving on the paper. It used to be a perfectly ordinary day but now it sticks up on the calendar like a rusty nail.)' (Tartt 2014: 9). A few pages further the protagonist also confides: 'I like to think of myself as a perceptive person (as I suppose we all do) and in setting all this down, it's tempting to pencil a shadow gliding in overhead. But I was blind and deaf to the future; my single, crushing worry was meeting as school' (ibid., p. 14). The indication that the tragic event happened fourteen years ago, the resistance to pin down the exact date and the wish to foresee the outcome all suggest a retrospective look at the years that have passed from the perspective of a now adult man who grieves that he could not know what was going to happen as the only worry at the time was quite a childish one. Since Theo's narrative is presented as a retrospective form of a confession, I would like to suggest that his form of storytelling substantiates the idea that the protagonist is unable to cope with the loss of his mother: 'For some reason I felt sure that the act of writing it down was going to magically make her walk through the door' (ibid., p. 70). Seeing as retrospection is a reminiscence of past events, it is a form of story that is stilled and unchanging, told from a certain point in time. I would argue here that precisely such form of storytelling implies that by aiming to structure his life as a retrospective narrative, Theo denies his mother's absence and freezes time as a way to make sense of the trauma. Reading metaphorically, it is Theo's aim to deprive 'death of its power to destroy duration' (Belting 2001: 89). At the very end of the novel, though, the protagonist confesses that his storytelling was part of this illusion:

I haven't written it from memory: that blank notebook my English teacher gave me all those years ago was the first of a series, and the start of an erratic if lifelong habit from age thirteen on, beginning with a series of formal yet curiously intimate letters to my mother: long, obsessive, homesick letters which have the tone of being written to a mother alive (...). (Tartt 2014: 855)

However, I would argue here that such narrative structure is not an example of an unreliable narration or an intentional form deception of the reader, but rather a subconscious act enabling

⁶ Etymology of the name Theo is taken from the Online Etymology Dictionary, accessed 20 April 2017, available from: http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?allowed_in_frame=0&search=theo

Theo to access the comforting “in-between” space as a way out of despair: ‘And that’s why I’ve chosen to write these pages as I’ve written them. For only by stepping into the middle zone, the polychrome edge between truth and untruth, is it tolerable to be here and writing this at all’ (Tartt 2014: 863-864).

Seeing as the word ‘still’ used at the beginning of the novel provides useful insights about the protagonist and his way of storytelling, I now feel the need to emphasise the significance of the other two words, ‘dreamed’ and ‘mother’. In general, the motif of dreams in general is widely used in literature. Dreams may set a certain mood, used as a foreshadowing technique or as a flashback, or may express repressed fears or desires. In his lecture “What use are dreams in fiction?” written by British novelist David Mitchell and read by professor Rod Edmond at a conference in 2005, Mitchell recognizes dream’s twofold nature and considers possible risks and perks of using this tool in fiction. On the one hand, he accuses dreams of distorting the coherence of plot because dreams belong more to the realm of fantasy rather than reality, a phenomenon Mitchell calls the ‘removedness from reality’, whereas the aim of fiction is to portray the real (Mitchell 2008: 435). In order to complicate the issue the novelist then asks: ‘[b]ut what if a primary aim of a given piece of fiction is to examine this very ‘removedness’? To probe these very holes in the fabric? To study the theories and practices of ontology? (ibid., p. 435). I would argue here that *The Goldfinch* examines this precise ‘removedness’ from reality, or better yet, the liaisons between that which is real and which is not, since throughout the story Theo himself discloses his wishes to escape from the real:

What mattered more was the feeling, a rich sweet undertow so commanding that in class, on the school bus, lying in bed trying to think of something safe and pleasant, some environment or configuration where my chest wasn’t tight with anxiety, all I had to do was sink into the blood-warm current and let myself spin away to the secret place where everything was all right. (Tartt 2014: p).

The quoted episode illustrates perfectly Theo’s aim to escape from the unbearable reality. Furthermore, the choice of words ‘all I had to do’ points to the fact that the narrator’s wish to fight against the acceptance of his mother’s death is not only subconscious but voluntary as well. Even though Theo starts living with a welcoming family of his friend Andy, has regular appointments with a therapist, and gets extra attention at school, the emptiness after the loss is leading him throughout his life: ‘[w]ithout noticing it I’d left reality and crossed the border into some no-man’s-land where nothing made sense. Dreaminess, fragmentation’ (ibid., p. 742). As a way to survive, Theo, thus, lives in a sort of transitional space between reality and fantasy where time is suspended, still; a space which he is later able to achieve by drinking alcohol and using drugs in Las Vegas with his friend Boris where Theo was forced to move

with his father and his girlfriend: '(...) we were sitting around waiting for the drugs to work. I slightly wished we had picked another night to take them, but Boris had insisted it would make me feel better' (Tartt 2014: 372).

Not surprisingly, then, this dual nature of perception is introduced from the beginning of the narrative starting with the image of the dream and prevails throughout the whole work. The themes of illusion and duality are yet strengthened by the appearance of another significant symbol, a mirror. A few pages further down, the protagonist thus elaborates upon his dream:

(...) I dreamed about my mother; a quick, mysterious dream that felt more like a visitation. I was in Hobie's shop – or, more accurately, some haunted dream space staged like a sketchy version of the shop – when she came up suddenly behind me so I saw her reflection in a mirror. (...) not a dream but a presence that filled the whole room: a force all her own, a living otherness. (ibid., p. 7)

The appearance of a mirror within a dream complicates the meaning of the episode. While a dream may be thought of as something created by the unconscious and, therefore, not reliable, a mirror is often considered as a trustworthy object. The Online Cambridge Dictionary defines the word 'mirror' as 'a piece of glass with a shiny, metal-covered back that reflects light, producing an image of whatever is in front of it'⁷, which suggests that anyone or anything that is reflected in a mirror is the real thing. Nonetheless, mirrors, not unlike dreams, are also based on contradictory aspects and more often than not are used in literary texts to blur the boundaries between such opposites as reality and illusion, clarity and deception, order and chaos. Here I find it necessary to emphasise one word from the definition of the word 'mirror' which in itself carries two meanings, the word 'reflection' in particular. According to the Online Cambridge Dictionary, 'reflection' can either mean 'the image of something in a mirror or on any reflective surface' or 'serious and careful thought'⁸. Thus, by having two meanings, one quite literal and the other a more conceptual one, the word 'reflection' brings new significance to Theo's dream, especially because the same exact dream is related a second time at the end of the novel:

And when I looked away for a second and then looked back, I saw her reflection behind me, in the mirror. I was speechless. Somehow I knew I wasn't allowed to turn around – it was against the rules, whatever the rules of the place were – but we could see each other, our eyes could meet in the mirror, and she was just glad to see me as I was to see her. (ibid., p. 811)

⁷ Definition taken from the Online Cambridge Dictionary, accessed 28 April 2017, available from: <http://dictionary.cambridge.org/>

⁸ Definition taken from the Online Cambridge Dictionary, accessed 28 April 2017, available from: <http://dictionary.cambridge.org/>

Seeing how the reader is positioned in the frame of *The Goldfinch* from the beginning of the novel, I would argue that first and foremost it is the protagonist who is “in-between”. Having analysed the structure of Theo’s narrative I suggest that the reader closely following the story in effect occupies a somewhat similar position as the protagonist, in the sense that Theo is the only narrator of the story and throughout the whole narrative certain information is constantly withheld from the reader until the very end. The reader, thus, finds himself in the “in-between” of the story and gradually deconstructs the chronological sequence by adding bits and pieces of Theo’s life which, as I argue in this analysis, follows the logic of still life painting. Since the main work of art in Tartt’s novel, Fabritius’s painting “The Goldfinch” is in fact a still life⁹, it is not surprising how the painting’s style correlates with Theo’s life and his narrative. Still life painting freezes life and especially stresses temporality. There is then a word play evident in the phrase ‘still life’ since it is life that is stilled, frozen, or in other words, for Theo it is the “in-between” of past and present, of his life before the tragic death of his mother and all the subsequent years. At the beginning of his narrative the protagonist confesses:

Things would have turned out better if she had lived. As it was, she died when I was a kid; and though everything that’s happened to me since then is thoroughly my own fault, still when I lost her I lost sight of any landmark that might have led me someplace happier, to some more populated or congenial life. Her death the dividing mark: Before and After. (Tartt 2014: 7)

“The Goldfinch” for the boy becomes irreplaceable after the loss of his mother, since it was her favourite painting of all time: “This is the one I was talking about,” she said. “Isn’t it amazing?” (...) “This is just about the first painting I ever loved” (...). “I used to sit on the floor by my bed and stare at it for hours, completely fascinated – that little guy!” (ibid., p. 28-29).

The protagonist becomes so emotionally attached to the painting that he even sees similarities between his mother and the painted little bird:

It was a small picture, the smallest in the exhibition, and the simplest: a yellow finch, against a plain, pale ground, chained to a perch by its twig of an ankle. (...) I stepped back, to get a better look. It was a direct and matter-of-fact little creature, with nothing sentimental about it; and something about the neat, compact way it tucked down inside itself – its brightness, its alert watchful

⁹ Information about the painting “The Goldfinch” taken from Norbert Schneider’s book *Still Life* (2003: 203), accessed 03 May 2017, available from:
<https://books.google.lt/books?id=P3P2nZyj1PQC&pg=PA203&lpg=PA203&dq=carel+fabritius+the+goldfinch+still+life&source=bl&ots=4dzFVmsXUy&sig=Rq24NDCOBAbzcUS3hMKymJSxnc&hl=lt&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwjAxomV6d3TAhWEfFAKHUOcBjk4FBDoAQg-MAI#v=onepage&q=carel%20fabritius%20the%20goldfinch%20still%20life&f=false>

expression – made me think of pictures I'd seen of my mother when she was small: a dark-capped finch wit steady eyes. (Tartt 2014: 29)

The comparisons between the two are recurrent throughout the novel, signifying the painting's importance for the protagonist:

It's clear, from the stillness she emanates in pictures, how much she mistrusted the camera; she gives off a watchful, tigerish air of steeling herself against attack. But in life she wasn't like that. She moved with a thrilling quickness, gestures sudden and light, always perched on the edge of her chair like some long elegant marsh-bird about to startle and fly away. (ibid., p. 8-9)

Gradually, "The Goldfinch" for Theo becomes a replacement of his mother. The boy's attachment to Fabritius's painting can be interpreted in the light of Belting's observations about death and visual culture. Even though the anthropologist researches actual images of the deceased which more or less resemble those people, I read Theo's emotional investment in the painting and constant comparisons to the mother metaphorically. Belting emphasizes that the understanding of any image from the outside world is never only an action produced by our perception. In the act of interpretation, the subject is, to use the anthropologist's terms, a living medium which associates the external image to images of his own memory (Belting 2001: 16). While studying ancient cultures and their rituals of death, Belting elaborates upon the phenomenon of replacement of the dead body when it is substituted by an image of it:

The exchange of experience for memory is an exchange between world and image. But the memory images that we thus acquire affect our every new perception of the world. They operate, intentionally or unintentionally, like a filter, censoring perception. We relate paintings and photographs as objects, documents, and icons, to our own image archive. Memory applies to these media its law of time, replacing what has been with images of what has been. (ibid. p. 44-45).

Reading Theo's emotional investment and interpretation of the world in the light of Belting's reasoning, I would suggest that the protagonist's perception of the world is thus altered by "The Goldfinch" and the painting in turn becomes a filter, or in other words a lens, through which Theo perceives the world as a still life. Since death is the force which breaks the continuum, the embodiment of the dead by the help of images, then, creates the illusion of continuity. Therefore, by constantly comparing his mother to the painted finch, one who is no longer with Theo with the one that is, the narrator enables himself to maintain the illusion of continuity. Belting's anthropological insights, therefore, support my claim that Theo treats the painting as a transitional object, which allows him to maintain the illusion of his mother's presence. Even though specialising in a somewhat different area, Louvel nevertheless suggests the same idea that in fact 'the origins of painting [is] to make absence present and replace it with illusion' (Louvel 2011: 26). The importance of having a transitional object, in

this case the painting, is of utmost importance for maintaining the illusion of a bond between the narrator and his mother. It enables Theo to live in the “in-between” space where the only idea allowing him to survive is knowing that he has the painting. I would suggest that in the novel, the illusion of owning the painting is far more significant for Theo than actually having it, since from the moment Theo wrapped it up to bring it with him to Las Vegas, he never once looked at the painting: ‘Grimly, I wrapped the painting, sheet by sheet, and taped it up with the same tape I’d used a few months before to wrap my mother’s Christmas present’ (Tartt 2014: 213). Theo’s behaviour in the story substantiates Belting’s claim that ‘whereas the picture represented presence when the person was alive, at the moment of death its meaning changes and it represents absence’ (Belting 2001: 4). Thus the fact that Theo never looks at “The Goldfinch” and does not even know that the painting was stolen by his friend Boris signifies his inability to let go of it and thereby admit the absence of his mother.

Even though at the level of the plot Theo could not have predicted the tragic outcomes, certain hints were provided for the reader, two other paintings by the Dutch Golden Age artists Frans Hals and Rembrandt in particular. Hals is an Antwerp-born painter who worked mainly in Haarlem and who is known primarily for his individual and group portraits.¹⁰ In his book *The Signature Style of Frans Hals: Painting, Subjectivity, and the Market in Early Modernity* (2012) art historian Christopher D. M. Atkins analyses Hal’s iconic painting “The Jolly Topper” and provides an accurate summary of Hals’s portraits in general by claiming that ‘one almost immediately understands the image to be not an illusion of the subject, but a painting of that subject – a two dimensional figure rendered on a flat support with paint. In other words, Hals crafted paintings that look like paintings, and look like they were painted’ (2012: 13). This supports the idea that the Dutch masters were not interested in photographic rendering of reality, but in the message the painting sends to the viewer. This can be said about Hals’s “Young Man holding a Skull” (1626-1628) (see Appendix Fig. 2) which is in fact not a portrait, but a Vanitas painting, a particular type of still life. It portrays a young man of a boyish appearance holding a skull in his hand. The position of the hand, the way it is stretched out in front, makes the viewer pay more attention to the skull than the boy himself, who is in the centre of the canvas. In pictorial representation, the skull is a reminder of the transience of earthly life and the certainty of death. This idea is accurately explained by art historian Ann Jensen Adams in her article on the theme of temporality in the seventeenth-century Dutch portraits:

¹⁰ Biographical information taken from the official website of the National Gallery in London, United Kingdom, accessed 15 April 2017, available from: <http://www.nationalgallery.org.uk/artists/frans-hals>

This reference to God's eternal time, and the viewer's steady participation in it, continued to figure in portraiture through the middle of the seventeenth century. Frans Hals employed it in his portrait of a sixty-year-old man holding a skull. While, to use Harry Berger's term, this subject "poses" for us, his gesture asks the viewer to contemplate man's life as but a small segment of the larger unbroken Aristotelian-Christian time of eternity. Life is linked to the cosmological order which can be contemplated in time but whose duration is not itself broken into discrete moments. (Jensen-Adams 2013: 5-6)

I would argue that "Young Man holding a Skull" advocates the same involvement and participation on the part of the viewer. Since the reference to it is provided at the very beginning, it is the title of Chapter 1 ("Boy with a Skull"), the reader already has the visual work in mind and by knowing its subject matter can imagine the course of the following events and even associate the two boys, the pictorial and the fictional one, Hals's unnamed young man and Tartt's Theo. Interestingly enough, this idea is even suggested by the protagonist's mother when they examine Hals's painting at the exhibition at the Metropolitan Museum of Art: 'We spent some time in front of Hals's 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?") (...)' (Tartt 2014: 27). I would argue that since Theo's mother noticed certain similarities in appearance and made the connection between her son and the young man in the painting, the latter can be interpreted as Theo's pictorial alter ego. Theo and his mother ran up the stairs of the Metropolitan Museum of Art to avoid a heavy rain which prevented them from going to a meeting at Theo's school since the boy was apparently in trouble for smoking in the territory of the school. After the terrorist attack, he is tormented by guilt, 'her death was my fault' (ibid., p. 9), because if it weren't for his inattentiveness, the mother would still be alive. At the time, however, Theo is not interested in the contemplation of man's life and its temporality as Hals's painting suggests to do, since his, thirteen-year-old boy's 'single, crushing worry was the meeting at school' (ibid., p. 14). Unlike the reader, who is also given the pictorial reference, Theo does not participate in the process of reflection and is afterwards left with the feeling of guilt which haunts him throughout his life.

Due to his emotional detachment at the time, Theo is also unable to critically interpret and emotionally connect to another work of art his mother ponders over, namely "The Anatomy Lesson of Dr. Nicolaes Tulp" (1632) (see Appendix Fig. 3) by Rembrandt, a Leiden-born artist who received critical acclaim as a portrait painter early in his career and who consequently left Leiden and moved to Amsterdam to work largely for Protestant patrons. Rembrandt was fascinated by the dramatic effects of light and shadow and was able to use

them in order to create extremely lively scenes.¹¹ Such effects are obviously applicable to “The Anatomy Lesson of Dr. Nicolaes Tulp” where Rembrandt painted a group of seven medical students and a physician, Tulp, who is easily distinguishable from the rest by the hat he is wearing and by the fact that he occupies the right side of the painting positioning himself in front of his students. Here, as with Hals’s painting, the viewer is again invited to contemplate temporality. Another important aspect is the fact that the two men in the background are not looking at Tulp, at the cadaver or the book at the bottom right corner of the canvas. Both men are looking directly at the viewer and one of them is indirectly pointing to the cadaver that way suggesting the same idea as expressed in Hals’s painting – that death is inevitable, an undeniable truth each has to learn and live with. French philosopher Sarah Kofman begins her essay titled “Conjuring Death: Remarks on the Anatomy Lesson of Doctor Nicolas Tulp (1632)” (1995) with one simple sentence: ‘It is a lesson’ (Kofman in Albert, G. and T. Albrecht 2001: 237). However, when Theo views this painting with his mother, all he sees is ‘livid flesh, multiple shades of black [and] alcoholic-looking surgeons with bloodshot eyes and red noses’ (Tartt 2014: 24), that way ignoring the lesson Rembrandt is giving here. Kofman emphasises that the message this work is sending is ‘not that of a *memento mori*; it is not that of a triumph of death but of a triumph over death (...)’ (Kofman in Albert, G. and T. Albrecht 2001: 239). I would argue that it is not a coincidence that the ekphrastic description of Rembrandt’s painting in the novel is such an extensive one. It seems as though the reader is allowed to go along with Theo and his mother to the exhibition and to see the painting in front of him:

Everybody always says this painting is about reason and enlightenment, the dawn of scientific inquiry, all that, but to me it’s creepy how polite and formal they are, milling around that slab like a buffet at a cocktail party. Although (...) see those two puzzled guys in the back there? They’re not looking at the body – they’re looking at us. You and me. Like they see us standing here in front of them – two people from the future. Startled. ‘What are you doing here?’ Very naturalistic. But then (...) the body isn’t painted in any very natural way at all, if you look at it. Weird glow coming off it, do you see? Alien autopsy, almost. See how it lights up the faces of the men looking down at it? Like it’s shining with its own light source? He’s painting it with that radioactive quality because he wants to draw our eye to it – make it jump out at us. And here (...) see how he calls attention to it by painting it so big, all out of proportion to the rest of the body? He’s even turned it around so the thumb is on the wrong side, do you see? Well, he didn’t do that by mistake. The skin is off the hand – 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. (Tartt 2014: 27)

¹¹ Biographical information taken from the official website of the Museum Het Rembrandthuis in Amsterdam, Kingdom of the Netherlands, accessed 15 April 2017, available from: <http://www.rembrandthuis.nl/en/rembrandt>

Here the reader sees how Theo's mother is examining the painting with close precision. The episode stands out because the ekphrastic description, to use Louvel's terms, is first of all framed by a textual framing device because it is a separate paragraph. This paragraph, therefore, mirrors the frame of Rembrandt's painting. Other pictorial markers listed by the French scholar include the use of the ING-form as in the words 'milling', 'looking', 'standing', 'doing', 'coming' and 'shining' which all suggest the suspension of time. Even though Rembrandt succeeded in creating the illusion of movement in his painting, the movement is nevertheless suspended, and this invites the viewer to ponder over the temporality of time. Similarly, by the help of these pictorial markers, Tartt is able to suspend time by suspending the flow of the narrative that way making the reader become aware of the painting. I would argue, however, that the significance of Rembrandt's work in the novel lies in the small details the mother chooses to omit and the ones she chooses to emphasise. While analysing the work, Theo's mother discusses the roles of everyone in the painting excluding Tulp. I would suggest that she metaphorically occupies the role of the physician and teaches her son not to be creepily polite and formal, or in other words, as insensitive as the medical students depicted in the painting. In the aforementioned essay Kofman argues that the medical students 'have before them not a subject but an object, a purely technical instrument that one of them manipulates in order to get a hold on the truth of life' (Kofman in Albert, G. and T. Albrecht 2001: 238). Therefore, the mother indirectly lectures her son not to treat others in a similar way, as objects rather than subjects.

Seeing as Theo's relationship with his mother and the painting "The Goldfinch", which becomes a metaphorical replacement of her, can be read as the protagonist's relationship with absence, I now feel the need to draw the attention to his relationship with the second most important female in his life, Pippa, and whether after the traumatic loss of his mother, Theo is able to maintain that relationship. Here I look at the ways in which Theo's objectification of Pippa revealed by, to use Louvel's terms, visually saturated descriptions of the female character results in his obsession with Pippa rather than an equal relationship. I would argue that Theo's affection for Pippa is not an incidental one. Since she is the girl Theo met at the same exhibition he visited with his mother the day she died, gradually, Pippa becomes the next most important person in his life whose significance is emphasised quite early in the story:

*And to think of the girl that saved my life made my eyes smart. Pippa! (...)
Whenever I thought of her eyes on mine, I felt dizzy at the thought that she - a
perfect stranger - had saved me from walking out of the exhibition and into the*

black flash in the postcard shop, nada, the end of everything. Would I ever get to tell her she'd saved my life? (Tartt 2014: 65)

The protagonist's choice of words indicates that due to the tragic circumstances, he not only feels connected but also indebted to Pippa. Since she was severely injured during the explosion at the museum, the protagonist's curiosity and willingness to see the girl again and to know her better during her recovery gently turns into his first love which eventually becomes a kind of obsession and fascination. Theo's descriptions of Pippa all seem to be saturated with pictorial impressions as though she were a painting rather than a real person:

Terrified she was going to catch me staring, unable to wrench my eyes away, I watched her studying my iPod with bent head: ears rosy pink, raised line of scar tissue slightly puckered underneath the scalding-red hair. In profile her downcast eyes were long, heavy-lidded, with a tenderness that reminded me of the angels and page boys in the Northern European Masterworks book I'd checked and re-checked from the library. (Tartt 2014: 429-430)

Here I would like to employ one of Louvel's categories of pictorial descriptions, namely the *painting-effect*. Louvel argues that the *painting-effect* is an allusion without any direct reference to painting in general or a particular painting; it 'functions also at the level of the character, who serves as a mediator for the reader by inscribing aesthetic impressions in the text' (Louvel 2011: 91). We as readers see Pippa through the frame of Theo's gaze, therefore he is the mediator who inscribes his aesthetic impressions. Also, the excerpt constitutes a separate paragraph which in Louvel's terms is considered to be textual framing. What is more, the use of the ING-form as in *staring* and *studying* suggest that Pippa is temporarily suspended in time. I would suggest that the suspension of time here illustrates Theo's urge to have Pippa rather than be with her. As Theo's obsession grows stronger, the longing for his mother is in turn replaced by the longing for Pippa:

All that blind, infantile hunger to save and be saved, to repeat the past and make it different, had somehow attached itself, ravenously, to her. There was an instability in it, a sickness. I was seeing things that weren't there. (...) [W]e were friends; nothing more. My hopes for a relationship with her were wholly unreal, whereas my ongoing misery, and frustration, were an all-too-horrible reality. Was groundless, hopeless, unrequited obsession any way to waste the rest of my life? (Tartt 2014: 570)

Even though the protagonist understands the hopelessness of his efforts to avoid reality, at the end of his story he nevertheless beautifully acknowledges the fact that surrendering to the world of fantasy, the "in-between" is the only possible way for him to survive:

And as much as I'd like to believe there's a truth beyond illusion, I've come to believe that there's no truth beyond illusion. Because, between 'reality' on the one hand, and the point where the mind strikes reality, there's a middle zone, a rainbow edge where beauty comes into being, where two very different surfaces

mingle and blur to provide what life does not: and this is the space where all art exists, and all magic.(...) And just as music is the space between notes, just as the stars are beautiful because of the space between them, just as the sun strikes raindrops at a certain angle and throws a prism of color across the sky—so the space where I exist, and want to keep existing, and to be quite frank I hope I die in, is exactly this middle distance: where despair struck pure otherness and created something sublime. (Tartt 2014: 863)

This extended quote concluding “The Goldfinch” illustrates perfectly the therapeutic power art has for Theo, enabling him to create and live in the “in-between” space in which illusion provides the necessary redemption. As Theo has his “in-between” space in order to survive, the reader too occupies the middle zone as he goes along pages of the novel together with the protagonist.

4. Conclusions

Donna Tartt's novel *The Goldfinch* designates a leap from Postmodernism and occupies a niche in what might be called New Realism, the newest literary movement which combines characteristics of both, Realist and Postmodern fiction. In reading Tartt's work, which revolves around the themes of art and death, the reader is invited to ponder over temporality of time, unavailability of death and the power of art in overcoming death. By having her protagonist and narrator Theodor Decker carefully construct his story as a form of everyday notes written to a supposedly present mother, Tartt exposes the psychological state of a traumatised and fragile human being and his efforts from the age of thirteen years old to overcome the suffering and find peacefulness. Theo's fragmented narrative, thus, signifies his understanding of death as something that interrupts continuous duration; therefore by trying to cope with the loss of his mother, the protagonist perceives life as a still life and develops his narrative accordingly, implying continuity when, in fact, there is none. By relying on the arts as the only empowering force, Theo is able to enter his own "in-between" sphere, a safe and comforting space enabling him to cope with all the life's hardships he had to face.

Summary in Lithuanian

Gedėjimo menas: žodinė išpažintis Donna Tartt romane „The Goldfinch“

Donna Tartt romanas „The Goldfinch“ pasakoja istoriją apie berniuką vardu Teodoras, kuris būdamas trylikos metų amžiaus netenka motinos po tragiško teroristinio išpuolio Metropoliteno meno muziejuje Niujorke. Po sprogimo paskatintas klieidinčio seno vyriškio, Teodoras išsineša iš muziejaus Karelo Fabricijaus paveikslą pavadinimu „The Goldfinch“, kuris taip pat buvo ir berniuko motinos mėgstamiausias paveikslas. Tartt savo romane glaudžiai sieja meno ir mirties temas, kurias analizavau pasitelkusi bei meno istoriko Normano Brysono pastebėjimus apie natiurmortus, antropologo Hanso Beltingo studiją apie vaizdo ir mirties santykį, bei kritikės Liliane Louvel įžvalgas apie *ikonotekstus*.

Savo analizėje susitelkiau ties pagrindiniu veikėju Teodoru bei jo naratyvo konstravimu, kuriam pasitelkčiau „verbalinio“ natiurmorto metaforą. Nors romano pradžia užkoduoja retrospektyvai, gyvenimui užšaldytam prisiminimuose, savo pasakojimo pabaigoje Teodoras prisipažįsta, kad tai nuo trylikos metų amžiaus rašyti jo laišakai motinai. Derindama realizmo ir postmodernizmo poetines logikas ir tokiu būdu kurdama Teodoro naratyvą, Tartt sugeba suklaidinti patiklų skaitytoją, atidžiai sekusį duotomis literatūrinėmis nuorodomis iki pat pasakojimo pabaigos, kada Teodoras atskleidžia tiesą, kad tai nuo pat pradžių buvo nuoseklus pasakojimas. Nuo pirmųjų romano puslapių kurtą naratyvo fragmentiškumą liudija ir ekfrastiniai Franso Halso, Rembrandto ir Karelio Fabricijaus paveikslų aprašymai, kurie įrėmina pasakojimą ir tokiu būdu atkreipia skaitytojo dėmesį į tam tikras paveiksluose ir romane išskleidžiamas temas. Nuorodomis į vizualiuosius menus bei derindama skirtingas poetines logikas Tartt savo romanu *ikonotekstu* išryškina vaizdo ir žodžio sandorą, bei liudija naujo literatūrinio judėjimo atsiradimą.

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Appendix



Fig. 1: Carel Fabritius, *The Goldfinch* (1654)



Fig. 2: Frans Hals, *Young Man holding a Skull (Vanitas)* (1626-1628)



Fig. 3: Rembrandt, *The Anatomy Lesson of Dr. Nicolaes Tulp* (1632)