

**Art and New Media:
Vermeer's Work under
Different Semiotic Systems**

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Art and New Media:
Vermeer's Work under Different Semiotic Systems

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ABSTRACT

The twentieth century was responsible for the revival of the visual arts, lending techniques to literature, in particular, after the advent of cinema. This visual revival is illustrated by the intersemiotic translations of Girl with a Pearl Earring: a recent low-budget movie was responsible for the revival of ordinary public interest in an art masterpiece from the seventeenth century. However, it was the book about the portrait that catalyzed this process of rejuvenation by verbalizing the portrait and inspiring the cinematographic adaptation, thereby creating the intersemiotic web.

The objective of this dissertation is to analyze the visual revival via the intersemiotic translations of the work of the Dutch master Johannes Vermeer. The relationship between verbal and non-verbal texts is deemed translation, and includes the process of intersemiotic translation of verbal text adaptations to other media. The literary work, built on ekphrastic descriptions, is a type of novel called a *Künstlerroman*. Concerning the movie adaptation, in addition to the study of ekphrasis, I show how cuts, additions and shuffling of scenes affected, or not, the core of the story. Additionally, I investigate the effect of the painter's works on the film's photography from the point of view of Gérard Genette and his proposed concept of transtextuality, which has been appropriated and applied to film studies by Robert Stam. Finally, I confirm the study of recycling within a general theory of repetition proposed by James Naremore through an overview of Vermeer's influence on contemporary art and media production.

Key words: oil painting, literature, cinematographic adaptation, ekphrasis, transtextuality, intermediality.

RESUMO

O século XX foi responsável pelo retorno das artes visuais, especialmente depois do advento do cinema que passa a emprestar técnicas para a literatura. Este retorno é ilustrado pelas traduções intersemióticas de Moça com Brinco de Pérola, uma vez que um filme britânico independente chama a atenção do público geral para um retrato feito no século XVII, lembrando que o ciclo não seria fechado sem seu principal catalisador: o livro. Criando assim uma rede semiótica.

O objetivo desta dissertação é analisar este retorno visual provocado pelas traduções intersemióticas feitas a partir da obra do mestre holandês Johannes Vermeer. A relação entre textos verbais e não-verbais é considerada uma forma de tradução, e inclui o processo de tradução intersemiótica de adaptações verbais para outras mídias. A obra literária que se constrói em torno de descrições efrásticas é um tipo de romance conhecido como *Künstlerroman*. Para o estudo da adaptação fílmica, demonstro como cortes, adições e inversões de cenas, afetaram, ou não, a essência do enredo, além do estudo de efrase. Investigo também o efeito da obra do pintor na fotografia do filme sob a luz da transtextualidade proposta por Gérard Genette, que foi apropriada aos estudos fílmicos por Robert Stam. James Naremore propõe um estudo de reciclagem dentro de uma teoria geral de repetição, que confirmo ao estudar a influência do legado de Vermeer na produção de arte e mídia contemporânea.

Palavras-chave: pintura, literatura, adaptação cinematográfica, efrase, transtextualidade, intermedialidade.

INTRODUCTION – The Life of Vermeer and his Artwork

One eye sees, the other one feels.

Paul Klee.

In the mid-nineties, 1995/96, an art exhibit gathering all known oil paintings by the Dutch master Johannes Vermeer took place simultaneously in two venues, the National Gallery, Washington D.C., and the Mauritshuis, The Hague. This exhibit produced a catalogue, symposia, and seminars. As a consequence of such interest a boom of intersemiotic translations having Vermeer’s work as inspiration for literature, in the form of poetry, novels, and movies happened. Vermeer’s work “really made a hit-fiction-wise” (Louvel “Seeing Dutch” footnote 1) through novels, poems, and movies.¹

The object of study for this dissertation is two works inspired by the portrait Girl with a Pearl Earring (1665-67), one of the most famous works by Vermeer: the novel written by an expatriate American author living in London, Tracy Chevalier, in 1999 and its movie adaptation directed by Peter Webber which came out in 2003 as an independent British production.

Tracy Chevalier, the author of the novel, was determined to translate the enigmatic look of the girl we see in the portrait Girl with a Pearl Earring. The novel tells the story about the painter in the act of painting the girl’s portrait, blending fiction, Vermeer’s real life and historical facts. The novel transposes the master’s work through ekphrastic descriptions and

¹ The Music Lesson by Katharine Weber, 2000; The Dance of Geometry by Brian Howell, 2002; Chasing Vermeer by Blue Balliett and The Irish Game: A True Story of Crime and Art by Matthew Hart, 2004; the poems in the books In Quiet Light: Poems on Vermeer's Women by Marilyn Chandler McEntyre, 2000; La pared amarilla by Carlos Pujol, 2002; the book Music on the Time of Vermeer by Constantijn Huygens, 2000; and the movie Brush with Faith, 2002, starring Glenn Close, based on the novel Girl in Hyacinth Blue by Susan Vreeland, 2000; can be cited.

tells about his life, forming a literary work with *Künstlerromanian* qualities. A film was made from the novel. Its plot is rather faithful to the novel; however this was not a relevant issue for the screenplay writer, Olivia Hetreed, or the movie director, Peter Webber. The production focused on translating not only the novel's core, but mainly Vermeer's aesthetics.

I intend to study the works entitled Girl with a Pearl Earring derived from the painting – a book and a film adaptation – as signs in a semiotic web. I will contrast and compare the depiction of the female protagonist in the different transpositions along with her role within this semiotic web. For this task, I will delve into the relationship between word and image, which is as old as its first ancient records but has recently been brought back to “center stage in recent interarts studies” (Clüver “On Representation” 13).

This introduction will give an overview on the life and the work produced by the Dutch master Johannes Vermeer and its relevance to art. In the first chapter, I will focus on how the source images, and Vermeer's life, are translated into what is, according to Solange Oliveira, *Künstlerroman* type of literary work. I will also investigate further the translation from image to word through the literary device, called ekphrasis: a narrative description widely used by the book's author. I will examine Claus Clüver's, Liliane Louvel's and Ulrich Weisstein's definitions of ekphrasis in order to acquire a more inclusive understanding of ekphrasis not only as a form of translation, but also as a literary genre. I will also count on Tamar Yacobi's definition of narrative ekphrasis. And I intend to delve into W. J. T. Mitchell's picture theory in which he develops the ideas of gender and social domination in the verbalization of art.

Chapter 2 will be devoted to the transposition² from novel to film. A parallel between the *Künstlerroman* and its film correlate Biopic will be made. Afterwards, I will examine

² As the terms intersemiotic transposition and intersemiotic translation have the same connotation, I chose to use the term transposition based on Gérard Genette's proposal for a hypertextual practices diagram which will be discussed in chapter 3 (Table 1 page 86).

ekphrastic evidence in the movie, using Clüver, Louvel, Yacobi, Mitchell and Walter Moser's definitions of ekphrasis. Four of the five taxonomic categories of transtextuality presented by Gérard Genette will be illustrated: intertextuality, paratextuality, metatextuality, architextuality.

The fifth category of hypertextuality, which has been appropriated and applied to film studies by Robert Stam in Film Adaptation, will be illustrated in the first part of the third chapter. I mean to study the transformations throughout the transposition process along with their effects in order to understand how the cuts and shuffling of scenes affected the core of the novel.

The second part of chapter 3 will, therefore, be devoted to the investigation of Vermeer's aesthetics becoming a source of inspiration for contemporary intersemiotic translations, with special emphasis on the interaction between arts and media through studies of intermediality. Since Vermeer's work was ahead of its time by at least two centuries, the quality of his paintings still inspires artists of different art and media fields such as literature, cinema, fine arts, photography and virtual manifestations. I will use James Naremore's proposal for the study of adaptation as a recycling process within a general theory of repetition.

I will now survey the life of the master Johannes Vermeer, the relevance of his work to Dutch art, his portrait entitled Girl with a Pearl Earring and how his work has expanded in recent years.

Johannes Vermeer

Johannes Vermeer was born on October 31, 1632, in Delft, Netherlands. Very little is known about his life. According to Arthur Wheelock,³ Vermeer's father, Reynier Jansz, was a silk weaver before running the Mechelen Inn in Delft, yet he mainly supported his family as an art dealer after being admitted to the St. Luke's Guild.⁴ Vermeer married Catharina Bolnes. Her mother Maria Thins was initially against the marriage, probably to his family's unstable financial situation and because he was only an apprentice at the time of his marriage proposal (9-16). Norbert Schneider⁵ adds another supposition that she was against the matrimony because of their different religious orientation: the bride was raised Catholic while the groom was a Protestant. However, over time, the relationship between mother and son-in-law improved. Vermeer is known to have converted to Catholicism and become a St. Luke's Guild master shortly after his wedding. The young couple first lived at the Mechelen Inn. They had fifteen children, only eleven of whom survived. He ran his family Inn and also worked as an art dealer like his father. Besides being a member of St. Luke's guild Vermeer was its *hoofdman*⁶ twice. He made more money by selling other painters' work rather than his own. Vermeer's family moved to the first floor of Maria Thins house on Oude Langendijk at the Papist corner, the Catholic part of Delft. It was here that Vermeer kept his studio on the second floor, which was furnished with a heavy wooden table and the lion chairs present in many of his paintings. Some of the paintings we see in Vermeer's work as *claves interpretandi*⁷ to his work belonged to Maria Thins. The paintings The Procuress, by Dirck

³ Arthur Wheelock is a curator of Northern Baroque Painting at the National Gallery of Art, Washington D.C., and an Art History professor. He has written several books on Dutch art and Vermeer.

⁴ Saint Luke's Guild was a "trade association to which artists, dealers, and artisans belonged" (Wheelock, 12).

⁵ Norbert Schneider is an Art History professor at the University of Karlsruhe, Germany.

⁶ *Hoofdman* is a word in Dutch with no exact translation to English. It refers to the headman of the guild.

⁷ *Clavis interpretandi*, or interpretative keys are subtle elements, which may not have a clear meaning at first; some kind of specific previous knowledge is needed to grasp such allusion (Schneider 90).

van Baburen, and the Crucifixion, or a copy of it, by Jacob Jordaens, are examples. Vermeer also used his wife's clothes and jewels in his compositions (7-10).

There are only thirty-six paintings attributed to him nowadays. This fact is due to his duties to his big family and to other jobs he had to do in order to support it. Another fact that may justify the limited number of pieces of art produced by Vermeer is that most of his paintings were not for the general public; he would mainly paint for specific clients who particularly admired his work, like the French nobleman Balthazar de Monconys and Jacob Dissius, who owned nineteen of the master's paintings.

According to Wheelock, Jacob Dissius, who used to be Vermeer's neighbor, would also be identified as his patron (14), while Slive claims that van Ruijven, who was Vermeer's client since 1650, is the one likely to have been the painter's patron (140-45). Vermeer's art was not worth its real value at his time, and many of the paintings were credited to other painters in order to increase their monetary value. He was buried practically unknown at the early age of 43 years on December 25, 1675 (Schneider 11-13).

Svetlana Alpers, an American art historian who dedicated most of her research to the study of Dutch art, wrote a book entitled The Art of Description in which she shows the differences between Italian and Dutch art, not with the intention of finding some kind of superiority or creating a north/south polarity or rivalry, but rather to show their distinctions. For her, Italian artists were always telling a story differently from Dutch painters. Alpers keeps with the definition in which Italian Renaissance painting is a sort of "surface or framed panel located within a specific distance from its observer who looks at a second or alternative world through it"⁸ (27). This second world is like a stage on which human figures behave according to source poems of inspiration. She calls it narrative art in which the *ut pictura*

⁸ Translation of: "uma superfície ou painel emoldurado a certa distancia do observador, que olha através dele para um segundo mundo ou um mundo substituto" (Alpers 27).

*poesis*⁹ doctrine is invoked in order to explain and validate images through their relationship with previous celebrated texts. But the focus of Alpers' study is on descriptive art, in which there is a pictorial and historical distinction, within the Golden Age of Dutch art. During the seventeenth century, and again in the nineteenth century, some of the most innovative European artists such as Caravaggio, Velasquez and Vermeer – Courbet and Manet in their last phase – adopted an essentially descriptive pictorial mode. Descriptive is, in fact, a mode of characterizing many of the works we usually classify as realistic, including, as Alpers suggests, the pictorial mode of photography. The quiet and still qualities of these works are a symptom of a certain tension between the narrative conjectures and a certain attention to a descriptive presence. There seems to be an inverse proportion between attentive description and action, the attention of the descriptive world is on the surface whereas that of the narrative action is on representation (25-30).

Alpers states that the descriptive Dutch art offers a delight to the eyes. It seems to ask less from us than the Italian narrative art. She also suggests the way we should look at Dutch art. For her, it should be done circumstantially, as it is done in the study of art and literature, so that art is perceived as a social manifestation as well as having access to the images in a place, space and role within a broader sense of culture. Dutch painting is rich in observation of the world, showing its virtues and domestic worries. The portraits, the still-lives, the landscapes and the representation of daily life depict the exhausted pleasures of a time: the family, ownership, the small town, the church, the countryside. In these images, the seventeenth century resembles a long Sunday after the difficult times of the previous centuries. They do not trick our senses or hide underneath a surface. They do show that the senses, in their intrinsic nature, are within what our eyes are able to capture, as illusionary as

⁹ *Ut pictura poesis* is a mini quotation of Horace's Poetic Arts (Moses 41). The phrase has been used to label interrelations between literature and painting, its principle and doctrine, since classical antiquity (Clüver "Liaisons" 10).

this might be (31-7). Art in the seventeenth century is also a register, or pictorial description, of reality, says Alpers. The representation of botany, maps, topography and behavior studies were part of the illustrator's job description – knowledge of art and nature in a two-way route (80-2).

Sir Lawrence Gowing¹⁰ claims that Vermeer, in particular, did not actually care about what he was painting. A nose, a finger, the conceptual world of names and knowledge was forgotten; Vermeer mainly worried about what was visible, the tone and the hem of light depicted on the canvas (19). Moreover, Alpers adds that we have images stored in our memory, but it was the Dutch artists that painted this state of mind (109-10). Vermeer did use common elements available to the seventeenth century Golden Age art movement: maps, landscapes, still-lives and daily domestic life, composing plans throughout windows. According to Wheelock, as Dutch paintings were cabinet size, perspective was a tricky technique to master. Therefore, the use of curtains in the foreground to create a *trompe l'oeil*¹¹ effect was one of the common alternatives (30).

But Vermeer had another very strong trademark: the representation of women as the object of male attention. There were no children in his scenes, for instance, different from the domestic context of Italian art. He preferred to represent women reading, writing, getting dressed-up and working alone on daily housework. Repetitively isolating women as his main theme, Vermeer's art is essentially descriptive. He passionately proposes a non-violated, self-sufficient world apart in which he exists through these women (Alpers 398-400).

Although rhetoric has less importance in Vermeer's work, Schneider adds, it is not completely absent. The master's treatment of characters and visual citations such as the *clavis*

¹⁰ Sir Laurence Gowing was the deputy director of the Tate Gallery in London, a painter, a professor and a writer on Art.

¹¹ *Trompe l'oeil* is a perspective device used in painting to promote a reality effect on the viewer.

*interpretandi*¹² used in many of the paintings betray a subtle irony. These allusions are not always clear to the receiver however during the seventeenth century the use of symbols became more accessible and less complex, in order to establish and consolidate a new moral code to guide the emerging middle class, different from the popular sayings with moral connotation of previous times (89-91). Paintings were then used as non-profit advertising campaigns do nowadays. Most of Vermeer's paintings had silent industrious women as a central theme. Even though we mainly perceive Vermeer's art on its aesthetic level, it also works as a mirror to the socio-cultural changes taking place during the Dutch Golden Age.

Vermeer's work was only recognized in the nineteenth century. It was Théophile Bürger-Thoré, a French journalist and politician, who, according to Schneider, developed his interest in seventeenth century Dutch painting and collected most of the thirty-six paintings recognized as Vermeers nowadays. While traveling around England, Belgium, the Netherlands and Switzerland, Bürger-Thoré perceived in Vermeer's work aesthetic particularities that anticipated the impressionist art movement and proved Jules Champfleury's¹³ and Pierre-Joseph Proudhon's¹⁴ theories, as well as the art schools of Barbizon¹⁵ and Gustave Coubert.¹⁶ The impressionists did not search for the intrinsic colors on the objects. For them, color was a response to light, its shine, tone and density depending on its wave length. The study of color was taken to a scientific level along with the conditions of the observer's perception (Schneider 87-88). Vermeer was ahead of his time in terms of his capacity for reception because of the methods and techniques used in his artwork such as the camera obscura, the predecessor to the photography camera.

¹² See note 7.

¹³ Jules Champfleury (1821-1889) was a French art critic and supporter of the French Realist painters. He was the first to promote the work of Gustave Coubert.

¹⁴ Pierre-Joseph Proudhon (1809-1877) was a French political philosopher. He was painted by Gustave Coubert in 1865.

¹⁵ The Barbizon school is named after the place where painters gathered. The Barbizon painters were part of a movement towards realism in art in the nineteenth century.

¹⁶ Gustave Coubert (1819-1877) was a French painter who led the Realist movement of the nineteenth century in France.



Fig. 1 – Johannes Vermeer, oil painting, 18¼ x 15¾ in. Girl with a Pearl Earring – *Meisje met de parel* – (Delft, 1665-67). Mauritshuis, The Hague; rpt. in Essential Vermeer. 09 Dec 2006 <<http://essentialvermeer.20m.com>>.

The portrait Girl with a Pearl Earring (1665-67) has been called the Gioconda of the North because of its enigmatic nature depicted under subtle chromatic harmony (Slive 151). There is no record of who the model was. There are only speculations that it could have been Maria Vermeer, one of the painter's daughters, or Magdalena van Ruijven since the painting used to belong to her father. But it could also have been any other model, as the novel suggests. The girl is wearing maid's clothes in contrast to the pearl earring, a symbol of wealth and chastity at the time. Schneider suggests that the pearl earring might be a reference to the biblical passage in which Isaac sends Rebecca a pair of pearl earrings as a sign of his love. So, the portrait might have been commissioned as the model's wedding gift. The turban on her head gives an exotic eastern effect; however the use of turbans in paintings was common since the fifteenth century. The painting was even called by some art historians Girl with a Turban before the name Girl with a Pearl Earring became common (Schneider 69-72). Its original Dutch title is Meisje met de parel, which literally translated into English is Girl with the Pearl. According to Wheelock, the portrait "is one of Vermeer's most lucid paintings" (92). Nowadays the portrait resides at the Mauritshuis Gallery in The Hague, Netherlands (see Fig. 1).

The work of the Dutch master Johannes Vermeer has been translated into multiple sign systems including literature, in the form of poetry and novel, and cinema among others. As previously mentioned, I am investigating the relation between three signs: static image (paintings), word (book) and image in movement (movie). The relationship between word and image, between verbal and non-verbal texts is seen as a form of translation which includes the adaptations of verbal texts to different media, such as cinema and photography.

Ulrich Weisstein states that the twentieth century was responsible for the revival of the visual arts by lending techniques to literature in particular after the advent of cinema (256). W. J. T. Mitchell describes this revival as a pictorial turn, which is not a naïve mimesis recurrence, but rather an invigoration of the pictorial in a post linguistic, post semiotic interchange among “visuality, apparatus, institutions, discourse, bodies and figurality” (16). Visual experience, or visual literacy, might not be thoroughly grasped in the model of textuality since spectatorship and its different readings play a major role in the process. Mitchell termed the whole process “the visual turn”, and it takes place not only in literature but also across most disciplines, most notably accelerated by the vast use of digital media and the Internet. This visual turn or visual revival can, thus, be illustrated by the intersemiotic translations of Girl with a Pearl Earring, since the novel catalyzed a sort of rejuvenation process when it verbalized the portrait and inspired a cinematographic adaptation, composing a semiotic web in which the three texts rely upon and depend on one another. This idea recalls the concept of *Kunstlerroman* that will be developed in the following chapter.

At the turn of the millennium, Chevalier and Webber, through different media, return to the seventeenth century aesthetic values represented by Vermeer: the lifestyle of industrious silent women depicted with technical perfection. Chevalier, a woman writer, gives voice to Vermeer’s silent work through fiction, whereas Webber, a man film director,

creates a vermeerized¹⁷ environment enabling viewers to perceive the artwork through the fictional model's eyes. The three works – painting, novel and film – are interdependent, relying on and feeding off one another. Vermeer's work nurtured both intersemiotic translations, novel and movie adaptation, and each one has its own particularities.

But still, why return to Vermeer's aesthetic values – the representation of silent, industrious women – now, in the beginning of the twenty-first century? Liliane Louvel elicits a similar question when analyzing Dutch painting by claiming how windows, a trademark of Dutch painting, are likely to inspire contemporary writers' imagination (“Seeing Dutch” pars. 32-33). She uses the novel Girl with a Pearl Earring to discuss her concept of ekphrasis, a descriptive literary device used by Chevalier and the subject of the first chapter. The return to Vermeer's values is also illustrated by the movie whose director was able to transpose the paintings to the cinematographic screen as I will show in chapters 2 and 3.

¹⁷ I invented this term on Linda Hutcheon's suggestion, “despite its linguistic barbarism”, first because “new elements require new names” and secondly to “underline the concept of *process*” (A Poetics xi).

CHAPTER 1 – From Canvas to Paper: The Novel by Tracy Chevalier

Art does not reproduce the visible, rather, it makes visible.

Paul Klee.

This chapter will be divided into two parts. In the first part, I will examine the literary work as a whole, taking into account Solange Oliveira's concept of *Künstlerroman* and Ulrich Weisstein's notion of Ekphrasis. In the second part, I will analyze three categories of ekphrastic descriptive excerpts from the novel, as seen through Claus Clüver, Liliane Louvel, Tamar Yacobi and W. J. T. Mitchell.

Part I

As I have mentioned, the novel Girl with a Pearl Earring is based on Vermeer's painting. It blends fiction, Vermeer's life and other historical facts. This kind of literary work, in which "a work of art or the figure of an artist – painter, sculptor, musician, it does not matter – is the backbone element"¹⁸ (Oliveira 40) of the novel, is known as *Künstlerroman*. A classical example is Joyce's Portrait of an Artist. There are several other works by Honoré de Balzac and Émile Zola in the nineteenth century, Thomas Mann and Virginia Woolf in the twentieth century, just to mention a few. There are also relevant contributions from contemporary Brazilian writers such as Clarisse Lispector, Lia Luft and Antônio Callado (Oliveira 06).

The *Künstlerroman* or the novel of the artist, from the German *künstler* meaning artist and *roman* meaning novel, was developed in Germany in the nineteenth century and became

¹⁸ Translation of: "a obra de arte, ou a figura de um artista – pintor, escultor, músico, não importa – aparece como elemento estruturador" (Oliveira 40).

a mode of literary representation of the artist. According to Linda Hutcheon, this literary tradition came “out of the *Bildungsroman*¹⁹. . . with its preoccupation with the growth of the artist” (Narcissistic 12) in which the internal creative experience is filtered through the character or the narrator.

Based on her analysis of Virginia Woolf’s To the Lighthouse, Solange Oliveira summarizes that *Künstlerroman* is a narrative in which aesthetic and technical aspects are part of the plot, and the creative artistic solutions affect other aspects of the artist’s life. Moreover, she defines as *Künstlerroman* as “any kind of narrative in which the figure of the artist or a piece of artwork, real or fictitious, plays an essential structural role, also encompassing literary works which pursue a stylistic equivalent based on the other arts”²⁰ (05). She includes works inspired by the impressionist and cubist movements, works inspired by music and those that use cinematographic techniques. Oliveira calls attention to how helpful it is to delve into the relationship between literature and the other arts in Horace’s *ut pictura poesis* tradition (05-06) so that the literary critic can be enriched by borrowing the semiotic elements from the different art forms. We shall see *Künstlerroman* qualities in the study of the protagonist of Girl with a Pearl Earring, who is not the master Vermeer, but his assistant and muse, the maid Griet. The novel is told in first person, as a narrator Griet is the author of the narrative playing the role of the artist besides collaborating with Vermeer.

In the painting there are only two characters, the model and the painter. There is no historical account of this specific model as it happens with the models of several other oil paintings, but only speculations about who she could have been.

For the novel, Chevalier chooses to create a fictional character, Griet, a Dutch Protestant teenager who becomes a maid in the house of the painter Johannes Vermeer. Her

¹⁹ *Bildungsroman* meaning the novel of formation.

²⁰ Translation of: “qualquer narrativa onde uma figura de artista ou uma obra de arte (real ou fictícia) desempenhe função estruturadora essencial, e, por extensão, obras literárias onde se procure um equivalente estilístico calçado em outras artes” (Oliveira 05).

calm and perceptive manner not only helps her in the household duties, but also attracts the painter's attention. Though different in upbringing, education and social standing, they have a similar way of looking at things.

The two main characters first meet at Griet's house while she is preparing some salad. Her awareness of color in doing such an ordinary task attracts the painter's attention. The painter and his wife, Catharina, need a maid to clean the master's studio. Griet needs a job because her father, a tile artisan, has just lost his sight in a work accident and cannot support his family anymore. The Vermeers are there to settle the final details of her hiring. After Griet starts working in their house, Vermeer slowly draws her into the world of his paintings: the still, luminous images of solitary women in domestic settings. A bond between maid and master is formed as she becomes responsible for cleaning his studio – a place so private that not even his wife is allowed to enter. On the verge of womanhood, Griet also contends with the attentions both from the butcher's son, Pieter, and from Vermeer's patron, van Ruijven. She has to find her way through this new and strange life outside the loving Protestant family she grew up in, now fragmented by accident and death, as her father becomes blind as mentioned above, her sister dies of the plague and her brother moves to another town to find work.

The growing intimacy between master and his maid creates disruption and jealousy. At first, Griet describes the artworks to her father, who has always been a great admirer of the master's work, when visiting her family over the weekends. Griet leaves her maid status behind when elevated to the master's assistant by helping him with the preparation of the colors by mixing pigments and they start discussing his art pieces as he finishes a painting and starts a new one. Van Ruijven gets interested in Griet since the very first time he sees her. He is determined to have the wide-eyed maid, as he likes to call her. Besides van Ruijven, no one else agrees with Griet's modeling, because of rumors involving the maid who last did so

for the painting The Girl with a Wine Glass and became pregnant even before the painting was finished. Van Ruijven's obsession leads to the climax of the story when Griet becomes Vermeer's muse, culminating in her sitting for the portrait Girl with a Pearl Earring. The novel can be considered a *Künstlerroman* because the core of its narrative is built on Vermeer's real life and the story of the mysterious girl he painted. The literary work is enriched by borrowing elements from painting shown by ekphrastic descriptions through Griet's reading of Vermeer's work.

The author of the novel, Chevalier, makes vast use of descriptions of Vermeer's paintings in the narrative of the novel Girl with a Pearl Earring, which is named after the portrait. Griet, the female protagonist, lays out the core of the story through a series of descriptions. This ancient descriptive device, which became rather popular during the Romantic Movement in the nineteenth century, is known as ekphrasis. Claus Clüver claims that ekphrasis is again central to the dialogue between word and image ("Estudos interartes" 333-59). I will now draw a parallel between the different aspects of this concept in order to see how ekphrasis is dealt with in the novel and the film.

The word ekphrasis comes from the Greek: *ek* (out) e *phrazein* (tell, declare, pronounce). The Greek rhetorical handbooks define it, as Clüver points out, as "a descriptive text which places the matter communicated clearly and distinctly before our eyes" ("Quotation, Enargeia" 36). The Latin translation is *descriptio*. The Oxford Classical Dictionary defines it as "an extended and detailed literary description of any object, real or imaginary" (515). A classical example of ekphrasis is the depiction of the Shield of Achilles written by Homer in the eighteenth book of the Illiad. Romantics, such as Keats, Shelley and Wordsworth, also offer us canonical pictorial works. The most celebrated one is Keats's "Ode to a Grecian Urn." In 1766, the German philosopher Gotthold Ephraim Lessing wrote

Laoköon oder: über die Grenzen der Malerei und Poesie in which he clearly establishes defined limits between the verbal and the visual arts.

In 1955, the term was brought back to literary discourse by Leo Spitzer when the studies of verbal representation of visual representation started to become a field of interest (Clüver, “Intermediality” par. 16). Murray Krieger is said to have revisited Lessing’s Laoköon in the sixties, elevating once again ekphrasis from a specific literary genre to a literary principle, enabling the appearance of the recent popular definition proposed by James Heffernan: “verbal representation of graphic representation” (Ekphrasis and Representation 299). This definition “emphatically excluded as objects of ekphrastic representation all non-representational paintings and sculptures and all architecture” (Clüver “On Representation” 13).

Claus Clüver, therefore, proposes to define ekphrasis as “the verbalization of a real or fictitious text composed in a non-verbal sign system” (“Quotation, Enargeia” 50) which, according to him, is a broader, yet less elegant, definition. In one of his latest articles, he defines ekphrasis as “verbal representations of texts composed in non-verbal sign systems” in order to broaden the forms of representations to media other than painting and sculpture (“Intermediality” par. 16). Clüver’s proposal, therefore, opens the door to the study of ekphrasis within different semiotic systems.

Tamar Yacobi, along with Clüver, defines ekphrasis as “an umbrella term that subsumes various forms of rendering the visual object into words” (“Pictorial” 600). Yacobi develops a chart showing ekphrastic relations between visual sources, which she calls a representation of artworks, and its verbal targets, which she calls the artworks re-presentation in literature. The former is one-to-one, from a visual source to a verbal target, i.e., the traditional ekphrastic relation, with one artwork inspiring one verbal text typically in the form of poetry. The latter is from one to many; it takes place when one image is the source of

many verbal texts, such as the dozen poems inspired by Breughel's *Icarus*. This relationship is "usually considered the limit of ekphrasis." Its reverse is the many-to-one relation – a kind of "cumulative text ... that covers a group of works produced by some artist, often as an act of homage." The last one, the many-to-many relation takes place "when a writer, a school, or an age revisits a certain image common to various paintings" (602-03).

For Yacobi, ekphrasis may verbalize not only a specific painting but invoke a 'pictorial model' when a text alludes to a "visual common denominator (e.g., the thematic makeup of 'a Madonna with child or the familiar components of 'a Turner seascape')" (599). Along with pictorial models, Yacobi analyzes another neglected form of ekphrasis, what she calls 'narrative ekphrasis.' Narrative ekphrasis promotes "the interpenetration of arts and media ... not to neutralize or transcend either component but ... to reinforce the features of the narrative system." Therefore ekphrasis may take place outside the domain of poetry since ekphrastic descriptions play a "key role throughout the narrative sequence" of novels as well, usually located at "central plot junctures" in order to "heighten or complicate ... the outset ... [to attend] and [to reflect] the hero's moment of discovery" (639-40).

Finally, I should mention what Yacobi calls the 'pregnant moment.' It is the moment right before the climax of the novel which stimulates the reader's imagination in a two-way interart movement between source artwork and verbal target. Yacobi states that "the traffic between visual arts and literature has always featured the allusive relations between works in the different media" (600).

In this chapter, I have shown that the novel is a *Künstlerroman* as it tells the story of Johannes Vermeer's life, be it fictional or real. However, the novel is also the story, invented by Tracy Chevalier, of a fictional character, Griet, who is a model for one of Vermeer's portraits. In this sense, the whole novel, a literary work departing from a single painting, can be seen as ekphrasis based on Ulrich Weisstein's assumption. In his article "Literature and

the Visual Arts,” he states that among many possibilities of intermedial relationships within literary works, ekphrasis is a type of literary work in which a work of art is described or interpreted (259). This idea strengthens Yacobi’s proposal of narrative ekphrasis discussed in the previous paragraph.

Another contribution is from the French theoretician Liliane Louvel. She proposes seven levels of pictorial saturation culminating in ekphrasis (“Nuances du pictural” 175-89). In two of her articles, “Peindre les nuages pour évoquer la lune” and “Seeing Dutch,” Louvel uses ekphrastic excerpts from the novel Girl with a Pearl Earring to illustrate how literature has been borrowing elements from different semiotic systems. Louvel’s levels of pictorial saturation are the following:

1. *Tableau Effect*: produced by the most diluted memory, therefore the most subjective of the levels, in which a “suggestive effect is so strong that the painting seems to be haunting the text”²¹ (“Nuances du pictural” 177).
2. *Picturesque View*:²² The scene is detailed, the background and the form are distinguished; the repertoire of shapes, colors and dimensions turn the scene into a tableau.
3. *Hypotypose*: Descriptive narrative, direct reference to the painting. It is up to the reader to make, or not, the association.
4. *Tableaux vivants*: The characters reproduce a painting or a historical scene presented by the narrator.
5. *Aesthetic or Artistic Arrangement*:²³ Composition which leads the character to contemplation, such as a still-life; there is no direct reference to a specific painting. This arrangement favors the reflexive effect.

²¹ Translation of: “*L’effet-tableaux: effet de suggestion si fort que la peinture semble hanter le texte*” (“Nuances du pictural” 177).

²² Translation of: *Vue pittoresque* (“Nuances du pictural” 178).

²³ Translation of: *L’arrangement esthétique ou artistique* (“Nuances du pictural” 182).

6. Pictorial Description:²⁴ “The text frames the description of a painting”²⁵ (“A descrição ‘pictural’” 204). The narrator’s linguistic competence is tested, as it highlights his ability to paint with words (“A descrição ‘pictural’” 202-03). A description is like an expansion of the narrative. It justifies the character’s gaze by leading the readers through his eyes (Hamon 58). A pictorial description takes place “when the text dreams with the image”²⁶ (“A descrição ‘pictural’” 217).
7. Ekphrasis: “The highest level of pictorial saturation. . . . It is a high level literary exercise in which a work of art evolves from the visible to the readable”²⁷ (“Nuances du pictural” 184).

W. J. T. Mitchell also discusses ekphrasis, but from a more political scope. He develops the idea of gender and social domination in the verbalization of arts in his article “Ekphrasis and the Other” published in Picture Theory in 1994. He develops his concept departing from Heffernan’s definition: “verbal representation of graphic representation” (299). He disagrees that a verbal representation is able to “represent – that is, make present” a visual representation. According to Mitchell “words can ‘cite,’ but never ‘sight’ their objects.” Mitchell finds ekphrasis a curiosity as “it is the name of a minor and rather obscure literary genre (poems which describe works of visual art) and of a more general topic (the verbal representation of visual representation)” (152), even though there is much ekphrastic literature from Homer to postmodern literature, from poetry to oral narrative. Mitchell compares Keats’s “Ode to a Grecian Urn” (1819) to Wallace Stevens’s “Anecdote of a Jar” (1919), along with analyses of poems by Homer and Shelley. He argues that there is no grammatical distinction between descriptions of different signs; the grammar used to describe

²⁴ Translation of: *Description picturale* (“Nuances du pictural” 183).

²⁵ Translation of: “*O texto emoldura a descrição de uma pintura*” (“A descrição ‘pictural’” 204).

²⁶ Translation of: “*O texto se põe a sonhar com a imagem*” (“A descrição ‘pictural’” 217).

²⁷ Translation of: “*haut degré de picturalisation du texte ... était un exercice littéraire de haute volée décrire une oeuvre d’art, à effectuer le passage entre le visible et lisible*” (“Nuances du pictural” 184).

a Vermeer is the same to describe a baseball game (157). Lastly, he claims that ekphrasis needs “to be understood as a fragment or miniature” (181).

Mitchell’s point of view enables a more thorough reading of the book as a semiotic transposition, and I shall analyze the novel’s fragmented ekphrastic moments in the second part of this chapter. For now, I will refer to Mitchell’s concept of “ekphrastic image as a female other” (168) as a pattern in the genre, making it clear that the proposed concept takes place when departing from a masculine perspective. He suggests “that female otherness is an over determined feature in a genre that tends to describe an object of visual pleasure and fascination from a masculine perspective, often to an audience understood as masculine as well” (168). Moreover, he claims that the verbal representation of the female image may carry nuances of voyeuristic “pornographic writing and masturbatory fantasy” (168) as “kind of mental rape that may induce a sense of guilt, paralysis, or ambivalence in the observer” (169). Mitchell discusses how ekphrastic procedures unveil the conventional by exposing “the social structure of representation as an activity and a relationship of power/knowledge/desire” (180). He emphasizes how “the otherness of the ekphrastic image is not just defined by the subject matter of the visual representation, but also by the kind of visual representation it is” (181). Mitchell further points out that he would probably have reached different conclusions if he had analyzed literature written by women.

When researching critical articles on the transpositions in the book entitled Girl with a Pearl Earring, I realized that most of them are either about the literary work or an account of Vermeer’s work within it. The great majority of writers are women and art, or art history, professors. Among them, I shall mention Peônia Guedes, Brazilian Literature professor at UERJ, who sees the novel as a feminine *Bildungsroman*,²⁸ in which Griet is also the centre of the narrative (131-33). Deborah Cibelli, art professor at Nicholls State University in

²⁸ *Künstlerroman*’s definition is similar to that one of *Bildungsroman*. However the latter refers to any “formation novel,” while the former refers only to the ones in which the character in question is an artist.

Louisiana, claims that we “are to read the painting to determine the story” (583) and suggests that Chevalier took advantage of the camera obscura as an element not only to validate her extensive research, but also to express emotions and passions within the values of seventeenth century Dutch society. She defines Griet as a profeminist.

Another writer, Aruna D’Souza, assistant art history professor at Binghamton University in New York State, compares three different adaptations with the Mona Lisa as a hypotext; Girl with a Pearl Earring is included since it is considered the Mona Lisa of the north. Besides considering Griet a profeminist as well, she sees her as a victim.

Meanwhile, Lee Ronald, British PhD student, considers Griet a victim trapped into a men’s world offering an enriching queer/gay perspective of the book. Finally, Nanette Salomon, art history professor at CUNY College of Staten Island, offers an overview of Vermeer’s artwork under a more subtle feminist light.

None of the above female critics²⁹ see Griet as a “female other . . . object of visual pleasure and fascination from a masculine perspective” (168), as proposed by Mitchell. On the contrary, they see her as the centre of the narrative, even when considered a victim. Even though a feminist reading within a historical account of the character is logical and consistent, I chose to analyze the protagonist’s role from an intersemiotic perspective within different signs in this dissertation.

Although Mitchell’s perspective of ekphrasis does not necessarily complement some other perspectives, it is worth taking a closer look at it, especially when making a parallel

²⁹ Only after I had already defended this dissertation I had access to the PhD dissertation of Laura Sager entitled Writing and Filming the Painting: Ekphrasis in Literature and Film. She develops a framework of four types of ekphrasis according to its degrees of complexity. She applies it to literature and films that use Goya, Rembrandt and Vermeer’s artwork demonstrating how literary texts deal differently from its related movie adaptations. She also “discusses the audience-related functions of ekphrasis in film” (vii). Her analyzes include Girl with a Pearl Earring. For her, the novel is about Griet’s “private thoughts and domestic troubles” (194) while the movie demonstrates male power by the use of art descriptions. Therefore, Sager is likely to agree that, in the film, Griet can be seen as a female other. Sager defended her PhD dissertation at the University of Texas at Austin in December 2006. 19 May 2008
<<http://www.lib.utexas.edu/etd/d/2006/sagerl43712/sagerl43712.pdf>>.

between the different verbal representations of the different semiotic transpositions, novel and movie, and of the portrait Girl with a Pearl Earring and Vermeer's artwork in general.

Taking into account Mitchell's assumption that ekphrasis should be understood as a fragment of the text, illustrated here with descriptive excerpts which I call ekphrastic moments, rather than whole literary work (181), I chose to divide these novel's ekphrastic moments into three different categories of description in order to optimize my analysis. These categories are in accordance with recurrent patterns I identified among the ways the characters describe the paintings. The first category I will call Post-Work Descriptions: the ones done in the most traditional way in which a character describes an existing painting, within the work of fiction, usually from memory. The second category is Pre-Work Descriptions: a sort of brainstorming done by more than one character before the character Vermeer actually starts a painting. The last category is Descriptions of Work in Progress: given while the painting is being executed. Next, I will analyze ekphrastic moments from the novel relying on Clüver, Louvel Yacobi and Mitchell's definitions of ekphrasis. This section will be divided into three parts, each one referring to a category proposed above.

Part II - Describing Vermeer on Paper: Ekphrasis I

Post-work Descriptions refer to existing artworks being described by one of the characters. In the novel, the female protagonist, Griet, describes some works to her blind father, a great admirer of the master. I chose to use two examples here: one of them is the description of the painting A View of Delft, the other is The Girl with a Wine Glass.

The first ekphrastic moment, the painting A View of Delft (see Fig. 2) is described at the very beginning of the novel when Griet and her father are talking about her new job in which she will be in charge of cleaning Vermeer's studio. The father is telling her who Vermeer is by recalling one of his prestigious paintings they had seen together:

“It was a view of Delft, from the Rotterdam and Schiedam Gates. With the sky that took up so much of the painting, and sunlight on some of the buildings.”

“And the paint had sand in it to make the brickwork and the roofs look rough,” [Griet] added. “And there were long shadows in the water, and tiny people on the shore nearest us.”

“That’s the one.” Father’s sockets widened as if he still had eyes and was looking at the painting again. (7-8)



Fig. 2 – Johannes Vermeer, oil painting, 38¾ x 46¼ in, A View of Delft – Gezicht op Delft – (Delft, 1660-61). Mauritshuis, The Hague; rpt. in “A Complete Catalogue of Johannes Vermeer’s Paintings.” Essential Vermeer. 09 Dec 2006 <<http://essentialvermeer.20m.com>>.³⁰

The second ekphrastic description, the painting The Girl with a Wine Glass (see Fig. 3), is described by several characters. The most relevant description is given by Pieter, the butcher’s son. He describes it as follows:

It was several years ago now. It seems van Ruijven wanted one of his kitchen maids to sit for a painting with him. They dressed her in one of his wife’s gowns, a red one, and van Ruijven made sure there was wine in the painting so

³⁰ All Vermeer’s paintings reproduced here are available at “A Complete Catalogue of Johannes Vermeer’s Paintings.” Essential Vermeer. 09 Dec 2006 <<http://essentialvermeer.20m.com>>.

he could get her to drink every time they sat together. Sure enough, before the painting was finished she was carrying van Ruijven's child. (126)

More relevant findings concerning the description of The Girl with a Wine Glass will be mentioned in chapter 3, when analyzing this painting in the transposition to the movie. Here, Pieter makes the rumors about the maid clear to Griet while verbally describing the scene.

The two ekphrastic descriptions fit both Clüver and Louvel's definitions since the conversation between the characters verbalize the paintings, so that the reader can visualize the town's landscape and the girl wearing the red dress. The second description illustrates the one-to-many category proposed by Yacobi since several characters describe the same painting according to their own point of view, while the first fit the traditional ekphrastic description, the one-to-one category.



Fig. 3 – Johannes Vermeer, oil painting, 30 ¾ x 26 3/8 in, The Girl with the Wine Glass – *Dame en twee heren* – (Delft, 1659-60). Herzog Anton Ulrich-Museum, Brunswick.

Pre-work ekphrastic moments occur when there is a discussion of how a certain scene should be depicted: the theme, the disposition of objects, the figures, the colors, and even the intended intensity of light. In the novel, there are several long dialogues between Griet and

her master, some kept in the movie, in simplified form. Most of them are also discussed throughout the painting execution in the following section.

The most relevant illustration, that plays a great role on the central plot, is a brief dialogue during a dinner party between Van Ruijven and Maria Thins on Vermeer's next commission. Van Ruijven notices the "wide-eyed maid," as he likes to call Griet, while she is serving them. Maria Thins recalls how pleased he was with the painting The Music Lesson (see Fig. 4) and suggests "another with a musical setting. After a lesson, a concert, perhaps with more people in it, three or four musicians, an audience" (154). Van Ruijven is against an audience but likes the idea and shows his interest in being in the painting with Griet. Maria Thins agrees at first and even compares it to The Girl with a Wine Glass. After all, she is aware of how interested the patron is in Griet and how much money he could be willing to spend on her. However, later on Maria Thins agrees with Vermeer that Griet should not be in the group scene, only because she wants to avoid problems with her daughter, Catharina Bolnes, who is again pregnant and could not bear the idea of the maid modeling for her husband. Van Ruijven insists that he wants his wide-eyed maid even if it cannot be in flesh but rather on a piece of canvas for him to admire her beauty. They all agree to keep it a secret in order to protect Catharina from her self-destructive jealousy. Van Ruijven, his wife and daughter end up sitting together in the group scene: the painting The Concert (see Fig. 5). The final result of the commission negotiation is the portrait Girl with a Pearl Earring.

Griet also describes in the novel the setting for the painting when she finds herself in the picture scene before modeling for Vermeer. She actually describes the painting The Procuress by Dirck Van Baburen (see Fig. 6):

As I waited I studied the paintings he had hung on the back wall that would form part of the concert painting. There was a landscape on the left, and on the right a picture of three people – a woman playing a lute, wearing a dress that

revealed much of her bosom, a gentleman with his arm around her, and an old woman. (168-69)

In spite of being brief, it is important to discuss this illustration of ekphrastic description for this category – pre-work descriptions – as it is surrounded by relevant details to the plot development is worth of study because it will lead to the climax of the story.



Fig. 4 – Johannes Vermeer, oil painting, 28 7/8 x 25 3/8 in, The Music Lesson – *De muziekles* – (Delft, 1664-67). The Royal Collection, Buckingham Palace.



Fig. 5 – Johannes Vermeer, oil painting, 28 1/2 x 25 1/2 in, The Concert – *Het concert* – (Delft, 1664-67). Isabella Gardner Museum, Boston (stolen).



Fig. 6 –Dirck van Baburen, oil painting, 39 3/4 x 42 1/4 in. The Procuress (1622). Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, rpt. in “A Complete Catalogue of Johannes Vermeer’s Paintings.” Essential Vermeer. 09 Dec 2006 <<http://essentialvermeer.20m.com>>.

Descriptions of Works in Progress refer to dialogues during the painting process. In the book there are several dialogues between Griet, Vermeer and Van Leeuwenhoek, Vermeer's friend known for having invented the camera obscura. The paintings Woman with a Pearl Necklace, Young Woman with a Water Jug, A Lady Writing and the portrait Girl with a Pearl Earring are thoroughly described in the book.³¹ All of them are somehow present in the movie except for A Lady Writing.

In addition to the paintings by Vermeer mentioned throughout the novel, there is also the question of the biblical imagery present in paintings by other painters hung around the house. Since the Vermeers are Catholic and Griet is Protestant, it is difficult for her to understand and accept their worship of religious images.

I will now show the most elaborate ekphrastic descriptions from the novel, which are the paintings Young Woman with a Water Jug, A Lady Writing, Woman with a Pearl Necklace, and the portrait Girl with a Pearl Earring.

In the first one, the reader follows the painting of Young Woman with a Water Jug (see Fig. 7) via Griet's descriptions to her blind father in the novel:

“The baker's daughter stands in a bright corner by a window,” I began patiently. “She is facing us, but is looking out the window, down to her right. She is wearing a yellow and black fitted bodice of silk and velvet, a dark blue skirt, and a white cap that hangs down in two points below her chin.” (90)

Griet continues the description by telling her father how Vermeer uses a combination of colors in order to achieve a new one. He seems to be having a hard time to imagine the painting and Griet replies “that's what is so strange. It's painted many colors, but when you look at it, you think it's white” (90). Her father notes how much simpler tile painting is and changes the subject by asking what the model is doing. Griet continues:

³¹ Chevalier 167-69; 178-83; 189-91; 214-16.

She has one hand on a pewter pitcher sitting on a table and one on a window she's partly opened. She's about to pick up the pitcher and dump the water from it out the window, but she's stopped in the middle of what she's doing and is either dreaming or looking at something in the street. (90)

Disappointed with her answer, the father admits to being confused by the lack of narrative. Griet ends their discussion by stating that Vermeer's "paintings don't tell stories" (91).



Fig. 7 – Johannes Vermeer, oil painting, 18 x 16 in, Young Woman with a Water Jug – *Vrouw met waterkan* – (Delft, 1664-65). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Marquand Collection

In the description of A Lady Writing (see Fig. 8), Griet changes the position of the cloth on the table while she is cleaning the set of the painting. According to the maid, she does so because "the scene was too neat ... there should be some disorder on the table, something to snag the eye" (132) so that the model's arm holding the quill could be better seen. Vermeer asks Griet why she did it, and she claims that there should be some disorder "to contrast with [the model's] tranquility ... something to tease the eye." In this part of the book, Vermeer demonstrates how he cares about his maid and assistant's opinion when he replies that he never thought he "would learn something from a maid" (136). On the other hand, he does not let his wife inside his studio, nor has he ever painted her. According to

Vermeer, Catharina “and the children are not a part of this world” and adds that she “is not meant to be” (214).



Fig. 8 – Johannes Vermeer, oil painting, 17 $\frac{3}{4}$ x 15 $\frac{3}{4}$ in, A Lady Writing – *Schrijvend meisje* – (Delft, 1665-66). The National Gallery of Art, Washington D.C.

Woman with a Pearl Necklace (see Fig. 9) is commented on by more than one character in the book. First, there is the excerpt in which Maria Thins catches Griet astonished looking at the painting. Maria Thins remarks that it is “not a common sight, now, is it?” She laughs and adds that Griet is “not the first to forget [her] manners in front of his paintings” (35). Griet tells the readers this is the painting she remembered best because it was the first one she saw. She describes:

A woman stood in front of a table, turned towards a mirror on the wall so that she was in profile. She wore a mantle of rich yellow satin trimmed with white ermine, and a fashionable five-pointed red ribbon in her hair. A window lit her from the left, falling across her face and tracing the delicate curve of her forehead and nose. She was tying a string of pearls around her neck, holding the ribbons up, her hands suspended in the air. Entranced with herself in the mirror, she did not seem to be aware that anyone was looking at her. Behind her on a bright white wall was an old map, in the dark foreground the table

with the letter on it, the powder brush and the other things I had dusted around. (36)

After the description, despite feeling ashamed, Griet admits to herself how much she would like to be painted and mainly how much she would like to get closer to Vermeer. After this self-acknowledgment, Griet goes back to her daily chores and describes how she is coping with the new cleaning job. Since she can not move anything from the painting set, she mentions how she polished “the brass studs and lion head” on the chair, how she “wiped around the objects placed there – a powder brush, a pewter bowl, a letter, a black ceramic pot, blue cloth heaped to one side and hanging over the edge” (34). All the elements composing the scene of the painting are verbalized in detail: the ones just mentioned along with the lady’s clothes, her ornament in her hair, the jewel, the mirror on the wall. Even the light striking on the woman’s face is accurately described.

All the descriptions in the three categories enable the reader to visualize the situation through words. There is also verbalization (the descriptions) of real non-verbal signs, (the paintings) in all of them. They also fit Yacobi’s chart of ekphrastic relations. Therefore, the ekphrastic excerpts are in keeping with Louvel and Clüver and Yacobi’s definitions of ekphrasis.



Fig. 9 – Johannes Vermeer, oil painting, 21 1/8 x 17 1/4 in, Woman with a Pearl Necklace – *Vrouw met parelsnoer* (Delft, 1664). *Staatliche Museen Preußischer Kulturbesitz, Gemäldegalerie, Berlin*.

The ekphrastic description of the portrait Girl with a Pearl Earring (see Fig. 10) is the climax of the novel. The whole plot conspires in favor of this moment. Nevertheless, this description is different from all the others. Its focus is on the protagonist's feelings while she is being portrayed, as well as on her interaction with the master during the negotiation of the portrait. Many of the ekphrastic descriptions studied here are interwoven with this one. The reader not only identifies the portrait but also easily visualizes it in the novel.

The excerpt starts from van Ruijven's obsession with Griet expressed in the description of The Girl with a Wine Glass. During the negotiation of Vermeer's next commission, The Concert, it is agreed that Griet will be portrayed by herself, and not beside van Ruijven, in order to avoid pregnant Catharina's jealousy. Griet, though relieved and excited, is aware of the drawbacks her proximity to Vermeer might bring her.

According to the novel, they start the project on the first day of the year. He had already laid the first coat of paint on the canvas, no "reddish marks," "false colors," or even the luminous spots as usual. The canvas is an empty "yellowish white" (Chevalier 177). Vermeer asks Griet to read a letter. She considers telling him that the paper is blank, but chooses to stay quiet. He suggests a book, but concludes that the problem is in her clothes. She suggests that he paint her as a maid but he refuses:

"What do you want, sir?" I asked, sitting. I was puzzled – we never sat together. I shivered, although I was not cold.

"Don't talk." He opened a shutter so that the light fell directly on my face. "Look out of the window." He sat down in his chair by the easel.

I gazed at the New Church tower and swallowed. I could feel my jaw tightening and my eyes widening.

"Now look at me." (168-69)

Griet turns her head over her shoulder to face the painter. He asks her to sit still. She realizes that she is actually being painted by Vermeer. Only a month later did they continue the modeling. After much negotiation over the composition of the painting, the master states that he “will paint [her] as [he] first saw [her], Griet. Just [her]” (179-80).

The painter and the model negotiate the composition of the portrait: the clothes, the blue and yellow turban instead of the traditional maid’s cap, the body turned towards the window, the gaze of her wide open eyes, the glossy lips, and, finally, the pearl earring. The painter worries in particular about the way the light is reflected on the model’s face. Griet, the fictional model, was highly aware of it the whole time; she knows that what really matters to him is the final result as requested by his patron. The girl is important only as his muse and not as a woman. While she does not fight her feelings towards the painter, Griet follows the natural course of her life out of the studio, as evidenced on the excerpt below:

Soon it became easier to keep my eyes on his. He looked at me as if he were not seeing me, but someone else, or something else – as if he were looking at a painting.

He is looking at the light that falls on my face, I thought, not at my face itself. That is the difference.

It was almost as if I were not there. Once I felt this I was able to relax a little. As he was not seeing me, I did not see him. My mind began to wander – over the jugged hare we had eaten for dinner, the lace collar Lisbeth had given me, a story Pieter the son had told me the day before. After that I thought of nothing. (180)

Griet only agrees to pierce her ears after Vermeer shows the work in progress. She continues the description:

The painting was like none of his others. It was just of me, of my head and shoulders, with no tables or curtains, no windows or powder-brushes to soften and distract. He had painted me with my eyes wide, the light falling across my face but the left side of me in shadow. I was wearing blue and yellow and brown. The cloth wound round my head made me look not like myself, but like Griet from another town, even from another country altogether. The background was black, making me appear very much alone, although I was clearly looking at someone. I seemed to be waiting for something I did not think would ever happen.

He was right – the painting might satisfy van Ruijven, but something was missing from it. (191)

In the book, one afternoon while Catharina is out, Maria Thins lends the pair of earrings to Griet and asks her help to have the painting finished as soon as possible. Vermeer includes the earring in the portrait. Griet asks him to place the jewel into her ears. Griet leaves the studio, without even taking a last look at the canvas, and proudly returns the earrings to her mistress. After all, she had accomplished the task.



Fig. 10 – Johannes Vermeer, oil painting, 18¼ x 15¾ in. Girl with a Pearl Earring – *Meisje met de parel* – (Delft, 1665-67). Mauritshuis, The Hague.

The character Griet convinces as a proud model sitting for her master with whom she is deeply involved. The pearl earring, besides balancing the light of the composition, has another prime role in the plot: it is the central element which connects and pushes muse and master away from each other. Here we encounter what Yacobi calls ‘pregnant moment’ since the very moment before the climax of the novel does connect the reader’s mind with the two media involved, the painting as the source and the literary text as the verbal target.

Finally, the description below is part of the novel’s introduction when Vermeer meets Griet for the first time. I would like to comment on it briefly before concluding this section:

I always laid vegetables out in a circle, each with its own section like a slice of pie. There were five slices: red cabbage, onions, leeks, carrots, and turnips. I had used a knife edge to shape each slice, and placed a carrot disc in the center. (5)

According to Liliane Louvel, the fifth level of pictorial saturation is called aesthetic or artistic arrangement and it is found in a character’s gaze. Although the pictorial lexis is evident in the description above, there is no direct reference to a specific painting (“Nuances du pictural” 182). The text serves as a frame for the description of the painting. The narrator works with words the way a painter would work with a brush on canvas. The description expands the narrative, extending the protagonist’s view and enabling the reader to perceive it through the character’s eyes while “the text dreams with the image”³² (“A descrição ‘pictural’” 217).

The analyses of these ekphrastic moments confirm my assumption that Griet does not play the role of a victim, or a radical protofeminist as some critics have suggested. Through her descriptions and discussions with her master, she is the one who gives voice to Vermeer’s silent artwork in the novel. Griet is the one who enables the readers visualize Vermeer’s

³² Translation of: “*O texto se põe a sonhar com a imagem*” (“A descrição ‘pictural’” 217).

paintings with her words. When we consider the interpenetration of art and media reinforcing the entire narrative system through ekphrastic description, the novel as a whole can be seen as a type of ekphrasis in which Vermeer's art is verbalized by an invented protagonist in charge of the narrative.

I shall now investigate if Griet plays the same role in the movie in the next chapter that will, therefore, be devoted to the translation of the word back to image: Webber's cinematographic adaptation of Chevalier's novel.

CHAPTER 2 – From Paper to Screen: The Movie by Peter Webber

When looking at any significant work of art,
remember that a more significant one probably has had to be sacrificed.

Paul Klee

This chapter deals with the translation of the novel by Tracy Chevalier back to image: Peter Webber's movie adaptation Girl with a Pearl Earring. In order to do so, I first discuss the film as a Biopic, the film equivalent of *Künstlerroman*. Then an ekphrastic analysis will be carried out, focusing on the movie. Finally, I will concentrate on the changes that took place in the transposition from novel to film, using Gérard Genette's concept of transtextuality.

Part I - Textual Transcendence

For Gérard Genette, "the object of poetics is not the (literary) text but its textual transcendence, its textual links with other texts" (ix). Therefore, I propose to investigate the textual transcendence catalyzed by the movie adaptation Girl with Pearl Earring. For the first part of this third chapter, I propose to apply the concepts of Biopic, a film correlate of *Künstlerroman*. Then I will study the ekphrastic moments present in the movie, relying on Louvel, Clüver, Mitchell and Yacobi as well. For its second part, I propose to show how cuts, additions and inversions may have affected the core of the story. I will use the concept of transtextuality proposed by Gérard Genette in 1981 in his Palimpsests: Literature of Second Degree, translated into English in 1997 and partially translated into Portuguese under the supervision of Professor Dr. Sônia Queiroz and published by *Cadernos Viva-Voz*, UFMG.

The independent British production Girl with a Pearl Earring was directed by Peter Webber, who makes his big screen debut. It was released in 2003. Eduardo Serra was the director of cinematography and Olivia Hetreed wrote the screenplay as Chevalier refused to adapt the story herself. It stars Colin Firth as Vermeer, Scarlett Johansson as Griet and Tom Wilkinson as the patron van Ruijven. The movie plot is faithful to the novel; however this was not a relevant issue for the production, which focused on translating not only the novel's core, but especially Vermeer's aesthetics. The movie was nominated for three Oscars: best art direction, best cinematography and best costume design. Not surprisingly all nominations are connected to visual aspects. They had another ten wins and thirty-one nominations in other award ceremonies.³³

The movie adaptation is more concise than the novel since it cuts and combines the parallel plots, such as the ones related to Griet's family. Some of the plots are shuffled in the movie adaptation, surprising Chevalier, who said she was rather pleased with the final result of the movie ("Mother of the Pearl" pars. 06-18). In contrast to the novel, which focuses on the maid's thoughts, the movie is principally concerned with the master/maid relationship. It also presents the aesthetics of Vermeer's paintings on the big screen through Eduardo Serra's unique use of light.

The movie adaptation also tells about Vermeer's life. In this sense it can be considered a Biographical picture, shortened to Biopic (Murphy 01), which is the film correlate to the literary *Künstlerroman*. According to Thaïs Diniz, in addition to the life of the artist, this kind of movie mainly explores the progress of his or her creative process (93). However, the book and the movie go beyond the concept of *Künstlerroman* and Biopic. The novel's protagonist is a maid who is illiterate, lower middle-class and Protestant. This normally marginalized woman becomes the center of the narrative as she enables the creative

³³ The awards include 10 BAFTAs, the Golden Hitchcock, Audience Award (2003 Dinard Festival of British Cinema) and Best Cinematography (2003 Los Angeles Film Critics Association).

process of the painter, a Catholic and a sophisticated board member of St. Luke's Guild. This strategy recalls the post-modern trend of ex-centering the role of silent or silenced marginalized characters as proposed by Hutcheon (A Poetics 60-2). In both novel and movie, the female protagonist becomes not just muse, but also the very personification of the painter's work, through her voice, in the novel, and her eyes, in the movie.

Walter Moser offers a controversial view on what he calls filmic ekphrasis by claiming that the incidence of films about paintings has considerably increased in the past twenty-five years. He suggests four strategies on which directors rely to transpose paintings into films, and one of them is the coming alive of characters from a painting: filmic ekphrasis. Thus, in the movie, such characters have a life of their own (52-55). If we are to apply this idea to the movie adaptation Girl with a Pearl Earring not only can the whole novel be considered ekphrasis, as proposed by Weisstein and reassured by Yacobi; but the whole film can be also considered ekphrasis, according to Moser. As I did for the novel, I will next focus on the ekphrastic moments relying on Louvel, Clüver, Mitchell and Yacobi's conceptions.

Describing Vermeer on Screen: Ekphrasis II

In the movie adaptation there is also fragmented ekphrastic moments; however, they are different from the novel. The paintings are part of the film in four different ways which I classified under the following categories: sets that evoke Vermeer's paintings but do not really exist as real Vermeer's paintings; paintings that exist and are only part of the background; paintings that exist, but are not verbally described as in the novel and whose execution plays an important part in the plot; and, finally, paintings that exist and are actually verbally described by one or more characters: the ekphrastic moments.

There are two illustrations of the first category in two scenes which evoke Vermeer's style. The first example is the opening scene of the movie, like the novel, in which Griet prepares a salad in her parents' kitchen. This scene does not have an equivalent painting by Vermeer, but it evokes one because of the elements used in its composition, such as the vegetables which are laid on the kitchen table, the woman working silently, and the use of light (see Fig. 11).



Fig. 11 – Peter Webber, DVD, *Girl with a Pearl Earring* (London, 2003), movie still chapter 1.

The painting *The Love Letter* (see Fig. 12) is not part of the plot, but it is definitely evoked in the movie (see Fig. 13). This group does not fit any definition of ekphrasis, but it does recall Louvel's seven levels of pictorial saturation.



Fig. 12 - Johannes Vermeer, painting, The Love Letter (Delft 1667-70).



Fig. 13 – Peter Webber, DVD, Girl with a Pearl Earring (London, 2003), movie still chapter 3.

In the second category is one of the paintings described in the novel which is only shown in the movie as part of the background: A View of Delft (see Fig. 14 and Fig. 15). The other one is The Milkmaid, which is only briefly mentioned by Tanneke, a maid who has been working for the Vermeers for a very long time, in the novel when she tells Griet how their “master painted [her] . . . pouring milk,” and adds “everyone says it was his best painting” (Chevalier 38), see Fig. 16 and Fig. 17. Tanneke is historically known as the Vermeer’s maid who actually modeled for the painting The Milkmaid. In the movie, both paintings are part of van Ruijven’s chamber decoration.



Fig. 14 - Johannes Vermeer, painting, A View of Delft (Delft 1660-61).



Fig. 15 – Peter Webber, DVD, Girl with a Pearl Earring (London, 2003), movie still chapter 3.



Fig. 16 - Johannes Vermeer, painting, The Milkmaid (Delft, 1658-61).



Fig. 17 – Peter Webber, DVD, Girl with a Pearl Earring (London, 2003), movie still chapter 3.

There is only one example of the third category: Young Woman with a Water Jug (see Fig. 18 and Fig. 19). In the movie, the part of the novel covering the painting is given significant attention, starting from the moment of its inspiration through the non-verbal negotiation between Griet and Vermeer of the final result. Even though the painting A Lady Writing is not shown in the movie, its description in the novel contains important plot elements, e.g., Griet's interfering in the painter's creative process and his approval of her interference. As a consequence, the director chose to transfer those elements to the sequence of Young Woman with a Water Jug.



Fig. 18 - Johannes Vermeer, painting, Young Woman with a Water Jug (Delft, 1664-65).



Fig. 19 – Peter Webber, DVD, Girl with a Pearl Earring (London, 2003), movie still chapter 7.

According to the novel, during the creation of the painting A Lady Writing, Griet changes the position of the cloth on the table and Vermeer not only likes it but also admits having learned something from her. Meanwhile, in the movie there is a scene in which Griet takes a chair out of the composition set for Young Woman with a Water Jug because, according to the character, the model “looked trapped” (DVD transcript scene 7). In the movie, Vermeer does not answer Griet, though he maintains the change. The movie stills show the evolution of the sequence (see Fig. 20, Fig. 21 and Fig. 22).



Fig. 20 – Peter Webber, DVD, Girl with a Pearl Earring (London, 2003), movie still chapter 7.



Fig. 21 – Peter Webber, DVD, Girl with a Pearl Earring (London, 2003), movie still chapter 7.



Fig. 22 – Peter Webber, DVD, Girl with a Pearl Earring (London, 2003), movie still chapter 7.

The focus here is on a maid interfering in the master's creative process. However, not only is her action subtler in the movie, but his response as well. Although we, viewers, visually follow the painting's execution from the moment of inspiration to its completion, I do not consider it ekphrastic because the painting is not actually verbalized. There are only the instructions Vermeer gives to Griet and the brief dialogue in which he asks her why she moved the chair and she answers him with one sentence.

The last category consists of paintings that are verbally described in the movie; the scenes related to the paintings Girl with a Pearl Earring, The Girl with a Wine Glass, The Concert and Woman with a Pearl Necklace.



Fig. 23 - Johannes Vermeer, oil painting, Girl with a Pearl Earring (Delft, 1665-67).



Fig. 24 – Peter Webber, DVD, Girl with a Pearl Earring (London, 2003), movie still chapter 10.

In the movie, the scene where the portrait Girl with a Pearl Earring (see Fig. 23) comes alive before our very eyes is also the climax of the story (see Fig. 24). As in the novel, the painter and the model negotiate the composition of the portrait. However, the series of descriptions which lead to the climax are more concise in the movie. For instance, the long description Griet does in the novel while watching her own portrait is reduced to “you looked inside me” (DVD transcript chapter 7) in the movie. The main difference between the

transpositions is that while in the novel Griet asks Vermeer to place the pearl earring into her ears after she had pierced them herself, in the movie she asks him to actually pierce her ear. This subtle plot difference produces a major mood twist. I will explore this fact further in the chapter 3, in the section dedicated to hypertextual procedures.

The study of the movie scenes related to the paintings Young Woman with a Water Jug and Girl with a Pearl Earring confirms my assumptions that the Griet from the movie enables spectators see Vermeer's work through her eyes in a passive way, while the Griet from the novel actively highlights the painter's creative process. Therefore I see the female protagonist playing a different role in each of the semiotic systems. The Griet from the novel is the narrator and voiced protagonist who tells about her relationship with Vermeer and his art. The Griet from the movie is a silent protagonist who leads the plot which culminates in her modeling for the painter.

Because van Ruijven describes the paintings The Girl with a Wine Glass, The Concert and Woman with a Pearl Necklace they have a different tone from the novel. He narrates the painting The Girl with a Wine Glass to Griet (see Fig. 25 and Fig. 26). Although we viewers are able to see the artwork while following his description, neither character looks at it during the scene. Griet doesn't even dare to look at the painting, while Van Ruijven seems to be imagining Griet in the place of the other maid.



Fig. 25 - Johannes Vermeer, painting, The Girl with the Wine Glass (Delft, 1659-60).



Fig. 26 – Peter Webber, DVD, Girl with a Pearl Earring (London, 2003), movie still chapter 3.

In the movie, van Ruijven describes:

Look at that dress. You can almost stroke the satin. And the wine winking through the glass. Can you imagine yourself in such finery, Griet? She loved it, you know. Lace and satin pressed tight against her plump little bubbies. The silk, heavy on her thighs, the gentleman watching. My God, she was happy!

(DVD transcript chapter 3)

The movie, then, cuts to a scene in Vermeer's kitchen. Tanneke, the other maid, continues van Ruijven's description adding juicy details of how the maid "thought she was somebody all dressed up like a lady" in such fine red dress and how van Ruijven "poured wine down her like he was forcing a goose" (DVD transcript chapter 3).



Fig. 27 - Johannes Vermeer, painting, The Concert (Delft, 1664-67).



Fig. 28 – Peter Webber, DVD, Girl with a Pearl Earring (London, 2003), movie still chapter 8.

As in the novel, the main characters are at a dinner party when discussing Vermeer's next commission, The Concert. In the movie, the description begins with Maria Thins suggesting a painting of a family or a happy group with wine, food, music and dancing, implying that this next commission could please van Ruijven as The Girl with a Wine Glass did. Van Ruijven agrees with the main idea but he does not want his family in it, if he is "to spend tedious hours sitting [he wants] something to lay [his] eyes on." He then grabs Griet abruptly taking her towards his lap as he claims that "she ought to be in the painting. A tavern scene" (DVD transcript chapter 8). He argues that it cannot be hard to depict a pretty girl and asks Maria Thins if he can have the maid. Later on, while Griet is cleaning the set for The Concert (see Fig. 27 and Fig. 28), Vermeer informs her that although she will not be in this group scene, she is to be painted by herself to please his patron.

Woman with a Pearl Necklace is commented on by more than one character in the movie, but again van Ruijven's tone differs from the tone present in the other descriptions. In the movie we follow Griet carefully cleaning the studio and gazing at the painting. Maria Thins interrupts her and makes the same remarks as she does in the novel, of how the painting is "not a common sight" and that she is "not the first to forget [her] manners in front of his paintings" (DVD transcript chapter 2).



Fig. 29 - Johannes Vermeer, painting, Woman with a Pearl Necklace (Delft, 1664).



Fig. 30 – Peter Webber, DVD, Girl with a Pearl Earring (London, 2003), movie still chapter 3.

In the book, when van Ruijven finally receives the painting of his wife Woman with a Pearl Necklace (see Fig. 29), he only comments: “A jewel once again,” and addresses his wife “Are you happy my dear?” She replies with an “of course” (72). In the movie, on the other hand, we encounter the dialogue during the feast offered by the Vermeers to celebrate the safe delivery of Vermeer’s newborn and the completion of the painting of van Ruijven’s wife wearing a pearl necklace (see Fig. 30):

[van Ruijven] Is this Indian yellow? Distilled from the urine of sacred cows fed only on mango leaves. You glazed my wife in dried piss.

[Vermeer] It was the right colour.

[van Ruijven] No stinting, eh?

[Catharina] I cannot bear the suspense a moment longer, Master van Ruijven. Pray tell us what you think.

[van Ruijven] This is good. The colour and perspective is true, the illusion is perfect. All this skill lavished on my dear Emilie. Why it’s almost as if she were thinking.

[Maria Thins] And have you considered a subject for your next commission?

(DVD transcript chapter 3)

Although ekphrasis is traditionally a poetic device, I consider the above descriptions as ekphrastic moments in the movie as the characters are verbalizing a real non-verbal sign system as proposed by Clüver. The fact that the spectators actually see the painting is not a problem since it is a common practice to place the described pictures besides the related ekphrastic poems.

The descriptions of The Girl with a Wine Glass, The Concert, Woman with a Pearl Necklace also fit Mitchell's definition of "ekphrastic image as a female other" (168) in a "relation of power/knowledge/desire" (180). Both descriptions are complemented by the characters' feelings aroused by the paintings. The character van Ruijven uses such descriptions and comments to depreciate and show his power over women, i.e, his wife, Maria Thins, the maid in the red dress, and Griet. His verbal representation of the female image does not only carry nuances of voyeuristic pornography "and masturbatory fantasy" (168) but also a "kind of mental rape" (169) of the maid's character as in the description of The Girl with a Wine Glass. The same idea arises again when van Ruijven exposes his wife's stupidity in front of society by his degrading comment that she looks "almost as if she were thinking" (DVD transcript chapter 3) in the description of Woman with a Pearl Necklace. Van Ruijven expresses his "relation of power/desire" (180) when he forces Griet to his lap, after commenting how the scene of The Concert should be and there is no reaction from the maid's employers.

From these examples, a drier, more sarcastic van Ruijven than the one from the book emerges. Neither of van Ruijven's ekphrastic descriptions has a counterpart in the novel, confirming what Mitchell implies when asserting that he came up with the definition of the "ekphrastic image as a female other" by analyzing only men's literary productions. In the

movie, which was directed by a man, the ekphrastic descriptions do carry a more sexist tone than the one presented in the novel, which was not only written but narrated by a woman.

The Role of Ekphrasis in Girl with a Pearl Earring.

Although the works entitled Girl with a Pearl Earring are not poems, the excerpts and scenes analyzed in chapter 1 and the first part of chapter 2 fit at least two of the contemporary definitions of ekphrasis herein presented. As mentioned before, Tracy Chevalier not only writes a novel that is ekphrastic as a whole, but also builds her narrative on ekphrastic descriptions of Vermeer's artwork. In the same way, Peter Webber takes advantage of the device and uses it in order to create a vermeerized³⁴ environment in the movie.

Vermeer always uses the same elements of composition in his work: clothing, ornaments, furniture and props on the table; the corner of his studio and its decoration; industrious silent women in quotidian activities as theme; the way the light is reflected and attracts the eye of the observer as style. Through words, Chevalier is able to reproduce these same elements in the ekphrastic descriptions inside the novel. In the same way, Webber, with the help of the cinematography director Serra, is not only consistent but also fortunate while transposing both Vermeer's artwork and Chevalier's story to the screen. He not only uses the same elements in composing his scenes but also reproduces the most relevant characteristic of Vermeer's technique: the use of light.

Clüver's definition is rather extensive since it does permit my study of different signs within two different semiotic systems, literature and movie. Louvel's proposal of the visible becoming readable applies to all descriptions in the novel, but it does not apply to the movie. Mitchell's concept of female otherness is only found in the movie which, not surprisingly, is directed by a man, just as Mitchell suggested. Women are described as the other only by the

³⁴ See note 17.

character van Ruijven, giving the movie a more carnal, appealing, and consequently more commercial tone than the novel. Without the ekphrastic descriptions, Vermeer's artwork would probably not be so relevant and the semiotic web would not even exist. Through the ekphrastic descriptions in the novel, Chevalier, the female writer, verbalizes Vermeer's artwork through Griet's voice, while in the movie the male director, Webber, emphasizes Vermeer's trademark – industrious silent women – through van Ruijven's voyeuristic gaze.

The ekphrastic relations in Yacobi's chart of visual source and verbal target can be identified in both novel and movie. All of the individual descriptions of paintings fit the one-to-one relationship. The one-to-many relationship is seen in descriptions of the same painting by different characters, such as Girl with a Wine Glass, described and commented on by van Ruijven, Tanneke and Pieter among others. Its reverse, the many-to-one relationship, is the homage Chevalier and Webber pay to Vermeer in both transpositions. Finally the many-to-many relationship can be found in the boom which took place in the nineties of transpositions with Vermeer as inspiration.

Yacobi's studies of neglected forms of ekphrasis can be applied at different levels in the novel and in the movie: Vermeer's paintings work as a 'pictorial model' to Chevalier and, especially, Serra, the cinematography director. It is also true that all the studied ekphrastic moments play key roles throughout both novel and movie plots, as Griet links the events in the story with descriptions of Vermeer's paintings. Therefore the consideration of Girl with a Pearl Earring as 'narrative ekphrasis' strengthens Weisstein's assumption that the whole novel can be deemed ekphrastic.

Yacobi's 'pregnant moment' takes place just before the climax of the movie, when the painting Girl with a Pearl Earring comes alive before our eyes, illustrating what she means by two-way interart movement between source artwork and verbal target. Yacobi's contribution is therefore highly useful when relating painting, novel and movie from a top down view.

Nevertheless, the research on descriptive narrative with emphasis on ekphrasis does not end the analysis of Girl with a Pearl Earring texts. Gérard Genette's concept of transtextuality is relevant to explain the occurrence of procedures during the transposition processes from novel to movie adaptation. The following section of this chapter is devoted to the analysis of the movie as a transtextual product.

Part II - Transtextuality

The term transtextuality proposed by Genette is based on the idea of literature as a palimpsest. A palimpsest is a "written document, usually on vellum or parchment, that has been written upon several times, often with remnants of erased writing still visible" (Genette back cover). This parchment would be made of the skin of goat or sheep, and the erased layers could be seen one beneath the other. Alluding to this piece of skin, Genette proposes the study of the relation of previous texts which are hidden, but can still be perceived underneath new ones. According to him, the old not only may, but should be read beneath the new. The connections between the three different works – painting, novel and movie – are not hidden relations; on the contrary, they are exposed while they revisit a work that had almost been forgotten by the non-specialized public. Hence, I will illustrate the semiotic web made up of the three works named Girl with a Pearl Earring with the concept of transtextuality.

Genette defines transtextuality "roughly as 'all that sets the text in a relationship, whether obvious or concealed, with other texts.'" In his work, he extends his previous definition of architextuality ("the entire set of general or transcendent categories – types of

discourses, modes of enunciation, literary genres – from which emerges each singular text’)³⁵ and goes beyond by subsuming it “along with some other types of transtextual relationships” (1).

Genette identifies five taxonomic categories:

1. Intertextuality: co-presence of two or more texts such as citations, plagiarism or allusion.
2. Paratextuality: relationship between the set composed of a literary work, the text itself, and its title, postfaces, notices, forewords, illustrations, epigraphs, blurbs, book covers, and even, in the case of the movie, the video rental shelf on which it is placed.
3. Metatextuality: a text about a previous text; a commentary.
4. Hypertextuality: the very notion of literature in the second degree, it is the relationship that links text B (hypertext) to text A (hypotext).
5. Architextuality: completely silent relationship determined by the readers and their reception, it refers to the work’s genre, the text’s genealogy.

All of these relationships are present in the movie Girl with a Pearl Earring as I expect to demonstrate. The concept of hypertextuality, which has been applied to and appropriated by film studies by Robert Stam, is definitely the most relevant relationship to this study.

Therefore, the analysis of hypertextuality will be considered in chapter 3.

Intertextuality

Genette defines intertextuality “as a relationship of copresence between two texts or among several texts: that is to say, eidetically and typically as the actual presence of one text within another” (01-02). The traditional practice of quoting is the most explicit and literal form of intertextuality. The practice of allusion is the least explicit and literal guise since it is

³⁵ “The term *architext* ... was proposed by Louis Marin ... in 1974 ... and was meant to designate ‘the primary text of all possible discourse, its ‘origin,’ and its foundation.’ This is closer, in sum, to what I am going to call *hypotext*” (Genette 429).

“an enunciation whose full meaning presupposes the perception of a relationship between it and another text, to which it necessarily refers by some inflections that would otherwise remain unintelligible” (2). Both Chevalier and Webber take advantage of intertextual practices by quoting and alluding to Vermeer’s work. It is not simply the portrait entitled Girl with a Pearl Earring, but the aesthetics in the master’s work that is evoked, more or less explicitly, in both works. Both recall the seventeenth century aesthetic values represented by Vermeer: the lifestyle of industrious silent women depicted with technical perfection. The female writer gives voice to Vermeer’s silent work through fiction, whereas the male film director vermeerizes³⁶ Griet’s world, enabling viewers to see the artwork through the eyes of the painter’s muse.

Chevalier exercises her knowledge of art history through the vast use of ekphrastic description as a narrative device throughout the novel. As previously seen in chapter 1, Ekphrasis, according to Claus Clüver, is the “verbalization of a real or fictitious text in a non-verbal sign system” (“Quotation, Enargeia” 50). The French theoretician Liliane Louvel, proposes seven gradual levels of pictorial saturation culminating in Ekphrasis, “the highest level of pictorial saturation. ... It is a high level literary exercise in which a work of art evolves from the visible to the readable” (“Nuances du pictural” 184). It is possible, indeed, to identify the levels described above, as well as the verbalization of non-verbal signs, through several descriptive excerpts from the novel. The narrative descriptions are precise and even the reader who is not familiar with Vermeer’s artwork could be able to visualize them through the excerpt and appreciate them in the movie. There are several excerpts that I could use to illustrate the concept of intertextuality; nonetheless, I choose a few which were dealt with differently when transposed from the novel to the movie.

³⁶ See note 17.

The first excerpt illustrates intertextuality within Vermeer's own artwork (The Concert and A Lady Seated at the Virginal) and that of Dirck van Baburen (The Procuress).

The second one refers to the painting The Girl with a Wine Glass, which is mentioned several times by different characters. Finally, two visual allusions to the master's work, one described in the novel and the other found only in the movie, will illustrate intertextuality.

Vermeer used other painters' works as intertextual elements in his own. The painting by Dirck Van Baburen entitled The Procuress is one of them.



Fig. 31 - Dirck van Baburen, oil painting, The Procuress (1622).



Fig. 32 – Peter Webber, DVD, Girl with a Pearl Earring (London, 2003), movie still chapter 3.



Fig. 33 - Johannes Vermeer, oil painting, The Concert (Delft, 1664-67).



Fig. 34 – Johannes Vermeer, oil painting, 20 3/4 x 17 7/8 in. A Lady Seated at a Virginal – *Zittende virginaalspeelster* (Delft, 1670-75). The National Gallery, London.

Vermeer even named one of his paintings after this one, and his source can be seen depicted in the background of The Concert and A Lady Seated at a Virginal. In the novel, The Procuress (see Fig. 31) is mentioned and described by Griet, as she describes the setting of the painting The Concert (see Fig. 33):

And on the right a picture of three people – a woman playing a lute, wearing a dress that revealed much of her bosom, a gentleman with his arm around her, and an old woman. The man was buying the young woman’s favors, the old woman reaching to take the coin he held out. Maria Thins owned the painting and had told me it was called The Procuress. (168-69)

In the movie the painting is not mentioned but it is part of the decoration in Vermeer’s house, as seen behind Catharina (see Fig. 32). It can also be seen in the composition of the paintings The Concert (see Fig. 33) and A Lady Seated at a Virginal (see Fig. 34); this last one is not part of the novel or the movie.

The plot mentions the character van Ruijven exposing his desire for Griet when he shows her the painting entitled The Girl with a Wine Glass (see Fig. 25 and Fig. 26, page 54). He wants to have her, even if framed in a portrait, as could be perceived in the ekphrastic description quoted in chapter 1 under the “Post-work Descriptions” section and again in chapter 2 under the group of real paintings verbally described in the movie. In both novel and movie, several characters mention this painting in order to warn Griet about the rumors involving the maid who modeled beside the art patron and who was carrying van Ruijven’s child even before the paint had dried on the canvas. In spite of being mentioned numerous times in the book and actually shown in the movie, the painting is not thoroughly described.

The first intertextual allusion refers to the beginning of both book and movie, when Griet is preparing salad (see Fig. 11, page 47). In the novel, the text serves as a frame to the description of a possible painting. Even if this is not actually an existing painting, the novel’s

descriptive excerpt and the movie scene recall and allude to Vermeer's work. This fact leads us to consider both book and movie transpositions as intertexts to the master's artwork.

The second illustration is the painting The Love Letter, which is not part of the novel or the movie plot, but there is definitely an allusion to it in the movie still (see Fig. 12 and Fig. 13, page 48).

The phenomenon of intertextuality happens, as can be seen, at different levels and intensities, from subtle reference to wide-open citation, from simple evocation to thorough description.

Paratextuality

Paratextuality is the "generally less explicit and more distant relationship that binds the text properly speaking, taken within the totality of the literary work." According to Genette, it is the relationship between the work and all that surrounds it, such as "a title, a subtitle, . . . prefaces, . . . forewords, . . . epigraphs; illustrations; blurbs, book covers, . . . and many other kinds of secondary signals, whether allographic or autographic" (03). Girl with a Pearl Earring reveals this relationship in several ways. As a typical example of bestseller, the novel was at the entrance shelves of main bookstores for a long time, notably during the movie's release. Nowadays in Brazil we find the book on the shelf dedicated to foreign literature. We find the DVD on the shelf dedicated to drama in video rental stores. Although the movie was an independent low cost production, some people commonly take it for a Hollywood blockbuster, probably due to the unexpected box office success and to Scarlett Johansson's participation, presently the sweetheart of prestigious directors, such as Sophia Copolla, who directed her in Lost in Translation, 2003 and Woody Allen, who has already directed her twice, in Match point, 2005 and in The Scoop, 2006.

I notice that a great number of Art History books published in the twentieth century feature Vermeer's work on its covers and art books often use the painting View of Delft as a representative sample of his work. However, Girl with a Pearl Earring has been the most reproduced painting since, and mainly during, the release of the movie. Probably because of the effect caused by the resuscitation of this piece of art brought about by the transpositions herein studied as we shall observe in the following book covers.³⁷ As I have mentioned in the introduction, Arthur Wheelock has written several books on Vermeer's artwork, each of them bringing a different painting on its cover, e.g., see Fig. 36.

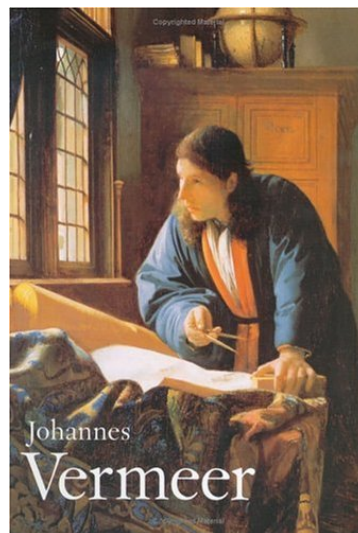


Fig. 35 – Arthur Wheelock, cover Johannes Vermeer, 1995.



Fig. 36 – Arthur Wheelock, cover The Public and the Private in the Age of Vermeer, 2003.

³⁷ All book covers reproduced here are available at the on-line shopping site Amazon. 23 Feb 2007. <www.amazon.com>.

The book The Public and the Private in the Age of Vermeer (see Fig. 35) features the portrait Girl with a Pearl Earring on its cover. Coincidentally, or not, it was published in the same year the movie was released: 2003.

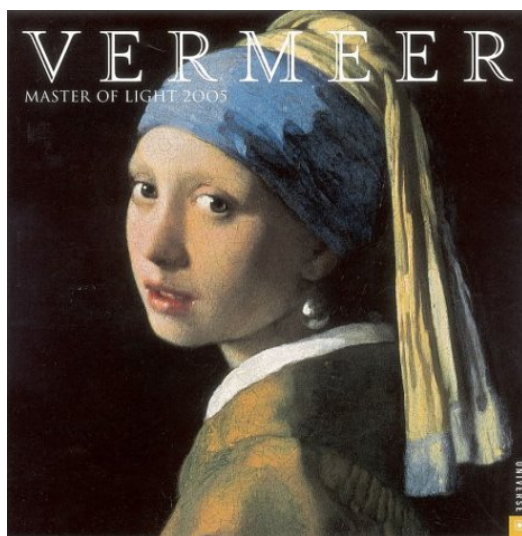


Fig. 37 – Wall calendar cover Vermeer Master of Light, published by Universe Publishing, 2004.

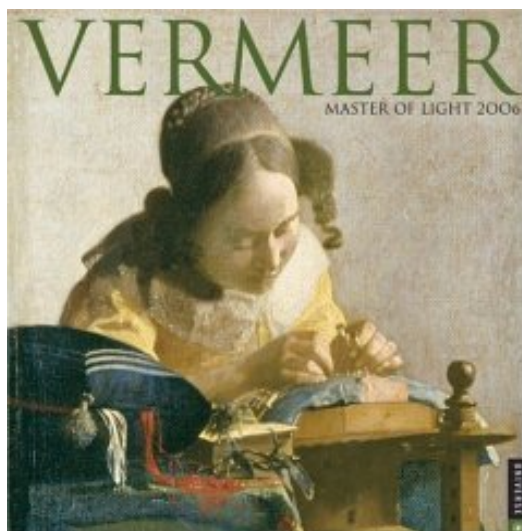


Fig. 38 – Wall calendar cover Vermeer Master of Light, published by Universe Publishing, 2005.

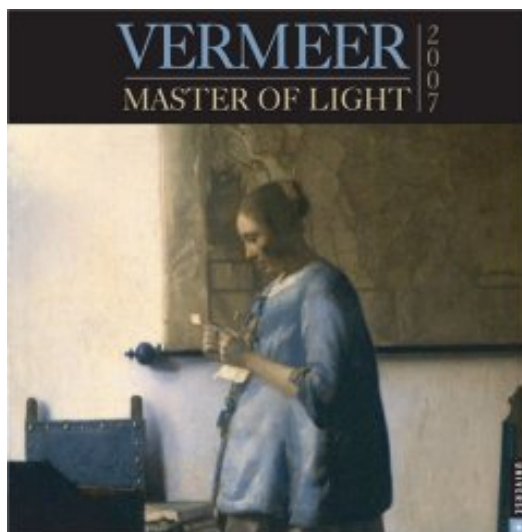


Fig. 39 – Wall calendar cover Vermeer Master of Light, published by Universe Publishing, 2006.

On the previous page, there are cover reproductions from three consecutive years of the Vermeer Master of Light wall calendar (see Fig. 37, Fig. 38 and Fig. 39). In the edition released in July 2004 (calendar year 2005), the portrait Girl with a Pearl Earring is in evidence once again.

In the cover of the novel (see Fig. 40), both Girl with a Pearl Earring and A View of Delft are reproduced, probably to ensure the intertext to the public interested in art since the latter used to be Vermeer's most recognized work. The covers from the original and the Brazilian editions are quite similar. As can be seen next, the cover of the original in English highlights the novel's being a New York Times bestseller and features both paintings in their entirety whereas the Brazilian version cuts part of both paintings and favors the portrait (see Fig. 41).

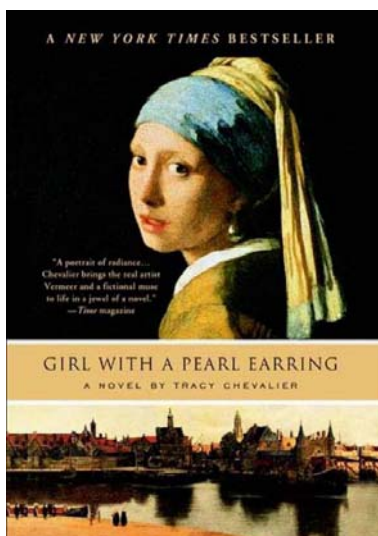


Fig. 40 – Girl with a Pearl Earring, English edition original cover, 1999.

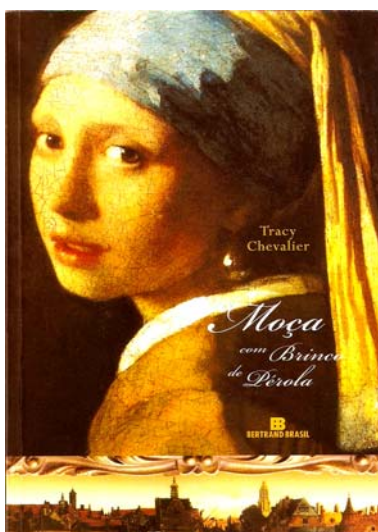


Fig. 41 – Moça com brinco de pérola, Brazilian edition cover, 2004. 23 Feb 2007 <www.americanas.com.br>.

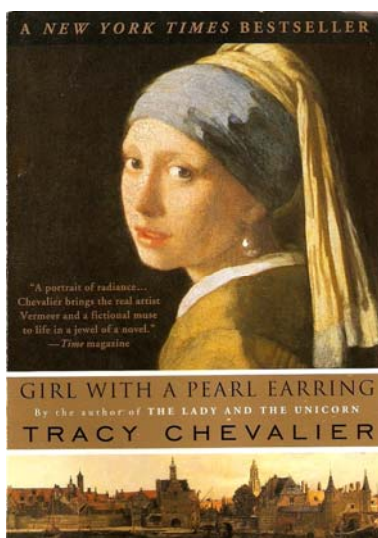


Fig. 42 – Girl with a Pearl Earring, paperback edition, 2001.

In the 2001 paperback US edition, in addition to content from the original, there is the following comment: “By the author of The Lady and the Unicorn,” novel found recently on the main bookstores bestseller shelves in Brazil (see Fig. 42). All back covers bring commentaries by well-known international newspapers, although the commentaries are not necessarily the same. The back cover of the Brazilian edition brings the content of the second page in the US edition. The third cover from this paperback US edition brings cover reproductions from other books written by Chevalier. The Brazilian edition, translated by Beatriz Horta in 2002, is a little more sophisticated, with both flats and better quality paper, more to the Brazilian reader’s taste. On the front flat of this edition, as well as on the Deluxe hard cover edition released in 2000, we read the following commentary:

In mid-career, the celebrated Dutch painter Johannes Vermeer painted a girl wearing a turban and a pearl earring. This famous painting, Girl with a Pearl Earring, has been called the Dutch Mona Lisa. Sometimes she appears to be smiling sensuously, while other times she seems unbearably sad. ... History and fiction merge seamlessly in this luminous novel about artistic vision and sensual awakening as seen through the eyes of the young woman who was the inspiration behind one of Vermeer’s finest paintings.³⁸ (pars. 01-02)

The English edition emphasizes the author’s literary work as a whole whereas the Brazilian edition emphasizes the connection between the literary work and Vermeer’s artwork. This is different from the DVD cover, which emphasizes the romance between the painter and his muse (see Fig. 43).

³⁸ Girl with a Pearl Earring. (Hard Cover edition.) New York: Plume Printing, 2005. “Inside the book – Front Flap.” Amazon on-line Reader. 3 pars. 23 April 2007. <www.amazon.com>.



Fig. 43 – Peter Webber, DVD cover original edition, Girl with a Pearl earring. (London, 2003), Lions Gate Films, 2003.

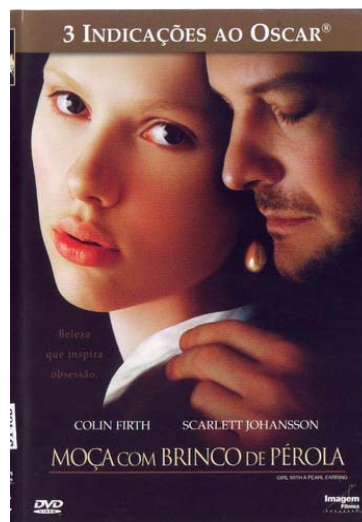


Fig. 44 – Peter Webber, DVD cover Brazilian edition, Moça com brinco de pérola. (Manaus, 2003), Imagem filmes, 2003.

The cover of the DVD shows the actress Scarlett Johansson modeling as the portrait besides the actor Colin Firth, even though we do not see this scene in the movie. The cover of the DVD elicits a sensual mood, as it emphasizes the romance between the painter and his muse. The sentence “beauty inspires obsession,” on the cover of the DVD which is also seen on the movie homepage, is apparently a marketing device to attract the mass public as it is not found in the novel or the screenplay.

Comparing the movie scene to the DVD cover, it becomes even clearer how the actress’s expression is more sensual, subtly more appealing than in the movie. Her lips are

glossier, the gaze in her eyes is more languid, her cheeks are rosier and she leans her head a little further. The picture in the Brazilian version is slightly different from the original: the focus of the zoom reflects the earring on the actress's lips and eyes, which seem darker than the real color of the actress's eyes, resembling more closely the eye color of the portrait (see Fig. 44). The Brazilian edition also highlights the Oscar nominations. It brings only the names of Johansson and Firth, whereas Tom Wilkinson, world-wide known actor, is not part of the front cover, but his name is on its back cover. Although there is no concrete evidence, the proximity of the release dates of the Portuguese version of the novel and the movie might have been a marketing strategy.

On the back cover of the DVD the names of the three protagonists are listed followed by successful movies in which they have appeared. A commentary by the newspaper Variety: "Breathless! An intelligent and impressive adaptation," evokes its adaptation rather than original screenplay status. Within the DVD there are: photo galleries, the theatrical trailer, actors' filmographies, a link to Tracy Chevalier's homepage on the Internet, and links to homepages in which Vermeer's artwork is shown as well as discussed.

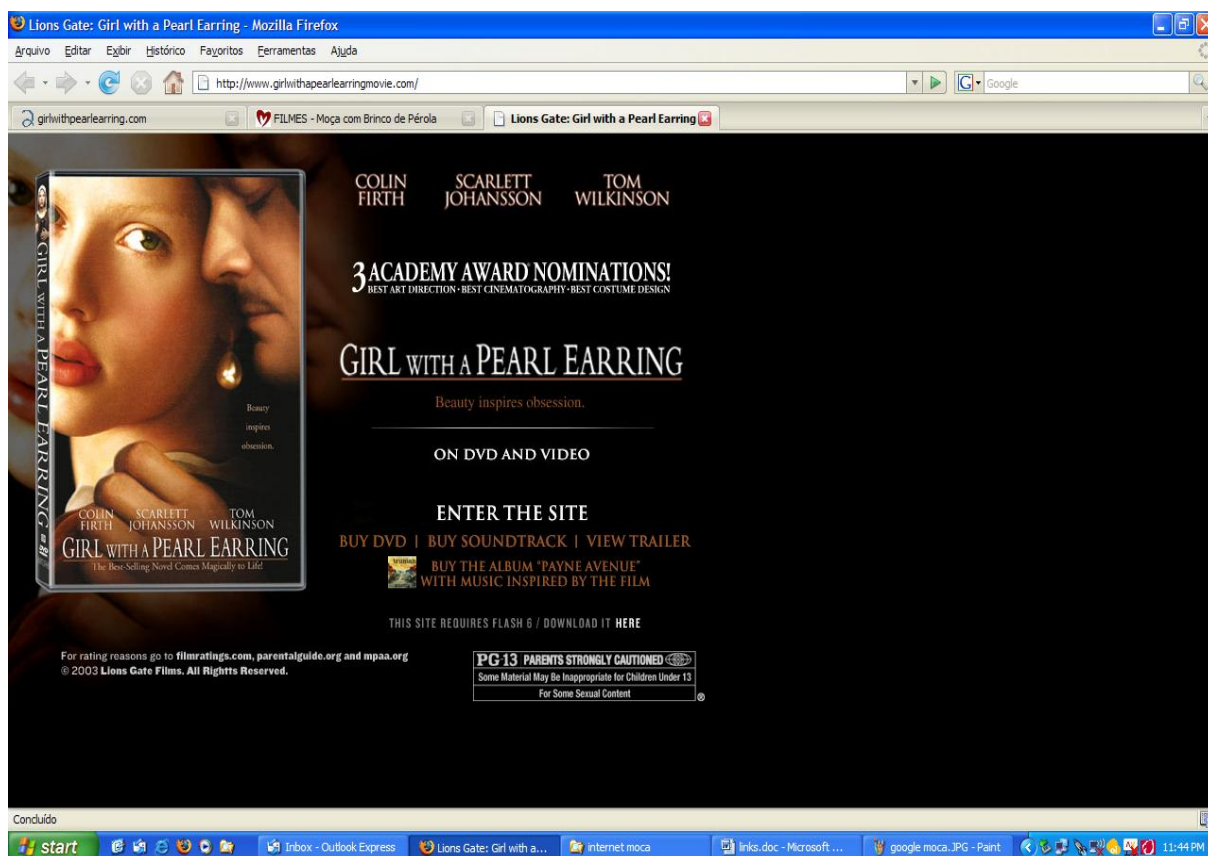


Fig. 45 - Opening page from the official movie site. 20 Jan 2007 <www.girlwithapearlearningmovie.com>.

The screenshot shows the movie homepage (see Fig. 45). This page reinforces the characteristics presented by the paratexts found on the DVD box. *Girl with a Pearl Earring*'s paratextual relationships, in both book and DVD, take us back to the painting. The same happens on the cover of the CD soundtrack (see Fig. 46), as can be seen on the next page. It was specially made for the film by the French Alexandre Desplat, who has composed several other movie soundtracks such as *Syriana*, 2005; *The Queen* in 2006, and *Firewall*, his most recent score in 2007. *Girl with a Pearl Earring* was nominated for the Golden Globe Award for Best Original Score and the BAFTA Award for Best Film Music.

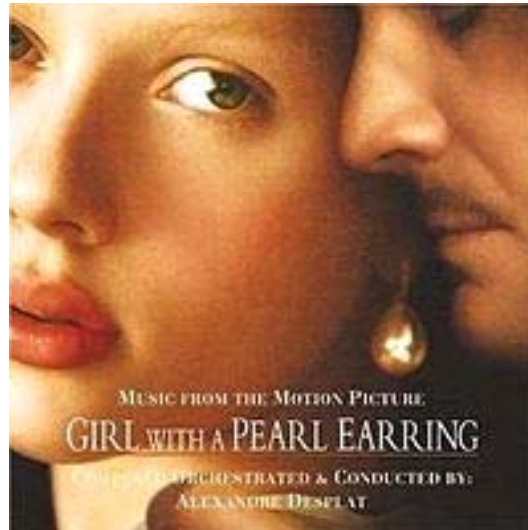


Fig. 46 – Alexandre Desplat, soundtrack CD, Girl with a Pearl Earring, 2004.

The different editions of the literary work Girl with a Pearl Earring always bring the painting by Vermeer on its cover. However, since the movie's release in 2003, the painting Girl with a Pearl Earring has also appeared on the covers of art books. The promotional material for the movie has a picture of the leading actress posing as the portrait with the leading actor behind her. Therefore, the paratexts found in the DVD and in the soundtrack CD covers make evident the interposition between reality and fiction, and emphasize the imminent romance between the master and his muse, thus giving the movie a more commercial focus than the paratexts found in the different editions of the book.

Architextuality

Paratextual elements, such as the ones analyzed, may lead us to the most subtle and silent transtextual category: the so-called architextual relationship or architextuality. It refers to the text genealogy. Even if Genette considers it the fifth category, I chose to anticipate the discussion on architextuality because of its relation to the previous section. As I have mentioned previously, the book is categorized as international or foreign literature in Brazil. When performing a search on the title Girl with a Pearl Earring at www.americanas.com.br, a

Brazilian on-line shopping site, the book comes up with other well-known foreign women writers such as Isabel Allende; however, this same page highlights commercial bestselling women writers such as Nora Roberts and Barbara Delinsky (see Fig. 47).

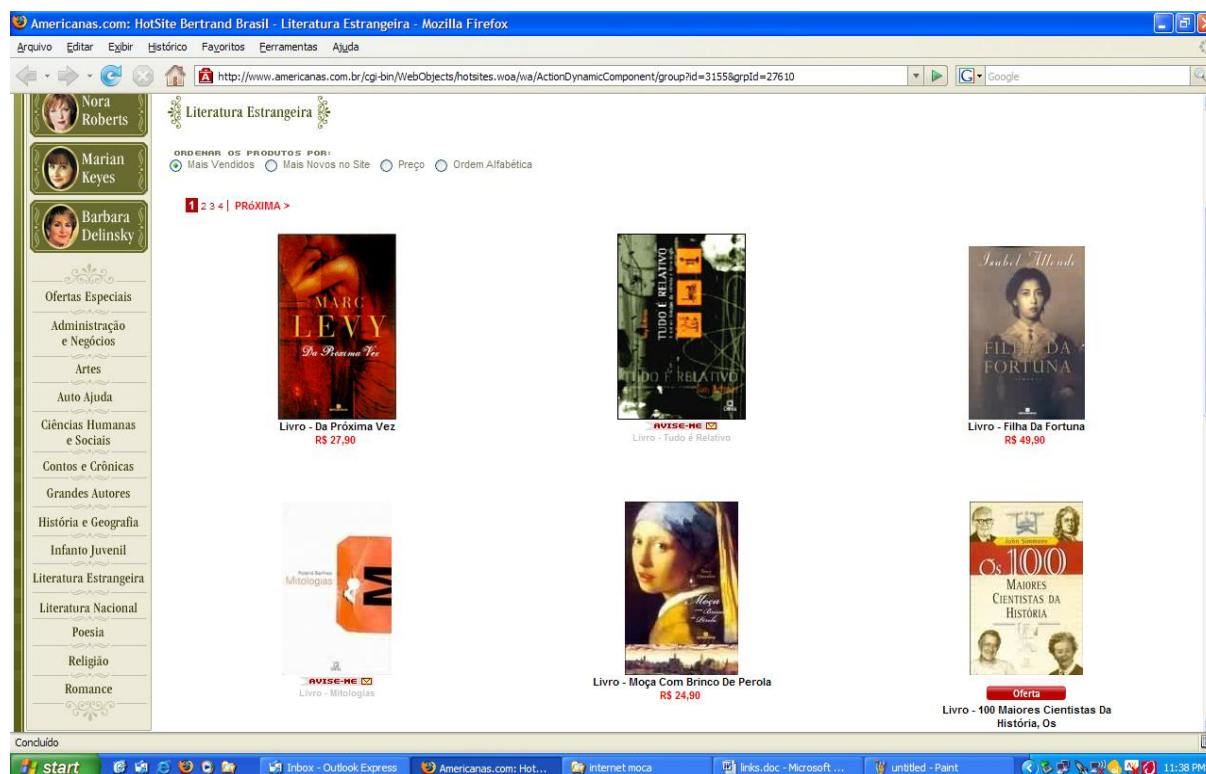


Fig. 47 – Brazilian on-line shopping homepage. 20 Jan 2007 <www.americanas.com.br>.

The movie is categorized as drama. The official movie homepage calls our attention to the Oscar nominations and emphasizes sensuality, reproducing the DVD cover and repeating the sentence “Beauty inspires obsession,” giving it a mass audience appeal.

Both transpositions had Vermeer as their source of inspiration. His art is compared to the impressionist movement from the nineteenth century. The art historian Svetlana Alpers contrasts the seventeenth-century descriptive Dutch painting with the seventeenth century narrative Italian painting. As mentioned before, there seems to be an inverse proportion between description and action in which space is more relevant than time with description offering a delight to the eyes. There is also a claim that the art from the north is consumed with observation of the world; it is characterized as a long Sunday stroll through portraits,

still-lifes, landscapes and routine scenes, mainly depicting what our eyes are able to capture, as illusionary as it may seem to be (Alpers 29-36).

Nowadays the portrait Girl with a Pearl Earring has been widely used to illustrate Vermeer's artwork as seen in the previous section. Since the architextual relationship strongly relies on the receiver's recognition, this fact only reinforces how the semiotic web promoted by the movie in 2003 made the portrait even more popular, even though the book and the movie are not so much in the public eye anymore. This reinforces what I pinpointed in the section on paratextuality: the book and, consequently, the movie did a great service to Vermeer in stirring up renewed interest in his work, although neither remained in evidence. As a matter of fact, purchasing the DVD was not an easy task, as it is sold out even at Internet shopping sites. The sound track CD is also sold out. I ran into the Brazilian version of the novel at the end of 2006. Every time I had tried to purchase it before, even at specialized bookstores, I would have to order it, for it was not easily available.

It was the movie that brought Vermeer's work into the twenty-first century, with the help of the novel for obvious reasons. Conversely, both book and movie were a sort of entertainment as in a fad or trend. It was the work of art, the masterpiece that remained in people's minds. Masterpieces may come in and out of scene, but are not easily dismissed.

As a result, Vermeer's work is more popular than it was at the end of the twentieth century due to the success of the book and movie. Upon doing a google image search on the title in Portuguese Moça com brinco de pérola, I found several – 604 on 01 May, 2007 – links to the movie (see Fig. 48); while entering the original title Girl with Pearl Earring I had access to a considerable number – 39,200 on 01 May, 2007 – links to Vermeer's work and to several contemporary painters that use his techniques (see Fig. 49).

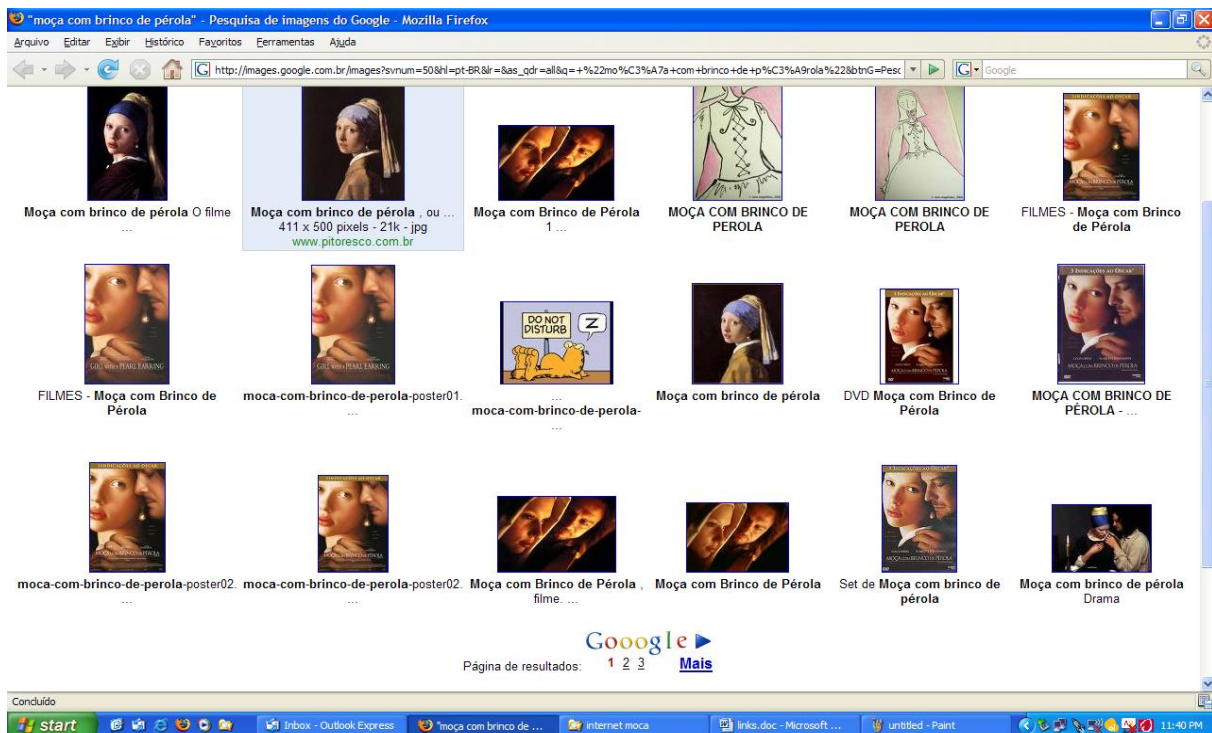


Fig. 48 – Search engine entry [moça com brinco de perola], 01 May 2007 <www.google.com.br>.

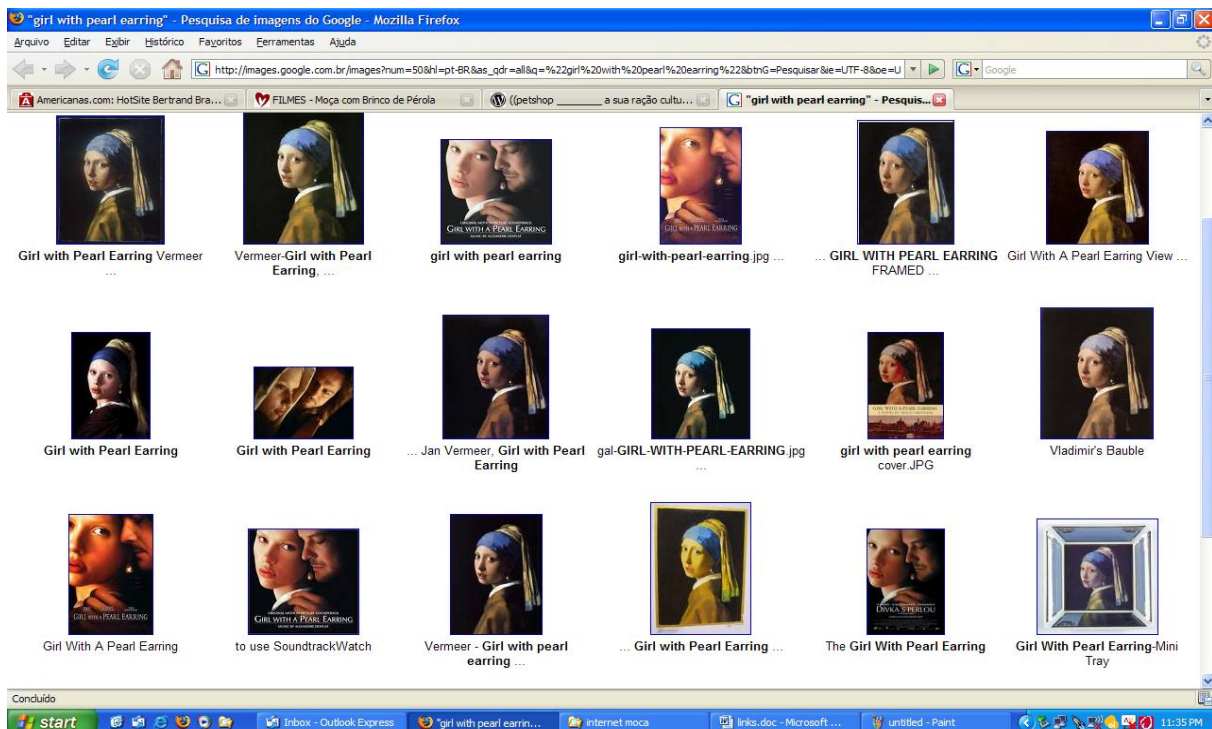


Fig. 49 – Search engine entry [girl with a pearl earring], 01 May 2007 <www.google.com>.

The figures above illustrate how the movie is more popular in Brazil while the painter is more widely recognized abroad. When I mention that the object of my master’s dissertation is Girl

with a Pearl Earring, the first reaction, even in academic circles, is usually “I love that movie” or “it is such a beautiful movie,” and then follows a commentary on the literary work or on the work of art and its painter. In sum, the silent architextual relationship demonstrates how the return to Vermeer’s work promoted the transpositions inspired by it.

Metatextuality

Metatextuality is the most easily identified relationship among all transtextual relationships. Genette defines it as the relationship that is “most often labeled ‘commentary.’ It unites a given text to another, of which it speaks without necessarily citing it (without summoning it), in fact sometimes even without naming it” (04). It may come in the form of a text about the studied text, a critical view or even a commentary. When researching critical articles on Girl with a Pearl Earring, I realized that most of them are either about the literary work or an account of Vermeer’s work within it. Very few are on the movie adaptation and none offers an intersemiotic perspective on the three media as my proposal for this master’s dissertation. The great majority of writers are women. Most writers are art history professionals. One of the few articles written by a man is on the movie photography. The commentaries which are the most relevant metatexts refer to the literary work. The novel is part of the literary corpus of a course seminar entitled “Ekphrasis,” at the University of Florida. The French theoretician Liliane Louvel quotes the novel in two articles also on Ekphrasis.

There are several superficial commentaries on the movie on the Internet, in different sites, blogs and movie forums. In general these commentaries favor the adaptation, often emphasizing its visual qualities. However, there are commentaries criticizing its pace and even calling it dull. A blog called Petshop.Wordpress brings in its movie section an article

entitled “Moças, brincos e pérolas” [Girls, Earrings and Pearls] by João Barreto, 23 Jan 2007.

Despite the negative tone of the review, it reinforces what I am trying to show:

Girl with a Pearl Earring proposes, before anything else, to be a chronicle of the seventeenth century. The narrative, set in Johannes Vermeer’s Netherlands, cannot be separated from its being a historic novel – in the case, metafiction. Therefore, **it should be believable, up to a certain point, since it proposes to do so.** It does not need to convey the incontestable historical truth but concern itself instead primarily with the relationship. So, in theory it even sounds more interesting. But in reality Girl with a Pearl Earring is a dull movie.

The idea was good. . . . **This is what Girl with a Pearl Earring is all about: an impressionist Dutch painting. Everything confirms it, including the lighting.** It seems that someone with a lot of money was **available to play at mimicking oil paintings.** That’s it. The movie is not able to be anything but that, **a moving painting,** and it moves very little.³⁹ (Barreto pars. 01-04)

Although Barreto is criticizing the movie by calling it dull, a waste of money and better in theory than in practice, he does admit that the movie, “including the lighting” is all about Vermeer’s work. By calling the movie a “moving painting,” Barreto summarizes what, for me, makes it outstanding.

Metatextual relationships also take place within the transpositions as commentaries.

There are several excerpts that could be used to illustrate them, especially those in which

³⁹ Translation of: “Moça com Brinco de Pérola se propõe, antes de mais nada, a ser uma crônica do século XVII. A narrativa, situada na Holanda do pintor Johannes Vermeer, não pode se eximir, entretanto, do seu caráter de romance histórico – no caso, metaficção. Dessa forma, deve ser verossímil, mas até certo ponto, uma vez que, se propõe a tal, pode se desvincular de exigências de verdade histórica incontestável e se recolher ao relacionamento. Assim, na teoria tudo fica até mais interessante. Mas a verdade é que Moça com Brinco de Pérola é um filme chato. A idéia era boa. . . . É isso o que é Moça com Brinco de Pérola, um quadro impressionista holandês. Tudo funciona em função disso, inclusive a iluminação. Parece que alguém com muito dinheiro estava disponível para brincar de imitar quadros. E só. O filme não consegue ser mais nada além disso, um quadro que se mexe, e se mexe bem pouco.” 01 May 2007 <<http://petshop.wordpress.com>>.

Griet is describing the paintings to her father, present only in the book. One of these excerpts is the description of the painting Young Woman with a Water Jug (see page 36). Looking at the excerpt more closely, I notice that, along with the descriptions of the painting, both Griet and her father talk about the use of color, and the use of light. According to Griet's father "tile painting is much simpler," as "blue is blue" (90). They also disagree on the painter's intentions. The father wants to know what the woman in the painting is doing; Griet's uncertainty and the comment that the master's "paintings don't tell stories" (91) makes her father impatient.

The Girl with a Wine Glass, which I mentioned in the section on intertextuality, is actually a better illustration of metatextuality than of intertextuality since several characters give their personal input in both book and novel. In the book Griet eavesdrops on Maria Thins and Catharina recalling "what a scandal that was!" (126). She could not dare to ask Maria Thins for details, and as Tanneke and she were not so close anymore, she asked Pieter the son about the painting. Pieter mentions that they "dressed [the girl] in one of [van Ruijven's] wife's gowns, a red one, and van Ruijven made sure there was wine in the gather" (126). He mentions that the maid was carrying van Ruijven's child even before the paint had dried on canvas. In the movie, the content is the same, but it is split into commentaries by van Ruijven himself and Tanneke; the subplot where the two maids argue is cut. In the third chapter of the movie Maria Thins asks Griet to deliver an invitation to van Ruijven as previously mentioned. She arrives at his business chamber where there are several Vermeer paintings among others on the wall. He opens the invitation, makes some remarks on how long the painter took to finish the work and on how tightfisted Maria Thins is. After noticing Griet's eyes he shows her the painting while acknowledging that her "master is a fine painter. Finest in Delft." And that the painting Vermeer had done of van Ruijven will probably be his epitaph. Van Ruijven goes on describing the red satin dress. Griet is

fascinated and struck by the painting. Van Ruijven asks her if she can “imagine herself in such finery” and concludes by saying how happy the other maid was. The next scene shows Griet and Tanneke preparing the feast in which the painting and Vermeer’s newborn will be presented to society. Tanneke gossips with Griet saying that the maid in the painting had been working at the van Ruijven’s only for a short period of time when she modeled, “though she was somebody all dressed up like a lady.” Van Ruijven “poured wine down her like he was forcing a goose” and “she was carrying his by-blow before the paint was dry” (DVD transcript chapter 3).

Woman with a Pearl Necklace is also commented on by more than one character in both book and movie as previously analyzed. First, there is the excerpt in which Maria Thins catches Griet looking at the painting. The mistress remarks that she is “not the first to forget [her] manners in front of his paintings” (Chevalier 35 and DVD transcript chapter 2). Later on van Ruijven finally receives the painting of his wife Woman with a Pearl Necklace and he acknowledges that it is “a jewel once again” (Chevalier 72), in the book. While in the movie, we encounter the dialogue during the feast offered by Vermeer’s family to celebrate both the safe delivery of his newborn and the completion of the painting of van Ruijven’s wife wearing a pearl necklace.

They start negotiating the next commission, which according to van Ruijven will be painted by an apprentice of Rembrandt van Rijn, unless Vermeer feels inspired by the subject. He means Griet. But the negotiation will continue during another meal at lunchtime, when they agree on the painting The Concert. This kind of commentary on the work of Vermeer is present throughout the novel and sometimes present in the movie, as in some transcribed scenes. On my view, these commentaries on artwork are complements to the ekphrastic descriptions, so widely used by Chevalier. So, Griet’s commentaries make the ekphrastic descriptions more consistent to the reader who is familiar with Vermeer’s work

and enable those who have not seen the paintings to get a clearer picture in their minds when reading the novel. I see the metatextual relationship inside the transpositions, book and movie, working in favor of the intertextual one.

My analysis of the movie adaptation as a Biopic along with the study of ekphrasis and transtextual relationships in the transposition from novel to film lead me to conclude that the book's fictional model, Griet, speaks for the silent women present in Vermeer's artwork. The movie, on the other hand, promotes a "feast for the eyes" (Sobchack 71) bringing Vermeer's aesthetics to the big screen. The book gives voice to the female protagonist, whereas the movie is able to place the viewer into Vermeer's paintings, working both on the kinetic and kinesthetic levels. Not just the portrait Girl with Pearl Earring, but more broadly the aesthetics of Vermeer's artwork is evoked in both book and movie. The director of cinematography, Serra, is able to create a vermeerized environment by shooting the scenes as a sequence of painting frames. The movie adaptation, like the novel, borrows elements from painting techniques, working as a palimpsest. The new revives and brings the old to the present, yet it is the old that unifies the new.

Nevertheless, I have not analyzed the most important transtextual category yet: hypertextuality. Hypertextuality provides tools to investigate the procedures undertaken during the transposition. Most notably, it has been appropriated and applied to film studies by Robert Stam. In chapter three I will discuss hypertextual relationships within the semiotic web Girl with a Pearl Earring along with James Naremore's proposition of a general theory of repetition to demonstrate how Vermeer's work is currently being revived, through contemporary art and media, in the twenty-first century.

CHAPTER 3 – Beyond Canvas, Paper and Screen

Art does not reproduce what we see; rather, it makes us see.

Paul Klee

In the previous chapters, through the analyses of the signs entitled Girl with a Pearl Earring – novel and movie – under the light of ekphrasis and the concept of transtextuality, I concluded that these signs are equally relevant to the web they produce. In short, both transpositions were inspired by Vermeer’s work; however, each one has its own singularities, as I have previously mentioned.

According to Gérard Genette, transformations may take place without necessarily being spoken of or even cited (5). Robert Stam develops this idea by claiming that a movie may adapt a novel “without referencing [it] explicitly” (“Beyond Fidelity” 69). Both book and movie borrow elements from painting techniques confirming a high level of interaction between the arts. Therefore, this third chapter will be dedicated to the study of hypertextuality in the movie adaptation of Girl with a Pearl Earring, using concepts from Genette and Stam. In addition, I will survey the relationship between word and image beyond the novel and movie as seen through a process of recycling within a general theory of repetition proposed by James Naremore. I am taking into account Roland Barthes definition “that the text is not a line of words releasing a single ‘theological’ meaning but a multi-dimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash” (146), since the semiotic web promoted by Girl with a Pearl Earring has generated several texts within different semiotic systems.

Part I - Hypertextuality

According to Genette, hypertextuality is the relationship between a text B, the *hypertext*, to a previous text A, the *hypotext*. It is quite different from a commentary. For him, this is the most important category of transtextuality, since it postulates “the general notion of a text in the second degree” which is “a text derived from another preexistent text” in a way that the text B does not speak “of a text A at all but [it is] unable to exist, as such, without A, from which it originates through a process . . . provisionally [called] *transformation*, and which it consequently evokes more or less perceptibly without necessarily speaking of it or citing it” (05).

Within hypertextual processes, there are two main types of operation: transformations and imitations. The former refers to direct or simple operations which transpose actions from one work to another. The latter refers to indirect or more complex procedures, in which the actions are not transferred but rather inspired by the previous text (06). In sum hypertext “is any text derived from a previous text either through simple transformation . . . or through indirect transformation, which [Genette labels] imitation” (07).

Such practices may be classified within playful, satirical or serious mood. The playful mood is associated with the change of meaning, in a light humorous way, from the hypotext to the hypertext. The satirical mood, on the contrary, carries a sarcastic tone in which the hypertext mocks and burlesques its hypotext. The serious mood, in its turn, aims to carefully create a faithful hypertext.

Transformation processes have, then, three categories according to mood: parody –the transformation process in a playful mood in which a minimal transformation changes the original meaning; travesty – transformation in a satirical mood in which a stylistic

transformation with degrading intentions takes place, (satire is more aggressive to its hypotext than parody); and transposition – the serious transformation of a hypotext.

The imitation processes follow the same categorization under the labels: pastiche – the playful imitation of the hypotext, without any burlesque intentions; caricature – the burlesque pastiche; and forgery – the serious imitation of the hypotext (Genette 22-30). Such relationships are summarized in the table 1.

Table 1

Hypertextual practices diagram (Genette 28).

Relation x Mood	playful	satirical	serious
transformation	PARODY	TRAVESTY	TRANSPOSITION
imitation	PASTICHE	CARICATURE	FORGERY

The semiotic web produced by the portrait Girl with a Pearl Earring may be categorized within Genette’s proposal as a transformation in a serious mood, or a transposition that

can give rise to works of vast dimensions . . . whose textual amplitude and aesthetic and/or ideological ambition may mask or even completely obfuscate their hypertextual character, and this very productivity is linked to the diversity of the transformational procedures that it brings into play. (213)

Hypertextuality is also the most relevant category to the study of transtextuality due to the relevance of “works that fall under its heading” (212) as well as its variety of procedures, as opposed to other simpler practices such as parody, travesty, pastiche, caricature and forgery.

The hypertexts elaborated through transpositions may result from three different creative processes: thematic transformation, transvocalization and spatial transfer.

Transposition may occur in principle and in intention at a purely formal level or it may be

deliberately thematic. Translation, transtylization and transmodalization are types of formal transposition manifestations. The latter is defined as “any kind of alteration in the mode of presentation characterizing the hypotext. At issue, then, is a change of mode, or a change within the mode, but not a change of genre . . . , these transformations are openly thematic, which is true, by and large, of the notion of genre itself” (277). These modal transformations can be distinguished as intermodal, when merely shifting from one mode to another, or intramodal, when the changes occur within the internal functioning of a mode. Departing from this categorization, Genette proposes four variations: two are intermodal, i.e., dramatization and narrativization; and the other two are intramodal, the variations within the narrative and dramatic modes. Girl with a Pearl Earring shifts from the painting descriptive mode to the literary narrative mode; then it shifts from this narrative mode to the movie adaptation dramatic mode. Finally, this adaptation reactivates the painting descriptive mode.

Before actually applying Genette’s proposed concepts to put such hypertextual concepts into practice, I find it relevant to draw attention to chapter 79 of Palimpsests: Literature of Second Degree entitled “Hyperesthetic Practices,” in which these practices are discussed, given that I am working on three different sign systems within the same semiotic web: painting, literature and cinema. As I have already mentioned, Genette’s definition for transtextuality is: “all that sets **the text** in a relationship, whether obvious or concealed, with **other texts**” (1).

Hence, Genette proposes a theory to be used among different texts and protects himself by claiming that even if “every object can be transformed, every manner imitated”, he finds it apropos to adjust and “extend the notion of the text, and thus of the hypertext, to all arts” (384). He emphasizes “the universal character of hyperartistic practices” in which it becomes necessary to make “a series of specific inquiries concerning each type of art, where possible parallelisms and convergences should in no case be postulated beforehand but

observed after the fact” (392). Genette also claims the universal relevance of “the fundamental distinction between transformational and imitative practices” (392).

Robert Stam has already appropriated and applied the notion of hypertextuality to film studies, which enables me to study the transpositions of Girl with a Pearl Earring under the light of the theory of transtextuality focusing on hypertextual processes. I will now discuss texts composing the same palimpsest within the notion of literature in the second degree.

For Genette, a text A, the hypotext, becomes a new text B, the hypertext, as it undergoes some sort of transformation by addition, suppression or substitution. I find it relevant to demonstrate how these procedures guarantee more gains than losses in the Girl with a Pearl Earring semiotic web. Genette categorizes such procedures as operations of reduction (excision, concision and condensation), and augmentation (extension, expansion and amplification).

I intend to work on each operation in three distinctive, yet interdependent, moments: first, the operation departing from the portrait to the novel, in which I detect amplification. The second operation is the cinematographic adaptation, the novel inspiring the movie. Here we encounter clear samples of reduction as well as augmentation, demonstrating the Liégeois substitution formula⁴⁰ by suppression + addition (228). Finally, the climax of the movie not only revives the portrait, but mainly recalls the aesthetic values of seventeenth century Dutch art, illustrating the reduction operation case of concision.

⁴⁰ “Liégeois formula” refers to the “Ecole de Liège,” or “Groupe μ ,” poetics who sought to develop a new “general rhetoric,” integrating traditional concepts with new ones, to account for the forms and figures of modern poetry (see Groupe Rhétorique et poétique; see Groupe μ , *Rhétorique et poétique* (Paris: Larousse, 1970). They described the figurative process in terms of substitution: i.e., of suppression and addition. (American translator’s footnote 5, chapter 45, pages 453-54)

From Canvas to Paper: Amplification

I will begin my analysis with the last type of augmentation proposed by Genette: amplification, which is the generalized addition to the hypotext without any symmetric correspondence to the reduction operations.

As mentioned before, only the master and the muse take part in the portrait Girl with a Pearl Earring. There are only speculations of who she could have been, since there is no historical account on this specific model. The novel suggests a fictional character, the teenage maid Griet, to represent the girl on the portrait. Gradually, a bond between the maid and the painter is formed, culminating in her sitting for him.

The addition of “who could have been Vermeer’s muse” to his real-life and historical facts, makes me think about the definition of extension. To begin with, extension is simply defined as the opposite of excision, since “the reduction of a text cannot be a simple miniaturization, so its augmentation cannot be a simple enlargement; as one cannot reduce without cutting, one cannot augment without adding” (Genette 254). But according to Genette’s definitions, the closest operation to the one studied here is:

The two stories intertwine, or rather alternate and cross each other. . . . The contamination here is well balanced enough to make it impossible to decide which of the two actions serves to amplify the other. . . . Those are contaminations between texts, or between texts and borrowings from “reality.”
(259)

Both book and movie blend fiction into reality, resulting in a *Künstlerroman* and a Biopic. Chevalier makes use of the extension procedure by giving voice to the female protagonist in order to verbalize the painter’s work, as discussed in the previous chapters.

From Paper to Screen: Substitution

The director of cinematography, Eduardo Serra, along with Webber, is able to vermeerize⁴¹ Griet's world, making the movie seem like a sequence of animated oil paintings while simultaneously making the best of Chevalier's detailed ekphrastic descriptions. For obvious reasons, the complete plot of the novel does not fit time wise into the standard commercial movie; therefore reduction is a crucial operation in the transposition from paper to screen. The movie emphasizes the romance between the painter and his muse, and the parallel plots involving Griet's fictive life are literally cut through excision, which Genette defines as the following:

The simplest, but also the most brutal and the most destructive to its structure and meaning, consists then of suppression pure and simple, or excision, with no other form of intervention. The assault does not inevitably include a diminution of value; it is possible to "improve" a work by surgically removing from it some useless and therefore noxious part. (229)

In the novel we are introduced to Griet's family, her parents, her brother and her sister, who dies after contracting the plague. The excerpts in which Griet describes Vermeer's paintings to her blind father are the most elaborate dialogues in the novel. In the movie, Griet's parents have a small part, but they are not even mentioned by any other character. The sister simply does not have a part and the brother is glimpsed but once in the church scene.

The dialogues between the characters Vermeer and Griet also suffer operations of reduction, not of excision, but of concision, defined as the simplification of text without excluding from it any relevant part. Notwithstanding, the plot does not suffer with such reductions. Genette declares that "concision would seem to work best for those works that are already concise" as it is "better to push a text to extremes than tone down its character, which

⁴¹ See note 17.

is tantamount to normalizing and therefore trivializing it” (237). In an interview,⁴² Tracy Chevalier admits to being astonished by the way the movie shrunk the novel, considered already brief, but says that she was happy with the final result. As Genette suggests, Webber removes to emphasize when producing the movie adaptation.

From Screen Back to Canvas: Concision or Liégeois Formula?⁴³

To close this section, I intend to illustrate the operations proposed by Genette using the climax of both novel and movie: the depiction of Griet as the model in the portrait Girl with a Pearl Earring. While Chevalier, on the one hand, creates a character to personify the model in the portrait through the operation of amplification, the film director, on the other hand, cuts parallel plots through excision and shrinks the dialogues via concision.

The portrait entitled Girl with a Pearl Earring has a prime role in the narrative not only as the title but especially in the climax of both book and movie. As mentioned before, the description of this painting is different from all the previous descriptions. It focuses on the protagonist’s feelings being portrayed and the painter/muse interaction during the portrait’s composition. In the movie this verbal interaction is reduced to its essence and is expressed through cinematographic resources such as acting, facial expression, camera angles, lighting, and soundtrack.

The visual excerpt in question begins when van Ruijven, Vermeer’s patron, agrees to accept Griet’s portrait rather than having her sit beside him for the painting The Concert. Van Ruijven makes it very clear that he wants her, even if only on canvas. Griet, fully aware of the possible consequences of sitting with van Ruijven, is glad because modeling for the portrait will enable her to get closer to the painter.

⁴² The interview is found in the Internet on-line news The Observer - Guardian Unlimited.

⁴³ See note 40.

According to the analysis done in chapter 3, we perceive through the visual excerpt in which Vermeer and Griet negotiate her wearing his wife's pearl earring that there was a minor shuffling of scenes. It results in a major and unexpected effect, providing the viewers, whether they have read the book or not, with a new experience. The core of the story is, in both book and movie, the platonic romance between master and muse, both aware that the nature of their relationship is merely contained in that very work of art. Even though they become close, their relationship is not actually consummated either inside or outside the studio.

The shuffling concerns the scene in which Griet goes after her boyfriend, Pieter the son, and gives herself to him outside a tavern. In the book, one day Vermeer watches Griet getting ready to model as she changes the maid's cap to the colored turban. After realizing the painter saw her hair down, which is not appropriate either for her as a Protestant or a maid, she decides to go after Pieter in a tavern. They have their first intimate relationship then. In the movie, this tavern scene, in which Griet and Pieter make love, takes place after Griet asks the painter to pierce her ear with the pearl earring. This is another minor, yet relevant, augmentation to the movie since the protagonist pierces her own ear in the novel. The delicate, subtle mood of this scene strengthens the bond between the painter and his muse. As previously seen, Griet only agrees to have her ears pierced after she sees the painting. While observing her own portrait, she describes it and agrees that it will please van Ruijven but it does not satisfy Vermeer's standards.

In the movie, Griet's ekphrastic description is reduced, through concision, to simply: "You looked inside me." It says it all. As suggested by Genette, the text is pushed to its limits, vermeerizing even more the transposition. The concision procedure takes place "whereby a text is abridged without the suppression of any of its significant thematic parts,

but is rewritten in a more concise style, thus producing a new text which might, at a pinch, preserve not one word of the original text” (235).

Beside the excerpts related to Vermeer’s work I have analyzed here for this study of transtextuality, the paintings A View of Delft and A Lady Writing play a relevant role in the core of the novel. A View of Delft is important because Griet and her father discuss it thoroughly in an ekphrastic dialogue. And the interaction between Vermeer and Griet in A Lady Writing is understood by the reader. Neither of the excerpts was transposed to the film. The scenes were cut by suppression. These facts support my thesis that the maid leaves the margins for the center of the narrative in order to enable the artist’s creative progress. Griet plays more than the role of the muse, since in the novel she is the voice, and in the movie she is the eyes through which we perceive Vermeer’s work.

Part II - Intermediality

The first part of this third chapter shows how reduction, augmentation and substitutions throughout the intersemiotic transposition from the paper to the screen produce more gains than losses in the movie adaptation Girl with a Pearl Earring. Both transpositions, from the painting to the book and from the book to the movie, confirm a high level of interaction between the arts.

However, such a conclusion does not answer my question: Why revisit Vermeer’s aesthetic values – the representation of silent, industrious women – now, in the beginning of the twenty-first century? Why not revisit the best know Dutch painter from the Golden Age, Rembrandt? Or even the later Dutch genius, Van Gogh?

In order to answer this question it is crucial to take a few aspects into consideration. The first investigation is undertaken in chapters 2 and 3 in the light of Gérard Genette, since transtextuality can be understood as the agent of a round trip. That is, through its study it is

possible to perceive how the semiotic web is triggered, especially through the most silent relationship which relies mainly on reception: the architextual relationship. The spectator (who may be a reader, a viewer or, more likely, an internaut) is the one likely to identify transtextual relationships, even when the author himself has not premeditated these connections. As Stam notes when discussing intertextuality: “any text that has ‘slept with’ another text . . . has also slept with all the other texts that that text has slept with” (“A Theory and Practice” 27). This statement leads me to another one, which says that “the danger with cinema work is that if you try to set the effect of a Rembrandt you end up with a Roybet. It’s much safer not to worry about that quality then and find you’ve achieved a Vermeer after all” (Cocteau 108-09). Evocation without an explicit citation, therefore, can be understood as a transtextual procedure. Vermeer’s artwork is more popular today than it was at the end of the twentieth century, aided by the movie adaptation which, in turn, could not exist without the novel. Vermeer’s work continues to inspire today. Because of Naremore’s suggestion of a general theory of repetition,⁴⁴ it becomes necessary to look into what contemporary artists have been doing.

Naremore proposes a study of recycling within a general theory of repetition. In this media-saturated environment we now live in, not only do books inspire movie adaptations, but movies inspire literary works; adaptations of screenplays are published; movies are adapted into musicals and television shows (12-15). Linda Hutcheon goes further when adding “theme parks, historical enactments, and virtual reality experiments” to Naremore’s list of possibilities (A Theory xi). For him, every form of retelling should be added to the “study of adaptation in the age of the mechanical reproduction and electronic communication” (15), long previewed in Walter Benjamin’s milestone article (1936).

⁴⁴ A general theory of repetition is proposed by Naremore taking into account the doors the study of intermediality have recently opened with regard to the study of the inter-relation between different semiotic signs including new media and technology.

Nowadays, the celebrated expression could be changed to the age of the digital reproduction and virtual communication, since new technologies and the use of new media have been changing the relations between, and within, the arts.

Naremore suggests that the cinematographic adaptation process is a multidirectional, dialogic and intertextual kind of translation (12-13). His proposal is in accordance with Robert Stam's view that adaptation is a process of exchange that is not hierarchical and biased as it used to be not so long ago ("A Theory and Practice" 46). Moreover, Hutcheon explains that "because adaptations are to a different medium, they are re-mediations, that is, specifically in the form of intersemiotic transpositions from one sign system (for example, words) to another (for example, images)" (A Theory 16). As explored previously, the studies of transformations occurring throughout the translation process are connected to the movie adaptation of Girl with a Pearl Earring, as it is the result of an intersemiotic transposition in which an independent British cinema production focuses the attention of the general public on a seventeenth century portrait. However, the cycle would not be complete without its main catalyst: the novel.

Although Naremore proposes his theory for film studies, I will extend it to the world of fine arts because it is here that his approach offers the most corroboration. During my research, I realized that art has outlets through many media. The static piece of artwork has given way to highly interactive art and media. This kind of interaction has been called intermediality.

The concept of intermediality comes from a field of studies called *Intermedialität* in German; *Interartiella studier* in Swedish; *Intermidialidade* in Portuguese. In the United States the field still goes by the name Interarts Studies (Clüver "Inter Textus" 09). The boundaries of Interarts Studies have indeed been stretched to the field of Media Studies. Even though it is a growing interdisciplinary field, the former is "still dominated by investigations

into relations of literature and other arts” and “the focus still tends to be on texts.” The latter’s focus, on the other hand, is on “questions of production, distribution, function, and reception” (“Intermediality” pars. 04-05). Therefore, intermediality can be understood as the interrelation between the traditional arts and different media in intermedial or intersemiotic transposition. And it is also the status of a combination of different media in multimedia, mixed media⁴⁵ and intermedia⁴⁶ texts⁴⁷ (“Estudos Interartes” 358).

Leo Hoek, based on Clüver’s concept, proposes a pragmatic classification of intersemiotic transposition, departing from the hypothesis that a text/image relation depends more on the production/reception parameters than on its intrinsic nature (65-80). Intermediality is not new to literary production since authors have always found inspiration in other art forms by crossing the boundaries which separate the arts, leading us back to Naremore’s proposal of a general theory of repetition.

In order to illustrate how artworks can be interwoven, I would like to explore the revival of the portrait Girl with a Pearl Earring in what is known as new media – not considered high art – through images I randomly found on the Internet. This is the kind of revival we deal with in our quotidian through electronic mail or while surfing the net:

⁴⁵ According to Clüver: “A multimedia text comprises separable and individually coherent texts in different media, while complex signs in different media contained in a mixed-media text would not be coherent or self-sufficient outside of that context. A comic strip is a mixed-media text; an opera score that contains the libretto is a multimedia text” (“Intermediality” par. 13). First published in Swedish in 1993: Clüver, “Interartiella studier: en inledning.”

⁴⁶ According to Clüver: Intermedia texts are “constituted by two or more sign systems in such way that the visual, musical, verbal, kinetic, or performative aspects of its signs cannot be separated or disunited ... labeled as ‘intermedia discourse’ or ‘intermedia texts,’ but which might be better called ‘intersemiotic texts’ because such texts will often be housed in one medium. Concrete or sound poems are prime examples of this type” (“Intermediality” par. 14).

⁴⁷ According to Clüver: “‘Text’ is to be understood here throughout in the semiotic usage that refers to all complex signs or sign combinations in any sign system as ‘texts’” (“Intermediality” footnote 5).



Fig. 50 – Wade Scott. [Dirt Car Art](http://www.dirtycarart.com). 23 Oct 2006 <www.dirtycarart.com>.



Fig. 51 – Site [Coloque seu rosto na Mona Lisa](http://www.digitaldrops.com.br). 25 Jan 2007 <<http://www.digitaldrops.com.br>>. And Site [MyDaVinci: Art that Clicks](http://www.mydavinci.com). 22 April 2007 <<http://www.mydavinci.com>>.

The first one shows the work by the American artist Scott Wade, known for his dirty car ephemeral art style (see Fig. 50). The second image refers to an advertisement hyperlink, found in the Brazilian site [Digitaldrops](http://www.digitaldrops.com.br), for an Internet service, provided by the American site [MyDaVinci: Art that Clicks](http://www.mydavinci.com), which adds anyone's picture to a masterpiece and, according to the site, turns your picture into artwork (see Fig. 51). We read on the headline of the Brazilian site: "Don't like Da Vinci's masterpiece? No problem, you may choose [Girl with a Pearl Earring](#) by Johannes Vermeer, or several other options."



Fig. 52 – “Modern Renaissance.” [Worth1000](http://www.worth1000.com). 01 May 2007 <[www.worth1000](http://www.worth1000.com)>.



Fig. 53 – “Pimp my Ren: ‘Girl with a Pearl Nose Ring’ and ‘Vermeer already tried to pimp this girl... just finished the job for him’” [Worth1000](http://www.worth1000.com). 12 Nov 2007 <[www.worth1000](http://www.worth1000.com)>.

The image from the website [Worth1000](http://www.worth1000.com) uses a similar technique with pictures of celebrities such as Hollywood actress Sandra Bullock (see Fig. 52); it is part of a slideshow called Modern Renaissance I received attached to an electronic mail. Finally, two more images from [Worth1000](http://www.worth1000.com) website showing the girl “pimped out”⁴⁸ wearing a nose ring in one image and dressed up according to current fashion in the other (see Fig. 53). According to Gennete’s hypertextual practices diagram (see Table 1) these manifestations fit the category of playful

⁴⁸ According to the online [urban dictionary](http://www.urbandictionary.com), pimped out means “to go all out on in a fashion manner.” 12 Nov 2007 <www.urbandictionary.com>.

transformations: parody. All of them illustrate the revival of the portrait Girl with a Pearl Earring in electronic media.

But what have contemporary artists been doing nowadays? Conceptual art and art for art's sake are not the mainstream anymore. A recent exhibition at Aperture Gallery, Chelsea, New York City, which closed on May 10, 2007, produced a book entitled Domestic Landscapes by the Dutch photographer Bert Teunissen.⁴⁹ It is a collection of photographs taken over the past decade. Teunissen depicts ordinary people in their ordinary houses mainly built before the Great World Wars.



Fig. 54 – Bert Teunissen. Domestic Landscapes (Belin Beliet 3, France, 1997). Website fig.#199. 16 July 2007 <www.bertteunissen.com>.

According to Saskia Asser,⁵⁰ the relation between Teunissen's and Vermeer's works in "atmospheric light" was first made in an exhibition review in an American publication. It was only after reading this commentary that Teunissen actually visited "the Frick Collection in New York to see first hand what the critics meant by this comparison." Despite Asser's argument that the photographer has been influenced by the "painterly dwellings of farmers

⁴⁹ Bert Teunissen has had his photographs "exhibited across Europe and the United States and published in numerous magazines. . . . The complete Domestic Landscapes archive can be viewed at www.bertteunissen.com" (Domestic Landscapes Back Flap).

⁵⁰ Saskia Asser is Curator at the Huis Marseille Museum of Photography, Amsterdam.

and fishermen” present in the work of Jozef Israëls (1824-1911) and not by “the interiors belongings to the urban, well-to-do merchant class,” Asser admits that Israëls had previously been influenced by the “Dutch tradition that emphasizes and sublimates the intrinsic value of everyday life” so well represented by Vermeer (128). Such reasoning confirms that intertextuality may not be conscious on the artist’s behalf, relying on the viewer’s reception. If Israëls’s paintings have ‘slept with’ Vermeer’s, Teunissen’s photographs have in kind slept with both Israëls and Vermeer’s work, as Robert Stam would put it.

As we can see from the previous photograph the vermeerization⁵¹ of this photograph is patent (see Fig. 54). The use of natural light, the depiction of people at home in ordinary positions in the very characteristic Dutch windows transposes the observer to the quiet life present in Vermeer’s artwork. It is true that the use of Vermeer’s aesthetics is not necessarily an innovation. It all started with contemporaries of Vermeer who were even credited for his work for more than two centuries. As the impressionist movement had been anticipated by him, he was again imitated in the nineteenth century.

In the thirties, Jean Cocteau deliberately did the same in his movie The Beauty and the Beast (Diary of a Film 108-09), and so did many other artists who work *a la manière* of Vermeer, as evidenced in the sections on architextuality, chapter 2, and on hyperartistic practices, chapter 3. Although Teunissen admits he does not have the intention to imitate Vermeer, he is able not only to use the painter’s outstanding technique, one of the main elements present in the master’s work, but also to produce a work of art stamped with his own personality. The intertextuality of Vermeer’s perception of light is present, but Teunissen’s pieces of art leave no doubt as to his creative potential. It is a collection of portraits using photography as a tool, which may be considered art pieces.

⁵¹ Gennete uses the word Mallarméization when discussing the transstylization process. He means appropriating the style in the manner of Mallarmé. I use the word vermeerization with the same intent.

Kathryn Shattuck, in an interview with Teunissen for the American newspaper The New York Times, calls attention to the fact that it may sound obvious to compare the photographs to the master's work. The photographer's goal is to "preserve memories of a lifestyle fast becoming obsolete" ("Photographing the Light" par. 07). This aim is faithful to Vermeer's who, in his turn, targeted the representation of the Dutch lifestyle and the promotion of better habits for women who were known to be somewhat idle in the seventeenth century. The purpose of the works is different indeed, but there is a similarity in preserving the memory of the Netherlands. It is true that Teunissen has extended his work throughout Europe and even Japan, which can be seen at the photographer's website. But since we do live in a globalized world, and there is no going back, Teunissen's work only proves Naremore's theory of repetition.

Next section presents some photographs by Teunissen and Vermeer's paintings, as well as scenes from the movie in order to illustrate further.



Fig. 55 - Johannes Vermeer, painting, The Love Letter (Delft 1667-70).



Fig. 56 – Peter Webber, DVD, Girl with a Pearl Earring (London, 2003), movie still chapter 3.



Fig. 57 – Bert Teunissen. Domestic Landscapes (Nara 24, Japan, 2003). Website fig.#164. 16 July 2007 <www.bertteunissen.com>.

The illustrations are in accordance with Liliane Louvel’s statement of how the windows, a trademark in Dutch painting, are likely to inspire a writer’s imagination in the “never ending dialogue between Word and Image” (“Seeing Dutch” par. 32). Here, in contrast, we perceive art inspiring art rather than art inspiring literature, which proceeds since my focus is on the multi-directional effects produced by the semiotic web of Girl with a Pearl Earring (see Fig. 55, Fig. 56 and Fig. 57).

Therefore, even though the previous photograph depicts a culturally different environment, the influence of Vermeer's artwork is evident in the superposition of plans formed by windows, the disposition of furniture and props, the modeling of the silent figure captured by means of precise technique and, of course, the use of natural light (see Fig. 57).

In the following comparison, the similarity in the use of light is remarkable in the photograph that portrays a man also by the window in a very dark Spanish kitchen (see Fig. 58 and Fig. 59). The way a pot is set in the sink under a round tap resembles the globe. This procedure fits what Gennete calls transtylization or "a stylistic rewriting, a transposition whose sole function is a change of style" (226). Teunissen, *a la manière* of Vermeer, stylistically transposes the light from Vermeer's genealogic influence to his photographs. I could not avoid relating the painting with this photograph, although there are no other obvious elements in common: intertextuality comes from my reception. Vermeer's work is being evoked, not imitated, recalling once again what Stam says about texts "sleeping with" other texts. Teunissen's photographs have "slept with" Vermeer's work, calling his aesthetics to mind.



Fig. 58 – Johannes Vermeer, oil painting, 19 3/8 x 17 3/4 in. The Astronomer – *De astronoom* – (Delft, 1668). The Louvre, Paris.



Fig. 59 – Bert Teunissen. Domestic Landscapes (La Alberca 5, Spain, 2005). Website fig.#376. 16 July 2007 <www.bertteunissen.com>.

This last photograph reminds me of the painting A Woman Asleep (see Fig. 60). The Japanese lady seems to be not only absorbed into Vermeer's world, but also part of it (see Fig. 61).



Fig. 60 - Johannes Vermeer, oil painting, 34 1/2 x 30 1/8 in. A Woman Asleep – *Slapend meisje* – (Delft, 1656–57). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. Bequest of Benjamin Altman.



Fig. 61 – Bert Teunissen. Domestic Landscapes (Wakayama 22, Japan, 2003). Website fig.#176. 16 July 2007 <www.bertteunissen.com>.

One can note the similarities of plans and the dark and light contrasts. It is true that fidelity is not a relevant matter for discussion, since a new version will never replace its original, but the way the reception of the source-text is influenced does matter (Clüver “Inter Textus” 15-16). Therefore, this illustration can go beyond being just another comparison of how much

the painting and the photograph have in common, and reach the level of an intermedial case study based on its high level of intertextuality. There are obviously no mixed media involved in each piece of art, but in terms of reception, the superposition of texts/images becomes a reality.

According to Clüver, “intertextuality always also involves intermediality . . . an individual text may be a rich object for intermedial studies” (“Intermediality” par. 19). But, can a photograph, or a book of photographs, be considered intermedial material? Maybe intermedial is not the most accurate term, but intertextuality is indeed present. And this intertextuality is not necessarily carried out consciously by the author at the moment of inspiration; it may be identified only at the reception by the reader/listener/viewer, recalling the silent category of architextuality proposed by Genette. Teunissen himself may not have planned to imitate Vermeer, but the evocation of the painter’s aesthetics on the photographer’s work is more than simply impressionism.

FINAL REMARKS

The adaptations of Girl with a Pearl Earring are translations into different media from different semiotic sources resulting in high levels of interaction between the arts. However, the depiction of the female protagonist differs when transposed from the novel to the movie.

When Chevalier creates the fictional character Griet to verbalize Vermeer's work, she chooses to make her outspoken. Griet is able to express her feelings and is not afraid of the possible repercussions of her actions and remarks, such as when she slaps the mischievous Cornelia (22), or when she bluntly refuses the piece of meat given her by the butcher (40). Although both episodes make part of the movie, the viewers do not follow her inner thoughts before and after such actions. Furthermore, she always talks back to her mistress, Maria Thins, who does not put the maid back in her place partly because she enjoys dealing "with a bit of cleverness" (45). As time goes by, Griet starts filtering the kind of information she gives her family during her Sunday visits. In order to be close to the master, Griet learns to manipulate not only what she says, but especially to whom, when and how she uses words. She refers to Vermeer only as "he," which suggests to the reader how close they are. She starts to use the same demanding tone as Catharina, e.g., during her visit to her brother Frans at his new job (68). The change in her personality leads her to lying. Eventually she acknowledges how she "began to get used to lying" (107) in order to avoid enemies and avoid talking about the closeness between her and her master. Griet stands up for herself whenever necessary, e.g., when she makes it clear to Maria Thins that she does "not wish to sit with van Ruijven" (157). Finally, when she leaves the house after Catharina sees the finished portrait, she is very aware of all the choices she had made so far and all the possibilities that are ahead of her.

In the movie instead, the director chooses to make a more introspective and silent Griet. Scarlet Johansson's character has only a few lines throughout the film. She does interact with Vermeer, and there are no complex dialogues on his art. The parallel plots involving her family are cut, as I have mentioned. She also interacts with Maria Thins, but she does not dare to answer her mistress back. In the movie, the plot evolves through her contemplative eyes.

Chevalier remarks in an interview⁵² that the novel and the movie are like two sisters who resemble each other but have different personalities ("Mother of the Pearl" par. 20). For me, it is the role of the female protagonist that makes the difference. They are like twin sisters: the depiction of the outspoken Griet from the novel, by a woman writer, may be physically very similar, almost identical, to the pensive Griet from the movie, by a man director, yet they play different roles in the different semiotic systems.

In the novel, the female writer gives voice to the silent women in Vermeer's work. Chevalier brings a fictional female character, Griet, from the margins to the center of the narrative making her the voice that tells the story, blending fiction and historical facts in a different type of *Künstlerroman*, once the main character is the fictional muse instead of the real-life artist.

In the movie, the male director chooses to show Vermeer's artwork and life, yet it is through the fictional female protagonist's eyes that the viewer follows the story. The directors create a vermeerized environment through this effect, but, as in the original paintings, the female protagonist is somehow silenced, playing mainly the role of a muse.

At the end of this dissertation there is an attempt to answer how, and, perhaps, why the semiotic web of Girl with a Pearl Earring brought about a revival of Vermeer's art. The exhibition of Vermeer's work, in Washington DC and The Hague in the mid nineties, was not

⁵² See note 42.

coincidentally a starting point for intersemiotic transpositions from the master's artwork. There is a reason behind it. The idealization of values, of aesthetics, of beauty even when using technologies from our media-saturated world, confirms Naremore's idea that translations must belong to a general theory of repetition. Movies do recycle art in the age of digital reproduction and virtual communication. As he claims, every form of retelling should be added to the study of adaptation in a multidirectional, dialogic and intertextual process. This study on the semiotic web catalyzed by [Girl with a Pearl Earring](#) is only the tip of the iceberg.

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