

Chapter 13.

The Full Spectra

i.

Oh TheoTheoTheoTheoTheoTheo¹. Born a tragedy at the MET. Flourishing words strung among long prose, you digress to the utmost extent, figuring your guilt, your mother's tragedy—your err. And a goldfinch size crater was left gruesomely tacked into your chest from the minute that bomb went off, and you were thrown among the pieces of wall and ceiling— *The Anatomy Lesson*². Why'd she have to see it again? But there's no excuse, is there? You were the one who stood by Tom Cable, Theo, while he was smoking that dastardly cigarette in the schoolyard during class. You were the one who got called into the office, scheduled for that very day when it was pouring rain so hard that you and your mother ducked into the MET. She wanted to show you her favorite paintings, the ones she'd studied in school, the ones she'd been haunted by as a child. But then you split up in the galleries. You'd meet her in the giftshop, but it happened. A grey cloud accompanied by a loud *BANG* consumed you, flung you, distraught you. You spoke to a man, Welty, and he was destiny. He gave you his ring, "Blackwell" inscripted in the gilt³. He told you to take it, the painting that is, and then that was the end. Well the beginning of it, anyway.

ii.

Donna Tartt, you crafty lady. You write in a sly, silent way, taking 12 years off after finishing *The Secret History*⁴. Though, there was no break involved. You hand wrote the whole book, acting as a silent observer, looking for your characters at the public library⁵. And those 12 years of anticipation brought: *THE GOLDFINCH* (the book is too grand to have any lower case letters or to exist in anything other than italics). I was 13 when I first picked up your book in a thrift store on main street. It was \$3⁶, and when I opened the book, a slip of magazine paper fell out showing your side profile and the history of your book. It was like a secret message, a whisper in my ear telling me I'm meant for *this* book and *this* book only. We're tied together by the thickest bond, like the whole of it lives in my stomach.

iii.

*The Goldfinch*⁷. The first painting your mother ever loved and Carel Fabritius' last one ever made. Just as he died in an explosion, so did your mother— their one survivor: *The Goldfinch*. Your painting, Theo. You said it yourself in all your words and prose and verse, "my

¹ Theo Decker is an adolescent New Yorker and the protagonist of Donna Tartt's *The Goldfinch*.

² *The Anatomy Lesson* is a Rembrandt painting made in 1632 depicting a dead man surrounded by doctors with his arm cut open.

³ *The Goldfinch* is not short of beautiful words, and my favorite is gilt. Sometimes I think she used the word gilt so much on purpose to tell me how much of Theo's guilt he sees everywhere.

⁴ "The Goldfinch," *Time*, accessed December 2, 2020, <https://time.com/70819/donna-tartt-2014-time-100/>.

⁵ *NEWSNIGHT: Kirsty Wark Interviews Author Donna Tartt about 'The Goldfinch'*. Youtube.com. United Kingdom: BBC, 2013. <https://youtu.be/AiL1dIXAQKo>.

⁶ The best \$3 of my life, what a steal.

⁷ Fabritius, Carel. "The Goldfinch," 1654. Mauritshuis. Hague, Netherlands.

painting.” And, I know you said you’d give it back in all your pages and all your pretty words, but I see why you kept it. Your mother, the obvious first guess. The better guess: you’re the bird Theo, chained to its feeding box, perched, ready to fly. Chained to your guilt, your secret (your mother), everything from the day at the MET hanging over you like a looming shadow forever depriving you of the sun. I don’t blame you for keeping the last shred of yourself and your mother you’ve had since that day. Without it I would never have had my beloved book.

iv.

Donna, your book– my book– is something I can’t stop staring at. I’ve only read twice through those cream colored pages, dripping with grandiose words, the ones that don’t make me want to punch myself in the face⁸. It’s the font, the title, the texture, the cover. Looking at it forces a clench of excitement and endearment within me, and an intrusive urge to rip the book apart. Not in a mean or even an angry way. I just feel a rush through my limbs, giving me the drive to grab out of necessity. I want to attach myself to the book in more than an intellectual way. I want to create tangible from the palpable by splaying the book open and cracking its spine, as if I could force a way to reach in and grab those words like grabbing money out of a wallet. Reading the verse isn’t quite enough when I look at *my book*. I feel a compulsion to rip more out of it and stuff it into my brain. I have an aggressive affinity to my book that can’t be sated by simply reading.

v.

There’s no true ending to *The Goldfinch*. You exist in your ongoing prose no matter what the words say. You’re the greys and browns of your painting, your title font on the cover, your side profile in a magazine page ripped out and placed in a book, and every one of the words that cascades your pages. You are...

⁸ I usually hate books that use big fancy words because it sounds pretentious and snobby (i.e. *Hopscotch* by Julio Cortázar (you can kindly screw off with your unnecessary poetry))

Works Cited

Fabritius, Carel. "The Goldfinch," 1654. Mauritshuis. Hague, Netherlands.

Carel Fabritius' *The Goldfinch* is one of 15 of his surviving paintings after an explosion from a gunpowder magazine near his studio that killed him and destroyed the majority of his art. It is a masterfully crafted painting done with oil on a panel only slightly bigger than a piece of paper. The piece represents techniques reminiscent of Rembrandt, most likely due to his affiliations to him as one of his pupils. The painting depicts a goldfinch chained to a feeding box in a stance as if it is about to fly.

The painting gives more and much needed context for the novel *The Goldfinch* by Donna Tartt. For one, the reader actually gets to see the centerpoint of the story, but they also get an understanding of why the main character Theo is entranced by the painting. The piece is also very symbolic of the ideas presented in the novel, so the book and the painting are communicating with each other while reading.

NEWSNIGHT: Kirsty Wark Interviews Author Donna Tartt about 'The Goldfinch'. Youtube.com.

United Kingdom: BBC, 2013. <https://youtu.be/AiL1dIXAQKo>.

Kristy Wark is a journalist and news presenter for BBC who hosted an interview on BBC Newsnight about the book *The Goldfinch* by Donna Tartt. The interview reviewed Tartt's writing as a whole, including her tactics, how often she writes, and her methods of writing (hand written and almost everyday). Wark's interview gave insight into how Tartt developed the novel and its intricate details spanning almost 1,000 pages.

The source offers opinions and insights about the novel straight from the author herself. Hearing her speak about her novel bridged a gap between my fascination with her writing and how the writing came to be, which gave me a newfound appreciation for both the author and the book. Learning that it took 12 years to complete the novel is astounding and extremely praiseworthy. Looking back at specific parts where I thought, “how did she do that, I want to write like that” I understood that a great level of meticulous persistence resulted in the prose that covers the pages.

Patchett, Ann. “Donna Tartt.” *Time*. Accessed December 2, 2020.

<https://time.com/70819/donna-tartt-2014-time-100/>.

Ann Patchett is an American novelist, essayist, and recent 2020 Pulitzer Prize finalist for her book *The Dutch House*— ironic since Tartt’s *The Goldfinch* won the Pulitzer Prize in 2014. Patchett wrote a paragraph about Donna Tartt for Time magazine about her career and the work she has been doing to achieve her status as Pulitzer prize winner of 2014. She outlines how between her first and second novel, she spent 10 years, and between her second and third (*The Goldfinch*), she spent 12.

This source mostly exists to outline how Tartt spent (and habitually does spend) a lot of time in between writing books. She is extremely meticulous and thorough in taking literal decades to write novels. This tidbit does add to the list of astonishing facts about the author. She is so methodical in her writing that it’s quite unbelievable. Looking at her deliberation gives me a wider sense of awe that I can’t help but place Tartt on a pedestal for her work.

Tartt, Donna. *The Goldfinch*. New York, New York: Little, Brown and Company, 2016.

The Goldfinch is a novel by Donna Tartt about a boy named Theo Decker who was visiting the MET before a disciplinary school meeting with his mother when there was a terrorist attack. The explosion greatly disoriented Theo and killed his mother. While coming to, he encountered an old man named Welty who eagerly urged him to take the painting *The Goldfinch*, the painting Theo had been looking at before the explosion. Throughout the book, Theo has to contend with the death of his mother and his terrible secret of stealing the painting.

Tartt's hefty novel of almost 1000 pages is consistently lengthy, specific, and extremely descriptive. She delves into so many different and thoroughly drawn plotlines throughout Theo's life from the age of thirteen to twenty-three. What stands out especially are the complex words Tartt tends to use, but she often utilizes them when describing Theo's inner thoughts. The more simplistic and predictably young boy-esque language contrasts the former well by creating a balance so the book doesn't seem pretentious. Tartt masterfully represents a complex story with beautiful language and does so while balancing a number of themes like addiction, loss, coming of age, and self-sabotage.

The source, of course, gives and breathes life into the lyrical essay as it is the main subject. But it isn't simply the novel itself that allows the essay to exist, but the emotions and attachments to the story and characters it creates. Without such a fondness for Theo and his plight, the essay couldn't be made.

Intention Statement

There are three elements that went into creating my ekphrastic lyrical essay: structure, praise, and pronouns. While there were other choices to consider, these three are the main focus of my essay in my effort to encapsulate the spirit of *The Goldfinch*, Donna Tartt, and my fascination with the novel.

The structure of my essay is meant to replicate that of the book. Each chapter in the book is titled with the chapter number followed by the chapter name, and all this is given one whole page to exist on. The content of the chapter often has several different parts (i.e. i., ii., v.) and those preface the prose, acting as sub-chapters within the chapter. The initial structure of my essay was just a paragraph following a paragraph following a paragraph, but I found that as I wrote, I was replicating Tartt's style in *The Goldfinch*, so it felt natural to add the sub-chapters. The end where I conclude saying there is no end to the book, it occurred to me that this work itself is an addition to the book. So, where the novel ends at chapter 12, I added my bit as chapter 13. The only added parts to *The Goldfinch's* structure are the footnotes and the line reading "BANG".

Continuing in structure, I kept the prose quite smushed together in 1.15 space since that is both how it is in the novel and that is what I admire most about the novel. Some pages in the book would be whole paragraphs without a break, and I found the excess to be the best part of the whole book. It was especially fitting since Theo is a complex character who will give detail on almost everything in his thoughts. The line, "BANG," where I spread out the writing around it is meant to be like an actual explosion, since they're inherently destructive and break up all surrounding them.

Praise is probably one of the most important parts of this essay, and is what ultimately makes it ekphrastic. I struggled in the beginning to give praise while adding in elements of the plot so readers wouldn't be confused, but it ended up sounding like lengthy, poetic garble. Splitting up the praise and poetic summary with *The Goldfinch* structure helped immensely and allowed for there to be more admiration for the book and the author. In addition to general praise, I used the pronoun "you" in reference to Tartt as well as the book (and Theo, but I'll get to that). By doing that, I gave direct praise to the two things I feel the most towards while reading the novel.

When referring to the subject of each sub-chapter— either Tartt, Theo, or *The Goldfinch*— I only used the second person singular "you." I did this to make my essay personal, almost in the style of a letter, to the subject. It made my writing somewhat obsessive as well, but that is exactly what my affinity to the book is. That becomes most apparent to readers in sub-chapter iv. I especially insert myself into the essay when I use the first person singular "I," and even more so when I use the first person plural "we." Using either of the first person pronouns makes the essay as personal as it can get, and once again adds to the obsessive tone.

My choices in structure, praise, and pronouns all coalesce to create an ekphrastic lyrical essay that not only mimics the novel it's about, but also develops into a personal letter to all that makes the novel brilliant for me. You could say it's an epistolary-ekphrastic-lyrical essay.