

Girl with a Pearl Earring Study Guide

Girl with a Pearl Earring by Tracy Chevalier

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Plot Summary

The Girl with a Pearl Earring is the story of Griet, a sixteen-year old girl who is hired by the famous painter, Vermeer, to clean his studio. The novel opens with Vermeer and his disheveled -wife, Catharina, visiting Griet's family to have a look at the girl they hope to hire. Griet has been cutting vegetables for the soup and has separated them by color in a wheel: turnips, carrots, leeks, red cabbage, and onion. She places the vegetables in this order because, she claims, otherwise the colors fight each other. Vermeer is intrigued by Griet's natural artistic interest and hires her on the spot. It is clear, even from this opening scene, that Vermeer and Griet have a connection and that Catharina is annoyed by it. Griet is forced into work when her father, a tile painter, loses his eyes in a kiln explosion and she needs to help her family raise money to eat. The next day, Griet travels to the Vermeer household and meets their five children, including their daughter Cornelia, a seven-year-old with a wicked streak that is immediately apparent. Griet also meets Maria Thins, Catharina's mother, and her maid, Tanneke. Throughout the first few months at the Vermeers, Griet does not see the painter again, but can sense him around every corner. Her infatuation grows every day, so that when he speaks to her for the first time, she physically begins to shake.

One of the jobs Griet is expected to perform at the Vermeer household is to buy meats from the butcher, Pieter. It becomes very apparent early on that Pieter the son, the son of the butcher, has feelings for Griet, even though she is only interested in her master, Vermeer. Griet fits in nicely to the Vermeer household, gaining complements for her work from each of the family members except Catharina and her shrewd daughter, Cornelia. Cornelia continues to create trouble for Griet, throwing her water pots into the river, breaking her favorite tile, and even stealing her tortoiseshell comb. The only solace Griet finds in the household is when she is cleaning Vermeer's studio, a task that requires her to clean without appearing to have moved anything. There, she imagines what the painter is doing, and what it would be like if his eyes fell upon her. Soon, she begins to notice that Vermeer's eyes do follow her around rooms, and gaze, almost longingly, at her. Vermeer's eyes are not the only ones that track Griet. His patron, van Ruijven, regularly gropes Griet and makes inappropriate comments about her. van Ruijven decides that he would like to be in a painting with Griet, an idea that horrifies her. It becomes very clear that Vermeer also does not want to paint van Ruijven with Griet and wants to protect her from this lascivious man. Van Ruijven impregnated the last maid that he wanted painted, and Vermeer wants to protect Griet from the same fate. He strikes up a deal to paint Griet on her own for van Ruijven, rather than having her sit with him.

Before this, Vermeer and Griet began to spend a lot of time together when Griet began assisting him with his paintings. Griet was given the task of purchasing paint supplies and grinding them in the evenings before Vermeer painted in the afternoons. The fact that they were working so closely together had to be kept a secret from the family, especially from Catharina, who would certainly be jealous. When Vermeer begins painting Griet, however, it becomes almost impossible to keep this secret from Catharina. Around this time, Pieter the son becomes more aggressive in his pursuit of



Griet and even shows up at the Vermeer's doorstep on her eighteen birthday to propose to her. At this time, however, Griet is so infatuated with Vermeer that she cannot contemplate leaving his household, despite the warnings she's received from his friends that Vermeer is only interested in himself and his art. He will ruin her, they warn. But Griet doesn't listen and is eventually convinced to wear Catharina's pearl earrings in the painting, even though Griet knows that doing so will land her on the streets. Sure enough, when the painting is complete, Catharina finds out that her husband has been painting Griet and is outraged. She is extremely jealous, rightfully so, and tries to slash the painting with a palette knife. Griet runs from the house as Catharina goes into early labor, and never looks back.

In the epilogue, ten years later, the reader learns that when Griet ran away from Vermeer's household, she ran into the arms of Pieter the son, whom she later married. She never saw Vermeer again, and heard that he passed away, leaving behind eleven children and a great deal of debt. One morning, while Griet is working the butcher stall, Tanneke, the old maid, comes to fetch her, claiming that Catharina wants to speak with her. Griet has not interacted with any member of the Vermeer family in over ten years, and has no idea why Catharina wants to see her. When she arrives, she is overcome with emotion upon seeing Vermeer's household again, and wishes she could see him, or the painting, one last time. In his will, Vermeer requested that Catharina give Griet the pearl earrings from the painting, which is why Catharina has called her here. It is clear that Catharina has not forgiven Griet, or her husband, and does not want to hand over the pearls. But she does, and Griet pawns them, wanting to erase the memory from her life. Griet uses the twenty guilders she received from the sale to cover the Vermeer family's butcher debt, and keeps five guilders for herself, which she swears she will never spend.



1664, Pages 3 - 24

1664, Pages 3 - 24 Summary

The novel opens with sixteen-year-old Griet chopping vegetables for dinner when she hears voices outside her kitchen - first a woman's, then a man's. Even from the timbre of their voices, the girl can tell the visitors are rich. The couple enters the room and looks Griet over. Griet had laid the vegetables for the stew in a pie shape with five slices: red cabbage, onions, leeks, carrots, and turnips. The wealthy man wants to know why the vegetables have been laid out this way, and Griet replies that, "The colours fight when they are side by side, sir." The man is clearly intrigued, but his wife, who is very pregnant, is annoyed with the man's attention spent on a teenaged girl.

After the couple leaves, Griet's mother tells her that she is to start work as the couple's maid the next day. Griet is shocked, but her mother tells her they have no choice now that Griet's father has lost his trade. Later, Griet spends some time with her father, a tile painter who lost his trade when a kiln exploded and took his eyes. He is sorrowful that he could not provide a better life for his daughter, and that she must be sent to work to help support the family. He recalls a painting that he took her to see years before. The painting captured a view of Delft from the Schiedam Gates, and had sand painted into the bricks for effect. The man who painted that image, Johannes Vermeer, will be Griet's new master. Griet learns that she will be in charge of cleaning Vermeer's painting studio, and she must do so without appearing to have moved anything. She has become accustomed to placing things where her father will always find them now that he is blind, and wonders if these skills will transfer over for the eyes of painter.

Griet's younger sister, Agnes, is devastated when she hears the news. A year earlier, their older brother, Frans, left the family to begin his apprenticeship at the tile factory. Now she will be all alone with her parents and will have to take on many of Griet's chores. Agnes is ten when Griet leaves home. Griet crosses through town, letting her eyes settle on landmarks she remembers from her childhood, then she crosses into Oude Langendijck where the Vermeer's live. She first sees four little girls sitting on a bench, holding a small baby, blowing bubbles. The children's names are Maertge, Lisbeth, Cornelia, Aleydis, and Johannes. The head maid, Tanneke, arrives and is very curt with Griet. Griet believes that Tanneke is already jealous that another maid has been called in to clean the studio, a room in which she is not allowed. Tanneke shows Griet around the house, and Griet is struck by how many paintings there are in each room. She is particularly disturbed by two graphic paintings of the Crucifixion. Tanneke tells Griet to drop her belongings in the cellar where she will be sleeping, and to get started on the laundry. When Griet goes to the canal to fetch water for the laundry, Cornelia follows her and laughs. Griet slaps Cornelia across the face, which infuriates the girl. Griet knows that Cornelia is going to be trouble for her. Later, Cornelia throws Griet's water container into the river, so she has to fish it back out with a long stick. The only thing that seems to intimidate Cornelia is the wrath of her grandmother, Maria Thins.



1664, Pages 3 - 24 Analysis

The opening section of the novel introduces all the main characters of the novel - the Vermeers, both Johannes and Catharina, as well as Griet, her parents, Maria Thins, and Cornelia, the daughter. In the opening scene, the reader can see the immediate connection that is formed between Vermeer and Griet through their mutual appreciation of art in the world. In this scene, the reader can also see the annoyance from Catharina at the attention Vermeer gives to Griet about her stew vegetables. The initial conflict is already beginning to brew on the first few pages, and the theme of the value of art is introduced. It is clear that Vermeer and Griet share an eye for the color in the world and the way that reflects back to art. They see the beauty of the stew vegetables while the other people in the room, Catharina and Griet's mother, see only sustenance.

This section also displays the social difference between the two families Griet will become a member of. Her birth family is very poor, so poor that they are sending their sixteen-year-old daughter off to work for a wealthy family. The Vermeers, on the other hand, wear expensive clothing, treat the family flippantly, and have the economical resources to hire maids and other servants. When Griet first arrives at the Vermeer household, she is shocked by its size and the relative wealth displayed by the collection of various paintings in the rooms. A side plot is also introduced in this section through Griet's initial interaction with Cornelia, the daughter who most resembles her mother. In this section, it becomes clear that Cornelia will function as the villainous character in the novel, the antithesis to Griet's goodness is Cornelia's innate "badness". Cornelia will function as a tool to create conflict for the duration of the novel, never forming into a complex character, a role that is apparent even in the opening section of the novel.



1664, Pages 24 - 51

1664, Pages 24 - 51 Summary

Griet begins work on the Vermeer family's laundry. She knows that it will take her days to catch up, but Tanneke has been managing all the family's errands for many years, and it is clearly too much for her. The laundry has been cleaned, sorted, and hung messily, and continues to pile up. Tanneke interrupts the laundry to take Griet to the market to buy meat. There are thirty-two butchers in Market Square, and the Vermeer's shop at a different butcher than Griet's family, although Griet's family has been too poor to purchase meat in months. The Vermeer's butcher is a handsome man with graying curls named Pieter, who openly flirts with Griet, playfully, which embarrasses her.

At dinner, Griet and Tanneke serve beef tongue and pork chops with parsnips, rye bread, and mugs of beer. The food is much welcomed by Griet who has never eaten so well. Still, she misses home even if home means cheap brown bread and watered down beer. That night, Griet is too tired to inspect her bedroom, even though it is her first night there. The only thing she notices is yet another graphic Crucifix painting hanging at the foot of her bed. The painting so disturbs her that she cannot sleep, but isn't brave enough to take the painting down, fearing Cornelia would notice and tell her mother.

The next morning, Catharina takes Griet to see the painting studio for the first time. The entire family treats the room with reverence - no one enters the room, ever, which makes Griet extremely nervous. While Griet is cleaning the windows, she catches a glimpse of herself and thinks, rather guiltily, that she is quite beautiful and that her best feature is her wide set eyes. She cleans the rest of the room well, avoiding the table and easel where Vermeer paints. When she can avoid the area no longer, Griet attempts to clean the table without appearing to have moved anything. She uses a complex system of measurement that involves nearly every part of her body, to lift an item, clean under it, and lay it back down exactly where Vermeer had left it. The only item Griet does not clean is a blue ball of fabric that she is too afraid to move because she will never get the creases back as they were. Griet finally musters up enough courage to take a peek at Vermeer's new painting: a woman standing in front of a table, turned towards a mirror, dressed in a mantle of yellow stain. The light from the window lights the woman's face, and she looks extremely beautiful. Griet is overcome with the desire to be seen as beautifully as how Vermeer sees this woman. Later, she learns that the woman is van Ruijven, the patron's, wife, and that she is not this beautiful in real life. After this moment, Griet is overwhelmed with admiration for Vermeer, an admiration that nearly stops her breath at times.

The next day, Griet returns to Market Hall to purchase meat where she sees Pieter the Son, son of Pieter the Butcher. He is very handsome and makes Griet nervous. Pieter the Butcher tries to sell Griet meat that is graying around the edges and Griet haughtily refuses, demanding better meat. When she returns home, Catharina tells her that her husband, Vermeer, is pleased with Griet's cleaning in the studio. Griet is pleased, but it



appears that Catharina is somewhat annoyed, perhaps even jealous. She doesn't understand why Griet is nervous to clean the windows, thinking it a petty question, while Griet understands the way cleaning the windows may affect the light in the studio. It is clear that these two women have very different understandings of Vermeer's work: Catharina sees it simply as a job, while Griet respects it as art.

That Sunday, Griet returns home for her first day-off since moving in with the Vermeers. Her family is anxiously waiting for her on the porch. Griet tells them everything about the family, but doesn't tell her sister Agnes that one of the daughters is ten years old, fearing that the lonely Agnes would feel replace. It is with great pride that Griet hands over her wages to her mother before the evening meal. Griet is deeply ashamed that she prefers the food at the Vermeer household, and that now, returning home, she can see first-hand how poor her family is in comparison to the Vermeers.

1664, Pages 24 - 51 Analysis

In this section, Tanneke takes Griet into the market to purchase meat for the first time. Here, she is introduced to Pieter the Butcher, which sets the stage for Griet to Pieter the Son, the man who will become her husband, later in the novel. Even from this initial interaction, Griet seems to sense that her life will become intertwined with the butcher's. In this way, Griet's narration almost nullifies any sense of suspense for the reader. Because the story is told in past-tense, the narration has the luxury of hindsight and Griet often hints at events that will take place in the future, perhaps as a way of hooking the reader into the story. Upon returning home, Griet helps to prepare the dinner meal, which is similar to the meals she used to prepare at her parents' home but the quality of food is much higher. Again, this expands the difference between Griet's two families and begins to prepare the reader for the time when Griet will turn her back on her birth family and be loyal only to Vermeer the painter.

In her room, Griet sees the Crucifixion painting for the first time and it is deeply unsettling to her. This is one of the main differences that Griet notices immediately about the two families - her family has raised her Protestant, while the Vermeers are devout Catholics. The conflict doesn't mean much yet, but eventually it will become more prominent in regards to Vermeer's work and Griet's family's discomfort with her position at the painter's home. From Griet's perspective, Catholicism is a far looser religion, allowing for lax, less conservative, behavior. In this section, Griet also sees Vermeer's studio for the first time. Here, the connection she feels to the painter begins to grow as she takes her first glimpse at a work of his in progress. She is nearly breathless by his work. She also catches a glimpse of herself in Vermeer's mirror and thinks she is quite beautiful. Although she immediately catches her vanity, claiming that this is no way for a maid to think about herself, it prepares the reader for the way Vermeer will later look at Griet, also recognizing her beauty.



1664, Pages 51 - 73

1664, Pages 51 - 73 Summary

Griet learns that the Vermeers are short on money. She is surprised to hear this as the family has so many nice things just lying around their house. Catharina and Johannes often fight about his painting - she believes that he should paint faster to make more money for their family, while he believes that rushing his work leads to sloppiness and a loss of art. Griet, obviously, agrees with Johannes, but does so secretly. Griet looks forward to cleaning the painting studio every day, and feels at peace there. She studies the painting each day, searching for differences. She finally begins to notice small ones, like an extra pearl added to the necklace the lady wears in the painting. One day she almost reached out and touched the real pearls when they were accidentally left out on a pillow, but Cornelia stood in the doorway watching her, a slight smirk creeping onto her face.

One day, Catharina comes quickly down the stairs, clearly hiding from whoever is upstairs. It is van Leeuwenhoek, the man with a mysterious box that Catharina once broke. Now, she cannot face him. In the studio later, Griet inspects the wooden box as it sits on the table. She has never seen anything like it and is startled when Vermeer walks into his studio and catches her staring at it. It is the first time Vermeer has spoken to Griet since first visiting her in her mother's home. He asks if she would like to look in the box, and she is breathless. The box is a camera obscura, and reverses the image of the painting into a mirror, so when one looks in the box, the image is reversed and missing parts. When Griet looks in, the painting looks complete, but is missing the central woman. She is terrified and believes the box to be witchcraft. She looks again, with Vermeer out of the room, but still does not understand what she is looking at. Vermeer comes back in and tries to explain that the camera obscura helps him to "see more of what there is." But Griet still doesn't understand. She presses him to explain further, and has clearly overstepped her boundaries as a servant. He becomes short with her and asks her to leave the studio.

After, Griet heads to the meat market to clear her head. There, Pieter the Son pulls her aside and tells her that the plague has been found near the Rietveld Canal, near where Griet's family lives. He has heard no news of a quarantine, yet. Griet runs back to Papists' Corner and barges in on Catharina with Maria Thins. She begs to go home and visit with her family, but both women refuse. Catharina fears Griet will bring the plague back with her. Griet is heartbroken and feels utterly alone. When Vermeer arrives to tell Griet that the quarantine has been set, his kindness makes her weak in the knees. As Griet thinks about the plague and her family, her work begins to suffer. Everyone in the Vermeer household takes notice and she is scolded endlessly. A few days later, Pieter the Son informs Griet that young Agnes has fallen ill with the plague. Griet does not know what to do, so she tracks down Frans at his apprenticeship to tell him the news. She has not seen her brother in months, but cannot celebrate at their reunification. They



both feel extremely helpless - no one has ever heard of anyone recovering from the plague.

1664, Pages 51 - 73 Analysis

In this section, Griet learns that the Vermeer family is short on money and that Catharina has been pressuring Vermeer to paint faster, ensuring more money for the family, a pressure Vermeer does not appreciate. In this section, the theme of the value of art is introduced. The Vermeer family has been divided by those who believe the value of Vermeer's paintings comes solely from the financial value they provide for the family, and those who believe that the value of Vermeer's art comes solely from its originality in artistic form, meaning that no one else can paint the world like Vermeer. This theme will become more important as the novel progresses and Vermeer puts Griet in a position of turmoil for the sake of his art.

When van Leeuwenhoek arrives with the camera obscura, Griet again questions the religious morality of the Vermeer household thinking that the camera obscura is a form of witchcraft. The camera obscura could be seen as a symbol for the way Vermeer sees the world - he has eyes different than anyone else in the world, and can view a room with a gaze that seems to flip and filter the colors, the setting, the people. Griet's initial reaction to the camera obscura, believing that it is witchcraft, reflects Griet's mother's later reaction to Vermeer's paintings, calling what he has painted akin to witchcraft. The fact that Griet eventually comes around and sees the beauty in the camera obscura's view again reflects her growing relationship with Vermeer and their artistic outlook on the world.



1664, Pages 73 - 94

1664, Pages 73 - 94 Summary

Soon after, Maria Thins tells Griet that she can fully clean out the studio. Vermeer's painting of the woman at the mirror is complete. Griet feels sickened to know that he will no longer be working on the painting, and doesn't feel right folding up the mantel or putting the pewter bowl in a chest. When she is finished, Griet no longer recognizes the room, and no longer finds comfort there. Later that day, van Ruijven and his wife visit to inspect the painting. van Ruijven is immediately taken with Griet and wants her to serve him personally. This attention irritates Catharina, who demands that Griet stay away from such a rich and important man. After dinner, a man servant comes to collect the painting of van Ruijven's wife, and Griet does not have the chance to look at it one last time.

Later that day, while Griet is at the meat market, Pieter the Son tells her that the quarantine has been lifted. He hands Griet a small package of meat for her family, and Griet takes off running toward her home. When she reaches home, her parents are sitting together on the porch, heads bowed, faces streaked with tears. Griet knows instantly that her sister, Agnes, is dead. Back at the Vermeers, Tanneke manages to speak kindly to Griet for a few days after the news of Agnes' death, but she is the only one. Cornelia hands Griet an old doll and asks, with fake innocence, if she would like to give it to her little sister. Griet and Frans visit home together as often as possible, but the house has been sucked of all happiness. The family is overcome with sorrow.

A few weeks after Agnes' death, Catharina goes into labor. After a few hours of labor, she gives birth to another boy, Franciscus. There is a great feast in celebration that takes ten days to prepare. Griet and Tanneke are run ragged washing every dish and every piece of clothing in the household. They beat cushions and rugs, polish furniture, and scrub the floors until their hands bleed. At one point, Pieter the Son comes to deliver some meat to the Vermeer household and requests to see Griet. When Griet walks out to meet him, she can feel Vermeer's eyes on her back. She spins around and locks eyes with Vermeer and suddenly, she feels caught between two men.

At the feast, van Ruijven corners Griet and grabs her face. He remarks on her beauty and shouts, drunkenly, that Vermeer should paint her. When Vermeer hears this, he frowns. After this, Griet feels as though Vermeer is angry with her. She is not sure if it was van Ruijven's comments, or the way Pieter the Son gazed at her in the yard, but he is cold and distant with Griet. And then one day, Vermeer walks in on Griet as she is washing the windows. He is inexplicably taken with her. She is pleased that he is interested in her again and excited when he asks her to help him set up his studio again. It is clear he has found a new muse.



1664, Pages 73 - 94 Analysis

In this chapter, van Ruijven is introduced, as well as his interest in Griet. This interest is, arguably, what piques Vermeer's interest in Griet, almost as though it is a competition. In a later section, van Leeuwenhoek suggests this theory stating that, "van Ruijven's interest in you has made your master protective of you" (p. 194). This sense of competition is again mirrored when Pieter the Son comes to visit with Griet while he delivers meat to the Vermeer family. In this scene, Griet "felt [Vermeer's] presence at my back - he had come down the hallway behind me. I turned to look at him, and saw that he had seen Pieter's smile, and the expectation there as well. He transferred his grey eyes to me. They were cold" (p. 86). This sense of competition between Vermeer and Pieter the Son will later prove to be one of the biggest conflicts in Griet's life as she feels pulled between two men. Even though the two men don't actually compete for Griet's affection, she feels as though she must choose between them, knowing she can never fully have both. In this competition, Pieter the Son and Vermeer represent the two different sides of Griet's life. It is not the love of two men that Griet is choosing between, but two different ways of life. With Pieter the Son, she is choosing a stable domestic life, but will surely lose the art form considered to be a vanity, or worse, a waste of time. With Vermeer, she is choosing an exciting life full of color and art, but losing the domestic side, the side that creates a sense of family.

Also in this chapter, Griet's sister, Agnes, dies of the Black Plague. Here, Chevalier is attempting to create a side-story perhaps to draw the reader's attention away from the brewing competition between the men and to highlight the complexity of Griet's move to live with the Vermeers. When Agnes dies, Griet's family loses all happiness, and essentially never recovers from its loss. The symbolism of Agnes's death following Griet's pull between the two men highlights the decision Griet eventually makes in choosing Vermeer over the rest of her family. In this scene, Agnes dies, but symbolically, the family life that once tied Griet to home, is also buried.



1665, Pages 95 - 125

1665, Pages 95 - 125 Summary

Griet continues to visit with her parents, describing Vermeer's paintings to her father. He is confused by the new one, of the butcher's daughter pouring water into a basin. He has been confused and moody since Agnes' death and Griet struggles to hide her irritation, especially when she believes her father is critiquing Vermeer's work when he cannot even see it on his own. After the meal, Griet's mother walks with her to the river and states, bluntly, that she has heard that the butcher's son is paying her attention. She instructs Griet to be kind, welcoming to the attention. Griet is flustered by this advice. On her walk home, she thinks about how she wasn't truly honest with her family about the portrait, and reveals to the reader that she has been assisting Vermeer.

One evening in January, when the boys are both sick with fevers, Catharina sends Griet to the apothecary for supplies. While she is walking away, Vermeer sticks his head out through the studio window and asks her to purchase something for him. He writes down his order, seals it up, and tosses it out to her. Cornelia witnesses the entire exchange, which makes Griet very nervous. When she arrives at the apothecary, he is confused and very surprised as to why Griet is making a purchase for Vermeer. The apothecary states that Vermeer has never asked anyone to purchase his supplies for him, and that he always does it himself. Griet becomes extremely uncomfortable, sensing that the apothecary is accusing her of something. She wonders if Cornelia would tell Catharina about Vermeer's request, and what Catharina's reaction would be. When she returns home, however, she sees that Cornelia had been in her things and had broken her favorite tile, the one her father sent when she moved away. When she sees this, Griet sits on her bed and weeps.

Vermeer continues to make special requests of Griet, and Griet always feels as if she must keep these requests a secret from the rest of the staff. One day, Vermeer even asks Griet to stand in the painting while he considers the light. Griet does so, but becomes very nervous under Vermeer's close scrutiny. She hadn't realized he would inspect her so closely and she feels her face flush and her hands start to shake. Griet watches as Vermeer begins to paint the portrait from scratch. First, he blocks out large areas of color and gradually begins to outline shapes in them. He almost never uses the true color of an object in the painting, but somehow the result is always believable. One day, Griet lays out the blue paint for Vermeer to use on the butcher's daughter's skirt. Vermeer is annoyed as he hadn't asked for blue. He points at the clouds out the window to Griet and asks her what color they are. When she says "white", he tisks his tongue. Then he shows her how the clouds are really blue, yellow, gray, and even green, but somehow, when they're all working together, the clouds appear white. This is what he emulates in his paintings and why he doesn't actually need blue paint to create a blue skirt. Later, Vermeer shows Griet how to grind bone with a muller to make paint. The first time, he reaches over and touches her hand to show her how to properly hold the



tool, and Griet becomes so flustered that she drops the muller and it rolls across the floor.

Griet knows that she cannot take on a larger workload by secretly assisting Vermeer, because others in the house would find out. A few days later, Tanneke complains to Catharina that she cannot sleep at night sharing a room with the nurse, who gets up constantly to check on the baby. Vermeer suggests that Tanneke move into Griet's room and Griet move into the attic above the studio. Catharina agrees as long as she can lock Griet into the studio each night, because the studio is where all her jewels are kept. Everyone agrees, and now Griet can continue to assist Vermeer without anyone finding out. Maria Thins, however, seems to sense that something is awry, but says nothing. A few days later, Maria Thins, the only family member allowed in the studio, climbs the stairs and finds Griet grinding paint. Although she is clearly annoyed, Maria Thins decides not to tell Catharina about Griet's involvement in the paintings. She claims that if Griet's help causes Vermeer to paint faster, and thus to make more money, she will keep it a secret.

The secret is not long kept from Cornelia, however. One afternoon, Cornelia asks Griet to help her down the stairs. She jumps into Griet's arms, punching her in the stomach, smearing red madder from the studio all over Griet's apron. Tanneke walks in, sees the painting material, and believes Griet has been rummaging through Vermeer's supplies. She runs off to tell Maria Thins, who convinces Tanneke not to say anything to Catharina. Now that Tanneke knows the truth about Griet, she is profoundly jealous and makes life much more difficult for Griet around the household by purposefully spilling grease on the floor, ignoring Griet's questions, and sending her repeatedly back to the market. At the meat market one day, Pieter tells Griet how Tanneke once jumped between Catharina and her brother when the brother was beating her. Griet is moved by Tanneke's loyalty to the family. Even though Tanneke doesn't respect Catharina, she still put herself in danger to protect her.

1665, Pages 95 - 125 Analysis

In this section, Griet's mother states that she has heard that Pieter the Son is paying Griet special attention. Instead of reminding her daughter to be modest in her sexuality, she encourages Griet to welcome Pieter's advances. This exchange exemplifies the poverty that Griet's family is suffering from as they are willing to essentially "sell" their daughter to Pieter the Son for food, compromising her reputation and morality: "Her words surprised me, but when I looked in her eyes and saw there the hunger for meat that a butcher's son could provide, I understood why she had set aside her pride" (p. 99). Here, it is clear that Griet's family has already chosen Pieter the Son to be their daughter's husband, a decision that draws Griet even further away from her family as she feels they don't understand her or her personal hopes for the future.

This shift away from her birth family is reflected in Cornelia's nasty action of splitting Griet's favorite tile in half. The tile is split perfectly down the center, separating the girl, who represents Griet, from the boy who represents Frans, or the idea of family. Now on



the tile, the little boy looks back over his shoulder at nothing, and the girl is all alone, her face hidden by her cap, emotions hidden, much like Griet's on the surface. Even though she has deep desires that she would love to share with someone, especially her mother, she feels that she must keep them all hidden so that she doesn't disappoint her family or step out of the social expectations for a girl of her age and economic standing.

Also in this section, Vermeer asks Griet to begin assisting him with his paintings. This new arrangement must be kept a secret from the Vermeer family, especially from Catharina, because she would be profoundly jealous of the attention Vermeer was investing in Griet that he could be investing into his wife or children. The only person who finds out about Griet's new position in the family is Maria Thins. Again, the theme of the value of art is reflected in Maria Thins' reaction to the unlikely apprenticeship in that Maria Thins decides to keep the arrangement secret from her daughter as long as Griet encourages Vermeer to paint faster, thus providing more income for the family. Here, Maria Thins is selling out her daughter's marriage to make more money for the family.



1665, Pages 125 - 150

1665, Pages 125 - 150 Summary

Pieter the Son surprises Griet and her family by showing up at their church, uninvited. When Griet questions why he is there, Pieter says that he wants to meet her parents, which deeply embarrasses Griet. Her mother, however, is pleased that a man is showing interest in Griet and invites him over to dinner where she wisely does not serve him meat, but fish stew with shrimp and lobster. Pieter begins visiting the family regularly, sometimes sending over gifts of meat which he knows the family cannot afford. It becomes clear to Griet that her parents would love for her to marry Pieter because they know the wife of a butcher, and her family, will never go hungry. After one such meal, Pieter takes Griet into an alleyway and kisses her. He asks about her hair, which he has never seen uncovered. Griet thinks about her hair and how she must keep it covered to keep the wild side of her contained: "I kept my hair completely hidden," she thinks, "so that there would be no trace of that Griet" (p. 131).

The baker arrives to the Vermeer's house to inspect the painting of his daughter. He brings his entire family, including all his children, for the event. He brings Vermeer's daughters a beautiful conch shell for the collection and allows them to enter the studio with him to gaze at the painting. Later, when Griet returns to the studio, she sees Cornelia climbing down the stairs from the attic. She thinks the children must have been playing a game, but is still a bit suspicious since Cornelia is involved. The butcher takes away the painting. Months pass before Vermeer sets up the studio for another painting. In the meantime, Griet overhears Maria Thins and Catharina gossiping about the last maid van Ruijven wanted painted. She was wearing a red dress, drinking wine. van Ruijven was sure to be at every painting session watching as the maid become drunker and drunker. Within a few months, she was carrying his baby and was dismissed from the family. She had been painted in a particular pose, looking over her shoulder to the painter, and now, van Ruijven wanted the same pose, this time with his wife as the model. Griet stands behind Vermeer and watches as he talks van Ruijven's wife through various poses, searching for the right one for the painting. He finally settles on the model sitting at the table writing with a quill and ink. She stares straight at the painter, as if contemplating something. The next day, Vermeer asks Griet to sit in for van Ruijven's wife, who can't make it, while he looks at the setting through the camera obscura. Griet feels as if she and Vermeer's eyes are blazing into each other. Later, while looking through the camera obscura for herself, Griet notices that something feels off in the setting for the painting. She thinks about it obsessively, until she figures out what is wrong. Boldly, she changes the setting without Vermeer's permission, one day while he is out running errands. Her change is simple - pulling the folded tablecloth so it wasn't as neat and cascaded over the tablecloth, mimicking the lines of van Ruijven's wife's arms. She waits nervously for Vermeer to see the change, but he says nothing to her. When she returns to her room that night, she sees that Vermeer has sketched the change in the painting. She is overjoyed. He, in turn, tells her that he never thought he would learn something about his art from a maid.



Griet continues to visit home and describe Vermeer's paintings to her family. One day, her mother snaps and says that there is something dangerous in Vermeer's paintings. They are Catholic paintings and are turning Griet against her religion and her family. Griet is shocked and jumps to defend Vermeer, which makes matters worse with her family, and with Pieter who is clearly jealous of Griet's loyalty to Vermeer. When she returns to Papists' Corner, Griet boldly confronts Vermeer about the hidden religious messages in his paintings. Vermeer calmly explains to her that paintings are not Catholic or Protestant, but the people who look at the paintings are. Vermeer himself converted to Catholicism after he married Catharina. When he speaks, his voice is like velvet to Griet, who believes his words could convince even her mother about the value of good art.

1665, Pages 125 - 150 Analysis

In this chapter, Pieter the Son makes another bold move in his pursuit of Griet by showing up at her church hoping to meet her parents. As expected, Griet's parents are quite welcoming of Pieter and even invite him over for dinner. Soon after, Griet gives into the idea of being with Pieter and allows him to take her in the alleyway to kiss her. Here, it becomes clear that Griet has a strict hold over her sexuality, almost as if she fears it. The theme of Griet's ownership over her sexuality becomes most clear when Griet is wearing her cap. She does so to keep her hair covered an act that she believes helps to keep her conservative, saying: "My hair was long and could not be tamed. When it was uncovered it seemed to belong to another Griet - a Griet who would standing an alley alone with a man, who was not so calm and quiet and clean" (p. 130).

Also in this section, Griet learns why Vermeer is so protective of her when van Ruijven is around. Apparently, van Ruijven once asked Vermeer to paint a portrait of another maid he found very beautiful. Van Ruijven insisted that the maid be painting sipping a glass of wine, and that he be present at every portrait sitting. At each sitting, the maid in the red dress, as she came to be known, would get very drunk from the wine, and within a few months, was carrying van Ruijven's child. She was immediately let go from the family and no one knows what happened to her, but given the era which was known to demonize women who became pregnant out of wedlock and offered no governmental support, it couldn't have been an easy life for her. Vermeer seems to be afraid that this same history will be repeated on Griet and he wants to protect her from van Ruijven's advances. The reader, alongside Griet, is left to wonder whether Vermeer wants to protect Griet out of an almost fatherly affection, or if he simply wants to keep Griet for himself, and keep Griet's beauty as his personal possession that only he, as an artist, can admire.

The conflict of religion in art is again discussed as Griet's mother believes Vermeer's paintings are akin to witchcraft and that they are brainwashing Griet to turn away from her Protestant upbringing. This is an interesting reaction coming from a mother who is willing to sacrifice her daughter's morality to earn meat for the family, but one that is important to the timeframe nonetheless. During the seventeenth century, there was great conflict between the Protestants and the Catholics in Europe as governments



were regularly changing their national religions, a process that often led to deaths and hostile takeovers. Vermeer addresses this conflict directly regarding his work, stating that, "A painting in a church is like a candle in a dark room - we use it to see better. It is a bridge between ourselves and God. But it is not a Protestant candle or a Catholic candle. It is simply a candle" (p. 149).



1665, Pages 150 - 180

1665, Pages 150 - 180 Summary

Catharina becomes weary of locking up her jewelry box with Griet in the studio every evening. Griet learns that Catharina plans to move Griet back down to the attic now that the nurse is leaving soon. Griet knows that this request will, inevitably, be like asking Vermeer to choose between the jewelry box, which is a part of his new painting, or her. She knows he will choose the jewelry box and believes that if she cannot work closely with Vermeer, she cannot imagine continuing to work in that household. Vermeer decides not to send Griet back to the attic, but comes up with a compromise - he gives the jewelry box to Catharina each evening after he finishes painting, and Catharina brings it back up to Griet in the studio when she unlocks the door each morning. This arrangement works well for the first few days until it becomes clear that Catharina is still annoyed. Cornelia somehow manages to pick up on this tension and one day suggests that her mother wear her tortoiseshell combs in her hair. When Catharina looks through her vanity, she cannot find them and immediately confronts the maids. As soon as Griet catches the smirk on Cornelia's face, she knows where the combs have been hidden. She quietly makes her way up to the attic where Vermeer is grinding paint. She opens her chest and finds that her own tortoiseshell comb, the one passed down to her from her grandmother, has been replaced with Catharina's comb. She is heartbroken, knowing that she will probably never see her own comb again, and that she may be dismissed from the house for this theft. Bravely, she asks Vermeer for his help. Vermeer informs the family of Griet's accusation against Cornelia, and they begin searching for Griet's comb. They find it hidden in the conch shell the butcher brought. Maria Thins beats Cornelia, and Maerget claims that the girl didn't cry, but sneered through the entire beating. Maria Thins also tells Catharina the truth, that Griet has been assisting Vermeer with his paintings. Griet expects the backlash from Catharina to be intense, but it is almost as if Catharina now fears Griet, and a bit of her hopes that Vermeer will paint faster.

Soon after, Maria Thins suggests to Vermeer that he paint a larger portrait, with more people in it so it will fetch more money from van Ruijven. Vermeer is skeptical, but that night when van Ruijven comes for dinner, he is thrilled with the idea and agrees to fund the project as long as "that wide-eyed maid" is in the painting. Soon, rumors begin circulating throughout town that Griet will be in Vermeer's new portrait and people begin assuming she will be in the same position as the maid in the red dress from van Ruijven's other painting. These rumors affect every relationship in Griet's life - her relationship with Pieter, her parents, Tanneke, and most importantly, with Vermeer, who clearly does not want Griet to sit in the painting but knows that refusing van Ruijven could end their business relationship. Maria Thins soon begins sending Griet out for long errands every time van Ruijven comes to help set up the painting, hoping he will forget about her. This plan doesn't work. When Griet returns home from visiting Frans one day, van Ruijven sees her and asks Vermeer about the deal they've struck up. Vermeer clenches his teeth but agrees to get started on it soon. Griet is very confused



until the next day, when Vermeer asks her to come and sit for him. It becomes clear that Vermeer will paint a portrait of Griet, alone, for van Ruijven.

1665, Pages 150 - 180 Analysis

In this section, Catharina becomes weary of locking up her jewelry box with Griet every evening in the studio. This act seems to foreshadow the conflict that will soon erupt between Griet and Catharina about her pearl earrings. It is almost as though Catharina can sense what is about to occur - that Vermeer will hand off Catharina's pearl earrings to the maid to wear in a painting. In this action, though, Catharina is unwittingly setting herself up to be disappointed by her husband by essentially asking him to choose between his marriage and his art. It has already been established that Vermeer is selfish with his art and values it above everything else in his life, including his marriage and family.

Also in this section, Cornelia's meddling has finally come back to affect her own family personally. By swapping Catharina's comb with Griet's mother's, Cornelia had been hoping to get Griet kicked out for stealing. She wasn't expecting, nor was anyone else, for Vermeer to come to Griet's aid, helping her discover Cornelia as the thief she is. This action also leads to Catharina finding out the truth about Griet's assistantship to Vermeer. Although Griet was expecting the backlash of Catharina's knowledge to be devastating, she was surprised to see that Catharina reacted with a sense of reverence and almost fear. Here, it becomes clear that Catharina knows her marriage is holding on by a thin thread, and even she is willing to sell out the fidelity of her marriage for money to help support their growing family.



1666, Pages 183 - 203

1666, Pages 183 - 203 Summary

Griet's parents become suspicious when she comes home smelling of linseed oil. To take their mind off the scent, Griet tells the, in great detail, of the concert painting Vermeer is working on. Pieter, however, is not suspicious of Griet and has decided to trust her, although he is impatient with her sexually. Once in the ally, he sneakily works his hand up her bonnet and pulls loose a strand of her hair. He tells her that he will marry her, and that he will make her very happy. Griet knows she is a fool to hesitate. Back at the Vermeers', Johannes is having a difficult time finding the perfect position for Griet to sit in. Soon, he realizes that her clothes are all wrong, but Griet refuses to wear anything of Catharina's. He decides that Griet must bare some of her hair, but again, Griet refuses. Perplexed, Vermeer hands Griet two swatches of fabric, one in gold, one in blue. He tells her to do something with them that will keep her hair covered, but will expose her face for the painting. When he sees her head wrapped in the scarves, he breathes deeply and says, "That is it, Griet. Yes." Vermeer works on both paintings at once, the one of Griet and the one of the concert. Van Leeuwenhoek arrives one day with the camera obscura while Griet is sitting for her portrait. While Vermeer is in another room, van Leeuwenhoek warns Griet not to get caught in Vermeer's possessive battle with van Ruijven over her. Griet is secretly pleased that Vermeer is possessive of her, and does not take much of van Leewenhoek's advice to heart. When Vermeer thinks the portrait of Griet is finished, he allows her to look at it for the first time. Neither of them are satisfied, and know something is missing. Griet figures it out right away - a point of brightness. She felt sickened when she figured this out, and for the first time, didn't want to tell Vermeer, she simply waited.

1666, Pages 183 - 203 Analysis

In this section, van Leeuwenhoek confronts Griet about her relationship with Vermeer, although Griet does not want to listen to his warnings: "He is an exceptional man. His eyes are worth a room full of gold. But sometimes he sees the world only as he wants it to be, not as it is. He does not understand the consequences for others of his point of view. He thinks only of himself and his work, not of you. You must take care then" (p. 197). Van Leeuwenhoek's warnings function not only as a caution to Griet to be careful for herself, but also as a foreshadowing to the reader that his warnings will eventually come to fruition. Even though van Leeuwenhoek states the conflict of Griet's relationship with Vermeer explicitly, Griet does not want to acknowledge that Vermeer might be using her for the benefit of his art. She wants to believe that Vermeer also has romantic feelings for her, although the reader can plainly see that Vermeer does not. Finally, when Griet sees her finished portrait, she begins to realize that van Leeuwenhoek's warnings may have some weight. She realizes, even before Vermeer, that there is something missing from her portrait, a spot of brightness to bring cohesion

to the entire painting and she knows, even without saying it aloud, that Vermeer will ask her to wear the pearl earrings.



1666, Pages 203 - 229

1666, Pages 203 - 229 Summary

One evening, Vermeer calls for Griet to bring Catharina a glass of wine while she is getting ready for a party and is wearing her pearls. Once she is in the room, Vermeer's eyes travel from the pearl earrings to Griet's face. She knows what he will ask her to do, and is terrified. Griet knows that if Catharina ever hears that Griet was wearing her pearls, she would be kicked out onto the street. This, she realizes, is what van Leeuwenhoek was warning her about: Vermeer cares not for his subjects, only for his paintings. He wouldn't care what happened to Griet as long as his painting was complete. Vermeer orders Griet to change into her headdress again. When Griet walks to the storeroom to change, she turns around to see that Vermeer has followed her and has seen her hair uncovered. He is the only person that has ever seen Griet's hair uncovered. She is unsure what to feel, especially when she sees an emotional look of love cross over Vermeer's face. He breathes her name, but says nothing else.

Now that Vermeer has seen her hair, Griet feels as though she has nothing to hide. She runs from the house to Pieter, drags him into an alley and has sex with him. When she returns, it is as if Vermeer can see the change in her, and asks her to sit with her lips licked and parted, like sensual woman. Griet continues to try to convince Vermeer that she doesn't actually need to wear the earring for the painting, but he insists, even after she explains that her ears aren't even pierced. Griet has no one to confide her fears in - she cannot talk about them with Tanneke, her parents, even her brother Frans, because he has run away from his apprenticeship and taken to the sea. Griet travels to the apothecary to purchase clove oil to numb her ear, and begins threading a thicker needle through her lobe every evening.

On the morning of Griet's eighteenth birthday, she travels to the meat market, where Pieter the butcher hints that Pieter the Son is off on an important errand. Griet is horrified. When she returns home, Maria Thins is waiting with the pearl earrings and secretly hands them to her. Griet stumbles through the hallway, overcome with the beauty of the stones. As soon as she reaches the studio, however, Maertge comes shouting that there is a man in the yard to see her. Pieter looks up at the studio window and sees Griet in her gold and blue headdress. She quickly changes caps and runs down to meet him. When she reaches the yard, Pieter boldly proclaims that now that Griet is eighteen, he is taking her away with him to be married. All Griet can think about is Vermeer watching this exchange from the studio window, and she is deeply embarrassed. She tells Pieter that he has made a mistake, and runs back inside. Vermeer is waiting for her, and he pushes the earring through her lobe, causing her to cry out in pain. He tenderly strokes her face, wiping away her tears, running his thumb along her lips. And then, he is back at the easel painting away. He tells Griet the painting is finished and she begins to weep, both ears bloody. When the painting is finished, Griet returns to the kitchen to continue her work and is shocked to hear Catharina heaving herself up the stairs toward the studio. Clearly someone has tipped



her off to the painting, and when she reaches it, she shouts in rage. Catharina immediately accuses Griet of stealing her pearl earrings, although they are not missing from the jewelry box. Catharina is inconsolable, and it is clear she is not angry about the pearls, but about the attention her husband has been giving to a maid. While choking back sobs, Catharina demands to know why Vermeer has never painted her. In a fit of rage, Catharina picks up the palette knife and charges at the painting, hoping to cut it to shreds, but Vermeer wrestles her to the ground. Catharina moans in pain, clutching her stomach. Griet doesn't wait any longer before bolting out the door and running as fast away from the house as possible.

1666, Pages 203 - 229 Analysis

All the major conflicts of the novel come to a head in this section, when Griet is finally forced to choose between her two men, and when Catharina finally sees the finished portrait of the Griet in the studio. In this section, Vermeer walks in on Griet when she is changing her headdress and sees her hair uncovered for the first time. Vermeer is the only person to have seen Griet so exposed, and in this moment, her character changes completely. This moment could be defined as the crucial moment in Griet's character development. From this moment on, nothing will ever be the same in life again. Almost as though she wants to rid herself of Vermeer's ownership of her, Griet runs to Pieter the Son and gives herself to him for the first time sexually. Griet claims that "I no longer felt I had something precious to hide and keep to myself" (p. 208). In this moment, she gives her virginity to him in an alleyway, like a prostitute, which is everything she ever feared.

Vermeer becomes emphatic of his ownership over Griet while he is painting her, and perhaps even more so after he has seen her exposed hair. It becomes clear early on that Vermeer is somewhat jealous of Pieter the Son's attention on Griet, although he never acts on it. It is only when van Ruijven becomes intent on owning a painting of Griet that Vermeer springs into action, refusing to paint Griet in a concert scene, therefore giving van Ruijven the opportunity to seduce Griet. Instead, Vermeer opts to paint a scene of Griet on her own, thus ensuring that he is still the only man who may gaze at length, and Griet. It is clear that Vermeer is emotionally torn about having to hand over the painting of Griet to van Ruijven upon completion, and he even requests to see the painting one last time before he dies. Vermeer's metaphoric "ownership" of Griet is finalized when he pushes the earring into Griet's lobe for the first time. The experience conjures parallels of a woman losing her virginity as he pierces her flesh, causing her to bleed. The scene is written almost seductively, using very sensual phrases, leading the scene in which Vermeer and Griet share their only sexually intimate contact in the novel: "He rubbed the swollen lobe between his thumb and finger, then pulled it taut. With his other hand he inserted the earring wire into the hole and pushed it through. A pain like fire jolted through me and brought tears to my eyes. He did not remove his hand. His fingers brushed against my neck and along my jaw. He traced the side of my face up to my cheek, then blotted the tears that spilled from my eyes with his thumb. He ran his thumb over my lower lip. I licked it and tasted salt" (p. 221).



Soon after this, Catharina hears about the painting and confronts both Vermeer and Griet about the work. She is outraged, and terribly hurt, to see Griet wearing her pearl earrings which, to her, symbolizes that she has been replaced in Vermeer's heart. Vermeer has never painted Catharina in a portrait and she can no longer stand the attention Vermeer gives to other women. Catharina's attack on the painting with the palette knife is, essentially, an attack on her husband's infidelity. Even though he has not been physically unfaithful, it is clear to Catharina that he has become emotionally involved with Griet and she is overwhelmed with a desire to destroy Griet, even if it is just the image of her. This action leads to Catharina's miscarriage of the fetus she is carrying, another symbol for the ruptured relationship between herself and Vermeer. Vermeer's unwillingness to come to Griet's defense in the studio when Catharina accuses her of stealing the pearls, a ridiculous accusation since the pearls aren't even missing, proves to the reader, and to Griet, that van Leeuwenhoek's warnings were founded. Vermeer does not seem to care what happens to Griet and he does not help her when she is thrown out onto the streets. All Vermeer cared about was his painting, and capturing the image of Griet that he has always had in his mind, regardless of the effect on Griet, or anyone else's, life.



1676, Pages 233 - 248

1676, Pages 233 - 248 Summary

It has been ten years since Griet ran away from the Vermeer household. In this time, she married Pieter and gave birth to two sons, Jan and Frans, perhaps named after the two most important men in her life. The chapter opens with Griet standing at the butcher's stall watching as Tanneke approaches. It is the first time they have interacted since Griet ran away, as the Vermeers now shop for their meat from another butcher. In fact, they switched butchers so quickly that they never paid their bill of fifteen guilders to Pieter. Today, Tanneke has come on behalf of Catharina, who has requested to see Griet. Griet is nervous and has no idea what Catharina wants. Griet knows that the family still blames her for the son Catharina lost that day with the palette knife in the studio. Two months earlier, Griet had heard that Vermeer passed away. She hadn't seen him again since the night she ran away. At first, she missed him terribly, painfully, but after she had her first son, she became absorbed in her own family and didn't think much of the Vermeers. Her only regret was that she never saw the painting with the pearl earring when it was finished, and now she knew that she never would. Now, returning to the house ten years later, all the old emotions spring back up.

The Vermeers had eleven children at the time Johannes died, and were now in massive amounts of debt. Although the house is still regal, it is very run down and is being sold off, bit by bit, to cover the debts. When Griet walks up the house, there is a gaggle of children playing in the front yard. Franciscus, who was too young to remember Griet when she ran away, recognizes her as "the lady from the painting." Griet is overwhelmed when she hears that Vermeer requested to see the painting one last time before he died. Inside the house, Catharina is waiting, wearing her yellow mantle, which looks well-worn and patchy, has a powdered face, and is wearing a badly repaired dress. Even though she is clearly poor, Catharina still wants to assume the role of the wealthy hostess, especially in front of Griet. When Griet arrives, Catharina cannot look her in the eye. It is clear that she is annoyed and would rather be anywhere but in this room. Sitting next to her is van Leeuwenhoek, who says that he is the executor of Vermeer's will. Griet is confused until Catharina hands her a note, stating that in his will, Vermeer requested that Catharina's pearl earrings be given to Griet. Griet is shocked and tries to refuse the gift, but Catharina angrily insists, stating that she could never wear the earrings again after seeing them in a maid's ears, and to just take them. Griet takes the earrings and runs, again, away from the house to the pawn dealer's shop. She trades the earrings in for twenty guilders, not even bothering to haggle a better price. She takes fifteen guilders to Pieter, to cover the Vermeer family's debt, and hides the other five guilders, swearing to herself that she will never spend them.



1676, Pages 233 - 248 Analysis

This final section of the novel takes place ten years after the scene with the palette knife in Vermeer's studio. This section functions mostly as a way to tie up the storylines of the various characters in the novel. Griet has married Pieter the Son, although it is not clear whether or not she truly loves him, and has had two children, the eldest of which is named Jan, seemingly after Johannes Vermeer. This name conjures up the first scene in which Griet met the Vermeer family and was introduced to the children. The baby, Johannes, was only to be called Johannes, never Jan. By naming her son Jan, Griet seems to reflect on her love for Vermeer and has called her son Jan to highlight the special relationship she had with him, giving the baby a nickname not even Vermeer's own children were allowed to use. When Griet returns to the Vermeer household ten years later, one of the children recognizes Griet as "the lady from the painting". Here, Griet learns that Vermeer requested to see his painting of Griet one last time before he died, an act that leaves the reader, and Griet, questioning why he wanted to see the painting. Was it because he truly loved Griet, or because he truly loved his own work? This question is never answered, and the reader is left to make their own assumptions about Vermeer's motivations.

When Griet returns to the Vermeer household, it is the same as she remembers, but also very different. It is clear to her that the family has struggled financially since she ran away, but Catharina would never let it show. She still wears the yellow mantle when Griet arrives, even though it is musty and moth bitten, to showcase her position of power as the wealthy woman of the home, even if it is no longer true. It is clear in this interaction that Vermeer's selfishness has affected Catharina as deeply, if not more so, as it did Griet. Catharina gives Griet the pearl earrings as Vermeer requested, but neither woman has been able to wear the earrings since the day of the painting. In this way, it becomes clear how similar the two women are, and that both are victims of Vermeer's artistic interests. Griet pawns the earrings without thinking twice, and uses the coins to settle the Vermeer family's debt to the butcher. She keeps the last five coins for herself, in a secret place, and vows never to use them. Perhaps this can be seen as Griet's way of emancipating herself from the memory of Vermeer. Her refusal to use the coins to purchase anything symbolizes her stance that Vermeer could not "buy" her dignity for a loaf of bread or a new pair of shoes. Alternately, Griet's refusal to use the coins could be seen as a way of always keeping Vermeer's memory alive with her. The special connection that they shared appears to be, to Griet, priceless.



Characters

Griet

At the opening of the novel, Griet is a sixteen-year-old girl chopping vegetables in the kitchen for the family stew. This simple domestic act leads to a troublesome job working for the painter Vermeer, and eventually sitting as the model for his most famous painting, *Girl with a Pearl Earring*. Griet is a beautiful girl with wide-set eyes that are her most striking feature. She was raised with a very religious family and has thus become quite conservative in her teenage years. Griet can almost always be seen wearing a long white cap that covers her hair and eyes, so that no one can see her expression. Griet keeps her hair hidden because to her it symbolizes a wild side of her that she would like to keep contained. Griet spends her entire life trying to keep her hair, and therefore her sexuality, hidden from the men in her life and succeeded until the time when Vermeer walked in on her changing her headscarf. After her hair was revealed to a man, Griet claims that "I no longer felt I had something precious to hide and keep to myself" (p. 208). After this, she runs from the Vermeer's household, finds Pieter, and gives her virginity to him in an alleyway, like a prostitute, everything she feared.

Throughout the novel, Griet is forced to make two tough decisions, the first is between her families - although Griet loves her birth family, she is forced to build a new loyalty to the Vermeers, the family that employs her. It breaks Griet's heart, but eventually she begins to choose the Vermeers over her own family because they are wealthier, can provide her better food and shelter, and because they value art in the same way she does. The other decision Griet struggles with in the novel is between two men - Pieter the Son is a stable, loving man who will certainly take good care of Griet if they were to marry. The other is the married painter, Vermeer, who has a complex, and oftentimes confusing, relationship with Griet. Throughout the novel the reader, and often Griet too, is unsure if Vermeer actually has romantic feelings for Griet, or if he is just using her for his work. In the end, Griet chooses Vermeer, turning her back against her family. The result is disastrous and Griet ends up on the street. In the last section of the novel, the reader learns that Griet eventually marries Pieter the Son, although it is unclear whether or not she loves him, and that she starts a family with him after mending relations with her own.

Johannes Vermeer

Johannes Vermeer is a famous painter of the seventeenth century. He is well known for a portrait of the seaside in Delft, Netherlands, where he mixed sand in with the paint to create a lifelike texture for the bricks of the buildings. In the novel, Vermeer is married to Catharina and fathers eleven children with her. Vermeer is described as having "grey eyes like the sea" (p. 4), a richly timbered voice, a long, angular face, a cleanly shaven face, and a steady, calming expression. As a painter, Vermeer struggles to make ends



meet for his ever-growing family. Even though more paintings mean more money for his family, Vermeer refuses to compromise his work simply to paint faster.

Even though there is no money to fund the project, Vermeer hires Griet to begin working as his assistant in the attic, grinding his paints for him. This relationship must be kept a secret from everyone, especially Vermeer's family, because the general consensus during this time was that if a man and woman were working closely together for a long period of time, they must, according to gossip, also be sleeping together. Throughout the novel, Vermeer is a man of very few words, so the reader doesn't know what Vermeer's intentions with Griet might be. Vermeer's own friend, on the other hand, offers his own forecast for Vermeer's future with Griet, warning Griet that Vermeer doesn't actually care about anything aside from himself and his work. This proves to be true when Vermeer requests that Griet wear his wife's pearl earrings, which he pierces into her ears himself in a symbolic act of deflowering Griet. Throughout the novel, the reader is never sure whether or not Vermeer has romantic feelings for Griet, or if he was simply concerned with creating a beautiful portrait. The reader is given a hint, however, in the final section of the novel, when the reader learns that Vermeer requests Griet's painting to gaze upon in the final moments before his death. When he died, Vermeer left behind eleven children and a massive amount of debt.

Catharina Vermeer

Catharina Vermeer a woman who seems to be constantly pregnant, which makes her clumsy. She has tiny blonde curls which are constantly escaping her cap, and a face shaped like an oval serving plate. Catharina has no respect for her husband's artwork except when it brings money in for the family. She is a lazy housewife and mediocre mother to her children. She seems to spend all her time presenting herself as a wealthy mistress, and ordering around her hired help like slaves. Throughout the novel, it is clear that Catharina is jealous of the connection Vermeer shares with Griet, and she is outraged to the point of a miscarriage when she sees the painting Vermeer completed of Griet wearing Catharina's pearl earrings.

Tanneke

Tanneke is the first maid that was hired to work in the Vermeer's home. She is twenty-eight-years-old and has been working for the family since she was fourteen. She has badly pockmarked skin from a childhood disease, a boubous nose, light blue eyes, and thick lips. She is deeply jealous of her position as head-maid in the household and can be moody if she feels Griet is overstepping her bounds. Tanneke has no respect for Catharina Vermeer, and believes her only mistress is Maria Thins. Johannes Vermeer once painted Tanneke pouring water into a basin, which Tanneke is deeply proud of.



Maria Thins

Maria Thins is Catharina's mother and the true mistress of the household. Maria Thins is perceptive, cunning, and seems to be able to read minds. She sits in a chair in the Crucifixion room and smokes a pipe, which has browned her fingers and teeth. Other than these stains, Maria Thins is always spotless. Although she has a stern face, Maria Thins always appears to be amused, and is particularly supportive of Johannes' painting. While the rest of the family wants him to paint faster to make more money, Maria Thins recognizes that speeding up his work would compromise his art.

Pieter the Butcher

Pieter the Butcher is the butcher the Vermeer's purchase their meat from in Market Hall. He is a handsome older man with graying curls and a bloody apron. He openly flirts with the girls who come to buy from him, which embarrasses the girls but amuses him.

Pieter the Son

Pieter the Son is the son of Pieter the Butcher. He has bright blue eyes, blond hair that falls in thick curls, and skin like apricots. Pieter clearly has feelings for Griet and always lets her jump to the front of his butcher line when she visits him at the market. It is Pieter who finds out the news of the quarantine in Griet's hometown, and who tells her of her sister's death. Pieter the Son has very strong feelings for Griet, which he shares with her without fear that the emotions won't be reciprocated. In the end, his tenacity pays off and Griet marries him, although it is unclear whether or not she truly loves him.

van Ruijven

van Ruijven is the wealthy patron that buys many of Vermeer's paintings. Because of their close business relationship, van Ruijven often will request certain poses or models in the paintings he will purchase. Once, he requested that Vermeer paint a portrait of his favorite maid wearing a red dress. van Ruijven was sure to be present at every painting session, where the maid was drinking wine, and within a few months, the maid was pregnant with van Ruijven's baby. Because of this history, Vermeer becomes extremely jealous and protective of Griet when van Ruijven's oily gaze turns to her.



Objects/Places

Camera Obscura

The camera obscura is the wooden box that Vermeer uses to "see more of what there is" when he paints. It is a wooden box with a smaller wooden box attached to one side. The large box top is flipped open to reveal a small mirror underneath. In the smaller box is a lens through which the scene is filtered, flipped, and projected onto the small mirror. When Griet first sees the camera obscura, she believes it is the work of the devil.

Delft

Delft is the city in the Netherlands where the story is set. The township where Griet lives is packed with narrow rows of houses, built from brick, along the many canals.

New Church

The New Church is the church where Griet was baptized as an infant. It is a tall, narrow tower that reminds Griet of a birdcage. This is the church where she hides out to pray when she hears that Agnes has come down with the plague and the Vermeers will not let her return home to pray with her family.

Market Hall

Market Hall is where the local market is held every morning. This is the center of social life in Delft, and where all of the gossip in the novel is circulated. Here, everyone is on their way to or from the butcher, the baker, or the blacksmith. Children rush around running errands for their parents or masters, horses and carts clatter across stone streets. In the center of Market Square is an eight-point star that points in every direction of Delft, including home to Oude Langendijck and to Papists' Corner, the wealthy part of town, where the Vermeer's live. Market Hall is also where Griet meets her future-husband, Pieter the son, and where she is destined to work, ten years after leaving the Vermeer's household.

Papists' Corner

Oude Langendijck, also known as the Papists' Corner, is considered the Catholic, and therefore wealthier, part of town. This is where the Vermeer's live, and where Griet works.



Oude Langendijck

Oude Langendijck is the part of town where Griet and her family live. It is a bit poorer than the other parts of town, especially Papists' Corner. In the mornings, the homeowners arise and scrub their own steps, children play in the streets, and women gather on street corners to gossip, knowing that their luck could change at any moment. When Griet leaves for work on the first day, for example, none of the neighbors gloat about Griet's family's misfortune because they know that one accident could put any of their families in the same position.

The Pearl Earring

The Pearl Earring is considered to be the symbol of ownership in the novel. Catharina technically owns the pearl earrings, but does not ever wear them. These are the earrings Vermeer requests that Griet wear in the painting even though he knows Catharina will throw Griet onto the streets if she catches the girl in her pearls. Griet wears the earrings, however, and Catharina explodes with fury. She realizes that her husband is in love with Griet through his use of the pearl earrings in the painting and she is never able to wear them again. She finally gives them to Griet six months after Vermeer's death, as was requested in his final will.

The Yellow Mantle

The Yellow Mantle is the piece of fur that van Ruijven's wife was wearing in the portrait Vermeer painted of her. It is also the symbol of Catharina's wealth. Even though the family is struggling to pay their bills, Catharina refuses to sell the yellow mantle because she believes it symbolizes elegance and class. She even wears it when she invites Griet back to the house ten years after she ran away. Then, the fur was beginning to fall out, the yellow had faded, and the shape was beginning to wilt, but Catharina continued to wear it as a symbol of her elegance.



Themes

The Value of Art

The value of art becomes a significant theme once Griet begins working alongside Vermeer, grinding the bone for his paint. While the Vermeer family would have been outraged with the close quarters Griet was keeping with Vermeer, Maria Thins believes that Griet's sensuality and the connection she has with Vermeer might help him to paint faster, thus creating more income for the family. Until this point, the family has been divided by those who believe the value of Vermeer's paintings comes solely from the financial value they provide for the family, and those who believe that the value of Vermeer's art comes solely from its originality in artistic form, meaning that no one else can paint the world like Vermeer. This division is first apparent in the opening scene of the novel, when Griet separates the vegetables for stew by color. No one sees the value of this art except for Griet and Vermeer. This is where their bond is first established and Vermeer knows that, even though he hires Griet to work as his maid, he can also be her artistic mentor. The theme surrounding the value of art grows when the family discusses ways they can convince van Ruijven to pay more for the paintings he purchases. They request that Vermeer paint scenes with more people in them because more people adds value, but both Vermeer and Griet believe these paintings are cluttered, and they value them aesthetically less. The final blow regarding the value of art occurs when Vermeer forces Griet to wear the pearl earrings even though he knows that this move will inevitably force Griet onto the streets. In this moment it becomes clear that Vermeer values his painting even more than he values Griet or Catharina, and will put them both in a situation of emotional turmoil simply to create the image of his choosing.

Ownership

The theme of ownership arises many times throughout the novel, including Tanneke's feeling of ownership of the Vermeer household and Cornelia's ownership of household power, and Catharina's ownership over the pearl earrings, but the theme occurs most notably in two areas: Griet's ownership of her own sexuality, and Vermeer's ownership of Griet. In the first instance of Griet's ownership of her sexuality, the theme becomes most clear when Griet is wearing her cap. She does so to keep her hair covered an act that she believes helps to keep her conservative, saying: "My hair was long and could not be tamed. When it was uncovered it seemed to belong to another Griet - a Griet who would stand an alley alone with a man, who was not so calm and quiet and clean" (p. 130). Griet spends her entire life trying to keep her hair, and therefore her sexuality, hidden from the men in her life and succeeded until the time when Vermeer walked in on her changing her headscarf. After her hair was revealed to a man, Griet claims that "I no longer felt I had something precious to hide and keep to myself" (p. 208). After this, she runs from the Vermeer's household, finds Pieter, and gives her virginity to him in an alleyway, like a prostitute, everything she feared.



In the second instance, Vermeer becomes emphatic of his ownership over Griet while he is painting her, and perhaps even more so after he has seen her exposed hair. It becomes clear early on that Vermeer is somewhat jealous of Pieter the Son's attention on Griet, although he never acts on it. It is only when van Ruijven becomes intent on owning a painting of Griet that Vermeer springs into action, refusing to paint Griet in a concert scene, therefore giving van Ruijven the opportunity to seduce Griet. Instead, Vermeer opts to paint a scene of Griet on her own, thus ensuring that he is still the only man who may gaze at length, and Griet. It is clear that Vermeer is emotionally torn about having to hand over the painting of Griet to van Ruijven upon completion, and he even requests to see the painting one last time before he dies. Vermeer's metaphoric "ownership" of Griet is finalized when he pushes the earring into Griet's lobe for the first time. The experience conjures parallels of a woman losing her virginity as he pierces her flesh, causing her to bleed. The scene is written almost seductively, using very sensual phrases, leading the scene in which Vermeer and Griet share their only sexually intimate contact in the novel: "He rubbed the swollen lobe between his thumb and finger, then pulled it taut. With his other hand he inserted the earring wire into the hole and pushed it through. A pain like fire jolted through me and brought tears to my eyes. He did not remove his hand. His fingers brushed against my neck and along my jaw. He traced the side of my face up to my cheek, then blotted the tears that spilled from my eyes with his thumb. He ran his thumb over my lower lip. I licked it and tasted salt" (p. 221).

The Role of Women

The role of women in the novel is decided not only by their gender, but also by their social class. All women in the novel are clearly subservient to men. The reader sees this most clearly through the actions of van Ruijven's wife when she is sitting for her portrait with Vermeer. In this situation, van Ruijven's wife is the boss of Vermeer as she is paying for the painting, but Vermeer orders her around bossily, and she doesn't talk back. This silence could be due to van Ruijven's respect for Vermeer's work, but is likely due to her position as a woman - it would be considered a huge social faux pas for van Ruijven's wife to tell Vermeer that his tone of voice makes her uncomfortable, or that the position he's asked her to sit in kinks her neck. Similarly, Catharina rarely confronts her husbands about the concerns she has for their marriage. She minds her own business and raises the children while Vermeer paints to pay the bills. The wealthy women like van Ruijven's wife and Catharina, however, have far less responsibility than the poor women, like Griet and Tanneke, have around the house. The poor women, who have been employed as maids, not only have to remain subservient to the men, they also have strict social codes. The reader sees that Griet doesn't wear bright colors, doesn't sit in the living room, and doesn't wear her tortoise shell hair combs because she is a maid, and all these actions would be considered inappropriate given her social standing. The strict social codes for women, in the presence of men and otherwise, is the underlying force that adds all the tension in the novel. Because of societal expectations, Catharina does not confront Vermeer about her suspicions, and Griet feels helpless to refuse Vermeer's artistic advances. This story could not have taken place in the same

way in any other era, as the societal pressures and expectations of women in this era are uniquely constraining.

Style

Point of View

The point of view of the novel is first person, told through Griet's perspective, told through limited omniscience, as the reader only has access to Griet's thoughts and emotions. The story is told in past-tense narration, as if Griet is looking back at her life's events years later. The point of view could have been better utilized for suspense, but because Griet is the narrator, and because the story is told in past tense, there is no real sense of suspense created through the narration alone. Griet immediately dispels any aroused questions of suspense in the narration immediately after its creation. Even though the story is told in first person, the narration is believable and the reader is never lead to believe that Griet is leading them astray. This reliability is created through Griet's character, as she is presented as a very straight-shooting girl who is concerned with social expectations, roles, and rules. Whenever Griet does something slightly devious to social expectations, she explains her motivation in the narration, so the reader is never left to question her reliability.

The story is evenly split between narration and dialogue. This structure is likely used to highlight the growing relationship between Griet and Vermeer. While the internal narration, or exposition, shows the reader Griet's growing infatuation with the painter, it is only through dialogue that the reader begins to see Vermeer's growing interest in Griet as well. Although the entire novel is told through the filter of Griet's perspective, the reader is still able to create complex images of the secondary characters, including Catharina, Maria Thins, Pieter the Son, and Cornelia through Griet's observations.

Setting

The novel is set in Delft, Netherlands, during the seventeenth century. The city of Delft sits on the river and is full of canals where Griet remembers playing in her childhood. In the center of Delft is Market Square, where the local market is held every morning. This is the center of social life in Delft, and where all of the gossip in the novel is circulated. Here, everyone is on their way to or from the butcher, the baker, or the blacksmith. Children rush around running errands for their parents or masters, horses and carts clatter across stone streets. In the center of Market Square is an eight-point star that points in every direction of Delft, including home to Oude Langendijck and to Papists' Corner, the wealthy part of town, where the Vermeer's live. The neighborhood where Griet grew up in, Oude Langendijck, is poorer than the neighborhood in Papists' corner. In the mornings, the homeowners arise and scrub their own steps, children play in the streets, and women gather on street corners to gossip, knowing that their luck could change at any moment. When Griet leaves for work on the first day, for example, none of the neighbors gloat about Griet's family's misfortune because they know that one accident could put any of their families in the same position.



Language and Meaning

The language in this novel is very conversational, as it is told through the voice of a sixteen-year-old maid with no formal educational or training, which is reflected through the voice of this first person narration. The sentences are constructed in a way that the average reader could understand them in the same way the character speaking them could. Because the novel is evenly split between exposition and dialogue, the reader still gleans a variety of different speaking styles through the dialogue which not only characterize the speakers, but also help to create the stratified social structures. Even though "Girl with a Pearl Earring" is considered to be a historical novel, the language of the text is not stiff or stuffy. It flows evenly from scene to scene, without a hiccup of structure or vocabulary. The world is presented simply, perhaps as a simple maid would see it. If there is vocabulary not readily understandable by today's reading audience, the author diffuses those questions almost immediately by defining, or explaining contextually, the meaning of most of the new vocabulary words.

Structure

The novel is comprised of four sections, each deciphered by their dates, 1664, 1665, 1666, and 1766. Within each of the numbered sections, the long text of the year is divided into much smaller sections, averaging about three pages in length, separated by white space. As the structures suggests, the story is told chronologically from the time Griet leaves her parents' home to move in with the Vermeers until she leaves the Vermeers to start a life of her own. The first three sections of the novel are set during the three years that Griet works for the Vermeers. The year 1664 could be described as the year Griet leaves home, 1665 as the year before the painting, and 1666 as the year after the painting. Clearly, the central image to the novel as a whole is the painting of Griets' portrait, and everything, even the timeline of the structure, reflects that importance. The only section to be told out of a one-year increment is the final section, which is told in the year 1766, ten years after Griet flees the Vermeer household. It is in this section that the author, still utilizing Griet's voice as the narrator, draws closure to the lives of the all the characters, ten years after the main thrust of the novel.

The plot of the novel is fairly simple as it describes first Griet's adjustment to living the life of a maid, and then in the main conflict of the novel: how Griet copes with having to hide the fact that she is a model for Vermeer while she is living under the rouge of being his maid. This conflict forces Griet to choose between two lives - her life back home with her family and a marriage to Pieter the Son, or her life with the Vermeers and an apprenticeship to Vermeer. The tension of the story comes from the expected social etiquette and the role of women at the time of the novel, not from complicated subplots. While Chevalier attempts to create subplots through the drama of the Black Plague, Frans' apprenticeship at the tile factory, and Mother's religious zealously, these subplots seems superfluous as they do not affect the main storyline of the novel.



Quotes

"I wanted to wear the mantle and the pearls. I wanted to know the man who painted her like that."

1664, p. 38

"As I turned to go I caught the glance that passed between father and son. Even then I knew somehow what it meant, and what it would mean for me."

1664, p. 42

"The room, too, was different - no marble tiles, no silk curtains, no tooled leather. Everything was simple and clean, without ornamentation. I loved it because I knew it, but was no aware of its dullness."

1664, pp. 50-51

"I shall have to explain to her when I see her on Sunday, I thought. I have two families now, and they must not mix. I was always ashamed afterward that I had turned my back on my own sister."

1664, p. 57

"He saw things in a way that others did not, so that a city I had lived in all my life seemed a different place, so that a woman became beautiful with the light on her face."

1664, p. 64

"I felt his presence at my back - he had come down the hallway behind me. I turned to look at him, and saw that he had seen Pieter's smile, and the expectation there as well. He transferred his grey eyes to me. They were cold. I felt dizzy, as if I had stood up too quickly. I turned back round. Pieter's smile was not so wide now. He had seen my dizziness."

1664, p. 86

"Her words surprised me, but when I looked in her eyes and saw there the hunger for meat that a butcher's son could provide, I understood why she had set aside her pride."

1665, p. 99

"They would never say so to me, but they must have seen feeding him as a way of filling their own stomachs in the future. A butcher's wife, and her parents, would always eat well. A little hunger now would bring a heavy stomach eventually."

1665, p. 128

"I did not want to lie but did not want him to know. My hair was long and could not be tamed. When it was uncovered, it seemed to belong to another Griet - a Griet who would stand in an alley alone with a man, who was not so quiet and clean."

1665, p. 130



"There is something dangerous about your description of his paintings, she explained. From the way you talk they could be of religious scenes. It is as if the woman you describe is the Virgin Mary when she is just a woman, writing a letter. You give the painting meaning that it does not have or deserve."

1665, p. 145

"A painting in a church is like a candle in a dark room - we use it to see better. It is the bridge between ourselves and God. But it is not a Protestant candle or a Catholic candle. It is simply a candle."

1665, pp. 148 - 49

"He is an exceptional man, van Leeuwenhoek continued. His eyes are worth a room full of gold. But sometimes he sees the world as he wants it to be, not as it is. He does not understand the consequences for others of his point of view. He thinks only of himself and his work, not of you. You must be careful then - "

1666, p. 197

"Now that he had seen my hair , now that he had seen me revealed, I no longer felt I had something precious to hide and keep to myself. I could be freer, if not with him, then with someone else. It no longer mattered what I did and did not do."

1666, p. 208

"He rubbed the swollen lobe between his thumb and finger, then pulled it taut. With his other hand, he inserted the earring wire in the hole and pushed it through. A pain like fire jolted through me and brought tears to my eyes."

1666, p. 221

"Now you know the world a little better you can see there's no reason always to keep your hands clean. They just get dirty again. Cleanliness is not as important as you thought it was back when you were a maid, eh?"

1676, p. 239



Topics for Discussion

Discuss the setting of Delft, Netherlands. How did Tracy Chevalier make this historical city come alive in the story? How does the setting tie into the themes of art and beauty in this novel? How would the story change if it were set in a different city? Do you feel the classification of this novel as "historical" is accurate? Why or why not?

Throughout the novel, Griet feels divided between her old life with her family and her new life with the Vermeers. How did Griet's life change when she moved to Papists' Corner? What does she miss most about her old life with her family? What does she appreciate most about her new life with the Vermeers? In the end, which life better suits Griet? How can you tell?

Discuss Vermeer's attraction to Griet. How was his attention different than the attention she received from Pieter the son and van Ruijven? Do you think Vermeer was ever romantically attracted to Griet, or was he simply using her to aid in his art? What do you think Vermeer received from his relationship with Griet that he didn't receive in his relationship with his wife? Why might this particularity be important to understanding Vermeer's character?

Discuss the various views of art that are presented in the novel. How does Catharina's view of Vermeer's artwork compare/contrast to Griet's view of the same work? How do these women's opposing views of art affect their relationship with the painter? What message do you think Chevalier is sending to her audience about the importance of art: should it simply be viewed as a job, or something more? How can you tell?

Throughout her life, Griet has made a careful job of hiding things from the outside world, most notably her face and hair with her cap. How did Vermeer strip these trappings away from Griet, physically and metaphorically, throughout the course of their relationship? What was Griet's reaction to being "uncovered"? Do you think Vermeer's eagerness to strip Griet bare was fair to her? Why or why not?

Describe Griet's reaction to Vermeer's painting of other women during the time she lived in his household. For Griet, how did the experience of watching other women be painted compare/contrast with the experience of being painted herself? Do you think the act of Vermeer painting Griet brought the pair closer together or tore them further apart? How can you tell?

Discuss Vermeer's relationship with his wife, Catharina. Do you think Vermeer loved her? Why or why not? Do you think Vermeer betrayed his wife by painting other women? What was Catharina's reaction to Vermeer's paintings? If the Vermeers had lived in today's society, do you think they would have stayed married, as they did in the novel? Why or why not?

The pearl earring Griet wears in her painting is extremely significant to the piece of art, and to the novel. What does the wearing of pearl earring symbolize to Griet? How does



this significance compare/contrast to the significance the pearl earring has to Vermeer?
What is symbolic about the moment when Vermeer pierced Griet's ears for the pearl earring? How does Catharina react to seeing Griet in her jewelry?