

= Girl with a Pearl Earring ( film ) =

Girl with a Pearl Earring is a 2003 drama film directed by Peter Webber . The screenplay was adapted by screenwriter Olivia Hetreed , based on the novel of the same name by Tracy Chevalier . Scarlett Johansson stars as Griet , a young 17th @-@ century servant in the household of the Dutch painter Johannes Vermeer ( played by Colin Firth ) at the time he painted Girl with a Pearl Earring ( 1665 ) in the city of Delft in Holland . Other cast members include Tom Wilkinson , Cillian Murphy , and Judy Parfitt .

Hetreed read the novel before its publication , and her husband 's production company convinced Chevalier to sell the film rights . Initially , the production was to feature Kate Hudson as Griet with Mike Newell directing . Hudson withdrew shortly before filming began , however , and the film was placed in hiatus until the hire of Webber , who re @-@ initiated the casting process . In this , which was his feature film debut , Webber sought to avoid employing traditional characteristics of the period film drama . Cinematographer Eduardo Serra used distinctive lighting and colour schemes similar to Vermeer 's paintings .

Released on 12 December 2003 in North America and on 16 January 2004 in the United Kingdom , Girl with a Pearl Earring earned a worldwide gross of \$ 31 @,@ 466 @,@ 789 . It garnered a mostly positive critical reception , with a 72 % approval rating from Rotten Tomatoes . Critics generally applauded the film 's visuals and performances while questioning elements of its story . The film was subsequently nominated for ten British Academy Film Awards , three Academy Awards , and two Golden Globe Awards .

= = Plot = =

Griet ( Scarlett Johansson ) is a shy girl living in the Dutch Republic in 1665 . Her father , a Delftware painter , has recently gone blind , rendering him unable to work and putting his family in a precarious financial situation . To help matters , Griet is sent to work as a maid in the household of famed painter Johannes Vermeer ( Colin Firth ) . Griet works hard , almost wordlessly , in the lowest position in a harsh hierarchy , doing her best despite spiteful treatment by one of Vermeer 's children . While she is on a routine shopping trip outside the house , a butcher 's son , Pieter ( Cillian Murphy ) , notices Griet and falls in love with her , even though she is slow to return his affections .

As Griet cleans Vermeer 's studio , which his wife Catharina ( Essie Davis ) never enters , the painter begins to converse with her and encourages her appreciation of painting , light and color . Vermeer gives her lessons in mixing paints and other tasks , taking care to keep this secret from his wife , who would react with anger and jealousy if she found out that her husband was spending time with Griet . In contrast , Vermeer 's pragmatic mother @-@ in @-@ law , Maria Thins ( Judy Parfitt ) , sees Griet as useful to Vermeer 's career .

Vermeer 's rich patron , Van Ruijven ( Tom Wilkinson ) , notices Griet on a visit to the Vermeer household and asks the painter if he will give her up to work in his own house , a situation which ruined a previous girl . Vermeer refuses , but accepts a commission to paint a portrait of Griet for Van Ruijven .

As Vermeer secretly works on the eponymous painting , Catharina cannot help but notice something is amiss and her growing jealousy of Griet becomes apparent . As Griet deals with her growing fascination with Vermeer and his talent , she has to fend off Van Ruijven 's attempt to rape her . Soon afterwards , Catharina 's mother summons Griet , hands over her daughter 's pearl earrings , and instructs Griet to finish the painting while Catharina is away for the day . At the final painting session Vermeer pierces Griet 's earlobe so she can wear one of the pearl earrings for the portrait ; she then runs to Pieter to be consoled . They caress and make love in a barn . Afterwards , Pieter proposes marriage , but she shakes her head and leaves . She then returns the earrings to Catharina 's mother .

Catharina discovers that Griet used her earrings , accuses her mother of complicity , and demands Vermeer show her the painting of Griet . Heartbroken that Vermeer does not consider her worthy of being painted because she " doesn 't understand , " Catharina tries but fails to destroy the painting ,

then banishes Griet from the house forever . Vermeer does not object , and Griet leaves the house in shock . Later , Griet is visited by the cook from the house , who comes bearing a gift : a sealed packet containing the blue headscarf she wore in the painting , wrapped around Catharina 's pearl earrings .

= = Cast = =

= = Production = =

= = = Development = = =

The production of *Girl with a Pearl Earring* began in 1999 , when screenwriter Olivia Hetreed gained access to the eponymous novel shortly before its publication in August . The novel had not yet become a best @-@ seller , but several groups were beginning to show interest . Hetreed loved the character of Griet and " ... her determination to be free in a world where that was almost impossible for a girl from her background . " Anand Tucker and Hetreed 's husband Andy Paterson ? both producers with the small British studio Archer Street Films ? approached the novel 's author , Tracy Chevalier , for a film adaptation . Chevalier agreed , believing that a British studio would help resist Hollywood 's urge " ... to sex up the film . " She stipulated that their adaptation avoid having the main characters consummate their relationship . Paterson and Tucker promised to " ... replicate the ' emotional truth ' of the story ... , " and Chevalier did not seek to retain control during the film 's creative process , though she briefly considered adapting it herself .

Hetreed worked closely with Tucker and Webber to adapt the book , explaining that " ... working with them on drafts helped me to concentrate on what the film would be , rather than how beautifully I could make a line work . " Her first draft was closest to the source material and it slowly " ... developed its own character ... " through rewrites . She avoided using a voiceover , which was present in the novel , " ... partly because it would make it very literary . " Instead , she focused on conveying Griet 's thoughts visually ? for example , in her adaptation Griet and Vermeer inspect the camera obscura together under his cloak amidst sexual tension ; whereas , in the novel Griet views it alone immediately after him and enjoys the lasting warmth and scent he leaves .

The novel maximises the few known facts of Vermeer 's life , which Hetreed described as " ... little pillars sticking up out of the dust of history . " To learn more about the artist , the screenwriter researched Dutch society in the 17th @-@ century , talked to artist friends about painting , and interviewed a Victoria & Albert Museum art historian who had restored the original artwork . Hetreed stayed in close contact with Chevalier , and the two became so close near the end of the production that they presented a Master class together on screenwriting .

= = = Casting = = =

Originally , the American actress Kate Hudson was cast as Griet , having successfully pursued the role from the film 's producers . In September 2001 , however , Hudson pulled out four weeks before filming began , officially due to " creative differences " . Hudson 's decision scuppered the production and led to the loss of financial support from the production company Intermedia . It also resulted in the withdrawal of Mike Newell as director and Ralph Fiennes as Vermeer ; Fiennes left the project to work on his 2002 film *Maid in Manhattan* . Due to this incident , The Guardian reported that it " ... now seems unlikely that the film will ever be made . "

Production commenced again later that year when the producers hired the relatively unknown British television director Peter Webber to helm the project , despite his not having directed a feature film before . Tucker and Paterson already knew Webber from several earlier projects ; the director discovered the project by accident after visiting their office , where he noticed a poster of Vermeer 's work and began discussing it . Webber read the script and described it as being " ... about creativity

and the link between art and money and power and sex in some strange unholy mixture . " Characterising it as a " coming of age " story with a " fascinating dark undertow , " Webber deliberately did not read the book prior to filming , as he was concerned about being influenced by it , opting instead to rely on the script and the period .

The casting of Griet was Webber 's first major step , and led to interviews with 150 girls before Webber chose the seventeen @-@ year @-@ old actress Scarlett Johansson . He felt that she " ... just stood out . She had something distinctive about her . " Johansson seemed very modern to Webber , but he believed this was a positive attribute , realising " ... that what would work was to take this intelligent , zippy girl and repress all that . " The actress finished filming *Lost in Translation* immediately before arriving on set in Luxembourg , and consequently prepared little for the role . She considered the script " beautifully written " and the character " very touching " , but did not read the book because she thought it would be better to approach the story with a " clean slate . "

After the hiring of Johansson , other major casting decisions quickly followed , beginning with the addition of English actor Colin Firth as Vermeer . Firth and Webber , both of a similar age and background , spent significant time discussing Vermeer 's personality and lifestyle in the period leading up to the beginning of filming . While researching the role , Firth realised that Vermeer was " incredibly elusive as an artist . " As a result , unlike Webber and Johansson , Firth chose to read the book to gain a better grasp of a man of whom little information existed on his private life . Firth sought to " invent " the character and discover his motivations , and ultimately identified with the artist for having a private space in the midst of a bustling family . Firth also studied painting techniques and visited museums carrying Vermeer works .

After Firth , Webber 's next casting decision was Tom Wilkinson as the patron Pieter van Ruijven , who was hired in late 2002 . He was soon joined by Judy Parfitt as Vermeer 's domineering mother @-@ in @-@ law , and Essie Davis , who portrayed Vermeer 's wife Catharina . The Australian daughter of an artist , Davis did not believe her character was the film 's " bad guy , " as " ... [ Catharina ] has a certain role to play in order for you to want Griet and Vermeer to be involved . " Cillian Murphy , known for his recent role in *28 Days Later* , was hired as Pieter , Griet 's butcher love interest . Murphy , taking on his first period film role , was interested in serving as a foil to Firth 's Vermeer , and representing the " ordinary " world that Griet seeks to avoid upon her meeting the artist . Other cast members included Joanna Scanlan as the maid Tanneke , as well as the young actresses Alakina Mann and Anna Popplewell as Vermeer 's daughters , Cornelia and Maertge , respectively .

= = = Filming = = =

During preproduction , Webber and cinematographer Eduardo Serra studied the period 's artwork and discussed the different moods they wanted to create for each scene . The director was a lover of the Stanley Kubrick period drama *Barry Lyndon* , but knew that *Girl With a Pearl Earring* would be different ; unlike the former film 's " ... elaborate and expensive set pieces ... , " Webber 's production was to be " ... about the intimate relationships within a single household . " He was not seeking to create a historically accurate biographical film of Vermeer ; Webber sought to direct a period film that avoided being " overly slavish " to characteristics of the genre , desiring instead to " ... bring the film to life ... " and have viewers " ... be able almost to smell the meat in the market . " Webber employed little dialogue and drew inspiration from the " ... quiet , tense , mysterious , transcendent world ... " of Vermeer 's paintings . The director also made a conscious effort to slow the pace of the film , hoping that by " ... slowing things down [ we could ] create these moments in between the dialogue that were full of emotion . And the more silent the film became , the closer it seemed to be to the condition of those Vermeer paintings and the closer it seemed to capture some kind of truth . "

The film was budgeted at £ 10 million . While it is set in Delft , the film was primarily shot in Amsterdam , Belgium , and Luxembourg . Chevalier later remarked that Webber and Serra " ... needed absolute control of the space and light they worked with ? something they could never achieve by shutting down a busy Delft street for an hour or two . " Only a few exterior shots were

filmed in Delft .

Webber hired Ben van Os as his production designer because " ... he wasn 't intimidated by the period obligations . He was much more interested in story and character . " For inspiration in constructing the film 's sets , Webber and van Os studied the works of Vermeer and other artists of the period , such as Gerard ter Borch . Set designer Todd van Hulzen said the goal was to " ... reflect that quiet , sober , almost moralizing ethos that you see in Dutch paintings . " They built Vermeer 's house on one of Luxembourg 's largest film soundstages , a three @-@ story set where they designed rooms that were meant to convey a lack of privacy . According to van Os , the film was about " being observed , " so they intended Griet to always feel that she was being watched . In addition , they built two other interior sets to represent the homes of Griet and van Ruijven ? Griet 's home possessed Calvinistic characteristics while van Ruijven 's contained mounted animals to reflect his " predatory nature . " The Mauritshuis museum made a high resolution photograph of the actual painting , which was then shot on a rostrum camera to be used in the film .

According to Webber , Serra " ... was obsessed with reproducing the amazing use of light by the artists of that period , and most particularly Vermeer 's use of it . " To reflect the " magical luminosity " of Vermeer 's artwork , Serra employed diffused lighting and different film stock when filming scenes in the artist 's studio . Webber and Serra did not want to be too reliant on Vermeer 's aesthetic , however ; they wanted audiences to come away focusing their praise on its story , not its visuals .

= = = Costume design and make @-@ up = = =

In desiring to avoid stereotypes of the costume drama , Webber costumed his actors in simple outfits he termed " period Prada , " rather than use the ruffles and baggy costumes common for the era . The intent was to " ... take the real clothes from the period and reduce them to their essence . " Costume designer Dien van Straalen explored London and Holland markets in search for period fabrics , including curtains and slipcovers . For Griet , van Straalen employed " ... pale colors for Scarlett Johansson to give her the drab look of a poor servant girl . " Firth was also outfitted simply , as Vermeer was not rich . Van Straalen created more elaborate costumes for Wilkinson , as van Ruijven was to her " ... a peacock strutting around with his money . "

Make @-@ up and hair designer Jenny Shircore desired that Griet appear without make @-@ up , so Johansson was given very little ; rather , Shircore focused on maintaining the actress ' skin as " ... milky , thick and creamy ... , " and bleached her eyebrows . They gave Davis as Catharina a " ... very simple Dutch hairstyle ... , " which they learned from studying drawings and prints of the period .

= = = Music = = =

The musical score for Girl with a Pearl Earring was written by the French composer Alexandre Desplat . Webber decided to hire Desplat after hearing a score he had composed for a Jacques Audiard film . Webber explained , " He had a sense of restraint and a sense of lyricism that I liked . I remember the first time I saw the cue where Griet opens the shutters . He was really describing what the light was doing , articulating that in a musical sphere . " Desplat was then known primarily for scoring films in his native language .

The score employs strings , piano , and woodwinds , with a central theme featuring a variety of instrumental forms . Desplat created a melody that recurs throughout the film , stating in a later interview that " ... it evolves and it 's much more flowing with a very gentle theme that 's haunting . " The score , his career breakthrough , gained him international attention and garnered him further film projects . The soundtrack was released in 2004 ; it earned a nomination for the Golden Globe Award for Best Original Score , helping increase Desplat 's name recognition in Hollywood .

Desplat 's work also garnered positive reviews . The New York Times described it as a " ... gorgeous score ... " which " ... brushes in a haunted gloom that gives the picture life where none seems to exist ... , " whilst Boston.com said it " ... burbles with elegant baroque minimalism . "

Empire magazine called his score " ... a supremely elegant work ... " that " ... creates a captivating atmosphere of cautious emotion and wonderment , the true highlight being ' Colour in the Clouds ' , so simply majestic that it really captures the heart of the story . "

= = = Editing = = =

In the interest of shortening the adaptation , approximately one @-@ third of the story was eventually edited out ; entire subplots and characters were removed . Before becoming a screenwriter Hetreed worked as an editor , and credits this experience for knowing " ... about structure and what you need to say and what you can leave out . I am a big enthusiast for leaving things out . " She focused the story on the relationship between Griet and Vermeer , deciding what other storylines were " ... distracting and had to be jettisoned . Before editing , there was great stuff there , but Peter was fantastically ruthless . " Changes from the novel did not bother Chevalier , who felt that as a result the film gained " ... a focused , driven plot and a sumptuous visual feast . "

= = Themes and analysis = =

According to Webber , *Girl with a Pearl Earring* is " ... more than just a quaint little film about art ... " but is concerned with themes of money , sex , repression , obsession , power , and the human heart . Laura M. Sager Eidt in her book , *Writing and Filming the Painting : Ekphrasis in Literature and Film* , asserts that the film deviates significantly from the source material and emphasises a " ... socio @-@ political dimension that is subtler in the novel . " *Girl with a Pearl Earring* , Sager Eidt says , " ... shifts its focus from a young girl 's evolving consciousness to the class and power relations in the story . "

In his work , *Film England : Culturally English Filmmaking Since the 1990s* , author Andrew Higson notes that the film overcomes the novel 's " subjective narration " device by having the camera stay fixed on Griet for much of the film . But , Higson says , " ... no effort is made to actually render her point of view as the point of view of the film or the spectator . "

Vermeer channels Griet 's sexual awakening into his painting , with the piercing of her ear and his directives to her posing being inherently sexual . In the opinion of psychologist Rosemary Rizq , the pearl Griet dons is a metaphor , something which normally would convey wealth and status . But , when worn by Griet the pearl is also a directive to the audience to look at the " ... psychological potential within ... " her erotic , unconsummated bond with Vermeer , unclear up to that point if it is real or not .

The film incorporates seven of Vermeer 's paintings into its story . Thomas Leitch , in his book *Film Adaptation and Its Discontents : From Gone with the Wind to The Passion of the Christ* , writes that while Chevalier 's Griet describes ten Vermeer paintings ( without naming them ) , Webber 's film avoids " ... show [ ing ] an external world that looks like a series of Vermeer paintings ... , " as this would have been a trivialisation of the artist 's achievements . Leitch adds the director " ... compromises by showing far fewer actual Vermeer paintings than Chevalier 's Griet describes but lingering longer over the visual particulars of the studio in which he creates them . "

= = Release = =

= = = Box office = = =

*Girl With a Pearl Earring* 's world premiere occurred at the Telluride Film Festival on 31 August 2003 . In North America it was distributed by Lions Gate Entertainment . The film was limited in release to seven cinemas on 12 December 2003 , landing in 32nd place for the week with \$ 89 @ , @ 472 . Lions Gate slowly increased its release to a peak of 402 cinemas by 6 February 2004 . Its total domestic gross was \$ 11 @ , @ 670 @ , @ 971 .

The film was released in the United Kingdom on 16 January 2004 by Pathé Films . In its opening

week , the film finished in tenth place with a total of £ 384 @, @ 498 from 106 cinemas . In the UK and Ireland , the film finished in fourteenth place for the year with a total box office gross of £ 3 @. @ 84 million . It garnered a total worldwide gross of \$ 31 @, @ 466 @, @ 789 .

= = = Home media = = =

In the US , the Girl With a Pearl Earring DVD was released on 4 May 2004 by Lions Gate . The Region 2 DVD 's release on 31 May 2004 included audio commentaries from Webber , Paterson , Hetreed , and Chevalier ; a featurette on " The Art of Filmmaking " ; and eight deleted scenes .

= = Reception = =

The review aggregator Rotten Tomatoes calculated a 72 % approval rating based on reviews from 174 critics , with an average score of 6 @. @ 8 / 10 . The website reported the critical consensus as " ... visually arresting , but the story could be told with a bit more energy . " Critical reception of Girl With a Pearl Earring was mixed , with reviewers positively focusing on the film 's visuals and performances while questioning elements of its story . Historian Alex von Tunzelmann , writing for The Guardian , praised the film for its " ... sumptuous design and incredible Vermeerish appearance ... " but felt that " ... it 's a bit too much like watching paint dry . " In The Observer , Philip French referred to the film as " ... quiet , intelligent and well @-@ acted ... " and believed that " ... most people will be impressed by , and carry away in their mind 's eye , the film 's appearance ... [ Serra , van Os , and van Strallen ] have given the movie a self @-@ conscious beauty . "

The BBC 's review , written by Susan Hodgetts , described the film as " ... a superior British costume drama that expertly mixes art history with romantic fiction ... , " which would appeal to " ... anyone who likes serious , intelligent drama and gentle erotic tension . " Hodgetts said that both Firth and Johansson gave " excellent " performances who did " ... a grand job of expressing feelings and emotions without the use of much dialogue , and the picture is the better for it . " Elvis Mitchell of The New York Times called the film an " ... earnest , obvious melodrama with no soul , filled with the longing silences that come after a sigh . " Mitchell did however laud its cinematography , production design , and musical score , as did the Film Journal International 's Erica Abeel . Despite praising its visuals , Abeel criticized Girl with a Pearl Earring for being " ... a chick flick dressed up in Old Master clothes ... " and for failing " ... to render Griet 's growing artistic sensibility dramatically credible . " She cited its melodramatic villains as another failing , but concluded that it was " ... to Johansson 's credit that she alone pulls something plausible out of her character . "

Sandra Hall of The Sydney Morning Herald praised Webber 's ability to " ... build individual moments [ such as ] the crackle of a bedsheet which has grown an ice overcoat after being hung out to dry in the wintry air ... , " but opined that he failed to " ... invest these elegant reproductions of the art of the period with the emotional charge you 've been set up to expect . " Griet and Vermeer 's relationship , Hall wrote , lacked " ... the sense of two people breathing easily in one another 's company . " Owen Gleiberman , writing for Entertainment Weekly , remarked that Girl with a Pearl Earring " ... brings off something that few dramas about artists do . It gets you to see the world through new ? which is to say , old ? eyes . " Gleiberman added that while Johansson is silent for most of the film , " ... the interplay on her face of fear , ignorance , curiosity , and sex is intensely dramatic . " In Sight & Sound , David Jays wrote that " Johansson 's marvellous performance builds on the complex innocence of her screen presence ( Ghost World , Lost in Translation ) . " Jays concluded his review by praising Webber and Serra 's ability to " ... deftly deploy daylight , candle and shadow , denying our desire to see clearly just as Vermeer refuses to explicate the situations in his paintings . The film 's scenarios may be unsurprising , but Webber 's solemn evocation of art in a grey world gives his story an apt , unspoken gravity . "

= = = Accolades = = =