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Het meisje met de parel

Girl with a Pearl Earring

Tracy Chevalier

BA TRANSLATION THESIS

Vertaling en vertaalreflectie 2

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Introduction

Why *Girl With a Pearl Earring*? I remember watching the film version when it premiered on Dutch television in 2004. Although I was still rather young to completely understand the film, it intrigued me. No, it was not due to Colin Firth, who allegedly “induced record increases in estrogen levels on both sides of the Atlantic” (Marx). It was the story that captivated me; the story of a naive young girl who is lured into the mysterious world of a painter. Not surprisingly, the novel by Tracy Chevalier I read several years later, on which the film was based, fascinated me even more. The rich history, fictitious but wonderfully lifelike; the vivid images; the dialogues, hesitant but unveiling.

It was specifically the ‘Dutchness’ of the novel that persuaded me to actually translate it. Due to the abundance of Dutch cultural-specific elements, this novel seemed perfectly suited for a very natural translation; the story about the old master would make good Dutch literature. Although the language used in the novel is rather uncomplicated, the dialogues in particular would form an interesting perspective for profound translation-oriented analysis. Furthermore, I saw a challenge in the approach of the artistic jargon. All in all, the deeper construction of *Girl with a Pearl Earring* led me to believe that this novel would form an excellent translation project.

1 General Source Text Analysis and Identification of Problem Areas

Prior to the creation of a good translation, a clear translation assignment and a thorough analysis of the source text that is to be translated are of vital importance. However, considering the fact that no specific requirements are given as to whether the source text must be translated for a particular readership or purpose, one may assume that the target text must intend the same purpose as is determined for the source text. In view of this, a target analysis is not only redundant, but simply not performable. As for a thorough source text analysis, Christiane Nord suggests the application of the so-called Lasswell Formula, a linguistic model for complete communication, in order to determine the degree of complexity of the source text: “*Who says what in which channel to whom with what effect?*” (145-146). One must answer this question before proceeding to the actual translation of the source text. Therefore, I will address each item of the formula and further expound the relevant information in the following paragraph, after which I will discuss the specific problem areas in depth.

- 1) *Who?* *Girl with a Pearl Earring* was written by novelist Tracy Chevalier and was first published by Harper Collins.
- 2) *To whom?* The novel was written for the interested reader and thus, has a wide target readership. That is to say, it is accessible to any interested (adult) reader, regardless of his/her foreknowledge of the subject. In terms of language, this means the translation must mirror the style and degree of complexity of the original work in order to comply with the standards of the reader.
- 3) *In which channel?* The medium used to convey the message is a novel, on paper or published as e-book; a literary work of (largely) fictional history, more specifically.

Consequently, this allows a relatively less faithful approach of the translation than a legal text, for instance.

4) *With what effect?* The primary effect of the novel is entertaining the reader and perhaps also conveying the atmosphere of 17th century social relationships between different classes. Once more, a more free translation is therefore not under taboo.

Nord also suggests a number of additional questions one may address in the analysis of the source text:

5) *Where?* The story was written in London, England (Chevalier, *Tracy Chevalier*) and is set in 17th century Delft, the Netherlands.

6) *When?* According to an interview with Chevalier, it took her approximately eight months to write the novel. Considering that it was first published in 1999, this means it was written in 1998 and perhaps even partly in 1999 (Chevalier, *Tracy Chevalier*).

7) *Why?* The immediate cause for the writing of *Girl with a Pearl Earring* was the painting of the same name by Johannes Vermeer (Chevalier, *Tracy Chevalier*).

8) *With what purpose?* Inspired by Vermeer's mysterious painting and its unknown genesis (only little is known about Vermeer and his works generally), Chevalier intended to create a background for the girl in the painting. This is, then, the intended purpose of the source text: providing a background, whether or not fictional, for the painting (Chevalier, *Tracy Chevalier*).

In view of this, the Lasswell Formula provides useful information, mainly in the form of background facts, which may prove of considerable help in the solution of specific translation problems. However, every source text comes with specific problem areas, whether in terms of style or substance, which determine its actual degree of complexity. Chevalier's language use in itself, as opposed to her style of writing, does not form an essential problem in the source text. The style in *Girl with a*

Pearl Earring may be characterised as very sparse and suggestive; it leaves an open space as regards the interpretation of the ‘spoken’ word of the characters. The narrative mode Chevalier has opted for, first-person point of view, has substantial consequences for the aforementioned interpretation by the reader as well as choices as regards the translation. In addition, the use of the continuous poses a familiar problem when translating a source text into Dutch and so it does in this particular source text. Another (minor) issue is the use of cultural-specific elements to enliven the scene-setting. Since the translation of these elements forms a minor issue, this will only be addressed briefly. Furthermore, dialogue is in this excerpt the most substantial means for conveying information, especially by means of subtext. The Dutch pragmatic particles form a significant reinforcement of this subtext and this problem area will, therefore, be discussed at length and illustrated with several examples from the source text. Finally, I will address the consequences of the excessive use of jargon and the proper approach of translation of technical language, particularly focusing on the target readership.

2 Style

2.1 Narrative Mode

Tracy Chevalier’s fictional historical novel *Girl with a Pearl Earring* provides an excellent background to Johannes Vermeer’s painting of the same name, which is in itself, at least as suspenseful as Chevalier’s story. The story is set in 17th century Delft, where seventeen-year-old Griet, a simple maid at the Vermeer household, manages to intrigue her master by her eye for detail. Moreover, it is this eye that

channels the reader through the novel, since the narrative point of view is Griet herself. Consequently, a purely objective point of view, as is the case with an omniscient narrator, is virtually impossible to retain, considering that one is offered biased information by an 'insider'. Protestant Griet is indeed the odd one out in the new, Catholic environment and she is treated as such by Vermeer's family. Hence, the reader, who is compelled to identify with Griet, will experience the family in a negative way.

This narrative mode, however, also has its advantages, seeing that Griet has a sharp eye and happens to be the most dynamic character in the novel. In this way, Chevalier provides a highly detailed portrait of the environment and its residents. In terms of word choice, this means that verbs which carry an emotive connotation or indicate a certain preference or inclination of Griet, are preferable to more general, 'unloaded' verbs, considering that the reader is experiencing the story through Griet. One must be cautious then, not to pass over the importance of the emotive aspect of this source text.

2.2 The Continuous: The Translation of the Present Participle

A frequently encountered problem in translations from English into Dutch is the present participle and this source text is, in spite of the relatively limited use of this form, no exception to the 'rule', since this verb form is simply very common in English. Although the solution to this problem largely depends on the specific contents and style of the source text, the Dutch present participle may be divided into several distinct categories (in terms of function) which can be approached in a similar fashion. That is to say, there is a certain interconnection between present participles with the same function and therefore, they are highly likely to be translated in a

similar fashion. In general, the present participle is a marker of non-finiteness. This is a typical form of a problem on linguistic level (Nord 147), since the Dutch language system simply does not permit a use of the present participle as frequent as in English.

Although it is difficult to form a general rule as to how to translate the present participle into Dutch, nonetheless it may be argued that there are two larger categories in which one may divide occurrences of the present participle. First, there is the forms that describe a certain action being carried out.

(1) When the door opened he was frowning, his eyes not *catching* mine.

‘Don’t knock, Griet, just come in quietly,’ he said, *turning* away and *going* back to the easel, where the blank canvas sat *waiting* for its colours.

(1a) Hij verscheen fronsend in de deuropening, mijn blik ontwijkend. ‘Niet kloppen, Griet, je kunt gewoon zachtjes binnenkomen,’ zei hij terwijl hij zich omdraaide en weer terugging naar de ezel, waar het lege doek op zijn kleuren stond te wachten.

A clear example of this sort are “turning away” and “going back”, which can usually be translated by a ‘terwijl’ construction. That is to say, the reduced clause, which consists mainly of present participles, is transformed into a subclause, indicated with the adverb ‘terwijl’. Hence, the reduced clause in question is translated into ‘terwijl hij zich omdraaide en weer terugging naar de ezel’. ‘Catching’ on the other hand, is one of the rarer cases where the present participle is literarily translated into Dutch, as demonstrated in (1a). Here, it is translated by an antonym (Chesterman 162), rather than a more literal but wordy alternative like ‘me niet aankijkend’. The use of a present participle in Dutch makes this sort of clause sound rather artificial, peculiar even.

The other category consists of present participles that have to do with motionlessness. This may sound incorrect, since present participles mark finiteness – the finiteness of a process or action, more specifically — but the motionlessness mentioned occurs only in a specific context, which has everything to do with aspect. The situation in the example is as follows: the painting *stands* on an easel “waiting for its colours”. The –ing form simply marks the progressive aspect of the clause, which one may also translate into Dutch by a ‘staan (te)’+infinitive construction. In this construction, a specific sort of auxiliary is combined with an infinitive, in order to preserve the progressive aspect of the clause while also expressing stillness. Typical verbs used for these constructions are ‘staan (te)’, ‘zitten (te)’, ‘liggen (te)’, etc. However, this as well as the other category-based solutions certainly do not apply to every translation problem caused by the use of the present participle and are largely dependent on the context they are placed in. The remaining occurrences of this phenomenon – that is to say, those not discussed in the analysis — are either solved in a similar fashion or addressed separately in the translation itself.

2.3 ‘Dutchness’: Cultural-specific Elements

Girl with a Pearl Earring is exotic, in the sense that Chevalier leaves the cultural-specific elements intact (Grit 190). Taken into consideration that the story is set in the Netherlands, it contains a considerably great number of geographical references, most of which are calques of the original Dutch names and are consequently fairly easy to integrate in the Dutch translation. Hence, the “New Church” may be translated by ‘Nieuwe Kerk’. The “New Church” is classified by Grit as “private-institutional concept” (lit. “particulier-institutionele begrippen”) (189) and although the choice of ‘Nieuwe Kerk’ appears to be a calque on first glance, it is in fact simply the name of

the actual institution, which was built on the Market Square of Delft in the late 14th century (Schneider 19; Vermeer, *Gezicht op Delft*). However, the excerpt from *Girl with a Pearl Earring* contains only one cultural-specific element and therefore, this phenomenon will not further discussed. In view of the above, the translation of cultural-specific elements poses no further problems.

3 Dialogue

3.1 Subtext

“Dialogue has a difficult task in that it must simulate real talk at the same time it must artfully waste no words, reveal character, provide tension, and move the story forward” (qtd. in Christophe 24). If one thing, Chevalier does certainly not waste any words in her dialogues, especially in those between Griet and Vermeer. The conversations between the two main characters are dense, sometimes even fragmentary. Both speak in clear, concise sentences and articulate only that which is of utter importance at that moment. Despite the mutual attraction, they persist in this formal straight-to-the-point manner of speech. Although Griet and Vermeer seem to speak similarly, a crucial difference may be found in the subtext of their utterances; that which is experienced by the reader without actually being enunciated by the characters (Duyns 19). To quote Downs & Wright, “people are seldom general in their speech” (Christophe 31), yet on paper, they appear to be.

In *Girl With a Pearl Earring*, dialogue is one of Chevalier’s most important instruments in providing information about the platonic relationship – if it may be called thus — of Griet and her master Vermeer. Their cautious and conspicuously

formal dialogues attest their inability to grow closer to each other than they are allowed by their environment. In order to create lifelike dialogues in the translation – that is to say, translate Chevalier’s original dialogues into natural Dutch without making substantial changes in style — it is of vital importance to analyse thoroughly the background and characteristics of the characters involved in these dialogues: in the passage concerned (i.e., the source text), this would primarily involve Griet and Vermeer.

Griet is a seventeen-year-old girl who is sent to become a maid in the Vermeer household by her poor family. She is by no means unintelligent, but rather uneducated, which accounts for her being illiterate. When having a conversation with Vermeer, one may remark she tries her best not to appear too ignorant. Although she does not seem to be ashamed of her descent, the apologetic tone in which she speaks to her master is most conspicuous:

(2) ‘You would like me to paint you with your mop?’

‘It’s not for me to say, sir. It is not my painting.’

(2a) ‘Wil je dat ik je met je zwabber schilder?’

‘Dat weet ik niet, meneer. Het is immers niet mijn schilderij.’

Griet clearly feels the urge to give an honest answer, but her humble reply attests her recognition of Vermeer as her superior. This is a clear example of how subtext is indispensable in order to fully understand a seemingly insignificant sentence like this. Griet looks up to Vermeer not simply because he is her master, but because she has feelings for him. With regard to this subtext, Griet’s reply in (2a) is more indicative of this balance of power. The simple ‘Dat weet ik niet, meneer’ does not mean Griet does not know the answer; it implies she does know, but cannot or does not want to tell him so. Although her curiosity is encouraged by her master, she remains cautious

in both her speech and actions. This may provide a solution to translation problems which may occur on linguistic level (Nord 147). Griet observes the rules of etiquette and therefore, considering Vermeer is her master, one may assume she addresses him as ‘u’, the Dutch polite form of address. Vermeer, on the other hand, is speaking to his maid and therefore he is most likely to address Griet as ‘jij/je’. The mutual relations of the characters, both of Griet and Vermeer and the other characters, are well-defined and therefore, the distribution of personal pronouns forms no significant problem in the translation of this novel.

3.2 Pragmatic Particles

Nord also mentions source-text-specific problems, which occur by definition in the specific context of an individual text. The solutions to these problems, therefore, may or may not be applicable to other source texts. However, the problem that will be addressed in this paragraph may also be classified as a problem on linguistic level (147). The insertion of pragmatic particles is a common action performed in Dutch translation, since their use simply makes a text sound more natural. The “typical Dutch noises with no particular meaning,” as Ad Foolen characterises pragmatic particles (39), serve to bring out elements that are implicitly present in the English source text and which do not translate automatically into Dutch in a word-for-word translation. Pragmatic particles “contribute greatly to the meaning of the sentence or a part of it, without effecting the actual contents either way”¹ (*E-ANS* 832). In view of this, the selective application of pragmatic particles may provide an excellent strategy for giving characters distinct voices, especially when they are engaged in dialogue. However, one must be careful not give the characters a dialect, given that this would

¹ Original quotation from *E-ANS* 8.3.2: “(...) dragen in belangrijke mate bij aan de bedoeling van de zin of een gedeelte ervan, zonder dat ze aan de feitelijke inhoud iets af- of toedoen.”

be too radical a change to the source text. Pragmatic particles on the other hand, subtly add to the fluency of the source text, without intervening in the author's style and/or the contents of the novel. In order to use them correctly, a profound analysis of the characters is required.

Vermeer is a rather mysterious character and remains so throughout the novel, since Chevalier does not reveal a great deal about the painter. He is portrayed as an introvert and intellectual man of considerable wealth – that is to say, in the eyes of Griet, who happens to be the narrator of the story. He seems to be somewhat oblivious of the world he lives in and tends to be absorbed by his art. He is silent; he only speaks when needed and truly counts his words. In order to integrate this in the translation, pragmatic particles, as expounded in the previous paragraph, may provide a syntactic solution. They bring a certain gradation and fluency to the text, which remains implicit in English (Van der Wouden 22). However, the idea of fluent sentences does not seem to harmonise with Vermeer's staccato way of speech. As Duyns accurately argues, the linguistic performance of a character is crucial for the way in which it is portrayed in the story and with that, the impression it leaves on the reader (15-16). Although the following sentence sounds utterly natural without particles in English, the Dutch translation clearly shows that the insertion of pragmatic particles is inevitable:

(3) 'Well, Griet, see what you can do with this.'

(3a) 'Nou, Griet, kijk wat je hiermee kan.'

(3b) 'Nou, Griet, kijk *maar* wat je hiermee kan.'

Although Vermeer is a man of few words, (3a) sounds too blunt, almost disparaging, even for a man like him, especially considering his relation with Griet. The insertion of the particle 'maar' in (3b) not only converts the ordering tone in (3a) to a slightly

more polite request, but also justifies the confusion Griet utters in the next sentence:

“I could not tell if he was angry or amused.” Vermeer’s request in (3b) may indeed be interpreted either way; the double interpretability is enabled by the pragmatic particle.

This example clearly shows that in the translation some of Vermeer’s utterances require particles in order to put his bluntness into perspective. In view of this, an efficient strategy would be to minimise the number of particles in Vermeer’s part of the dialogues, using them only where highly necessary, so as to create a certain contrast with Griet’s idiolect. The dominating role of pragmatic particles in this process especially shows in the following example:

- (4) ‘You wanted me, sir.’
 ‘*Yes. Stand over there.*’
- (4a) ‘Ja. Ga daar staan.’
- (4b) ‘Ja. Ga daar *eens* staan.’

Despite the fact that the literary translation in (4a) is by no means syntactically or semantically incorrect, it sounds very much like the command a dog owner would give his dog. Vermeer frequently utters similar compact phrases, which may be severely misinterpreted if not modified by pragmatic particles. However, the demeaning tone in (4a) disappears completely with the insertion of the particle ‘eens’, as demonstrated in (4b).

Compared to Vermeer on the other hand, Griet is relatively open, a characteristic which shows in her utterances. Nevertheless, one must keep in mind she is just a simple maid and consequently, somewhat limited in her speech. She belongs to the (generally) uneducated working class and is therefore more likely to speak in simple Dutch, using particles.

- (5) As much as I wanted to feel the soft fur of the mantle around my neck,

it was not what I normally wore.

(5a) (...) het was niet wat ik gewoonlijk droeg.

(5b) (...) het was *nou eenmaal* niet wat ik gewoonlijk droeg.

The clause in (5a) sounds like a mere announcement and misrepresents the subtext, whereas (5b) does capture the emotions (Munday 39) expressed in the preceding sentence demonstrated in (5). Griet wishes she was in the position to wear such fine clothing, but at the same time she is utterly aware of the fact she is not. The phrase ‘nou eenmaal’ is of vital importance for the conveyance of this subtext.

Seeing that Griet is the narrator of the story, Chevalier also writes down her flow of thoughts, which are relatively more fluent than the thoughts she actually expresses, and therefore, require more use of particles.

(6) I *should* let him paint me with a mop, I thought.

(6a) Eigenlijk zou ik hem mij moeten laten schilderen met een zwabber, dacht ik.

(6b) Eigenlijk zou ik hem mij *gewoon* moeten laten schilderen met een zwabber, dacht ik.

The idiom ‘eigenlijk moeten’ replaces the emphasis Chevalier lays on the single word “*should*”. Once again, the translation in (6a) is neither semantically nor syntactically incorrect, but simply does not convey the fluency one would expect in a *flow* of thoughts. For this reason particularly, particles may be used to capture this fluency (as demonstrated in both (6b) and (5b)) and make a piece of text sound like the genuine thoughts of a living person.

In view of the above, elements as small as pragmatic particles may certainly enable a character distinction in voice, yet only when correctly applied. The reticence of the two main characters in this source text is clearly deciding for the form of the

dialogues and therefore it is crucial to analyse their character thoroughly, particularly paying attention to their vocabulary and language use. Only then may one develop an effective strategy for the creation of distinctive character voices, with the use of pragmatic particles. Since the source text is largely composed of dialogue and the scope of this analysis is rather limited, there is simply no space to deal with each problem individually. The problems mentioned are the most conspicuous examples and serve, therefore, as a model for the solution of others.

4 Vermeer's Palette: The Translation of Jargon

A novel like this, naturally, comes with a good share of painter's jargon. Considering the wide readership of the novel, Chevalier uses precisely enough jargon. That is to say, the quantity of technical language is not so large so as to deluge the layman with an overflow of unintelligible information, but neither is it too limited to attract the more informed reader, who has prior knowledge of the art of painting or Vermeer's works specifically. Moreover, the terminology used in the novel seems to be carefully selected – that is to say, it is relatively easily accessible to all readers given its rather simple nature — and therefore appealing. The presence of jargon invites the reader into the world of the rather mysterious Vermeer and allows one to experience this world through the eyes of Griet. Too large a quantity of terminology on the other hand, would reach the opposite effect: it would have an alienating effect and would consequently discourage the reader to actually read the novel.

The majority of the more common technical terms used in the source text may be found in any elaborate dictionary or encyclopaedia. For the translation of the more

field-specific terms, it is necessary to consult a special dictionary or another work of reference. The following passage, for instance, contains a considerable number of technical terms:

It was the first day of the new year. He had painted the *ground layer* of my painting almost a month before, but nothing since – no reddish marks to indicate the shapes, no *false colours*, no *overlaid colours*, no *highlights*. The canvas was a blank yellowish white. I saw it every morning as I cleaned.

Although “ground layer” does not seem a very technical term, the problem lies in the translation of it. On the one hand, a semantically correct option would be the Dutch ‘grondlaag’. On the other hand, this term is not specific enough, seeing that it is also commonly used to refer to the first layer of paint applied to a wall or a fence. It would imply house painting rather than artistic (oil) painting and thus, a more terminological term is preferable. Hence, the specialised *Encyclopedie van de schilderkunst en aanverwante kunsten* provides an alternative that is highly appropriate for this source text. ‘Onderschildering’ is painter’s jargon for “ground layer” (Swillens 115) and is more suitable on grounds of aesthetics and contents.

The term “highlights” offers an excellent opportunity to use actual painter’s jargon. Although the term ‘lichtpunten’ would suffice, one must consider that Griet, who is speaking – thinking, in fact — in this passage, has already mastered a considerable number of technical terms due to her assisting Vermeer in his painter’s activities. The terminological term for “highlights” is ‘hoogsels’, which is a technical term for the clearest reflection of light coming from an object in a painting, applied with white paint (Swillens 73), like in the painting of the *Girl with a Pearl Earring*. As opposed to “ground layer” and “highlights”, the term “overlaid colours” is a more general term used for both sorts of painting and can therefore be translated as thus.

The translation itself however, also comes with a number of options, the most natural being ‘overlappende kleuren’. Purely aesthetically, ‘overlappende’ sounds rather blunt and is therefore not appropriate in this artistic context. The Dutch ‘dekkend’ on the other hand, sounds stylistically better, yet not in combination with ‘kleuren’. Although neither the dictionary nor the special encyclopaedia have an entry for this term, ‘deklagen’ sounds more like the kind of language one would expect a painter to use, regardless of the fact that it is Griet’s thoughts that are written down in this passage. For ‘false colours’ one does not have to look far. It is a rather ordinary term, commonly used in photography and considering this, the dictionary provides a plausible translation, namely the literal ‘valse kleuren’. According to Swillens, false colours are applied on top of the ground layer and give the actual figures, once painted over the false colours, a certain depth (163).

The range of colours, pigments and raw materials mentioned also fall within Vermeer’s jargon and, considering the fact that she assists the painter, also within Griet’s. Although the exact tone of the colours described may not be identified at once by the reader, most of the ‘special names’ are elucidated by the mention of the umbrella primary or secondary colour, which makes the text – in all its exclusiveness — more accessible. One may, for instance, not be acquainted with ‘lake’, the Dutch ‘karmijn’, and yet understand what Griet is talking about, by the mere addition of ‘red’. Consequently, the term ‘karmijnrood’ is a comprehensible translation of “*red lake*” (see footnote 20 for full explanation). Other similar cases are “*lead white*” (‘loodwit’), “*lead-tin yellow*” (‘lood-tin-geel’) and “*black*” (‘zwart’). “*Ochre*” and “*ultramarine*” on the other hand, may not be clarified like the previous examples, but may in principle be considered common knowledge. In view of this, the terms ‘oker’ and ‘ultramarijn’ suffice (Swillens 144).

Conclusion

In view of this, the most significant problem areas encountered in this source text do not concern difficult language or complicated constructions, but chiefly problems on linguistic level and source-text specific problems (Nord 147). These problems have been largely solved by a thorough source-text analysis and will, therefore, form no further issue in the translation of the excerpt. Minor problems, which are also mainly source-text specific (Nord 147), will be addressed in separate footnotes in the translation itself.

Tracy Chevalier, *Het meisje met de parel*²

Een maand eerder had hij me gevraagd naar zijn atelier te komen. ‘Ik ben op de bovenverdieping³,’ deed ik de kamer die avond mee.

Tanneke keek niet op van haar naaiwerk. ‘Gooi nog wat hout op het vuur voor je gaat,’ beval ze.

De meisjes waren met hun kantwerk bezig, onder toezien oog van Maria Thins. Lisbeth had geduld en behendige vingers en ze leverde goed werk, maar Aleydis was nog te jong om het fijne kantklossen⁴ te kunnen beheersen, en Cornelia te ongeduldig. De kat zat aan Cornelia’s voeten bij het haardvuur en zo nu en dan liet het meisje een eindje draad bungelen zodat het beest ernaar kon klauwen.

Waarschijnlijk hoopte ze dat de kat uiteindelijk zijn klauwen door haar werk zou slaan en het kapot zou maken.

Nadat ik hout op het vuur had gegooid stapte ik om Johannes heen, die met een tol op de koude keukentegels aan het spelen was. Op dat moment gaf hij de tol een woeste draai, waardoor deze met een sprongetje in het vuur belandde. Johannes begon te huilen terwijl Cornelia gierde van het lachen en Maertge het speeltje met een tang uit de vlammen probeerde te vissen.

‘Stil, jullie maken Catharina en Franciscus nog wakker,’ waarschuwde Maria Thins de kinderen. Ze hoorden haar niet.

² The title deviates from *Girl with a Pearl Earring*, but since the painting by Johannes Vermeer is originally called *Het meisje met de parel* (Schneider 69), this rather than any other construction seems the most appropriate translation.

³ Taken into consideration that Vermeer’s studio is located in the “attic”, one may wonder whether there would be enough room on a ‘zolder’: “bovenste verdieping onder het dak van een gebouw” (“Zolder”). In this case, the use of a hyperonym, as suggested by Chesterman (162-163), seems to provide a solution. Thus, I consider the more explicit ‘bovenverdieping’ to be the most proper alternative.

⁴ Since the source text explicitly mentions the characters are working with lace, ‘kantklossen’ is the most suitable translation of “weaving”.

Ik sloop de kamer uit, opgelucht aan het lawaai te kunnen ontsnappen, ondanks de kou die me in het atelier zou opwachten.

De deur van het atelier was gesloten. Terwijl ik ernaartoe liep perste ik mijn lippen op elkaar, maakte ik mijn wenkbrauwen glad en liet ik mijn vingers langs mijn wangen naar mijn kin glijden, alsof ik een appel testte op zijn stevigheid. Ik aarzelde even voor de zware houten deur en klopte toen zachtjes. Er kwam geen antwoord, hoewel ik wist dat hij er moest zijn – hij verwachtte me.

Het was de eerste dag van het nieuwe jaar. Hij had de onderschildering van mijn schilderij bijna een maand geleden geschilderd, maar sindsdien niets toegevoegd – geen lichtrode markeringen om de contouren aan te geven, geen valse kleuren, geen deklagen, geen hoogsels. Het doek had een nietszeggende⁵, geelachtig witte kleur. Ik zag het elke morgen als ik schoonmaakte.

Ik klopte wat harder.

Hij verscheen fronsend in de deuropening, mijn blik ontwijkend. ‘Niet kloppen, Griet, je kunt gewoon zachtjes binnenkomen,’ zei hij terwijl hij zich omdraaide en weer terugging naar de ezel, waar het lege doek op zijn kleuren stond te wachten.

Ik deed de deur zachtjes achter me dicht, waardoor het lawaai van de kinderen beneden vervaagde, en liep naar het midden van de kamer. Nu het moment dan eindelijk was aangebroken was ik verrassend kalm. ‘U had naar me gevraagd, meneer.’

‘Ja. Ga daar eens staan.’ Hij gebaarde naar de hoek waar hij die andere vrouw had geschilderd. Daar stond de tafel die hij gebruikte voor het concertschilderij⁶, maar

⁵ In this context, “blank” is more likely to stand for ‘meaningless’ rather than simply ‘empty’ or ‘white’ and therefore the proper translation is ‘nietszeggende’.

⁶ ‘Concertstuk’ is merely an alternative for ‘muziekstuk’ or ‘composition’ and does, therefore, not necessarily imply it is a painting Griet is speaking of. In the preceding chapter she describes the

de muziekinstrumenten had hij weggehaald. Hij reikte me een brief aan. ‘Lees dit eens,’ zei hij.

Ik vouwde het vel papier open en boog mij erover, bang dat hij zou ontdekken dat ik slechts deed alsof ik een onbekend handschrift aan het lezen was.

Er stond niets op het papier geschreven.

Ik keek op om hem dat te zeggen, maar bedacht me. In zijn gezelschap was het vaak beter niets te zeggen. Ik boog me weer over de brief.

‘Probeer dit anders,’ stelde hij voor terwijl hij mij een boek aanreikte. De lederen band was versleten en de rug was op verscheidene plaatsen gebroken. Ik sloeg het op goed geluk open en bestudeerde een pagina. Ik herkende geen van de woorden.

Hij liet me zitten met het boek, en me er vervolgens mee staan terwijl ik hem aankeek. Hij nam me het boek af, gaf me de witte kruik met het tinnen deksel en ik moest doen of ik een glas wijn inschonk. Hij vroeg me te gaan staan en gewoon uit het raam te kijken. Ondertussen keek hij peinzend voor zich uit⁷, alsof iemand hem zojuist een verhaal had verteld waarvan hij zich het einde niet kon herinneren.

‘Het zijn de kleren,’ mompelde hij. ‘Die zijn het probleem.’

painting as follows: “A young woman sits at a harpsichord, playing. She is wearing a yellow and black bodice – the same as the baker’s daughter wore for her painting – a white satin skirt and white ribbons in her hair. Standing in the curve of the harpsichord is another woman, who is holding music and singing. She wears a green, fur-trimmed housecoat and a blue dress. In between the women is a man sitting with his back to us –” ‘(...) All that can be seen of him is his back, his hair, and one hand on the neck of a lute,” (Chevalier 184). What Griet has just described is the exact composition of Vermeer’s *The Concert* (Vermeer, *Musicerend trio*); a fact which improves our knowledge of the contents of the painting and thus, enables the choice of a more appropriate alternative for “concert painting”. Using the actual title of the painting, *Musicerend trio*, would suggest the painting is, in this passage, already finished and named, which is most certainly not the case. Therefore, I chose the phrase ‘concertschilderij’, which covers both the contents of the painting and the painting *in se*.

⁷ The remaining part of the sentence gives an indication as to how one would describe Vermeer’s expression, “as if someone had told him a story and he couldn’t recall the ending”. Clearly, Vermeer is looking for a solution; searching, as it were, to find the answer. ‘Verward’, ‘onthutst’ or ‘verbijsterd’, three options the dictionary provides for “perplexed”, imply surprise rather than confusion and do therefore not suffice to describe what is happening here. ‘Peinzend’, however, does capture the intense thinking process Vermeer is going through in order to find the answer and is, therefore, a more suitable alternative. Since an equivalent translation of this phrase would result in something like *‘Al die tijd leek hij te peinzen’, which is not ‘good’ Dutch, I decided to combine the expression on Vermeer’s face with ‘ondertussen’ in order to create a correct phrase: ‘Ondertussen keek hij peinzend voor zich uit’.

Ik begreep het. Hij liet me dingen doen die een dame doet, maar ik droeg de kleren van een dienstmeid. Ik dacht aan de gele mantel en het geel-met-zwarte lijfje, en vroeg me af welke van de twee hij me zou vragen te dragen. Hoewel ik opgewonden zou moeten zijn bij die gedachte, voelde ik me onzeker. Het was niet alleen dat ik met geen mogelijkheid voor Catharina zou kunnen verbergen dat ik haar kleren droeg. Het voelde niet juist om boeken en brieven vast te houden, om wijn voor mezelf in te schenken, om dingen te doen die ik normaal gesproken niet deed. Hoezeer ik het zachte bont van de mantel ook om mijn hals wilde voelen; het was nou eenmaal niet wat ik gewoonlijk droeg.

‘Meneer,’ zei ik uiteindelijk, ‘misschien moet u me iets anders laten doen. Iets wat een dienstmeid doet.

‘Wat doet een dienstmeid dan?’ vroeg hij met zijn warme stem⁸ terwijl hij zijn armen over elkaar sloeg en zijn wenkbrauwen optrok.

Ik kon niet meteen antwoorden – mijn mond trilde. Ik dacht aan Pieter en mij in het steegje en slikte. ‘Naaien,’ antwoordde ik. ‘Zwabberen en vegen. Water dragen. Lakens wassen. Brood snijden. Ramen zemen.’

‘Wil je dat ik je met je zwabber schilder?’

‘Dat weet ik niet, meneer.’⁹ Het is immers niet mijn schilderij.’

Hij fronste. ‘Nee, het is inderdaad niet van jou.’ Het klonk alsof hij tegen zichzelf praatte.

⁸ Whereas ‘zachtjes’, as an equivalent of “softly”, would in Dutch rather be used to describe whispering, ‘met warme stem’ seems a more appropriate alternative, since it also manages to capture the subtext; that is to say, Griet’s feelings for Vermeer. She experiences his tone of voice as ‘warm’ *because* of these feelings.

⁹ “It’s not for me to say, sir” implies a certain balance of power, a certain submissiveness of Griet towards her master. Therefore ‘Dat is niet aan mij om te zeggen, meneer’ does not quite cover the actual meaning – in respect of the subtext — of this clause. ‘Dat weet ik niet, meneer’, however, is simple, yet multifaceted. It illustrates the dilemma Griet is in: she wants to give an honest answer to her master, but she is aware of her inferior position and thus, acts like she is expected to.

‘Ik wil niet dat u me met mijn zwabber schildert.’ Ik zei het voor ik er erg in had.

‘Nee. Nee, je hebt gelijk, Griet. Ik zou je nooit schilderen met een zwabber in je handen.’

‘Maar ik kan de kleren van uw vrouw ook niet dragen.’

Er volgde een lange stilte. ‘Nee, dat verwacht ik niet,’ zei hij. ‘Maar ik ga je ook niet schilderen als een dienstmeid.’

‘Hoe dan wel, meneer?’

‘Ik ga je schilderen zoals ik je voor het eerst zag, Griet. Gewoon jou.’

Hij zette een stoel vlakbij zijn ezel, tegenover het middelste raam, en ik ging erop zitten. Ik wist dat dit mijn plaats was. Hij zou proberen dezelfde pose te vinden die hij me een maand geleden had laten aannemen, toen hij besloten had me te schilderen.

‘Kijk eens uit het raam,’ zei hij.

Ik keek naar de grauwe winterdag buiten en probeerde, zoals ik mij herinnerde van de keer dat ik moest invallen voor de dochter van de bakker, niets te zien en mijn gedachten stil te laten worden. Dat was moeilijk, omdat ik aan hem dacht, en aan mij, in de stoel tegenover hem¹⁰.

De klok van de Nieuwe Kerk sloeg twee keer.

‘Draai je hoofd nu heel langzaam in mijn richting. Nee, niet je schouders.

Houd je lichaam naar het raam gedraaid. Beweeg alleen je hoofd. Langzaam, langzaam. Stop. Nog een klein beetje, zodat – stop. Blijf nu stilzitten.’

¹⁰ The present participle is not as commonly used in Dutch as in English and is, therefore, only seldom translated in the same form (see Analysis for elaborate explanation). In this particular phrase, “It was hard because I was thinking of him, *and of me sitting in front of him*,” I decided to make the clause more explicit (Chesterman 168) by laying the focus on Griet’s stillness and the fact that she is sitting in a chair, which she has mentioned before in the source text. This resulted in the following solution: ‘Dat was moeilijk, omdat ik aan hem dacht, *en aan mij, in de stoel tegenover hem*.’

Ik bleef stilzitten.

In het begin kon ik zijn blik niet beantwoorden. Als ik dat deed voelde het alsof ik voor een vuur zat dat ineens oplaaide. In plaats daarvan, bestudeerde ik zijn sterke kin, zijn dunne lippen.

‘Griet, je kijkt me niet aan.’

Ik dwong mezelf hem aan te kijken. Weer voelde het alsof ik brandde¹¹, maar ik hield vol – dat wilde hij.

Al snel werd het makkelijker om mijn ogen op de zijne gericht te houden. Hij keek naar me alsof hij niet mij zag, maar iemand anders, of iets anders – alsof hij naar een schilderij keek.

Hij kijkt naar het licht dat op mijn gezicht valt, dacht ik, niet naar mijn gezicht zelf. Dat is het verschil.

Het leek bijna alsof ik er niet was. Toen ik dit eenmaal besepte kon ik me een beetje ontspannen. Zoals hij mij niet zag, zag ik hem niet. Mijn gedachten dwaalden af – naar de gestoofde haas die we die avond hadden gegeten, de kanten kraag die Lisbeth me had gegeven, een verhaal dat Pieter de zoon me de dag ervoor had verteld. Daarna dacht ik nergens meer aan. Hij stond twee keer op om de stand van een van de luiken te veranderen. Hij liep een paar keer naar zijn kast om andere penselen en kleuren uit te zoeken. Ik bekeek zijn bewegingen alsof ik op straat stond en door het raam naar binnen keek.

De kerkklok sloeg driemaal. Ik knipperde. Ik had niet doorgehad dat er zoveel tijd was verstreken. Het leek alsof ik was betoverd.

¹¹ ‘In brand staan’ (or another similar construction) would suggest Griet is literally on fire. A form of ‘branden’, however, covers the fact that Griet is not simply feeling warm, but rather burning with desire.

Ik keek naar hem – zijn ogen rustten nu op mij. Hij keek me aan. Terwijl we elkaar aanstaarden trok er een golf van warmte door mijn lichaam. Toch bleef ik hem aankijken, tot hij uiteindelijk zijn blik afwendde en zijn keel schraapte.

‘Dat was het voor vandaag¹², Griet. Er ligt boven nog wat been¹³ om te malen.’

Ik knikte en glipte met bonzend hart de kamer uit. Hij was mij aan het schilderen.

‘Haal je kapje eens uit je gezicht,’ zei hij op een dag.

‘Uit mijn gezicht, meneer?’ herhaalde ik suf, waarvan ik meteen spijt kreeg. Hij had liever dat ik niet praatte, maar gewoon deed wat hij zei. Als ik dan toch praatte, moest ik zijn tijd niet verspillen.

Hij gaf geen antwoord. Ik trok de kant die voor hem zichtbaar was van mijn wang. De gesteven punt schuurde langs mijn nek.

‘Verder,’ zei hij. ‘Ik wil de contouren¹⁴ van je wang zien.’

Ik aarzelde, maar trok het toch verder naar achteren. Zijn ogen gleden over mijn wang.

‘Laat me je oor zien.’

Dat wilde ik niet. Ik had geen keuze.

¹² The more equivalent option ‘dat was alles’ [‘that will be all’] would (in Dutch) imply that Vermeer is done with the painting. Therefore, it must be made more explicit (Chesterman 168) with the addition of ‘voor vandaag’, in order to stress the fact that Vermeer refers to that particular moment rather than the painting process in general.

¹³ ‘Been’ rather than ‘kalk’ or ‘ivoor’ is the name used for the material Vermeer and his contemporaries used to grind (that is to say, the carbonized substance which remained after burning these materials) in order to obtain the pigment used for the production of black paint (Swillens 174).

¹⁴ I used ‘contouren’ rather than ‘lijnen’ or ‘omlijning’ since it is the technical term used by artists to refer to the outer line(s) of an object (or a subject, which is the case in this phrase). Moreover, the term may be considered common knowledge and is, therefore, a most appropriate translation.

Ik voelde even onder het kapje om er zeker van te zijn dat er geen haar loszat en streek wat plukken achter mijn oor. Vervolgens trok ik het kapje naar achteren zodat mijn oorlel tevoorschijn kwam.

Zijn gezichtsuitdrukking was als een zucht, hoewel hij geen geluid maakte. Ik hoorde een geluid in mijn eigen keel en onderdrukte het voordat het kon ontsnappen.

‘Je kapje,’ zei hij. ‘Doe het af.’

‘Nee, meneer.’

‘Nee?’

‘Vraagt u me dat alstublieft niet te doen, meneer.’ Ik liet de punt van het kapje zakken zodat mijn oor en wang weer werden bedekt. Ik keek naar de vloer, waar de grijze en witte tegels zich voor mij uitstrekten, strak en regelmatig.

‘Je wilt je hoofd niet ontbloten?’

‘Nee.’

‘En toch wil je niet geschilderd worden als een dienstmeid, met je zwabber en je kapje, noch als een dame, met satijn en bont en gekapt haar.’

Ik gaf geen antwoord. Ik kon hem mijn haar niet laten zien. Ik was niet het soort meisje dat haar hoofd bloot liet.

Hij schoof op zijn stoel en stond toen op. Ik hoorde hem de voorraadkamer binnengaan. Toen hij terugkwam, had hij zijn armen vol lappen stof¹⁵, die hij in mijn schoot liet vallen.

‘Nou, Griet, kijk maar wat je hiermee kan. Zoek iets uit waarmee je je hoofd kunt bedekken, zodat je dienstmeid noch dame bent.’ Ik kon er niet uit opmaken of hij boos of geamuseerd was. Hij liep de kamer uit en sloot de deur achter zich.

¹⁵ Since the word “cloth” is frequently repeated in this passage, I decided to use several synonyms (Chesterman 162), in order to avoid excessive repetition. Hence, I varied the translation of this word by using ‘stuk(ken) stof’, ‘lap(pen)’ and ‘doek(en)’.

Ik zocht door de lappen. Er zaten drie kapjes tussen, alle drie te goed voor mij, en te klein om mijn hoofd volledig mee te bedekken. Er waren stukken stof, restanten van jurken en jakjes¹⁶ die Catharina had gemaakt, in geel en bruin, blauw en grijs.

Ik wist niet wat ik doen moest. Ik keek om me heen alsof ik het antwoord zou vinden in het atelier. Mijn oog viel op het schilderij van *De koppelaarster*¹⁷ – het hoofd van de jonge vrouw was onbedekt, haar haar vastgebonden met linten, maar de oude vrouw droeg een doek, kruiselings om haar hoofd gebonden. Misschien is dát wat hij wil, dacht ik. Misschien is dat wat vrouwen die noch dame, noch dienstmeid, noch dat andere zijn met hun haar doen.

Ik koos een stuk bruine stof uit en nam het mee de voorraadkamer in, waar een spiegel was. Ik deed mijn kapje af en wikkelde de lap zo goed mogelijk om mijn hoofd, terwijl ik af en toe keek naar het schilderij om te proberen de oude vrouw na te doen. Ik zag er vreemd uit.

Eigenlijk zou ik hem mij gewoon moeten laten schilderen met een zwabber, dacht ik. Mijn trots heeft me ijdel gemaakt.

Toen hij terugkwam en zag wat ik had gedaan, moest hij lachen. Ik had hem niet vaak horen lachen – soms om de kinderen, een keer om Van Leeuwenhoek. Ik fronste. Ik vond het niet fijn als ik werd uitgelachen.

‘Ik heb gewoon gedaan wat u van mij vroeg, meneer,’ mompelde ik.

¹⁶ The “jackets” worn by women in the 17th century were called ‘jakjes’ in Dutch (Schneider 69).

¹⁷ “*The Procuress*” may refer to either the painting by Johannes Vermeer himself (1656) or an older painting of the same name by Dirck van Baburen (1622), which was evidently owned by Vermeer’s mother-in-law, Maria Thins (Schneider 24-25). Both paintings feature an old woman with unusual headwear. The painting Griet is looking at is described as follows: “the young woman’s head was bare, her hair held back with ribbons, but the old woman wore a piece of cloth wrapped around her head, crisscrossing in and out of itself” (Chevalier 193). Since the girl in Vermeer’s *The Procuress* is wearing a cap, one may assume Chevalier is referring to the 1622 brothel scene by Van Baburen, where the younger woman is bareheaded, wearing only ribbons in her hair (Vermeer, *De koppelaarster*; Van Baburen). Furthermore, the Van Baburen painting is also visible on the background of other paintings by Vermeer, namely *The Concert* and *A Lady Seated at a Virginal* (Vermeer, *Musicerend trio* and *Zittende klavecimbelspeelster*). However, the actual translation of the title poses no further problems, since both paintings are originally titled *De koppelaarster* (Schneider 24-25).

Hij stopte met grinniken. ‘Je hebt gelijk, Griet. Het spijt me. En je gezicht, nu er meer van te zien is, het is –’ Hij stopte, en heeft zijn zin nooit afgemaakt. Ik heb me altijd afgevraagd wat hij gezegd zou hebben.

Hij wendde zich tot het hoopje stof dat ik op mijn stoel had laten liggen. ‘Waarom heb je voor bruin gekozen,’ vroeg hij, ‘terwijl er andere kleuren zijn?’

Ik wilde niet weer beginnen over dienstmeiden en dames. Ik wilde hem er niet aan herinneren dat blauw en geel kleuren waren voor dames. ‘Bruin is de kleur die ik gewoonlijk draag,’ zei ik stomweg.

Hij leek te raden wat ik dacht. ‘Tanneke droeg blauw en geel toen ik haar een paar jaar geleden schilderde,’ bracht hij er tegenin.

‘Ik ben Tanneke niet, meneer.’

‘Nee, dat ben je zeker niet.’ Hij trok een lange, smalle band blauwe stof tevoorschijn. ‘Toch wil ik dat je dit probeert.’

Ik bestudeerde het. ‘Dat is niet genoeg stof om mijn hoofd mee te bedekken.’

‘Gebruik dit dan ook maar.’ Hij pakte een stuk gele stof dat een rand had van hetzelfde blauw en stak het naar me uit.

Ik nam de twee lappen met tegenzin mee terug naar de voorraadkamer en probeerde het opnieuw voor de spiegel. Ik knoopte de blauwe stof om mijn voorhoofd, met de gele lap eromheen gewikkeld, zodat mijn kruin bedekt was. Ik stopte het uiteinde weg achter een vouw aan de zijkant van mijn hoofd, schikte hier en daar wat plooiën, streek de blauwe band om mijn hoofd glad en stapte het atelier weer binnen.

Hij was een boek aan het bekijken en merkte niet op dat ik weer in mijn stoel schoof. Ik stelde mezelf weer op zoals ik eerder zat. Toen ik mijn hoofd draaide om

over mijn linkerschouder te kijken, keek hij op. Op dat moment¹⁸ liet het uiteinde van de gele lap los en viel het op mijn schouder.

‘O,’ zuchtte ik, bang dat de stof van mijn hoofd zou glijden en mijn haar zou onthullen. Maar hij bleef zitten – alleen het uiteinde van de gele lap bungelde los. Mijn haar bleef verborgen.

‘Ja,’ zei hij toen. ‘Dat is het, Griet. Ja.’

* * *

Ik mocht het schilderij niet zien van hem. Hij zette het op een tweede ezel, van de deur afgewend, en droeg me op er niet naar te kijken. Ik beloofde dat niet te doen, maar sommige nachten lag ik in bed en dacht eraan mijn deken om me heen te slaan en naar beneden te sluipen om het te zien. Hij zou het nooit te weten komen.

Maar hij zou het raden. Ik geloofde niet dat ik hem dag in dag uit naar me zou kunnen laten kijken, zonder dat hij zou raden dat ik naar het schilderij had gekeken. Ik kon niets voor hem verbergen. Dat wilde ik ook niet.

Daarbij was ik huiverig om te ontdekken hoe hij me zag. Het leek me beter om dat niet te weten.

De kleuren die hij me gevraagd had te mengen gaven ook niets prijs over wat hij aan het doen was. Zwart, oker, loodwit, lood-tin-geel, ultramarijn, karmijnrood¹⁹ – het waren stuk voor stuk kleuren waarmee ik al eerder had gewerkt, en ze konden evengoed zijn gebruikt voor het concertschilderij.

¹⁸ Although “at the same time” should be translated as ‘tegelijkertijd’, I believe ‘op dat moment’, which also covers the meaning, is an aesthetically better option.

¹⁹ “**Lake**, any of a class of pigments composed of organic dyes that have been rendered insoluble by interaction with a compound of a metal” (“Lake”). According to the dictionary, ‘lake’ is an equivalent of the Dutch ‘karmijn’, and therefore, the correct translation of “red lake” is ‘karmijnrood’.

Het was ongebruikelijk voor hem om aan twee schilderijen tegelijk te werken. Hoewel hij liever niet afwisselde tussen de twee, maakte dat het wel makkelijker om voor anderen te verbergen dat hij mij aan het schilderen was. Maar enkelen wisten ervan. Van Ruijven wist ervan – ik wist zeker dat mijn meester het schilderij maakte op zijn verzoek. Mijn meester moest erin hebben toegestemd mij alleen te schilderen, zodat hij me niet met Van Ruijven hoefde te schilderen. Van Ruijven zou het schilderij van mij in bezit krijgen.

Die gedachte stond me niet aan. En ik geloofde dat ze mijn meester evenmin beviel.

(...)

Toch kon ik niet ontkennen dat het spannend was om zo aandachtig te worden bestudeerd door twee heren, zelfs al kon ik hun gezichten niet zien.

Mijn meester liep de kamer uit om een zachte doek te vinden waarmee hij de lens kon poetsen. Van Leeuwenhoek wachtte tot hij zijn voetstappen op de trap hoorde en zei toen zacht: ‘Pas op jezelf, kind.’

‘Wat bedoelt u, meneer?’

‘Je moet weten dat hij je schildert om Van Ruijven tevreden te stellen. Van Ruivens belangstelling voor jou heeft jouw meester beschermend gemaakt.’

Ik knikte, heimelijk blij te horen wat ik al had vermoed.

‘Zorg dat je niet in hun strijd verwickeld raakt. Je zou gekwetst kunnen worden.’

Ik zat nog altijd in de pose die ik had aangenomen voor het schilderij. Mijn schouders maakten een krampachtige beweging, alsof ik een sjaal van me afschudde.

‘Ik geloof niet dat hij me ooit kwaad zou doen, meneer.’

‘Zeg me eens, kind, wat weet je allemaal over mannen?’

Ik bloosde hevig en wendde mijn hoofd af. Ik dacht aan de keren dat ik met Pieter de zoon in het steegje was.

‘Concurrentie maakt mannen bezitterig, weet je. Hij is deels in jou geïnteresseerd omdat Van Ruijven dat is.’

Ik gaf geen antwoord.

‘Hij is een bijzondere man,’ vervolgde Van Leeuwenhoek. ‘Zijn ogen zijn een kamer vol goud waard. Maar soms ziet hij de wereld alleen zoals hij hem wil zien, niet zoals hij is. Hij ziet niet in wat de consequenties van zijn gezichtspunt zijn voor anderen. Hij denkt alleen aan zichzelf en zijn werk, niet aan jou. Je moet dan zorgen dat –’ Hij stopte. De voetstappen van mijn meester klonken op de trap.

‘Zorgen waarvoor, meneer?’²⁰ fluisterde ik.

‘Zorgen dat je jezelf blijft.’

Ik hief mijn kin naar hem op. ‘Dat ik een maagd²¹ blijf, meneer?’

‘Dat is niet wat ik bedoel. De vrouwen in zijn schilderijen – hij neemt ze gevangen in zijn wereld. Je kan daar verdwaald raken.’

Mijn meester kwam de kamer binnen. ‘Griet, je hebt je bewogen,’ zei hij.

‘Het spijt me, meneer.’ Ik nam mijn pose opnieuw aan.

²⁰ The alternative ‘Zorgen dat wat, meneer?’ sounds rather unlike the way Griet would be supposed to talk to a gentleman like Van Leeuwenhoek. It is simply too blunt and impolite and therefore, I opted for a slightly more polite question, namely ‘Zorgen waarvoor, meneer?’.

²¹ Although the word “maid” has several meanings, the preceding sentence gives a clear indication as to what the correct interpretation should be in this case. Griet lifting her chin is a sign of chastity; with this gesture she wants to show Van Leeuwenhoek that she intends on remaining a virgin. Therefore, “maid” should in this phrase be translated as ‘maagd’.

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Excerpt from Tracy Chevalier, *Girl with a Pearl Earring*

A month before he had asked me to come up to the studio. ‘I will be in the attic,’ I announced to the room that afternoon.

Tanneke did not look up from her sewing. ‘Put some more wood on the fire before you go,’ she ordered.

The girls were working on their lace, overseen by Maertge and Maria Thins. Lisbeth had patience and nimble fingers, and produced good work, but Aleydis was still too young to manage the delicate weaving, and Cornelia too impatient. The cat sat at Cornelia’s feet by the fire, and occasionally the girl reached down and dangled a bit of thread for the creature to paw at. Eventually, she probably hoped, the cat would tear its claws through her work and ruin it.

After feeding the fire I stepped around Johannes, who was playing with a top on the cold kitchen tiles. As I left he spun it wildly, and it hopped straight into the fire. He began to cry while Cornelia shrieked with laughter and Maertge tried to haul the toy from the flames with a pair of tongs.

‘Hush, you’ll wake Catharina and Franciscus,’ Maria Thins warned the children. They did not hear her.

I crept out, relieved to escape the noise, no matter how cold it would be in the studio.

The studio door was shut. As I approached it I pressed my lips together, smoothed my eyebrows, and ran my fingers down the sides of my cheeks to my chin, as if I were testing an apple to see if it was firm. I hesitated in front of the heavy wooden door, then knocked softly. There was no answer, though I knew he must be there – he was expecting me.

It was the first day of the new year. He had painted the ground layer of my painting almost a month before, but nothing since – no reddish marks to indicate the shapes, no false colours, no overlaid colours, no highlights. The canvas was a blank yellowish white. I saw it every morning as I cleaned.

I knocked louder.

When the door opened he was frowning, his eyes not catching mine. ‘Don’t knock, Griet, just come in quietly,’ he said, turning away and going back to the easel, where the blank canvas sat waiting for its colours.

I closed the door softly behind me, blotting out the noise of the children downstairs, and stepped to the middle of the room. Now that the moment had come at last I was surprisingly calm. ‘You wanted me, sir.’

‘Yes. Stand over there.’ He gestured to the corner where he had painted the other woman. The table he was using for the concert painting was set there, but he had cleared away the musical instruments. He handed me a letter. ‘Read that,’ he said.

I unfolded the sheet of paper and bowed my head over it, worried that he would discover I was only pretending to read an unfamiliar hand.

Nothing was written on the paper.

I looked up to tell him so, but stopped. With him it was often better to say nothing. I bowed my head again over the letter.

‘Try this instead,’ he suggested, handing me a book. It was bound in worn leather and the spine was broken in several places. I opened it at random and studied a page. I did not recognise any of the words.

He had me sit with the book, then stand holding it while looking at him. He took away the book, handed me the white jug with the pewter top and had me pretend to pour a glass of wine. He asked me to stand and simply look out the window. All the

while he seemed perplexed, as if someone had told him a story and he couldn't recall the ending.

‘It is the clothes,’ he murmured. ‘That is the problem.’

I understood. He was having me do things a lady would do, but I was wearing a maid's clothes. I thought of the yellow mantle and the yellow and black bodice, and wondered which he would ask me to wear. Instead of being excited about the idea, though, I felt uneasy. It was not just that it would be impossible to hide from Catharina that I was wearing her clothes. I did not feel right holding books and letters, pouring myself wine, doing things I never did. As much as I wanted to feel the soft fur of the mantle around my neck, it was not what I normally wore.

‘Sir,’ I spoke finally, ‘perhaps you should have me do other things. Things that a maid does.’

‘What does a maid do?’ he asked softly, folding his arms and raising his eyebrows.

I had to wait a moment before I could answer – my jaw was trembling. I thought of Pieter and me in the alley and swallowed. ‘Sewing,’ I replied. ‘Mopping and sweeping. Carrying water. Washing sheets. Cutting bread. Polishing windowpanes.’

‘You would like me to paint you with your mop?’

‘It's not for me to say, sir. It is not my painting.’

He frowned. ‘No, it is not yours.’ He sounded as if he were speaking to himself.

‘I do not want you to paint me with my mop.’ I said it without knowing that I would.

‘No. No, you're right, Griet. I would not paint you with a mop in your hand.’

‘But I cannot wear your wife’s clothes.’

There was a long silence. ‘No, I expect not,’ he said. ‘But I will not paint you as a maid.’

‘What then, sir?’

‘I will paint you as I first saw you, Griet. Just you.’

He set a chair near his easel, facing the middle window, and I sat down. I knew it was to be my place. He was going to find the pose he had put me in a month before, when he had decided to paint me.

‘Look out the window,’ he said.

I looked out at the grey winter day and, remembering when I stood in for the baker’s daughter, tried not to see anything but to let my thoughts become quiet. It was hard because I was thinking of him, and of me sitting in front of him.

The New Church bell struck twice.

‘Now turn your head very slowly towards me. No, not your shoulders. Keep your body turned towards the window. Move only your head. Slow, slow. Stop. A little more, so that – stop. Now sit still.’

I sat still.

At first I could not meet his eyes. When I did it was like sitting close to a fire that suddenly blazes up. Instead I studied his firm chin, his thin lips.

‘Griet, you are not looking at me.’

I forced my gaze up to his eyes. Again I felt as if I were burning, but I endured it – he wanted me to.

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. Twice he got up to change the position of one of the shutters. He went to his cupboard several times to choose different brushes and colours. I viewed his movements as if I were standing in the street, looking in through the window.

The church bell struck three times. I blinked. I had not felt so much time pass. It was as if I had fallen under a spell.

I looked at him – his eyes were with me now. He was looking at me. As we gazed to each other a ripple of heat passed through my body. I kept my eyes on his, though, until at last he looked away and cleared his throat.

‘That will be all, Griet. There is some bone for you to grind upstairs.’

I nodded and slipped from the room, my heart pounding. He was painting me.

‘Pull your cap back from your face,’ he said one day.

‘Back from my face, sir?’ I repeated dumbly, and regretted it. He preferred me not to speak, but to do as he said. If I did speak, I should say something worth the words.

He did not answer. I pulled the side of my cap that was closest to him back from my cheek. The starched tip grazed my neck.

‘More,’ he said. ‘I want to see the line of your cheek.’

I hesitated, then pulled it back further. His eyes moved down my cheek.

‘Show me your ear.’

I did not want to. I had no choice.

I felt under the cap to make sure no hair was loose, tucking a few strands behind my ear. Then I pulled it back to reveal the lower part of my ear.

The look on his face was like a sigh, though he did not make a sound. I caught a noise in my own throat and pushed it down so that it would not escape.

‘Your cap,’ he said. ‘Take it off.’

‘No, sir.’

‘No?’

‘Please do not ask me to, sir.’ I let the cloth of the cap drop so that my ear and cheek were covered again. I looked at the floor, the grey and white tiles extending away from me, clean and straight.

‘You do not want to bare your head?’

‘No.’

‘Yet you do not want to be painted as a maid, with your mop and your cap, nor as a lady, with satin and fur and dressed hair.’

I did not answer. I could not show him my hair. I was not the sort of girl who left her head bare.

He shifted in his chair, then got up. I heard him go into the storeroom. When he returned, his arms were full of cloth, which he dropped in my lap.

‘Well, Griet, see what you can do with this. Find something here to wrap your head in, so that you are neither a lady nor a maid.’ I could not tell if he was angry or amused. He left the room, shutting the door behind him.

I sorted through the cloth. There were three caps, all too fine for me, and too small to cover my head fully. There were pieces of cloth, left over from dresses and jackets Catharina had made, in yellows and browns, blues and greys.

I did not know what to do. I looked around as if I would find an answer in the studio. My eyes fell on the painting of *The Procuress* – the young woman's head was bare, her hair held back with ribbons, but the old woman wore a piece of cloth wrapped around her head, crisscrossing in and out of itself. Perhaps that is what he wants, I thought. Perhaps that is what women who are neither ladies nor maids nor the other do with their hair.

I chose a piece of brown cloth and took it into the storeroom, where there was a mirror. I removed my cap and wound the cloth around my head as best as I could, checking the painting to try to imitate the old woman's. I looked very peculiar.

I should let him paint me with a mop, I thought. Pride has made me vain.

When he returned and saw what I had done, he laughed. I had not heard him laugh often – sometimes with the children, once with van Leeuwenhoek. I frowned. I did not like being laughed at.

'I have only done what you asked, sir,' I muttered.

He stopped chuckling. 'You're right, Griet. I'm sorry. And your face, now that I can see more of it, it is –' He stopped, never finishing his sentence. I always wondered what he would have said.

He turned to the pile of cloth I had left on my chair. 'Why did you choose brown,' he asked, 'when there are other colours?'

I did not want to speak of maids and ladies again. I did not want to remind him that blues and yellows were ladies' colours. 'Brown is the colour I usually wear,' I said simply.

He seemed to guess what I was thinking. ‘Tanneke wore blue and yellow when I painted her some years ago,’ he countered.

‘I am not Tanneke, sir.’

‘No, that you certainly are not.’ He pulled out a long, narrow band of blue cloth. ‘None the less, I want you to try this.’

I studied it. ‘That is not enough cloth to cover my head.’

‘Use this as well, then.’ He picked up a piece of yellow cloth that had a border of the same blue and held it out to me.

Reluctantly I took the two pieces of cloth back to the storeroom and tried again in front of the mirror. I tied the blue cloth over my forehead, with the yellow piece wound round and round, covering the crown of my head. I tucked the end into a fold at the side of my head, adjusted folds here and there, smoothed the blue cloth round my head, and stepped back into the studio.

He was looking at a book and did not notice as I slipped into my chair. I arranged myself as I had been sitting before. As I turned my head to look over my left shoulder, he glanced up. At the same time the end of the yellow cloth came loose and fell over my shoulder.

‘Oh,’ I breathed, afraid that the cloth would fall from my head and reveal all my hair. But it held – only the end of the yellow cloth dangled free. My hair remained hidden.

‘Yes,’ he said then. ‘That is it, Griet. Yes.’

* * *

He would not let me see the painting. He set it on a second easel, angled away from the door, and told me not to look at it. I promised not to, but some nights I lay in bed and thought about wrapping my blanket around me and stealing downstairs to see it. He would never know.

But he would guess. I did not think I could sit with him looking at me day after day without guessing that I had looked at the painting. I could not hide things from him. I did not want to.

I was reluctant, too, to discover how it was that he saw me. It was better to leave that a mystery.

The colours he asked me to mix gave no clues as to what he was doing. Black, ochre, lead white, lead-tin yellow, ultramarine, red lake – they were all colours I had worked with before, and they could as easily have been used for the concert painting.

It was unusual for him to work on two paintings at once. Although he did not like switching back and forth between the two, it did make it easier to hide from others that he was painting me. A few people knew. Van Ruijven knew – I was sure it was at his request that my master was making the painting. My master must have agreed to paint me alone so that he would not have to paint me with van Ruijven. Van Ruijven would own the painting of me.

I was not pleased by this thought. Nor, I believed, was my master.

(...)

I could not deny, however, that it was exciting to be studied so intently by two gentlemen, even if I could not see their faces.

My master left the room to find a soft cloth to polish the lens. Van Leeuwenhoek waited until his tread could be heard on the stairs, then said softly, 'You watch out for yourself, my dear.'

'What do you mean, sir?'

'You must know that he's painting you to satisfy van Ruijven. Van Ruijven's interest in you has made your master protective of you.'

I nodded, secretly pleased to hear what I had suspected.

'Do not get caught in their battle. You could be hurt.'

I was still holding the position I had assumed for the painting. Now my shoulders twitched of their own accord, as if I were shaking off a shawl. 'I do not think he would ever hurt me, sir.'

'Tell me, my dear, how much do you know of men?'

I blushed deeply and turned my head away. I was thinking of being in the alley with Pieter the son.

'You see, competition makes men possessive. He is interested in you in part because van Ruijven is.'

I did not answer.

'He is an exceptional man,' van Leeuwenhoek continued. 'His eyes are worth a room full of gold. But sometimes he sees the world only as he wants it to be, not as it is. He does not understand the consequences for others of his point of view. He thinks only of himself and his work, not of you. You must take care then –' He stopped. My master's footsteps were on the stairs.

'Take care to do what, sir?' I whispered.

'Take care to remain yourself.'

I lifted my chin to him. 'To remain a maid, sir?'

‘That is not what I mean. The women in his paintings – he traps them in his world. You can get lost there.’

My master came into the room. ‘Griet, you have moved,’ he said.

‘I am sorry, sir.’ I took up my position once more.

Word Count

Introduction + Analysis	4351 Words
Source Text	2982 Words
Translation	3103 Words
Footnotes (2-21)	1113 Words