

The Role of Ekphrasis in the Context of a University (Campus) Novel

Amankosova Shakhnoza Mirzagaliyeva
Nukus State Pedagogical Institute

Abstract. The article is devoted to the study of the phenomenon of ekphrasis in the works of Donna Tartt, especially in her first novel “The Secret Story”. Ekphrasis as a feature of ancient literature has become an interesting topic for research in modern literary criticism, since in the realities of postmodernism, references and allusions to classical painting are a very common occurrence. The article provides numerous examples from Donna Tartt's novel, which mentions works of art by Van Gogh, Rubens, Monet and other artists.

Key words: *ekphrasis, intermediality, d. tartt, “the secret history”, artists, paintings.*

Introduction

ABSTRACT

The article is devoted to the study of the phenomenon of ekphrasis in the works of Donna Tartt, especially in her first novel “The Secret Story”. Ekphrasis as a feature of ancient literature has become an interesting topic for research in modern literary criticism, since in the realities of postmodernism, references and allusions to classical painting are a very common occurrence. The article provides numerous examples from Donna Tartt's novel, which mentions works of art by Van Gogh, Rubens, Monet and other artists.

KEYWORDS: Ekphrasis, intermediality, D. Tartt, “The Secret History”, artists, paintings.

The concept of “ekphrasis” is considered by researchers as a subtype of referential intermediality – citing one artistic media through another. It is worth noting that referential intermediality is not limited only to ekphrastic manifestations, but also implies a dialogue of cultures carried out through artistic reminiscences (this phenomenon, in turn, is called media citation - quoting one text in another).

In the “Literary Encyclopedia of Terms and Concepts” edited by Nikolyukin, “ekphrase” is defined as “a verbal description of a man-made object, be it a temple, palace, bowl, statue or painting” [1, p. 699]; Even in Hellenistic literature, such descriptions were framed as plot digressions. In modern philological research, ekphrasis is understood as the verbal transmission of works of art. In his article “Love painting, poets...”. Ekphrasis as an artistic and worldview model” Elena Vladimirovna Yatsenko, based on the theoretical works of other researchers (L. Geller, N.V. Braginskaya, V.V. Bychkova, S.S. Averintseva, R. Mnikh), classifies ekphrasis according to several criteria [2]:

1. According to the object of description - direct and indirect; direct ekphrasis - description / designation of an object in a literary work, indirect - description of a landscape / character / elements of the artistic world using motifs of a visual work of art;
2. By volume – full, collapsed and zero; full ekphrasis consists of a detailed description of an object of art, compressed - from a description of a couple of sentences, zero only makes reference to the connection between the artistic world and an object of visual art;
3. According to the described referent (carrier), ekphrasis are divided into types of works that they represent - 1) fine arts (painting, sculpture, graphics, photography); 2) non-fine arts (architecture, design, arts and crafts); 3) synthetic art (cinema); 4) visual artifacts that are not works of art (labels, advertising, printed materials);
4. According to the presence or absence of a real referent in the history of art - mimetic and non-mimetic.

Ekphrasis as a phenomenon has not been fully studied, therefore researchers do not yet have a specific list of its functions. Writers can use this technique for their own author's purposes, giving it any individual functions. However, it is worth noting that the use of ekphrasis is associated with a number of factors: the era in which the literary work was created (it can influence the vision and role of art for that time); the country of the literary work (socio-political and cultural backgrounds also matter); the author's personal relationship to art.

Despite the above, we can list the most common functions of ekphrasis:

- 1) plot-forming - the artistic object plays an important part in the plot of a literary work;
- 2) symbolic – ekphrasis as a symbol of an event/feeling;
- 3) worldview – the attitude of the character/author to any socio-cultural phenomenon;
- 4) psychological - helps to indicate the hero's attitude to the outside world.

Different areas of art are often combined in Donna Tartt's novels as a result of her background - the writer graduated from the department of classical philology at Bennington College of Liberal Arts. Painting plays a particularly significant role in her novel "The Goldfinch," the plot of which is built around a painting by Carel Fabritius (in addition, many of the characters in the work are in one way or another connected with art), however, "The Secret History" is also full of ekphrastic appeals.

Her own experience influenced not only the setting of the work (a university novel set in the same New England college where Tartt herself studied), but also the choice of specialty that the main characters would study. The plot centers on a group of privileged students studying classical philology. The main character is Richard Papeen, a man from the middle class, who, thanks to his persistence, ended up in this very group of wealthy students, pretending to be a wealthy heir in order to impress his new acquaintances. As readers, we see everything that happens through Richard's eyes, but it is worth remembering that he is an unreliable narrator. We only know what he knows. Richard is Fitzgerald's Nick Carroway, an outsider to situation and class; he sees this world more clearly than its inhabitants see themselves, but at the same time, various factors affect the clarity of perception (for example, alcohol causes failures in Richard's memories).

However, all the descriptions are given to us by Richard, through whom Donna speaks here, drawing her characters with the help of her own art historical knowledge. At the same time, such a broad outlook does not seem unnatural for Richard himself, who in fact turns to the past many years after graduating from college. The synthesis of painting and text is manifested in descriptions of interiors, landscapes and characters; These descriptions seem to accompany not paragraphs of text, but famous paintings.

Richard describes Charles and Camilla as follows: «And then there were a pair, boy and girl. I saw them together a great deal, and at first, I thought they were boyfriend and girlfriend, until

one day I saw them up close and realized they had to be siblings. Later I learned they were twins. They looked very much alike, with heavy dark-blond hair and epicene faces as clear, as cheerful and grave, as a couple of Flemish angels» [4, c. 18]. When reading, it seems that Tartt is referring us to the painting by Peter Paul Rubens and Frans Snyders “Christ with John the Baptist and Two Angels.”

Subsequently, parallels are drawn between Charles and Henry Wallis's *The Death of Chatterton*: «We stopped by the twins’ apartment and found Charles asleep on the couch, sprawled on his stomach in his shoes and overcoat, one arm dangling over the edge so that three or four inches of wrist and an equal amount of cuff were exposed» [4, c. 304].

There is also a description for Henry: «Henry, in coat and tie, waded out to where Francis stood, his trousers rolled to the knee, an old-fashioned banker in a surrealist painting» [4, c. 91]. This probably meant Manet's painting "Breakfast in the Studio."

In addition, ekphrastic references serve to create the aesthetics of a college novel, so that the reader can better experience the atmosphere of a New England town and, in particular, a liberal arts college:

1. Van Gogh “Harvest”: “It was like a painting too vivid to be real [...]” [4, p. 93].
2. Emil Nolde “Landscape in Red Light” and the works of Thomas Kinkade: “The very colors of the place had seen into my blood: just as Hampden, in subsequent years, would always present itself immediately to my imagination in a confused whirl of white and green and red, so the country house first appeared as a glorious blur of watercolors, of ivory and lapis blue, chestnut and burnt orange and gold, separating only gradually into the boundaries of remembered objects: the house, the sky, the maple trees ”[4, p. 96].
3. “The light of the lawn was golden, casting long velvety shadows, and the cloudy, radiant sky was straight out of Constable [...]” [4, p. 95].

As in *The Goldfinch*, Donna Tartt tries to show the special role of art in human life; For her, art can not only influence a person favorably, but also push people to do terrible things if it is perceived incorrectly. Shakespeare’s “Fair is foul and foul is fair” runs like a red thread [3, p. 5], the high and the low are mixed.

This thought is clearly expressed by Richard: “That night I wrote in my journal: “Trees are schizophrenic now and beginning to lose control, enraged with the shock of their fiery new colors. Someone – was it van Gogh? – said that orange is the color of insanity. Beauty is terror. We want to be devoured by it, to hide ourselves in that fire which refines us” [4, p. 40].

Thus, the synthesis of arts in the novel “*The Secret History*” through the use of ekphrasis performs not only symbolic, psychological and ideological functions, but also helps to express the author’s idea within the genre of a university novel. In addition, through ekphrasis, both the personal background of the writer herself, who has a humanitarian education, is revealed, and the image of the main character, Richard, as a person versed in art, is drawn.

Reference

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