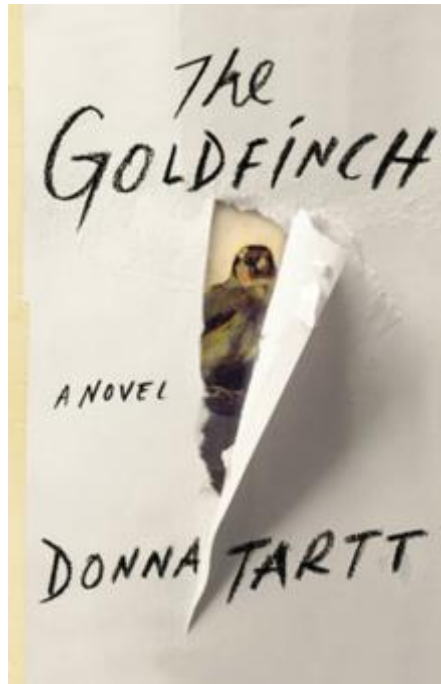


Adherence to Adolescence:
A Psycho-analytical View on Donna Tartt's *The Goldfinch*

L. S. Jerry Gracia, M.Phil. Scholar



Courtesy: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Goldfinch_\(novel\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Goldfinch_(novel))

Abstract

This paper unveils the aftermath of the terrorist attacks faced by the victims and their families. The struggle faced by the young people who are forced to become adults quickly to survive in the world for their living. The victims of the attacks become traumatized physically and mentally. Their struggle to overcome the fear and pain caused by the attacks with courage is a struggle to victory. Donna Tartt in her novel *The Goldfinch* brings out the struggles of the victim and the social issues. The protagonist Theo faces the hurdles of the survival at the young age of thirteen after the death of his mother in the Museum bombing. It explains the guilt and pain caused by the happening and his overcoming them with courage.

Keywords: Bombing victims, Trauma, Fear and pain, Loss of family, Courage to overcome

The Goldfinch

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The Mississippi-born American writer Donna Tartt is famous for her portrayal of the real world of social class, social stratification, guilt and aesthetic beauty. The novelist brings out the realistic life of the bourgeoisie and their day to day struggle to cope up with the society. All her novels bring out the pain and the search of the protagonist's lost love and hope. Tartt creates her novel from common issues which deploy the reality of the world. The Pulitzer winning novel *The Goldfinch* is a clear portrayal of the aftermath, the terrible life of the victims of the bomb blast, those who had lost their loved ones. It shows how the protagonists struggle to survive the unknown world which is filled with mystery and struggles.

“*The Goldfinch* is a novel of shocking narrative energy and power. It combines unforgettably vivid characters, mesmerizing language, and breathtaking suspense, while plumbing with a philosopher's calm the deepest mysteries of love, identity, and art. It's a beautiful, stay-up-all-night and tell-all-your-friends triumph, an old-fashioned story of loss and obsession, survival and self-invention, and the ruthless machinations of fate.” (Lit lovers)



Donna Tartt

Courtesy: http://www.goodreads.com/author/show/8719.Donna_Tartt

Theodore Decker in 9/11

The Goldfinch is a depiction of the 9/11 terrorist attack where numerous lives were destroyed. The aftermath of this is seen in the victims' lives who lost their family and loved ones, living with the physical and mental pain. In this novel, Theo (Theodore Decker) is the one who faces the pain at the age of thirteen after the terrorists' bomb attack. The novel

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portrays the teenager's way of survival and the pressure to mature, to know more about the society. This paper brings out the young protagonist's pain and struggle to survive the dehumanized world and his ability to overcome the dehumanized world. Theodore Decker who is forced to grapple with the world alone after his mother... [is killed]. Tartt's narrative is in essence an extended footnote to that horror, with his mother becoming ever more alive in memory even as time recedes.... (Kirkus Reviews)

Survival within a Society

Theo faces three different circumstances where he learns about surviving within a society. Though he learns he could not let go of the memory of his mother and the art which he got from the old man in the museum during the blast, these two things play a vital role in the growth of Theo. After the incident Theo runs back home to find his mother whom he believes is not dead. He waits for his mother's phone call instead he receives a phone from the hospital conveying the news of mother's death. "I missed her so much I wanted to die: a hard, physical longing, like a craving for air underwater. Lying awake, I tried to recall all my best memories of her—to freeze her in my mind so I wouldn't forget her—but instead of birthdays and happy times I kept remembering things like how a few days before she was killed she'd stopped me halfway out the door to pick a thread off my school jacket. For some reason, it was one of the clearest memories I had of her: her knitted eyebrows, the precise gesture of her reaching out to me, everything. Several times too—drifting uneasily between dreaming and sleep—I sat up suddenly in bed at the sound of her voice speaking clearly in my head, remarks she might conceivably have made at some point but that I didn't actually remember, things like 'Throw me an apple, would you?' and 'I wonder if this buttons up the front or the back?' and 'This sofa is in a terrible state of disreputableness.'"

Traces of His Mother Everywhere

The young boy finds the traces of his mother everywhere; then he accepts his fate to move on with his life with a burdened heart. He never gets any support from his grandparent's family and he is fostered temporarily by Barbour's family. The family think him as a responsibility, whereas, all that the thirteen year old Theo needed was love and care. Theo was taken to the counselling to help his mental stability: "I accepted all this counsel politely, with a glassy smile and a glaring sense of unreality. Many adults seemed to interpret this numbness as a positive sign; I remember particularly Mr. Beeman (an overly clipped Brit

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in a dumb tweed motoring cap, whom despite his solicitude I had come to hate, irrationally, as an agent of my mother's death) complimenting me on my maturity and informing me that I seemed to be "coping awfully well." And maybe I was coping awfully well, I don't know. Certainly I wasn't howling aloud or punching my fist through windows or doing any of the things I imagined people might do who felt as I did. But sometimes, unexpectedly, grief pounded over me in waves that left me gasping; and when the waves washed back, I found myself looking out over a brackish wreck which was illumined in a light so lucid, so heartsick and empty, that I could hardly remember that the world had ever been anything but dead."

Finding No Love

Though the Barbour's family was considerate to him, he still found no love and care in that family. Then he found Hobie (Hobart) who was told by the old man Welty in the museum to visit him with a ring. Theo found his individuality and happiness in that place. He found that love can be found only with hearts not with money. In his novel, Hobie plays a vital role in the life of Theo. He is like a guardian to him, he helps Theo to survive the world and he allows him to free himself from all pain.

When One Chooses the Right Path

Hobie is one of the main characters in the novel where he shows survival in the world is not tough when one chooses the right path. "Hobie's reassuring hand on my shoulder, a strong, comforting pressure, like an anchor letting me know that everything was okay. I hadn't felt a touch like that since my mother died—friendly, steadying in the midst of confusing events—and, like a stray dog hungry for affection, I felt some profound shift in allegiance, blood-deep, a sudden, humiliating, eye-watering conviction that this place is good, this person is safe, I can trust him, nobody will hurt me here." The Barbour's family took Theo inside their house to show off their charity and the how open hearted they were. Their love for Theo was unreal. Theo finds happiness with Hobie who allows him to do things the way he wishes and corrects him whenever its needed. Hobie shows the real role of a father and a family which Theo could rely on. Theo finds that the value of love is more than money. From then on he spends most of the time with Hobie.

New Life in Las Vegas

The second incident where he learns about survival was when his father Larry Decker returns with his girlfriend Xandra to take his son back to Las Vegas. Theo has hatred towards his father because of his past actions towards his mother. He ran away leaving his mother in grief and pain, but Theo and his mother found happiness after that incident. Theo was not happy to go with his father but the Barbour's family was not ready to accept him back. So Theo bid his farewell to everyone. He found a new life in Las Vegas with his new friend, Boris. Boris is "gloomy, reckless, hot-tempered, appallingly thoughtless. Boris pale and pasty, with his shoplifted apples and his Russian-language novels, gnawed-down fingernails and shoelaces dragging in the dust. Boris — budding alcoholic, fluent curser in four languages — who snatched food from my plate when he felt like it and nodded off drunk on the floor, face red like he'd been slapped." Theo even thought Boris had some bad habits, but he found happiness with him as he found with Hobie. Theo tried new things everyday with Boris and he was very happy to do so. Theo was happy with Boris he found a new life in the barren land. Theo was unable to believe his father's love and care. But Theo finally finds out the true colour of his father's love when he finds out that Larry took him in because of the money that Theo's mother saved up for him.

Betrayals and Pain

Larry was in debt due to gambling and he thought of settling the debt with that amount. Theo was happy that he had a family, wanted by his father and the pain would go away, but fate played a violent game. Larry was after his money and not for the love of his son. The act of the father affects the son because the huge trauma caused by his mother's loss is again stimulated by his father's act. Boris' betrayals affect the mind of Theo; first he leaves Theo for the sake of his girlfriend. He follows with many betrayals, but Theo doesn't lose his trust for Boris. But the final confession of Boris breaks Theo's trust completely, that is the selling of the painting without the knowledge of Theo. The painting of the Goldfinch had great impact in the life of Theo. The painting has lived with him all the time after the bombardment. The painting replaced the place of his mother but not the presence of his mother. The painting has seen his tears, anger and every soul emotions of the young protagonist. When he hears that Boris has sold the painting he finds a real betrayal on the spot which he receives from the most trusted person and loved one in his present life. Theo loses his trust in everyone and he gets back to Hobie after these incidents.

When Theo returned, he found Hobie was in debt and he decided to help Hobie. So Theo started selling the fake portraits made by Hobie to many foreign people. Through that he settled all the debts of Hobie and started to live happily with him.

Original The Goldfinch Painting - Trauma

One day he found the Barbour's family and found that Andy was dead. He felt sorrowful because the only person in the Barbour's house who shared empathy with him was Andy. Theo accepted the proposal and agreed to marry the Barbour's daughter Kitsey. On the day of engagement, Boris arrived at the party, and conveyed the message that he found the painting of The Goldfinch.

Fate again played a trick through the character of Lucius Reeve who found out the illegal business done by Theo. Hobie felt bad about the wrong manner he had chosen to pay off the debt. Theo had guilt in his heart and he ran off from the place with Boris. Boris and Theo went to fetch the painting from a gang and they caused a commotion. The commotion finally ended up in the death of the gang member, which again resulted in stimulating the trauma in the mind of Theo.

Theo was alone left in the hotel for days and Boris was nowhere to be seen. Theo one day dreamt of his mother and it made him have a heart change. “[S]he came up suddenly beside me so I saw her reflection in a mirror. At the sight of her I was paralyzed with happiness; ... [S]he was smiling at me, ... not a dream but a presence that filled the whole room ... I knew I couldn't turn around, that to look at her directly was to violate the laws of her world and mine; ... our eyes met in the glass for a long moment; but just as she seemed about to speak ... — a vapor rolled between us and I woke up.” This brought a heart change in the mind of Theo. He planned to confess the truth about the painting to the officials and receive the required punishment. When Theo was about to go out of the hotel, Boris called him out and handed out a lump of money. Boris said that the painting has been given to the officials and this was the reward money. Theo decided to get back all the painting that he has illegally sold as compensation.

Theo understands “That life — whatever else it is — is short. That fate is cruel but maybe not random. That Nature (meaning Death) always wins but that doesn't mean we have to bow and grovel to it. That maybe even if we're not always so glad to be here, it's our task

to immerse ourselves anyway: wade straight through it, right through the cesspool, while keeping eyes and hearts open. And in the midst of our dying, as we rise from the organic and sink back ignominiously into the organic, it is a glory and a privilege to love what Death doesn't touch.”

Pain in the Heart

The painting was the real reason for the pain in the heart in addition to the loss of his mother. The guilt that he had after stealing the painting and the fear he had, increased the pain in his heart instead of reducing it. Theo was full of guilt; he thinks that he was the reason for the death of his mother. His mother would not have died if he did not get called by the school for his mischief. The death of the mother affects Theo at the age of thirteen and gives him a lot of responsibility. The age which is meant to be happy becomes a burden in the life of Theo. He is pushed to become a responsible young teenager to survive in this dehumanized society. Theo starts his life with endurance and innocence. But these did not help him in any way, it deceived him. Later he finds happiness with his loved ones, but he chooses the wrong path to make them stay in their life.

Theo, to save Hobie from debts and make him happy, makes the wrong choice of selling Hobie's fake painting to the upper class people. He realises his mistake when Lucius opens up about the illegal business he has been doing. He finds himself guilty and runs away from the party. Theo's fear and guilt were the ones which suppressed him from everything. Theo did not try to overcome them, instead he tried to escape from them. Every time he suppresses his fear he falls into the deep black pit of pain. The dreams were the only hopes he had in his life to overcome the negative elements of his life. Tarrt brings out the real problems faced by the people who are affected by disasters and bombardment. The life after becomes a struggle to live in the unknown society with all sorts of responsibility on their shoulders. The character Theo wants to develop a new hope with which he can live in peace. It took nineteen years to find his long lost hope and his living in the society. Throughout the novel he finds trouble more than love and hope, but he finally finds the strategy to live in the real world through the dream of his mother.

Struggle and Pain Endured by the Victims of the Disasters and Terrorist Attacks

Tartt depicts the struggle and pain endured by the victims of the disasters and terrorist attacks, who have lost one of their family. Picking up the issues that are prevailing in the society, she brings out the positive and negative aspects of the society. The life struggles affect the people and force them to take responsibility to survive the society. Troubling are the emotions in the hearts of young kids who lose their loving family and are forced to become responsible for the sake of survival. The terrorist attacks and war cause great impacts in life, they change the fate of people within seconds. The decision of certain individuals causes collisions in the life of many people and makes them face struggles that they never faced before in their lives.

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