

## Girl with a Pearl Earring

By Tracy Chevalier


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After earning a graduate degree in creative writing from the University of East Anglia, Tracy Chevalier was immediately recognized for her literary talent. In *Girl with a Pearl Earring*, she recreates the 17th-century world of Johannes Vermeer. This haunting work of historical fiction received rave reviews in publications as diverse as *The New Yorker*, *The Wall Street Journal*, and *The Christian Science Monitor*.

In 1664, sixteen-year-old Griet enters the Vermeer household as a servant. Daughter of a Delft tile maker, she has a natural eye for color and design. Daily, she cleans the studio, learning much about how Vermeer sees the people he paints. As his attention focuses on her, she slowly becomes one of his subjects. Tracy Chevalier fills this unusual love story with the shades, sounds, and textures of everyday life in Holland. Narrator Ruth Ann Phimister perfectly voices Griet's growing awareness of the intrigues surrounding her and the need to define the value of her life.

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### Editorial Review

#### Amazon.com Review

With precisely 35 canvases to his credit, the Dutch painter Johannes Vermeer represents one of the great enigmas of 17th-century art. The meager facts of his biography have been gleaned from a handful of legal documents. Yet Vermeer's extraordinary paintings of domestic life, with their subtle play of light and texture, have come to define the Dutch golden age. His portrait of the anonymous *Girl with a Pearl Earring* has exerted a particular fascination for centuries--and it is this magnetic painting that lies at the heart of Tracy Chevalier's second novel of the same title.

*Girl with a Pearl Earring* centers on Vermeer's prosperous Delft household during the 1660s. When Griet, the novel's quietly perceptive heroine, is hired as a servant, turmoil follows. First, the 16-year-old narrator becomes increasingly intimate with her master. Then Vermeer employs her as his assistant--and ultimately has Griet sit for him as a model. Chevalier vividly evokes the complex domestic tensions of the household, ruled over by the painter's jealous, eternally pregnant wife and his taciturn mother-in-law. At times the relationship between servant and master seems a little anachronistic. Still, *Girl with a Pearl Earring* does contain a final delicious twist.

Throughout, Chevalier cultivates a limpid, painstakingly observed style, whose exactitude is an effective homage to the painter himself. Even Griet's most humdrum duties take on a high if unobtrusive gloss:

I came to love grinding the things he brought from the apothecary--bones, white lead, madder, massicot--to see how bright and pure I could get the colors. I learned that the finer the materials were ground, the deeper the color. From rough, dull grains madder became a fine bright red powder and, mixed with linseed oil, a sparkling paint. Making it and the other colors was magical.

In assembling such quotidian particulars, the author acknowledges her debt to Simon Schama's classic study *The Embarrassment of Riches*. Her novel also joins a crop of recent, painterly fictions, including Deborah Moggach's *Tulip Fever* and Susan Vreeland's *Girl in Hyacinth Blue*. Can novelists extract much more from the Dutch golden age? The question is an open one--but in the meantime, *Girl with a Pearl Earring* remains a fascinating piece of speculative historical fiction, and an appealingly new take on an old master. --*Jerry Brotton*

#### From Publishers Weekly

The scant confirmed facts about the life of Vermeer, and the relative paucity of his masterworks, continues to be provoke to the literary imagination, as witnessed by this third fine fictional work on the Dutch artist in the space of 13 months. Not as erotic or as deviously suspenseful as Katharine Weber's *The Music Lesson*, or as original in conception as Susan Vreeland's interlinked short stories, *Girl in Hyacinth Blue*, Chevalier's first novel succeeds on its own merits. Through the eyes of its protagonist, the modest daughter of a tile maker who in 1664 is forced to work as a maid in the Vermeer household because her father has gone blind, Chevalier presents a marvelously textured picture of 17th-century Delft. The physical appearance of the city is clearly delineated, as is its rigidly defined class system, the grinding poverty of the working people and the prejudice against Catholics among the Protestant majority. From the very first, 16-year-old narrator Griet establishes herself as a keen observer who sees the world in sensuous images, expressed in precise and luminous prose. Through her vision, the personalities of coolly distant Vermeer, his emotionally volatile wife, Catharina, his sharp-eyed and benevolently powerful mother-in-law, Maria Thins, and his increasing

brood of children are traced with subtle shading, and the strains and jealousies within the household potently conveyed. With equal skill, Chevalier describes the components of a painting: how colors are mixed from apothecary materials, how the composition of a work is achieved with painstaking care. She also excels in conveying the inflexible class system, making it clear that to members of the wealthy elite, every member of the servant class is expendable. Griet is almost ruined when Vermeer, impressed by her instinctive grasp of color and composition, secretly makes her his assistant, and later demands that she pose for him wearing Catharina's pearl earrings. While Chevalier develops the tension of this situation with skill, several other devices threaten to rob the narrative of its credibility. Griet's ability to suggest to Vermeer how to improve a painting demands one stretch of the reader's imagination. And Vermeer's acknowledgment of his debt to her, revealed in the denouement, is a blatant nod to sentimentality. Still, this is a completely absorbing story with enough historical authenticity and artistic intuition to mark Chevalier as a talented newcomer to the literary scene. Agent, Deborah Schneider.

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From School Library Journal

YA-A fictional account of how the Dutch artist Vermeer painted his masterpiece. In this splendid novel, the girl in the painting is Griet, the 16-year-old servant of the Vermeer household. The relationship between her and Vermeer is elusive. Is she more than a model? Is she merely an assistant? Is the artist's interest exaggerated in her eyes? The details found in this book bring 17th-century Holland to life. Everyday chores are described so completely that readers will feel Griet's raw, chapped hands and smell the blood-soaked sawdust of the butcher's stall. They will never view a Dutch painting again without remembering how bone, white lead, and other materials from the apothecary shop were ground, and then mixed with linseed oil to produce the rich colors. YAs will also find out how a maid from the lower class, whose only claim to pearls would be to steal them, becomes the owner of the earrings.

*Sheila Barry, Chantilly Regional Library, VA*

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## **Users Review**

### **From reader reviews:**

#### **Joyce Morton:**

This Girl with a Pearl Earring book is not really ordinary book, you have it then the world is in your hands. The benefit you have by reading this book will be information inside this e-book incredible fresh, you will get information which is getting deeper a person read a lot of information you will get. This specific Girl with a Pearl Earring without we realize teach the one who reading through it become critical in pondering and analyzing. Don't become worry Girl with a Pearl Earring can bring when you are and not make your bag space or bookshelves' grow to be full because you can have it within your lovely laptop even cellphone. This Girl with a Pearl Earring having great arrangement in word and also layout, so you will not truly feel uninterested in reading.

#### **Harry Oliver:**

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**Paul Avila:**

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**Samuel Crader:**

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