

that to my eye are notably absent from his work: "the bond between two individuals, the bounty of God's creations, the need for moderation and restraint, the vanity of worldly possessions, the transience of life, or the lasting power of artistic creation."ⁱ

That is still the Vermeer of the literary as well as the popular imagination, the one about whom Tracy Chevalier and Susan Vreeland and Katharine Weber write and the one for whom long lines form when a museum is fortunate enough to be able to put his name up in lights. There is a funnier and funkier Vermeer out there, less sanctimonious and less sincere. He's waiting to be discovered, but if you want to see him, you do have to look. Not just at paintings, but at life as well.

Girl in Hyacinth Blue, by Susan Vreeland, Denver, MacMurray and Beck, 1999; 242 pages, \$17.50 hardcover.

The Music Lesson, by Katharine Weber, New York, Corwn Publishers, Inc., 1998, \$21 hardcover.

Girl with a Pearl Earring, by Tracy Chevalier, New York, Dutton, 2000, \$21.95 haradcover.

Tulip Fever, by Deborah Moggach, New York, Delacorte Press, 1999, \$21.95 hardcover.

Confessions of an Ugly Stepsister, by Gregory Maguire, illustrations by Bill Sanderson, New York, ReganBooks, \$24 hardcover.

Notes

ⁱ Ibid., p. 27.

Moggach's artist is called Jan van Loos. His surname sounds Dutch, but is not. Only the names Loos or de Loos have ever existed in Holland. That is not his only historical problem. He paints daylight scenes at night, an inconceivable practice in the 17th century, and creates genre scenes of women in 1636 of a type that did not enter the repertoire of Netherlandish painting until after 1650. He is included here for his Vermeerlike qualities.

ⁱ Schumacher consulted the membership of the Internet discussion list CAAH (Consortium of Art and Architectural Historians) in the preparation of her article, which she made available to the list on September 13, 2000.

ⁱ The quotations from Thoré-Bürger, Havard, Faure and Proust are taken from Philippe Resche-Regon, "Critical Anthology," in Albert Blankert, John Michael Montias and Gilles Aillaud, *Vermeer*, New York, Rizzoli, 1988, pp. 217-223. The quotation from Herbert Read, cited by Resche-Regon, is from *Art and Alienation: The Role of the Artist in Society*, London, Thames and Hudson, 1967, p. 89. Gowing's line was quoted by Resche-Regon in the Dutch edition of Blankert, Montias and Aillaud (Amsterdam, Meulenhoff, 1987, second partly revised edition, 1992), but not in the English edition. The original source could not be located. The version here is a re-translation from the Dutch.

ⁱ A bit more research might have done the novels a lot of good. A brilliant essay on Dutch women in genre paintings was published in 1997 by the literary historian Richard Helgerson in the journal *Representations*: "Soldiers and Enigmatic Girls." It was reprinted in 2000 by Chicago University Press in a volume with the telling title *Adulterous Alliances: Home, State, and History in Early Modern European Drama and Painting*. Dealing with exactly the same kind of artistic material as the novelists, Helgerson shows how essential politics and ideology are to the understanding of Dutch paintings of the home and of the women in it. "In the 1650s and 1660s, the Dutch produced a great many paintings of women, almost always without a male householder, engaged in activities of often morally ambiguous significance in domestic or domestic-like interiors. And in a considerable number of these paintings the domestic space is shared by a soldier or other young man of soldierlike appearance.... I will be arguing that ... the nature and survival of Dutch republican government is at stake in these domestic scenes of sexual negotiation.... In their apparent avoidance of politics, these paintings were at their most actively political" (pp. 85-86). In following their romantic instincts, the historical novelists were missing out on aspects of their subject that I am sure would have grabbed them. I hope that I am not alone in finding his interpretations of women in Dutch art more interesting than merely pictures that "mirror the mood" of a viewer.

ⁱ C. Willemijn Fock, "Werkelijkheid of schijn: Het beeld van het Hollandse interieur in de zeventiende-eeuwse genreschilderkunst" (Reality or appearance: The image of the Dutch interior in 17th-century genre painting," *Oud Holland*, vol. 112, 1998, pp. 187-246. The author sums up the evidence for the existence of marble floors in domestic interiors, concluding that they were found nearly exclusively in corridors. In the English summary she states "All this is borne out by one quantitative source: a series of the conditions of sale pertaining to houses in the city of Haarlem over a period of sixty years. Although they

concern the second half of the 18th century, a considerable number of 17th-century interior features were still preserved. No fewer than approximately 5000 different houses are described in this source: by then nearly all the larger houses had marble entrance halls and corridors, most of them dating from the 18th century; however, a total of no more than *nine* living rooms are mentioned as having marble or stone floors!" (P. 244.)

ⁱ Albert Blankert, "Vermeer's 'modern' onderwerpen, in exhib. cat. *Joahannes Vermeer*, The Hague, Mauritshuis, Washington, National Gallery of Art and Zwolle, Waanders Publishers, 1995, pp. 31-46, pp. 34-35.

ⁱ See too the chapter on Proust and Vermeer in the rich critical potpourri by Christiane Hertel, *Vermeer: Reception and Interpretation*, Cambridge and New York, Cambridge University Press, 1996, pp. 103-115. Although this book, as the jacket promises, "addresses the critical problem of locating his paintings in history," the 17th-century Netherlands, unfortunately for our purposes, is not one of the historical environments that particularly interests the author.

ⁱ Blankert, as in note 6, p. 33.

ⁱ Quoted without source by A.B. de Vries in exhib. cat. *In het licht van Vermeer: vijf eeuwen schilderkunst*, The Hague, Mauritshuis, 1966, unpaginated.

ⁱ Exhib. cat. 1995, cited in note 6, p. 42.

ⁱ *Ibid.*, p. 27.