

Critical Lens Analysis: *Girl With a Pearl Earring*

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Gender-related stereotypes are prominent in today's society, and they have been a large part of society for as long as the two genders have been separate. Stereotypes leak into literature produced by authors from cultures affected by them, and can also find their way into literature written about those cultures. *Girl With a Pearl Earring* by Tracy Chevalier and *The Three Musketeers* by Alexandre Dumas, set in the 1600s, both include important stereotypes that existed during the time period of the setting, as well as the time periods of the respective authors. They can both be examined for their references to gender and how gender is dealt with in the books. Women tend to be referred to as weaker, and they often don't have as much standing in their family as men do. They are also often portrayed to be more emotional than men. These stereotypes tend to show great hierarchical and behavioral differences between men and women, and they are reflected in both books.

The Three Musketeers tells the story of a young nobleman, d'Artagnan, from a poor family as he leaves his house and progresses into the world. When he departs, his father gives him a letter for his father's friend, Monsieur de Tréville, who is the commander of the King's Musketeers. D'Artagnan stops in a small town and instigates a fight, after which the letter is stolen from his unconscious body. After promising to avenge the letter's loss, he sets out to Paris only to be rejected by Tréville. As he leaves the commander's anteroom, he attracts negative attention from three prominent Musketeers: Porthos, Athos and Aramis. The four men bond after working together to duel their rivals, and the story goes on to recount their adventures together. Dumas also tells of an imprisoned noblewoman who manipulates her guards to carry out political deeds, and whose story is intertwined with that of d'Artagnan. The story ends with each musketeer finding his place in life. Dumas's story refers regularly to the gender lens. In some cases, Dumas emphasizes the superiority of men; in others, he points out the weaknesses of female characters. These ideas are presented to the reader often, impressing upon the reader their supposed validity.

Chevalier's novel *Girl With a Pearl Earring* is based on the painting of the same name by Johannes Vermeer. The events of the story take place during Vermeer's life in the 1600s, in Vermeer's hometown of Delft in the Netherlands. The main character is one of Vermeer's maids. Chevalier based the entire premise of the story on what she could glean from the painting, as well as knowledge of Vermeer's personal life. Griet, the girl in the painting, is forced to become a maid after her father is stripped of his job, which is the family's only source of income. Vermeer takes her in, and she supports her family with the money she makes. Griet's dad, who is now blind, is interested in Vermeer's paintings and demands that Griet explain the paintings to him whenever she comes back to the house. On the job, she meets a young butcher, Pieter, who takes an interest in her. Griet, as the book progresses more, becomes interested in her master, and she eventually distances herself from the Vermeer family to marry Pieter. Much like Dumas's writing, this book contains suppositions that men are superior to women, and that women have significant weaknesses. The 'in-passing' appearance of these stereotypes discourages the reader from questioning their prejudice.

Female characters in both stories unsuccessfully attempt to attract men, but the men do not need to work hard to attract women. Griet, the main character of *Girl With a Pearl Earring*, narrates her story; everything that she thinks is printed on the page for the reader to take into account when considering her actions. Griet, while thinking about her master's kindness during her service for him and how she feels about him, thinks, "It was I who felt differently about him. I felt indebted. I felt