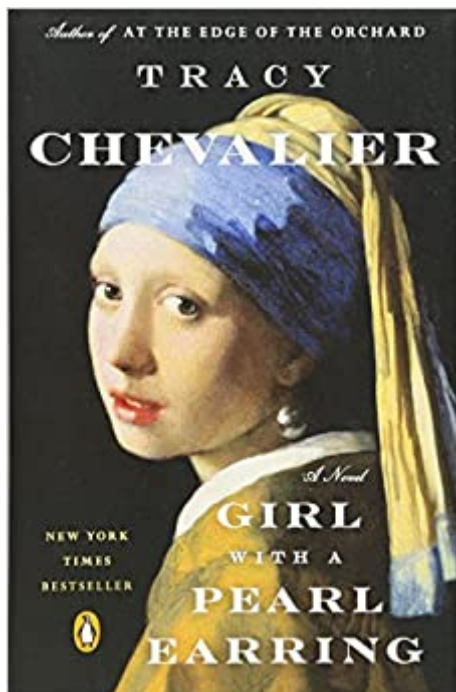


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# Girl With A Pearl Earring: A Novel



## Synopsis

The New York Times bestselling novel by the author of *At the Edge of the Orchard* and *Remarkable Creatures* Translated into thirty-nine languages and made into an Oscar-nominated film, starring Scarlett Johansson and Colin Firth Tracy Chevalier transports readers to a bygone time and place in this richly-imagined portrait of the young woman who inspired one of Vermeer's most celebrated paintings. History and fiction merge seamlessly in this luminous novel about artistic vision and sensual awakening. *Girl with a Pearl Earring* tells the story of sixteen-year-old Griet, whose life is transformed by her brief encounter with genius . . . even as she herself is immortalized in canvas and oil.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

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 --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

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. Copyright 1999 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

This book pulled me in right from the beginning. I liked the dynamics of the family and complexity of the characters. After reading this I will never look at colors the same.

The book was assigned reading for an art class I took, and I'm really glad it was assigned. The book is a fictional story created to give Vermeer's painting of the same name a story behind the painting, which was very clever. The descriptions are beautiful. It was also nice to get a glimpse into the life and mind of a common girl. The majority of books set during the time, both fiction and non-fiction, are written from the perspective of a noble person. This book was a nice deviation from that. Don't expect non-stop action, or big plot twists, because there aren't any. The story is paced like you'd expect to see if reading someone's journal.

I loved it. Amazing that the author could look at a famous painting and use her imagination to create a whole book about who this girl is and how she came to have her image painted. I'd like more books along this line. Loved getting an insight into how painters work.

Good read---interesting story mixing art, history and characters in this novel. I found myself thinking about the characters after I sadly finished the book--always the sign of a good book. My first book by this author---will be looking for others.

Tracy Chevalier's novel imagines the life behind a painting, a conceit in lesser hands that could

have sustained no more than a short story. Griet, the daughter of a blinded and thus unemployed tilemaker, is sent into the Vermeer household as a maid where she quickly learns the ways of servitude. Griet is not well-liked by the senior maid nor by her mistress, both of whom are jealous of her because she, and not they, are allowed into Vermeer's studio. Griet is beautiful and has an eye for color and order, qualities the painter finds enchanting. How she ends up in the painting and what it does to the futures of all involved make up this tale. This book is easily read in a couple of sittings - maybe even one, if you have the time. Because I read it back to back with Anita Diamant's *The Red Tent*, I found it lacking in complexity and depth, but was a good read all the same. Griet's chores in the household are well imagined and precise, and the historical details Chevalier provides, particularly those pertaining to the grinding and creation of color, are a delight. While Vermeer himself seems elusive as a character, almost as though the author were afraid of giving him flesh, the other major characters are solid. I couldn't help liking Griet and feeling for her difficult position. This is an excellent vacation book, not demanding but still evocative. You don't have to be interested in art or Vermeer or historical fiction to enjoy this book. It stands on its own as the story of a young woman coming of age and learning where her place in the world lies.

The Girl with a pearl Earring has always been my favorite painting, I never care to much about the Mona Lisa. This book is a nice fictional story regarding the painting a good read.

A fresh unique entertainment. The story is haunting and rich with detail. Griet is a lovely human girl with an erie wisdom and a touch of involuntary mischief. I love this story!

I truly enjoyed this book. After I started to read, I just couldn't put it down! I had traveled to Delft in early April and seen this painting. That gave me a connection to Delft. Amazing read!

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