

INTERTEXTUALITY IN DONNA TARTT'S NOVEL "THE SECRET HISTORY"

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ABSTRACT: The article is devoted to the study of intertextuality in Donna Tartt's novel "The Secret History". The article examines the influence of Hellenistic culture on the work of the American writer Donna Tartt. In her works she actively uses the ancient code, introducing and deconstructing plots and elements of ancient Greek works. The perception of ancient culture is manifested through narration and intertextuality, which performs several functions in the novel: plot-forming, compositional and escapist.

KEYWORDS: Intertextuality, classical philology, D. Tartt, "The Secret History", Greek mythology, Dionisius, hamartia.

Donna Tartt graduated from the department of classical philology at Bennington College of Liberal Arts, and this fact of her biography significantly influenced her work: Tartt constructs all of her novels as ancient Greek tragedies: the reader learns about the turning point in the plot from the very first lines. The writer herself explained this construction of the novel as follows: she began writing "The Secret History" at the age of nineteen, when she was still in college and, therefore, read a lot of ancient Greek literature. The affair took ten years, and for her it became a way to return to times she missed, "the result of yearning for the atmosphere of the place" and "a time capsule."

The characters in *The Secret History* study in the same specialty as she once did, although, as the writer admits, they are much more advanced in languages than she is. Nevertheless, in all interviews D. Tartt creates the impression of a deeply erudite person, capable of quoting poetry from memory. Her heroes are similar to herself - they are well educated, knowledgeable about art, and often insert quotes from ancient Roman, ancient Greek, French, Italian and English poets and writers into their speech.

Just as the ancient Greek public knows that Agamemnon will be killed, so for us the death of Bunny in *The Secret History* does not come as a surprise. The real mystery is how this will happen. *The Secret History* has the structure of a tragedy. It is important to note that the genre is closely associated with the cult of Dionysus and religious holidays in his honor, since he was considered the patron of the theater (where an altar was erected in his honor) and tragic competitions. It follows from this that tragedy has a ritual origin.

The tragedy consists of the parts of the choir and the actions of the actors. In the novel, Richard is the choir. He knows in advance what will happen to the heroes; he constantly addresses the audience - the readers - throughout the narrative and explains what is happening. In addition, he almost does not participate in the actions, only learns about them later and conveys them on the pages of the novel. All other characters are actors.

Beginning with the prologue, the narrative takes on a tragic tone as Richard describes the aftermath of Bunny's death. He mentions hamartia from Aristotle's *Poetics*: «Does such a thing as the fatal flaw, that showy dark crack running down the middle of a life, exist outside literature? I used to think it didn't. Now I think it does» [6, p. 5]. The concept of hamartia is one of the main ones for the novel; we are shown how human flaws affect fate. There are no strictly positive or negative characters in the work; they are all morally gray, evoking both sympathy and antipathy at different moments; all this makes them very human and real. As Aristotle argues in the *Poetics*,

the hero should be portrayed as not particularly virtuous or just; he finds himself in a tragic situation not because he is naturally bad, but by mistake. It seems that the characters themselves see themselves as heroes of the tragedy; theatrical vocabulary is used from time to time: Bunny's corpse looks like a prop; Richard notes that Edmund seems to be assigned the role of a tragically deceased jester; The FBI investigation and interrogations are seen by Henry as a performance: "He, in some senses, was the author of this drama and he had waited in the wings a long while for this moment, when he could step onto stage and assume the role he'd written for himself" [6, p. 396].

Richard's fatal flaw, in his opinion, is his craving for things filled with external shine. However, he is not the only one who has this characteristic: the other students (and Julian) are obsessed with the idea of beauty, they strive to see the world differently from what it really is, and deliberately avoid reality. For the characters, the Hellenistic lifestyle is a kind of escapism; in the constant references to ancient Greek figures, ideas and literary images, their obsession with this world is noticeable, their regret is discernible because the real world is not like that. They constantly compare the surrounding reality with Hellenistic images (Julian's profile, for example, is described as an Etruscan bas-relief, and the gazebo at Francis's country house is described as a tholos, a round structure in ancient Greek architecture). The constant use of such comparisons shows how much classical philology has captured their consciousness.

Even the classroom in which Julian takes classes (Richard notes that he makes it a Platonic microcosm) is closed to the outside world, even geographically (it is their own pocket universe): they study in the Lyceum, an old building on the outskirts of campus where Professor Morrow works one. The teacher himself makes the selection based on personal impressions rather than academic indicators. The Lyceum is also a reference to the ancient Greek educational institution in Athens where Socrates and Aristotle taught. It is interesting that before the appearance of the school, temples of Apollo Lyceum were located in that place. The Lyceum is closed to everyone else who is not part of the classics group, it is a place of knowledge, of something sublime; This makes the contrast between the rest of Hampden's inhabitants stronger. When residents come to search for Bunny, Julian's territory appears to be desecrated: everything is trampled, littered, local children are rolling down the slope, and an old elm tree is mangled due to a jeep driving into it. This can be interpreted as the invasion of Dionysian chaos and energy invading the Apollonian cosmos, the world of the rational.

The characters' sense of superiority is manifested in the way they justify any of their actions based on their own morality: Henry calls the murder of Bunny «redistribution of matter» [6, p. 339], and Francis believes that the death of the farmer is a sad, but not particularly significant episode, since they «I mean, this man was not Voltaire we killed» [6, p. 220]. The motive of predetermined fate is important. What happens to the characters can be interpreted as fate, in which they themselves believe - Henry believes that by planning the murder of Bunny, he allows him to choose the circumstances of his death - but this is what they themselves want to believe, abdicating responsibility for their own actions.

The novel consists of a descriptive prologue, two episodes (Books I and II) and a retrospective epilogue. The distance between the narrator and the story, the reconstruction of events from memory, the disclosure of details during the course of the narrative suggests Plato's diegesis. The dramatic unity of time, place and action is maintained - events unfold over the course of one year on campus and its environs and narrate the causes and consequences of Bunny's death.

For ancient Greek tragedy, verbal expression plays an important role; Often events are not shown, but rather told. The novel embodies this in the sense that some of the most important scenes are described after the fact. We get the description of the ritual from the words of other characters, since Richard does not participate in it and does not even know until Henry informs him about what happened. At such moments, Richard's narrative blindness is striking, since preparations for the ritual take place in the same house where he spends his time with the others. Bunny's death is described very schematically - Richard cannot remember how it all happened. Jean-Pierre Vernant, a Hellenistic historian, defines tragedy as a space in which familiar institutions are questioned and the boundaries of morality blurred. "The Secret History" becomes a field within which the problems of arrogance, deliberate isolation from reality, and the use of intellectual resources for evil are explored. The motives characteristic of the ancient Greek tragedy is traced: conflict, sacrifice, divine punishment, predetermination of fate, the importance of knowledge. The plot as a whole is based on Euripides' "The Bacchae"; an important role is given to Dionysus, the god of wine, illusions and ritual madness.

The work tells the story of a tragically ended Dionysian ritual. D. Tartt, making an allusion to Euripides' "The Bacchae," shows what happens if repressed emotions come out. Once manifested, they are no longer controllable. This is what happens to the characters in the novel: Henry, always cold and reserved, admits that he felt something only when he killed a man; Bunny, upon learning of the ritual performed without him, becomes angry and causes others to fear that he will not be able to keep the secret (which subsequently leads to his death). Charles gradually slips into alcoholism; Francis begins to suffer from panic attacks. Camille is literally speechless, and when she comes to her senses, she speaks only French.

Thus, Julian's group, in a bacchanalian frenzy, brutally kill a local farmer with their bare hands - just as the maenads tear to pieces first the herd and then Pentheus. It is noteworthy that during the ritual they (the students) see Dionysus: «I remember a pack of dogs. Snakes twining around my arms. Trees on fire, pines bursting into flames like enormous torches. There was a fifth person with us for part of the time. [...] You know what the Greeks called Dionysus. Πολλυειδής. The Many-Formed One. Sometimes it was a man, sometimes a woman. And sometimes something else» [6, p. 169]. This divine phenomenon is probably the cause of Camilla's numbness. In addition, her brother has a deep bite on his arm that does not look like a human. After the ritual, they do not remember all the details, but Charles and Henry note how they chased a doe through the forest; It seems to Camilla that she herself was this doe. This motif can be seen in Euripides' "The Bacchae" - he describes the maenads as wild deer, not people. Moreover, it seems possible that the rest of the group also turned into dogs. They remembered running after a doe and covering a very long distance barefoot through the wilderness.

The atrocity committed by the characters seems to be a reference to Lord of the Flies. The rosy-cheeked, simple-minded Bunny, who became an outsider of the group and then a murder victim, is definitely an allusion to Piggy. Tartt's heroes - decent-looking college students - do terrible things, only one of the factors in their rejection of humanity is not geographical isolation from the outside world, but intellectual one.

Tartt's characters deliberately cut themselves off from the modern world; they are not interested in modern life or current historical periods. It comes to the point that they steal a TV to watch a report on the search for Bunny - none of them simply had one at home. If Richard does not belong to the group classily, then Edmund stands out culturally. He has no particular love for his specialty; he seems to choose it out of a sense of imaginary superiority. Richard remembers Bunny writing a worthless (and scientifically unreliable) final paper on John Donne; tells how

Bunny embarrassed them during the Christmas party from the literature department by uttering a loud cry at the mention of his idol, Emperor Augustus, in the text of the Gospel of Luke. Bunny began studying ancient Greek because of his dyslexia, since one of his schools believed that with such a perception disorder it would be useful to study a language other than the Latin alphabet. Bunny is the only one who has friendships outside the group; He has a lot of sympathy on campus. He watches TV, reads modern (often fiction) literature, is interested in sports - in a word, Bunny does not belong to the world or mentality of his friends.

An important leitmotif is the comparison of Dionysian and Apollonian principles; Nietzsche believed that Dionysus symbolizes spontaneity and ecstasy, Apollo – rationality and order. From here the binary opposition “Chaos-Cosmos” is born, the collision of modern man and primitive instincts, the world of eidos and the world of things. They accept the Dionysian principle with the help of ritual. Henry believes that they need to accept God in order to enter a state of trance and lose control over themselves. Thus, through the concepts under consideration, the binary opposition of Apollonian and Dionysian principles is deconstructed, where the first - order, honor, harmony - has always been associated with the masculine, and the second - chaos, darkness, madness - with the feminine.

There is other evidence of Hellenistic consciousness in the text: Richard thinks that dogs will be able to smell the scent of murder on them. Henry is much more worried about the medium working on campus (by the way, in the Aeneid the Sibyl knows the way to the kingdom of the dead). He also believes in omens (a pregnant dog crossing the road is interpreted by him as a bad sign; the twins say that he sees signs in the images of birds) and is quite superstitious (sometimes he leaves a saucer of milk on the porch in order to appease evil spirits). The atmosphere of Hampden, shrouded in fog, has been compared to Valhalla or Olympus. Henry initially plans to poison Bunny with mushrooms - Richard compares this to Agrippina mixing a poisonous mushroom into Emperor Claudius's dish.

Divine punishment falls on the heroes. All the characters are unhappy at the end, marked by the inevitability of fate. Richard is shot; Henry commits suicide; Charles runs away from home and is still suffering from addiction; Francis is forced to marry a girl, and therefore attempts suicide. Camilla looks after her aging grandmother and lives alone, unable to forget Henry even years after his death; she is not aware of the affairs of her twin brother and does not even communicate with him. Saying goodbye to her at the end of the novel, Richard remembers Orpheus looking back at Eurydice. Tartt's characters are marked by death as if by a curse. The motif of the shadow, the invisible presence of Bunny, and then Henry, is constantly repeated. Among the ancient Greeks, the image of a shadow is found as a spirit living in the underworld or the ghost of a dead person.

In addition, the dream motif is repeated no less often. This idea is expressed by Julian: “The dead appear to us in dreams [...] because that’s the only way they can make us see them; what we see is only a projection, beamed from a great distance, light shining at us from a dead star...” [6, p. 627] Francis echoes him: “Then again, the Athenians think death to be merely sleep” [6, p. 616]. A detailed description of dreams is repeatedly present on the pages of the novel; they are very surreal, filled with images that are sacred to the characters. Characters dream of each other or see dead people in their dreams. The Secret History even ends with a scene in which Henry visits Richard in his dream. Here a parallel is drawn with the scene from the Iliad, when the deceased Patroclus and Achilles meet in the latter’s dream.

Despite the fact that much more attention is paid to Shakespeare's contemporaries, and not to himself, the motifs of the shadow and sleep clearly refer to "Macbeth": "Macbeth does murder sleep" [5, p. 36]. Intertextuality also works through the work of T. Middleton. His tragedy "The Werewolf" raises the issue of the unforgivability of murder for any reason. Another play, *Women Beware of Women*, features a poisoning motif, which is Henry's original attempt to kill Bunny.

Julian appears as a sage figure, a priest of the cult. He enjoys unconditional respect among students and is a storehouse of sacred knowledge. It is he who expresses the idea of the beauty of the terrible, says that for a modern person the worst thing is to lose control over oneself; the Hellenes saw something beautiful in this. Julian knows that the students are planning a bacchanalia, but this does not scare him - on the contrary, he is happy when they succeed. In the context of Julian's character, Richard's choice of *The Avenger's Tragedy* for his dissertation seems remarkable. Vindice and Ippolito, two brothers, kill Lussurioso, who dishonored Antonio's wife, out of revenge, and he himself is proclaimed duke. Upon learning of their deed, Antonio sentences them to death. The same thing happens to Julian and his students: after learning about Bunny's death, he runs away from college without warning them, and this becomes the last straw for Henry. Considering that the students sincerely loved Julian and saw him as a fatherly figure, they regard such an act as a betrayal. After his departure, the specialty is closed, and no one except Richard returns to college. Thus, Julian, in a sense, sentences them to spiritual and psychological execution.

Thus, here intertextuality helps to reveal the inner world of a character who interprets texts in accordance with his own emotional experiences. Richard once again finds escapism in art, but now with the goal of justifying his own sins and finding solace. In this case, intertextuality plays an appellative function, since the reader must understand the intention behind the choice of a particular author or work.

I would like to pay special attention to the image of Richard. As a narrator, he must play the function of the reader's guide in the world of the novel. We are limited to his point of view, which makes it not immediately clear that Richard is an absurdly unreliable narrator. This is where Tartt's writing skill shines, as she very subtly gives the reader hints to doubt half of what Richard lives, believes, and tells. We see the characters through the prism of his perception, we know only what he knows (and the character himself is deceived more than once). There is both a simple lack of understanding of the character and his doubts about what other characters tell him.

Lonely in life, with new friends he finds a sense of belonging; it seems to him that he is joining their close-knit group, but from the fact of his eternal ignorance it becomes clear that his friends devote him to their affairs only to a certain extent. The characters' frankness awakens after Bunny's death, when the sense of group unity is lost. At the end of the novel, Richard, an almost thirty-year-old man, is still alone in every sense - he has no family, no friends, no love relationships. The motif of a found family takes us back to Dickens, whose characters often seek and create their own microcosm. D. Tartt has repeatedly admitted that she is a fan of his work; her novel *The Goldfinch* is a deconstruction of *Great Expectations*.

Richard's insecurity is also due to the fact that he is young, in a new environment and among people of a different social background. Even when he thinks he is becoming part of this group, he is still an outsider. In addition, he is often under the strong influence of alcohol or drugs, and at some point, he begins to hallucinate. According to the writer, the entire novel is imbued with "altered states of consciousness" [6, 75]. Thus, the characters adhere to the cult of Dionysus, the god of wine, throughout the entire work, since they are almost always drinking something.

There is also a temporal distance - Richard remembers the events of eight years ago. He constantly destroys the integrity of the narrative, reminding him that this is all a story he is telling, and not a direct transmission of events. As in the ancient Greek tradition, he addresses the audience in the form of a reader.

In tragedies, several moral voices are heard at once, speaking with their own ideology. In a similar sense, *The Secret History* lacks a moral transmitter in the form of a single omniscient narrator. On the one hand, Richard's outsidership to some extent makes him a witness to events, not fully involved in the action. On the other hand, the very fatal flaw that he recognizes in himself at the very beginning plays a big role, since it prevents him from seeing everything in its true light. Thus, the narrative itself also has this flaw. At the end of the novel, some questions remain open, but even what is known casts doubt on Richard's interpretation.

In the image of Richard there is an allusion to Nick Carraway, who also enters a previously unknown world; they both see things from an outsider's point of view; They both belong to a different social class than their new friends and find themselves embroiled in dramatic situations. Richard admits that *The Great Gatsby* is his favorite book. In one situation, he even sees "I failed to see anything except what I construed as certain tragic similarities between *Gatsby* and myself" [6, p. 79].

The writer, to a certain extent, deconstructs one of the key scenes of Fitzgerald's novel, when *Gatsby* dies, shot by Myrtle's husband. Almost at the end of *The Secret History*, when the conflict between the characters reaches its limit, a drunken Charles looks for Camilla and Henry in a hotel room and threatens to shoot him. True, as a result, Henry shoots himself. The similarity between George Wilson and Charles is that both are in this way trying to deal with the lovers (in the case of *Gatsby*, wrongly) of their lovers, since Charles and Camilla indulged in incest.

Another similarity to *The Great Gatsby* is the role nature plays in the novel. D. Tartt admitted that she was guided by Fitzgerald in the way he uses weather to convey the state of the characters. She acts almost as a separate character. Nature often reflects the mental states of heroes and reacts to what is happening. At the moment of Bunny's murder, the forest is described as "[...] deathly still, more forbidding than I had ever seen them" [6, p. 298], and the campus atmosphere is compared to Kansas before a tornado.

There are also motifs from Dostoevsky from *Crime and Punishment*. Most of the text is devoted to the characters' fear of being caught; they all slip into a paranoid state in one way or another. They are also wracked with guilt over the crime they committed (Richard almost confesses everything to Bunny's father); Self-loathing, mental burden and mutual distrust subsequently play a large role in their destinies. Raskolnikov's famous question is relevant - "Am I a trembling creature or do I have the right?", and if initially they are convinced of the need to kill Bunny or of the insignificance of killing a farmer, then the realization of what they have done falls upon them with a heavy burden. The crimes themselves are not important to the text; What's more telling is the psychological and emotional punishment the characters receive for their actions.

Such intertextuality and the filling of the text with allusions are, for obvious reasons, natural for the novel. In the case of Fitzgerald and Dostoevsky, it serves more of a poetic function, since this guessing of references works like a game with the reader.

The ancient code is also widely used and the characters' belonging to the Hellenistic culture is emphasized - here intertextuality performs an expressive function, since it helps the writer to identify her cultural and semiotic reference points.

In addition to all of the above, the novel is filled with references to various writers and literary works. Mentioned are Plato, Euripides, Homer, Horace, Xenophon, Virgil, Dante, C. Marlowe, J. Donne, A. Rimbaud, E. A. Poe, C. Dickens, C. Baudelaire, T. S. Eliot, H. L. Borges, R. Brooke, J. Ford, S. Rushdie, R. Lattimore, D. Defoe, P. G. Wodehouse, A. Artaud, M. Proust, J. Orwell, F. Dick, A. Tennyson, R. Green, T. Lodge, T. Kidd, J. Lily, T. Nash and many others. From literary works - "Paradise Lost", "Lycidas", "Madame Bovary", "The Drunken Ship", "One Summer in Hell", "Ash Wednesday", "The Waste Land", "Hero and Leander", "Phaedo", "Apology of Socrates", "Epitaph to Charidant", "Iliad", "Vanity Fair", "Lethe", "The Great Gatsby", "The Wizard of Oz" and others.

Writers or other works are used to convey the mood of the text. Various situations or surroundings are described as something from F. M. Dostoevsky, J. Cocteau, L. N. Tolstoy, from "Alice in Wonderland" or "Gulliver's Travels". Julian, for example, seems to romanticize what is happening in this way; one gets the impression that he really wants to be the hero of the novel, and then he perceives everything as an incredible adventure.

Intertextuality in the novel also performs a metatextual function. It manifests itself through the title itself and the many epigraphs that accompany parts of *The Secret History*. This use of paratextuality—that is, the relationship of a text to its title or epigraph—is intended to help the reader interpret the novel.

As already mentioned, the title of the work is borrowed from Procopius of Caesarea, a Byzantine historian who, as a military chronicler under the Emperor Justinian, wrote an eight-volume *History of Wars*. Procopius also wrote a pamphlet, *Anecdota*, which talks about the real causes of certain political events. The title of the pamphlet was translated into English as "The Secret History". In this way, we are made to understand that the novel will describe events hidden from prying eyes under a veneer of decency and normality. For people from the outside world, everything looks as if the student dies as a result of an accident - the heroes are trying to frame what happened. Thanks to Richard, we learn the true reasons for Bunny's death and the effect it had on their future destinies. All the characters have their own hidden motives and secrets, but Edmund's death will forever remain their common secret, which they will take with them to the grave.

As the first epigraph, D. Tartt chooses an excerpt from the unwritten book "We, Philologists": "And so, I wonder about who and how becomes a philologist, and I affirm: 1. in youth a person does not yet have the slightest idea about the ancients Greeks and Romans, 2. he does not know whether he is fit to make them the subject of his study..." [2, p. 76]. The most obvious thing is that the novel is about students studying classical philology, just like Nietzsche himself once did.

In his book "The Birth of Tragedy from the Spirit of Music" [3, 196], the philosopher identifies two instincts - Dionysian and Apollonian, which are the deep principles of art. He also puts forward the concept of art as a wall that helps a person separate from the real world and maintain his poetic freedom. This idea underlies the existence of the characters in the novel, who prefer antiquity to their reality. Moreover, they embody both principles to varying degrees, with varying degrees of inclination towards one or the other.

Particularly interesting are the Dionysian and Apollonian instincts that emerge in Henry - always an ascetic, reserved, emotionless strategist who sees beauty in the Hellenistic idea of losing control of oneself. The novel stipulates that when people like Henry give vent to their feelings, terrible things happen. An incident is mentioned when he severely beats a guy with whom he had

a conflict; Judy, Richard's acquaintance, claims that six people could not pull Henry away. Bacchanalia is the quintessential acceptance of the Dionysian principle for all of them, but especially for him.

The elitism of the heroes makes them believe in their own superiority over others. Julian, during his first and most pivotal lecture, clearly promotes the idea of the superman. They come up with a theory about how the six of them could take over Hampden Town. Francis says that they would become "demigods [...] we could sit on thrones in the town square" [6, p. 40]. However, what happens after Bunny's death shows that they are just ordinary people, subject to fear and other emotions.

In light of this, Henry's suicide looks like a disappointment in Nietzsche's ideas. The flight of Julian, who has always promoted the high principles of self-sacrifice, duty, devotion, looks like hypocrisy against everything he himself believed in. Julian doesn't care about Bunny's death; he fears much more for his own reputation. Henry says that he would forgive him even for informing the police - at least it would be an action. Richard sees Henry's death as a unique way to prove to himself that everything that Julian spoke so enthusiastically about is not an empty phrase. Moreover, Henry sees the professor as a role model; he tries to embody the ideals that the teacher talks about and lives by. The nature of their relationship is interesting in that Julian clearly loves Henry more than anyone else because he sees his extraordinary potential. In addition, Julian himself believes in the superiority of platonic love between men over relationships with women - for example, he immediately concludes that Bunny did not show up for class because of problems with his girlfriend. Richard somehow catches them at the moment when Henry kisses Julian on the cheek. Thus, by his flight, Julian betrays the highest form of love that existed among the Hellenes.

The rest of the group, after all the events, returns to their families, they are forced to accept reality and live in it. Decadence, escapist aestheticization of the surrounding world and art for art's sake play a cruel joke on them, cruelly showing that in fact they "have no right." It is noteworthy that in the epilogue Richard quotes lines from "The Tragic History of Doctor Faustus" by C. Marlowe: "I'faith, he looks much like a conjurer" [6, p. 616]. It is interesting that Nietzsche himself said the following about Goethe's Faust: "Faust, tragedy of knowledge? Indeed? I laugh at Faust" [2, 133]. Thus, this cycle of acceptance and rejection of Nietzschean ideas by the characters in the novel is closed.

Thus, "The Secret History" is a synthesis of genres and has the features of an education novel, academic prose, and a university detective story. There are motives of understanding the world through art, loneliness of the individual, death and loss. The cultural and semiotic component of the novel is associated with ancient Greek tragedy; The ancient code not only performs a plot-forming function, but also helps to express the philosophical issues of the work. Ekphrastic appeals and the structure of ancient tragedy are part of the author's poetics of the text.

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