

## SILENCING THE OTHER IN 'THE ARTIST' (2006) BY MAGGIE GEE

**Olga A. Dzhumaylo**

Southern Federal University (Rostov-on-Don, Russia).

ORCID ID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1217-5567>

*Abstract.* The study proposes an interpretation of Maggie Gee's short story *The Artist* (2006) through Bakhtinian perspective, which enables its reading both as a piece of social criticism and as a mediation about the true artist's capacity for empathy and responsiveness towards the Other. A nontrivial meditation about the dimensions of being an Artist is conceived in an elaborate narrative, revealing the protagonist's lack of ethical consciousness and sensitivity through some formal means. The first set of means foregrounds monological aspects of Emma's (a would-be artist) approaching Boris (a migrant worker), which leads to his objectivized image, and its silencing as an equal subject. The 'central consciousness' mode of narration with signs of unreliability is combined with instances of the unexpected shifts from Emma's to Boris's point of view, some effects of ellipsis, and a 'circular story' structure in order to provide a key to satirical message of the author. The second set of formal means are signs and symbols, which represent lack of protagonist's sensitivity and 'answerability' to the Other: the protagonist's ability to perform (verbally and corporeally) with empathy is questioned. Her vision is highly selective and displaced, which is rendered through 'ostranenie' (Shklovsky). Ironic and playful use of title is combined with a repetition of attributive 'sensitive', used and understood in a different way all through the story, which deconstructs a banal love story and widespread cultural preconceptions, gives way to a social drama of migrants' silencing, and finally questions the artist's ethics.

*Keywords:* Maggie Gee; artistic self; the Other; answerability; silencing; dialogism in fiction.

## ОТРИЦАНИЕ «ДРУГОГО» В РАССКАЗЕ «ХУДОЖНИК» (2006) МЭГГИ ДЖИ

**Джумайло О. А.**

Южный федеральный университет (Ростов-на-Дону, Россия).

ORCID ID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1217-5567>

*Аннотация.* Рассматриваемый сквозь призму идей Бахтина об искусстве как ответственности рассказ современной британской писательницы Мэгги Джи «Художник» (2006) предстает не только как художественная форма социальной критики, но и как нетривиальное размышление о личном измерении художника, его способности к сопереживанию и диалогу с Другим.

Интрига и ирония заглавия рассказа, в сюжете которого возникает пара героев, именующих себя художниками, также закрепляется лейтмотивным повтором атрибутивной характеристики «чувствительный», понимаемой по-разному на протяжении рассказа, вплоть до ее полной деконструкции. Во-первых, система художественных средств рассказа организована с введением фокализации, «центрального сознания» героини, ограниченность художественного воображения и личностная недостаточность которой не позволяет ей понять подлинную драму героя, трудового мигранта из Боснии. Монологизм сознания героини приводит к полной объективации его образа и отрицанию Другого как равноправного субъекта. Сатирический замысел автора проявляется посредством введения внезапных сдвигов фокализации (от точки зрения Эммы к точке зрения Бориса), сюжетными лакунами, кольцевой композицией. Второй набор формальных средств – это знаки и символы, которые представляют собой отсутствие чувствительности и «ответственности» главного героя перед другим: способность главного героя действовать (вербально и телесно) с эмпатией ставится под сомнение. Ее зрение сильно избирательно и смещено, что передается через «остранение» (Шкловский). Ироничное и игривое использование названия сочетается с повторением атрибутивного «чувствительного», используемого и понимаемого по-разному на протяжении всей истории, что деконструирует банальную историю любви и широко распространенные культурные предубеждения, уступая место социальной драме молчания мигрантов и, наконец, ставит под сомнение этику художника.

Джумайло О. А. Отрицание «Другого» в рассказе «Художник» (2006) Мэгги Джи

Ключевые слова: Мэгги Джи; личность художника; Другой; ответственность; диалогизм в художественной литературе.

Для цитирования: Джумайло, О. А. Отрицание «Другого» в рассказе «Художник» (2006) Мэгги Джи / О. А. Джумайло. – Текст: непосредственный // Филологический класс. – 2020. – Т. 25, № 4. – С. 173–180. – DOI: 10.26170/FK20-04-17.

For citation: Dzhumaylo, O. A. (2020). Silencing the Other in 'The Artist' (2006) by Maggie Gee. In *Philological Class*. Vol. 25. No. 4, pp. 173–180. DOI: 10.26170/FK20-04-17.

Maggie Gee's *The Artist*, which is placed in the short story collection 'Blue' (2006), due to its title and ambiguous narrative voice, may perplex a reader. At the plot level of the story's perception there is a questioning about who is *the* real Artist. It turns out that the main protagonist, the middle-aged Emma, who lives with her husband in the house and asks a migrant worker (presumably from Bosnia) to make some repairs, is actually a narcissistic would-be novel writer, but is not published at all. Notably, in one of the episodes, she is wearing 'a smart Chanel-copy suit with gold buttons and pink braid' [Gee 2006: 22]. At the same time her painter, whose name is Boris, is a well-known artist in his country, 'a genius', now displaced by misfortune in his home country. But this typically novelistic turning point, which is interesting in itself, is not the whole story.

Mine Ozyurt Kilic starts one of the chapters of her book 'Maggie Gee. Writing the Condition-of-England novel' (2013) with Boris's figure as 'an emblem of the ignored and rejected artist', and makes a suggestion that 'the story problematizes the position of dislocated artists who live beyond their national context and questions what it is that makes the artist a respectable figure' [Kilic 2013: 140]. It is also clear that dramatic news about Boris's daughter's death and his artistic block as a result of this traumatic experience is fueled by social satire here: the middle-class arrogance of an English woman doing nothing sounds self-revealing and ironic, when she says with a sheer feeling of superiority: 'Boris feels he's an artist. He isn't, of course. But he wants to be'. She enjoyed this thought. Poor Boris. What Emma did, he only dreamed of' [Gee 2006: 17].

The plot, which is developing around Emma's temporary hospitality, might also have a historical background: without going into detail Emma mentions 'that bloody awful war' [Gee 2006: 17]. After 1992, the year of UK visa restrictions for asylum seekers from former Yugoslavia, the gov-

ernment established the Bosnia Project according to which a quota of refugees might gain the status of temporary protection. It gave the state the right to repatriate refugees when the war in the former Yugoslavia was over. For those who were brought to Britain, there was usually little or no choice over which country they were to go to. Interestingly, Emma's caring and compassionate words 'He didn't choose to come here. But now we can help him' [Gee 2006: 17] might be emblematic. Thus, Boris and his family, who are offered tea, biscuits and lemonade in Emma's house, are actually not even getting water or are being reproached for not fully rewarded kindness: "[...] She yelled at him, feeling her power at last, losing her temper with his handsome tanned face, his white broken teeth, his thick stupid curls, his foreign problems, the swamp of his need, sucking down tea and coffee and kindness [...]" [Gee 2006: 21]. Behind stimulated artistic affinity and friendly small talk, the fundamental relationships of power, of inclusion and exclusion, and of the subaltern Other, are still alive. Maggie Gee 'exhibits an infallible ear for the faltering language' [Hickling 2006], but her stories are also remarkable for their endings.

Emma's 'welcoming scheme' is repeated at the end of the story, but this time the young Bosnian ex-student 'started to talk about invasions, displacements. Oh dear, she thought, he may be a bore.' [Gee 2006: 26]. Remarkably Emma is struggling to open the packet of biscuits: her sweet charm cannot cover her actual emotional greediness and only temporary hospitality.

All above said goes well with the wide-spread idea that the short story form often speaks directly to and about those whose sense of self is insecure, of 'submerged population groups' [O'Connor 2004]. 'The Artist' offers the representation of liminal or problematized identities and ruptured condition of migrants (Boris, his family and countrymen) and it is not surprising in view of social, political and ethical agendas in

Maggie Gee's novels, now translated into fourteen languages and shortlisted for numerous prizes.

And yet, the story's title 'The Artist' provokes to consider it as nontrivial meditation about the ethical dimensions of being an Artist. In other words, this 'slice of life' kind of story about either unsuccessful romance, or dramatic loss, steadily shows sensitivity and empathy for real Other to be the core of truly artistic self. Drawing on 'Art and Answerability' by Mikhail Bakhtin, as well as his fundamental ideas about the dialogism of understanding I seek to examine silencing the Other in "The Artist".

Exploring the key idea of I and the Other, Bakhtin introduces two forms of cognitive activity: monological – knowledge of things and any objects of knowledge as things, and dialogical – knowledge of another subject. "The consciousnesses of other people cannot be perceived, analyzed, defined as objects or as things – one can only relate to them dialogically. To think about them means to talk with them, otherwise they immediately turn to us their objectivized side: they fall silent, close up, and congeal into finished, objectivized images." [Bakhtin 1984: 68]. Thus, monologue, according to Bakhtin, denies the presence of what is outside oneself, equal consciousness, equal 'Self' ('You'). In the monological approach, the 'Other' remains only the object of consciousness.

Another idea of Bakhtin links 'answerable deed' and 'answerability of the deed'. "[...] One thing should be very clear: in so far as an utterance is not merely what is said, it does not passively reflect a situation that lies outside language. Rather, the utterance is a deed, it is active, productive: it resolves a situation, brings it to an evaluative conclusion (for the moment at least), or extends action into the future. In other words, consciousness is the medium and utterance the specific means by which two otherwise disparate elements – the quickness of experience and the materiality of language – are harnessed into a volatile unity. Discourse does not reflect a situation, it is a situation' [Holquist 2002: 196]. Having this in mind, however let us follow Dominic Head's idea that there is a vital connection between the literary form of a short story and the social context, a connection which is often challenged [Head 1992: 189].

Our purpose is to explore Maggie Gee's idea of the true artistic ethical consciousness and sensitivity through formal means of her telling the story. We will focus, firstly, on particulars of monological aspects of Emma's approaching the Other as it is manifested in the choice of narrative mode (central consciousness); and, secondly, on selected signs and symbols representing absent scope of protagonist's sensitivity and 'answerability' to the Other.

**Consciousness of the Artist.** The story is written in 'indirect free' style of narration in which the voice of the narrator is modulated so that it appears to merge with that of a character of the fiction. And the ambiguity of the artist's identity in the story is complicated by the narration mode, which is mostly Emma's central consciousness. In course of development of the short story plot line the reader is faced with a situation fraught with slight contradictions in the (main) focalizer Emma. But whether he adopts the sceptical view of the focalizer's selective representation of reality, he has to decide whether the character narrator is fallible or deluded. Following Vera Nünning's insightful ideas in "Unreliable Narration and Trustworthiness: Intermedial and Interdisciplinary Perspectives" [Nünning 2015], Emma might be both unaware of what she may have done (fallible), and self-deceptive (deluded), if indeed in some way she is aware of her being insensitive to Boris's troubles.

At the very beginning there is some artistic or potential love bond suggested from what is said and what appears in Emma's mind. From her perspective the worker is flirting with her: 'dark red... rose he was offering her with that graceful, cavalier flourish', 'he bowed extravagantly, a knight' and there are signs of 'admiration' [Gee 2006: 20], which she easily transfigures into a romance in a contemporary middle-class house setting (inaccessible princess, castle, husband and pleasantly 'impossible' knight).

As a would-be artist she is aestheticizing their relationships and Boris himself. Being apart from him she is back to missing his phantasmic image – his 'sweet dark eyes, the slight roughness of his jaw' and remembers how 'he had opened doors for her. Surely, he liked her. He gave her a rose. He... admired her' [Gee 2006: 25]. She

is maintaining a desired self-concept in the cheap melodramatic frame she has created herself.

As Boris's presence is a tool to inflame her imagination of that of a love story writer, she pushes herself to writing during the dramatic day when Boris's daughter possibly dies somewhere in the hospital and he himself is forced to finish repairs: 'She felt unsettled, sitting bowed in her study, trying to invent a love story, safe in her room in the cool pleasant house but uneasily aware of the four male bodies crawling all over it, obsessed, intent, locked to her hot surfaces, sweating, grunting' [Gee 2006: 24].

As we have seen throughout this short story the central consciousness of Emma tends to work against the elaboration of Boris's character, the details of his situation, and any kinds of continuities that inevitably emerge from genuine interest and care. This fits perfectly with Gee's desire to portray Emma's interest towards Boris, which is not truly personal – she considers him to be a tool to a pleasant erotic imagination, which is why she finds annoying all the real-life details which may ruin her phantasmic reality. There is a curious resemblance between Emma and her husband, they both simply make use of Boris and are annoyed with his being not altogether able to fit their expectations. For Edward, Boris is 'this person', not 'a proper builder, an English one', 'just an illegal, cheap', 'clown', unable to finish his work in due time. For Emma, Boris is 'different' and his appearance in her house is a tool to push her creativity to be full of exotic imagery, ridiculously stale though it is: 'She liked Boris's voice, and his accent, which spoke to her of strange wide spaces somewhere far away in southeast Europe, hot stony fields, bright market-places, somewhere she would never go, she supposed, since now she so rarely went out at all' [Gee 2006: 17]. She is utterly disillusioned when she gets a real picture of other migrants, which she suppresses: 'Boris had come to her on false pretenses; he had let her imagine him framed by blue mountains, aromatic meadows, sturdy flocks, but now she saw he just came from this, a sour sad place where no one was happy' [Gee 2006: 24]. At the end of the story Emma finds a similar type of man, because his 'mouth was quite appealing', and this nullifies Boris as a personality, and objectifies him to the point of replacement.

Emma's stereotypical thinking is probably a result of her self-chosen home entrapment, which contributes to her narrow middle-class views and conservative, to the point of boredom, tastes (in this respect she is a true wife of her husband reading the Antiques Almanac); and her inability to imagine a complicated situation, which escapes labeling. Thus, Boris is an exotic 'knight', 'an excellent worker', and a 'cheap illegal', but never a loving family man, a genius artist, and a victim of displacement. Migrant workers cannot be 'proper', foreigners' names are incomprehensible, and there is no awareness about the fine arts and seventeenth century history in the "strange wide spaces somewhere far away in southeast Europe" [Gee 2006: 17]. She is stubborn in her preconceptions, her way of seeing things has a particular culturally-biased optics (e.g. 'Boris, who drove them before him like sheep' [Gee 2006: 18]).

In absence of authoritative voice to point a moral, the 'moral revelation' can be realized not through the narrative itself (it is problematized), but with some other means. In 'The Artist' they are: an unexpected shift from Emma's central consciousness to Boris's; some effects of ellipsis; and a 'circular story' structure.

Thus, we witness the disappearance of Emma's narrative voice in the crucial episode of her demanding Boris to finish his repairs, which is exceptional for the text: '[...] She screamed at him. Boris was frightened of this new savage woman, so different from the mild, flirtatious one he knew' [Gee 2006: 21]. Gee traces, through her own use of focalization in this text, the way for a 'blazing moment' for Boris. Naming Emma as savage does not only ironically subvert ethnic preconceptions, or refers to her lack of emotional control, but manifests her hostility. From that point in the text he responds formally and never looks her in the eyes. The change in focalization also goes together with the change of 'normalcy' of site for Emma and signals the discovery of a real world of poverty and misfortune.

Dialogue between characters is rare, brief or disconnected, revealing no genuine conversation or real exchange of thought. With the use of abruptness it shows suppressed wishes or conclusions Emma does not want to confess to herself: her need for Boris's male admiration, her longing for a similar experience, and her regrets

(if any). An abridged episode when Emma wants Boris to smile to her before he leaves forever is followed with no comments about the manner it happened, but this part of the text is finished with the unanswered question from Edward addressed to Emma: 'Why are you crying?' But even this last hope for Emma's genuine sensitivity will be destroyed with the last lines of the story, when Emma hires a new Bosnian worker after proving he has no family.

Free from any duties and literally having a 'room of one's own' Emma is just the opposite of a free female spirit whom Gee is celebrating in Woolf, when citing from *Three Guineas* about 'the capacity of the human spirit to overflow boundaries and make unity out of multiplicity...' [Gee 1991]. No doubt Emma is still living in a patriarchal society and her forced hostility towards Boris might have been preconstructed by the middle-class values of her husband, who is reproaching her: 'You can't manage tradesmen, you never could. The cleaners never do what you tell them to' [Gee 2006: 13]. Her attitude is just opposite to that '[...] unindifference' of those acts performed on the basis of acknowledgement of one's 'obligate uniqueness', as Bakhtin puts it, that the ethical dimensions of acts, [...] to people, is fully integrated' [Wagner 1999: 82].

Emma's being tactful is nothing but a false pretense which adds to her total ignorance about migrants' misfortunes. She doesn't care about 'sensitive issues' and her stubborn attitude towards Boris, who 'would never be an artist', is confirmed when Emma asks him for 'proper workmen', not understanding that they are proper workmen but socially dismissed as illegal migrants.

What is more interesting is that true artist's sensitivity is silenced in Emma's mind, she never believes in Boris's talent even when it was directly acknowledged by others.

The existential ontology of individual being in Bakhtin is actualized as a "continuous act", which is not only individual, but embodies "participatory thinking", "participatory experience" and therefore becomes a "participatory act", or "dialogic act". Therefore, it is appropriate to emphasize again that Bakhtin's understanding of "otherness" provides for the "non-diversity-inseparability" of I and the Other, I and culture, which mutually penetrate in "participative actions" as

unique "events of being" and become dialogues of I with the Other, with other people and other cultures. The young Bosnian guy would have told the missing parts of Boris's story, but Emma doesn't want to listen.

The 'circular story' composition with the repetition of the key elements of the plot – Emma, attractive Bosnian worker, coffee, artistic bonding pretext – deconstructs what tries to pass itself off as polite and ethical behavior. Apart from this, it is now obvious that by silencing the nicely-spoken English of the young Bosnian guy, Gee shows Emma's cynical lack of any concern and thus indirectly defines what she means by true ethics. Her narrative technique and her choice of silencing of voices is a potent device for delivering the idea of total objectivization of the Other, the denial of the presence outside one's own mind, of equal consciousness, of equal "You". All in all, it creates a satirical characterization of Emma-the-artist.

**Sensitivity of the Artist.** In their introduction 'Beyond the Blue. The Sorrowful Joy of Gee' to a book of critical essays 'Maggie Gee' (2015), Sarah Dillon and Caroline Edwards attract attention to the writer's 'stark acceptance of and an open confrontation with our mortality, at the same time as a defiant hope that we might never end' [Dillon and Edwards 2015: 9]. The critics find ambiguity of the Gee's use of blue: 'Is the blue positive or negative for Gee? Is it Edenic haven of restfulness free from chains and cares of the present? Or is it the cold emptiness after death? The answer, of course, is "both" [Dillon and Edwards 2015: 9]. It is possibly significant that in 'The Artist' blue is clearly associated with the early death of a beautiful girl: her face became blue when she was suffering from asthma attacks. Still we find it difficult to philosophize about restfulness free from chains of migrants' life. There's another matching mortally cold blue in the story – Emma's 'striking blue' eyes, and her emotional coldness, inability to see and hear others.

In any case, Emma's proclamation of her own artistic sensitivity is steadily shaken throughout the story, as to be sensitive means to be aware of and able to understand other people and their feelings. Emma is strikingly different from Maggie Gee herself, who dedicates the book to her friend and editor who passed the year before the

collection's publication and puts it like this: '1933–2005: into the blue'.

As if she is an evil doppelganger of the writer, Emma refrains from any reflections, does not endure fits of self-doubt or frustration. Emma's blue eyes can see but cannot "feel into the blue" of anyone's heart. Emma persists in thinking about an ongoing love-affair no matter how inappropriate the current situation is. She cannot read the fear in Boris's grasping of her hand, and also misinterprets his reserve for a man's charm: "He looked at her strangely as she came downstairs, but he bowed slightly, and she felt exalted. She was excited: it was an outing. She didn't listen to what he was saying" [Gee 2006: 22]. Emma is surprised to see tears in his eyes a bit later after a telephone call. The reader is guessing about bad news from the hospital, but Emma is unaware of the backstage drama. Notably this moment represents an apotheosis of her inability to see and hear, an obvious lack of empathy.

Steadily during the course of the story Emma's ability to perform (verbally and corporeally), with sensitivity and empathy is questioned. Her vision is highly selective and displaced, which is rendered in a dramatic episode of her driving to pick up more workers during which she has an unusual experience of 'ostranenie' or defamiliarization (Viktor Shklovsky):

"Her attention was distracted. She was driving down a long desolate road, straight, running between Victorian terraces, but there was something in front of the terraces, something that at first she mistook for trees, grey shapeless trees with aimless branches, one or two hundred metres of trees, something that struck her as strange in a city, but then she realized they were not trees. They were thickets of men, standing in clumps, mostly silent, staring at the traffic, men in rough clothes with worn brown skin, men looking furtive, men looking hungry, men with no colour beneath their tans. Dozens of them. Scores. Hundreds? Not a single woman among those thin faces. Washed out tracksuits, ill-fitting trousers. Some of their hair was white with dust. Most of them were smoking lethargically. The slogans on their chests looked tired, dated.

'What is it, Boris? What's going on?'

'Here we find men. Stop car. I do it.'

'I don't want these people!' she found herself shouting. They looked ill and strange, not exot-

ic like Boris. Scenting interest, some had turned towards the car. They were calling out, but she couldn't understand them" [Gee 2006: 23].

But if "the act of breaking down the familiar is also the act of welcoming the other" [Attridge 2004: 26], Emma keeps thinking of migrants as 'barely human'. Shklovsky's 'ostranenie' here not only shows Emma's ignorance about migrants, but her usual habit of suppression of scenes of human suffering.

Social stereotypes of English politeness, which are used as a crutch to easy communication ('a bore, but good manners demanded it') help Emma to simulate attentiveness. She offers Boris's wife and daughter lemonade, biscuits, cake, fruit juice, milk, herbal tea. But the daughter asks for water only, which disrupts Emma's protocol of politeness: puzzled 'she got two glasses, but forgot to fill them' [Gee 2006: 19].

She neither hears the name of the wife, no understands the daughter's condition, she never steps away from her own reality and her own feelings (she advises aromatherapy to an asthmatic girl). When Emma, left alone in the car stopped on the unknown street, is taken aback by the frightening otherness of 'cheap' illegal workers, Gee captures her sense of fragility ("What if they suddenly rushed the car, snatched her handbag, raped her, mugged her?" [Gee 2006: 23]) but immediately lets her regain a deep confidence in unquestionable protocol of English superiority: Emma takes the mobile call from Boris's desperate wife and repeats twice to her about the need to speak English.

'She felt better as she said it, briefly, in this unfamiliar place, that had no rules; she stood up for something she thought she believed in, but then the phone went silent, dead, and she laid it on the seat, and felt worse than ever. It must have been his wife. She spoke no English' [Gee 2006: 24].

The passage slightly uncovers but not explores possible self-criticism of Emma, being slow and egocentric in responding to real person. There's obviously no process of 'a fusion of horizons', implying that individual perspectives expand to include the viewpoints of the other, no empathetic genesis of a unique understanding that reflects a merging of each individual's construction of the other and of the situation.

To be sensitive is also to be easily offended or upset, and it is 'off-stage' Boris who is about

to cry when not understood in grief and worry about his daughter – he cries out of disillusionment about the human bonding he thought he had with Emma. She interprets his sudden move when he 'clutched her fingers, with an odd little moan' to be sexually offensive and socially inappropriate for her worker. Being attracted by him in her fantasies she might have imagined it differently.

The grade and context of sensitivity makes a huge difference between Emma and the migrants, revealing Gee's satire. While Emma is sensitive to roses because of hay fever and chooses aromatherapy, Boris's daughter suffers from asthma as a result of the damp and dusty London slums in which she is living, and actually dies without proper treatment (Boris probably does not have money for injections). While Emma feels stress and loses any remaining drops of sympathy towards Boris's daughter because of her husband's 'serious' annoyance, Boris is dramatically aware of his grief but tries to maintain reserve and propriety. Emma is missing her 'imaginary exotic lover', but it is easy to substitute him with another one, while Boris is totally ruined by the misfortune of the loss of his daughter.

Emma's writing becomes the first stumbling block in her relationship with Boris. His wish to know her better is betrayed twice with her having nothing to share and being not fully trustworthy, as for a long time she made him think that her books were actually published. But there are far more important reasons for Emma's lack of creative insight about which Boris may guess: it is the lack of an empathetic view, which at first surprises Boris and then makes him want to finish his job and leave Emma forever. His words at the very beginning of the story are remarkable: 'I like this very much, to work for an artist, like me' [Gee 2006: 16]. In the climactic scene of misunderstanding he desperately wants Emma to imagine his sick girl's face becoming blue, but Emma has neither heart nor mind for it. "Empathy is a process that allows people to imaginatively enter the world of another person, see it from the other person's point of view, and feel the emotions the other person is experiencing" [Broome 2015: 286]. It might be worth remembering that 'this term was brought into Western culture in the mid-19th century by the German philosopher Robert Vischer, who coined the term *Einfühlung* (or

"feeling into") in his development of a psychological theory of art appreciation. *Einfühlung* was viewed as a vehicle for understanding, feeling, or experiencing an aesthetic object such as a painting" [Broome 2015: 287].

The text starts with a repetition of 'beautiful'. It seems that the two soulmates, Emma and Boris, are connected through their ability to see and create beauty. Their artistic receptivity might refer to George Edward Moore's beauty and goodness, which lies in a true bonding of people. But this idea will be debunked. In the first paragraph it was a beautiful, but 'slightly battered', rose, which might possibly tie characters like "a dark red complicated knot of velvet". In the final paragraph it is "a beautiful daughter", whose illness did not evoke any compassion in Emma and marked the abysmal disparity between the characters. 'Life is beautiful, but life is short' – the summing up lines spoken by the young Bosnian, might be the 'epiphany' for the reader, but obviously not for Emma.

The beautiful but battered rose might have a strategic symbolic function in gathering together the story's thematic strands. The flower needs water, but Emma is throwing it away. Anna wants only water, and eventually doesn't get it from Emma. The leitmotif of thirst in the story functions twofold: in a frame of a love romance, contrived by Emma, it is a stereotypical 'thirst for needy love and admiration'; but in the frame of a realistic story of migrant's misfortunes, it is a literal thirst for plain water and human survival.

The final line 'I see you are sensitive like me. I am an artist. You know' [Gee 2006: 28], addressed to another Bosnian worker, subverts the whole idea of sensitivity to the Other, and makes it a cliché. While Boris is 'receptive to sense impressions', 'easily hurt emotionally', 'capable of indicating minute differences' and 'calling for tact, care, or caution', Emma is not. Perhaps it might lead us back to the title of the story. She would never ever be the artist, as she never cares, sees and hears the Other.

There lies a deeply ironic message, which makes the difference between 'the point' and 'epiphany' moments, deconstructs a banal love story and widespread cultural preconceptions, gives way to a social drama of migrants' stigmatization and silencing, and finally questions the artist figure and moments of his/her connection

to reality, his/her responsibility to see all, to sympathize and to care.

Mikhail Bakhtin organically connects the aesthetic and cultural dimensions of human existence through personal responsibility. In his early work "Art and Answerability" he writes: "Art and life are not one, but they must become united in myself – in the unity of my answerability" [Bakhtin 1990: 2]. This means that art as all other spheres and projections of human existence finds its reality only in the event of an act (deed), only in the events of a freely responsible action. This is the highest degree of sociality. Interestingly, in one of her interviews Gee says: "I do believe that we are all part of one another. [...] The

painful side of empathy is that it means I don't have boundaries, [...]. I am always trying to find bits of myself in other people; I mean, looking for common ground. [...] I try to find something in myself that's like my characters, too, including the really bad ones" [Kilic 2013: 154].

The capability for an artistic empathetic feeling into voices of Others (and those like Emma) is pivotal in Maggie Gee, who finds empathetic feeling into the character the most important job of a writer. And rather than consider *The Artist* to be only a meditation on displaced artist silencing, we will place ethical consciousness and sensitivity as a means of revealing the true artist's capacity for empathy and responsiveness towards the Other.

### References

- Attridge, D. (2004). *The Singularity of Literature*. London, Routledge.
- Bakhtin, M. (1984). *Problems of Dostoevsky's poetics* / transl. by C. Emerson. Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press.
- Bakhtin, M. (1990). *Art and Answerability* / ed. by M. Holquist and V. Liapunov, transl. by V. Liapunov. Austin, University of Texas Press.
- Broome, B. (2015). "Empathy". In *The Sage Encyclopedia of Intercultural Competence* / ed. by J. M. Bennett. London, Sage, pp. 286–289.
- Hickling, A. (2006). Culture crash. In *The Guardian*. 18 Nov. URL: <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2006/nov/18/featuresreviews.guardianreview>.
- Dillon, S. and Edwards, C. (2015). *Maggie Gee. Critical Essays*. Canterbury, Gylphy.
- Gee, M. (1991). *Virginia Woolf*. London, British Council, Booklet Text.
- Gee, M. (2006). *The Blue*. London, Telegram.
- Gee, M. (2018). Audio of Maggie Gee's Special Presentation on the Topic of Empathy for the "Empathy and Writing", Cross-disciplinary Research Group at Bath Spa University. URL: [https://data.bathspa.ac.uk/articles/Professor\\_Maggie\\_Gee\\_-\\_Presentation\\_23rd\\_May\\_2018\\_-\\_Empathy\\_Group/9676244](https://data.bathspa.ac.uk/articles/Professor_Maggie_Gee_-_Presentation_23rd_May_2018_-_Empathy_Group/9676244).
- Head, D. (1992). *The Modernist Short Story: a Study in Theory and Practice*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.
- Holquist, M. (2002). *Dialogism: Bakhtin and His World*. London, Routledge.
- Kilic, M. O. (2013). *Maggie Gee. Writing the Condition-of-England novel*. London, Bloomsbury.
- Nünning, V. (2015). *Unreliable Narration and Trustworthiness: Intermedial and Interdisciplinary Perspectives*. Walter de Gruyter. URL: [https://www.fabula.org/actualites/nunning-ed-unreliable-narration-and-trustworthiness\\_71515.php](https://www.fabula.org/actualites/nunning-ed-unreliable-narration-and-trustworthiness_71515.php).
- O'Connor, F. (2004). *The Lonely Voice: A Study of the Short Story*. New York, Melville House.
- Wagner, V. (1999). Unbearable Lightness of Acts. In *The Ethics and Literature* / ed. by A. Hadfield, D. Rainsford and T. Woods. New York, Macmillan, pp. 73–85.

### Данные об авторе

Джумайло Ольга Анатольевна – доктор филологических наук, доцент, заведующий кафедрой теории и истории мировой литературы, Южный федеральный университет (Ростов-на-Дону, Россия).

Адрес: 344006, Россия, г. Ростов-на-Дону, пер. Университетский, 93.

E-mail: oadzhumaylo@sfsedu.ru.

### Author's information

Dzhumaylo Olga Anatol'evna – Doctor of Philology, Associate Professor, Head of Department of English Literature, Southern Federal University (Rostov-on-Don, Russia).