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## Intertextual and Intermedial Relationships: Deborah Moggach, Zbigniew Herbert and Dutch Painting of the Seventeenth Century

### Abstract

The aim of the article is to analyse the intertextual and intermedial relationships between *Tulip Fever*, a novel by Deborah Moggach, *The Bitter Smell of Tulips*, an essay by Zbigniew Herbert from the collection *Still Life with a Bridle*, with some selected examples of Dutch paintings of the seventeenth century. As Moggach does not confine herself only to the aforementioned essay by Herbert, I will also refer to other essays from the volume as well as to the essay *Mistrz z Delft* which comes from the collection of the same title.

Keywords: Deborah Moggach, Zbigniew Herbert, novel, essay, Dutch paintings, intertextuality, intermediality.

Zbigniew Herbert's essay *The Bitter Smell of Tulips* comes from the collection *Still Life with a Bridle* which is a part of the trilogy that, apart from the aforementioned collection of essays, consists of two other volumes: *Labyrinth on the Sea* and *Barbarian in the Garden*. In each of the volumes, in the form of a very personal account of his travels, Herbert spins a yarn of European culture and civilization. *Labyrinth on the Sea* focuses on the history and culture of ancient Greece and Rome whereas in *Barbarian in the Garden* Herbert draws on the whole spectrum of subjects ranging from the prehistoric paintings on the walls of the cave in Lascaux, through the Gothic cathedrals and Renaissance masterpieces, to the stories about the Albigensians and the persecution of the Knights of the Templar Order.

The title of *Still Life with a Bridle*, first published in Poland in 1993, refers to the picture of a barely known Dutch painter, Johannes Torrentius from 1614. Although Herbert's essays from the collection are mostly devoted to the paintings of

the Dutch Golden Era (*Gerard Terborch: The Discreet Charm of the Bourgeoisie*, the eponymous *Still Life with the Bridle*, which besides being the title of the whole collection is also a separate essay), they also touch upon social and economic issues (*The Bitter Smell of Tulips* and *The Price of Art*) as well as geographical and historical conditions which influenced Dutch society of the 17<sup>th</sup> c. (*Delta, The Nonheroic Subject*). *Apocryphas*, the second part of the volume, is a selection of mini portrayals of eminent Dutch characters such as Jan van Olden Barneveldt, the Great Pensionary who was a politician and one of the founders of the new Republic, William Yasbrantz Bontekoe - the ship's captain, Long Gerrit - the fisherman, Jan Pieterszoon Coen - governor-general of East India, Jan Swammerdam - the etymologist, Cornelis Drebbel - the inventor and scholar, the crew of the ship which was trapped in the Arctic ice on her voyage to China, Baruch Spinoza - the philosopher, Jan Vermeer - the painter and Cornelis Troost - the textile merchant. Even a sketchy analysis of the names and occupations reveals that what Herbert provides a presentation of the cross-section of Dutch society of the 17 c so it goes without saying that the collective hero of *Apocryphas* and the essays that made up *Still Life with a Bridle* are the Bourgeoisie of Holland of the Golden Age.

According to Alissa Valles, one of Herbert's English translators, he took his first trip to the Netherlands in 1976. He visited Rotterdam, Amsterdam and other cities. Inspired by the teachings of his spiritual and intellectual mentor, Eugène Fromentin, a French painter and writer as well as an art critic<sup>1</sup>, he visited museums and art galleries developing his fascination with Dutch culture and history. During the following decade and a half, making yet another visit in Holland in 1988, Herbert wrote *Still Life with a Bridle*. As Valles writes in the introduction to *The Collected Prose 1948–1998*:

Here Herbert brings to light the submerged passions of an apparently staid and sober culture, rendering vividly the drama of water, the drama of commerce, science, and, in the title essay, the dramatic biography of Torrentius, a painter of the most becalmed of genres, the still life. In Dutch culture, with its anti-heroic bent, Herbert finds myth almost entirely subsumed by objects - the new heroes - and the gods and theologies of the Greeks and Italians stripped down to the bare, hushed interior of a Calvinist church and the dry QED's of Spinoza. Herbert is fascinated by the tension between the Dutch passion for material goods (often involving foreign conquest) and their religious rationalism and austerity, by the way of mystical impulse, banished from spiritual life, entered the life of science and commerce<sup>2</sup>.

Apart from the first Polish edition of 1993, *Still Life with a Bridle* was also published in "Kultura" (1983) and "Zeszyty Literackie" (2003). In the American edition of 2010, similarly to its Polish equivalent, the essays were supplemented

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<sup>1</sup> In his book *The Old Masters of Belgium and Holland* Fromentin presented an analysis of the paintings of Rubens and Rembrandt focusing not only on the style, but also on the emotions that accompanied the act of creation of their masterpieces. Being a painter himself, he is considered to be one of the first art critics to approach the subject of *The Old Masters* from a personal point of view (Z. Herbert, *The Collected Prose 1948–1998*, transl. J. and B. Carpenter, New York 2010, p. 182), which must have served as an inspiration for Herbert when he was writing his essays.

<sup>2</sup> A. Valles in: *ibid.*, p. XXI.

by the collection of the apocryphas. The whole text of the American edition of the volume was rendered into English by John and Bogdana Carpenter.

In the essay *The Bitter Smell of Tulips* Herbert is concerned with the phenomenon popularly referred to as Tulip Mania or Tulipomania, that is the first recorded financial bubble. It took place in Holland between the years 1634–1637 and shook the foundations of Dutch economy. During that period tulip bulbs became objects of speculation. The prices reached extraordinarily high levels and then plummeted rapidly. The episode was used by Moggach as the background and time framework of her novel so Herbert's essay can function as a natural introduction, the role of which is setting the scene for the main plot of the narrative. Valles points out that in his essay Herbert is concerned with his infatuation for "follies in the sanctuaries of reason"<sup>3</sup>. What puzzles and somehow fascinates Herbert is the fact that the state of popular frenzy afflicted "a sober, hardworking and parsimonious nation"<sup>4</sup> living in the country with a very stable economy, where people's lives were based on a very rational premise which had its deep roots in the Calvinist teachings.

When pondering over the phenomenon of Tulipomania, Herbert gives several reasons for its occurrence. The most significant of them is "the peculiar Dutch predilection for flowers"<sup>5</sup>. In the country the territory of which in its substantial part had been very often reclaimed from the sea the space was limited and the price of land very high. The arable land was taken by pastures, gardens and orchards according to the rules of rational and extensive economy. Also the flatness of the Dutch landscape might have evoked in the local people natural yearnings for lush vegetation which they associated with the concept of "a lost paradise".<sup>6</sup> Despite space limitations, the Dutch were very fond of rosaria and flower beds. Obviously, in comparison with their English or French equivalents, they were very modest, very often occupying a few square meters. The Dutch were keen on growing flowers in an enlightened way. The scholars and connoisseurs lectured on the subject in the university of Leyden. They travelled with the colonizers to distant lands and wrote books, which is best exemplified by *Arboretum Sacrum* by Jan van der Meurs.

Flowers were also depicted by painters. A classic example of the genre could be *Bouquet against a Vaulted Window* by Ambrosius Bosschaert, painted around 1620 and exhibited in the Mauritshuis in the Hague.<sup>7</sup> In his analysis of the painting Herbert points out that the flowers in the picture are not rendered in an ornamental way. They constitute an autotelic subject. Their integrity is emphasized

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Z. Herbert, op. cit., p. 206.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., p. 207.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> According to Charles Sterling, the first Dutch still lifes with flowers as the main theme date back to the end of the sixteenth century. Unlike the similar still lifes of the seventeenth century, at the beginning they were very ornamental and revealed a strong Italian influence. Then, the bouquets of flowers started to appear in illusionist paintings, in which, imitating the Flemish miniature manner, they were often set between the curtains and in the window vaults, just like in Bosschaert's still life painting (see Ch. Sterling, *Martwa Natura*, Warszawa 1998, p. 66).

by the fact that they are “overnatural” in the form of the artistic rendition. They are not submerged in *chiaroscuro*. Each flower is prominent and painted in a very meticulous manner. When describing the peculiarities of the painting, Herbert makes an explicit comparison to the collective portraits by Frans Hals in which there is no division into more and less important characters. According to Herbert, in the presentation of the flowers, Bosschaert does not attempt to endow them with the state of his psyche, as it happened in the case of *Sunflowers* by Van Gogh, but seeks to visually reproduce them as if he were a botanist or anatomist.<sup>8</sup> The picture, defined as “A pagan monstrosity of flowers”, was painted more than a decade before the outbreak of Tulipomania, but it seems to anticipate the dramatic character of the folly.<sup>9</sup>

In the subsequent part of his essay Herbert focuses on the history of the popularity of tulips in Europe and in Holland, in particular. Tulips arrived from the East and their name derives from Persia and designates a turban. Apart from Persia, they were popular in Turkey and Armenia. They were admired by the oriental poets and mentioned in the tales of *The Thousand and One Nights*. Their arrival in Europe is attributed to the Austrian diplomat in Constantinople, Augier Ghislain de Busbecq who in 1554 sent a shipment of tulip bulbs to the Viennese court of the Emperor Francis I. In 1561 Konrad Genser in his work *De Hortis Germaniae* features the first scientific description of the flower. Then, its popularity spread over the courts and stately homes of France, England and the Netherlands. It also became a culinary delicacy and a medicament used in the treatment of flatulence. Originally it was the flower of the rich and monarchs because it was elegant, inaccessible, precious and refined. Its introverted character is emphasised by the lack of strong fragrance, which is associated with moderation as the flower evoked no violent emotions, such as desire or jealousy. The fashion began to be imitated by the representatives of the lower social classes. The first symptoms of tulipomania appeared, particularly in France, assuming the state of an epidemic in Holland. Trying to account for the causes of the phenomenon, Herbert draws a comparison to a plague, the onset of which is usually easy to define. Unlike a plague, tulipomania was a kind of a mental contagious psychosis, similar to the Gold Rush or the American stock market crisis of 1929.<sup>10</sup>

It is difficult to establish the exact date when tulips appeared in the Netherlands. The first shipment of tulip bulbs reached the port of Antwerp in 1562. Herbert claims that the common interest in the flowers was the reflection of the fashion which had its origin in the aesthetic preferences of the French court.<sup>11</sup> As far as the Netherlands are concerned, in Herbert’s opinion, the beginnings of

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<sup>8</sup> Contrary to Herbert, Johan Huizinga points out that in the paintings depicting compositions of flowers each bud had a symbolic meaning and each still life, besides referring directly to reality, was also endowed with an emblematic meaning. Huizinga claims that decoding those meanings is beyond the capacity of contemporary scholars (see J. Huizinga, *Kultura XVII-wiecznej Holandii*, Kraków 2008, p. 124).

<sup>9</sup> Z. Herbert, op. cit., p. 208.

<sup>10</sup> Z. Herbert, op. cit., p. 2011.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 211.

tulipomania should be traced back in the activity of Carolus Clusius, professor of Botany from the university of Leyden who allegedly spread the news about the tulips cultivated in the university gardens, which subsequently resulted in the theft of some rare bulbs.<sup>12</sup>

The transmutation of the object of scientific research into the object of speculation triggered off a chain reaction which affected the whole country. In tracing the causes of this process, Herbert lists such reasons as snobbery: the tulip was a flower associated with aristocracy, easiness of cultivation: however at the same time the tulip was an egalitarian flower that could be grown by anybody; biological pathology: a certain kind of virus was rampant in the Dutch gardens at the time which caused that tulip petals could assume most fantastic forms; finally, a variety of tulip strains: it was maintained that the flower could produce new mutations and forms on its own so the owner of a particular bulb acted as a gambler who by a strange twist of fate could become a millionaire.<sup>13</sup>

In Herbert's opinion what distinguished the Netherlands from other European countries of 17th c. was a mighty fleet, a liberal state and, at least, seven hundred varieties of tulips<sup>14</sup> The names of tulips were both ordinary and sophisticated, based very often on military ranks and aristocratic titles. Nevertheless, in the volume of varieties there was a hidden germ of the catastrophe to come as it left a lot of room for different speculative combinations and strategies. The tulip became an abstract value that could be exchanged for a particular amount of money as shares and bonds in the stock exchange. The tulip strain that remained at the top of the price lists was *Semper Augustus*, which was not an ordinary variety of the flower. It has impeccably white petals with ruby veins running along them and the blue bottom of the chalice. It reached the price of 5000, which at the time was the equivalent of a house with a garden.

The transactions were often made in the form of a barter exchange. The legal tender was replaced by farm produce, cattle, wine, cheese, clothes and home utensils. The prices were soaring all the time to reach the state of uncontrollable frenzy. There appeared a tremendous discrepancy between the real value of the bulbs and the price offered in the stock market. The profiteers counted on the fortunate twist of fate, hoping that the boom would constantly last. The bulb purchased today would at least double its value tomorrow. Pondering over the speculative character of this way of thinking, Herbert makes a reference to the old human myth of miraculous multiplication.<sup>15</sup>

The subsequent part of the essay focuses on the pathological aspect of the tulip frenzy. The hectic atmosphere of the trading procedures resulted in both stockbrokers and buyers losing touch with reality. The former ignored the real purchasing abilities of their customers. The latter acted beyond all reason. The situation, according to Herbert, was typical of a psychic deviation, in which those affected by it create their own autonomous worlds which are governed by their own rules.

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., p. 212.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., p. 214.

In the case of tulipomania it was a gigantic flower lottery in which everybody expected winning the jackpot. What arouses Herbert's surprise is the fact that it happened "in a country where the cardinal virtues were caution, moderation, and accountability"<sup>16</sup>, which in the subsequent course of events led to the stock plummet as: "A system based on bourgeois calculation could not coexist with a system of financial phantasmagoria"<sup>17</sup>. Speculations always took place on the margin of legal economic activities because there was never any official and open tulip stock exchange.

The excessive trade of tulip bulbs raised deep concern of the Dutch authorities as the whole society, including children, seemed to be afflicted by the state of mania. Decrees were issued to curb the dangerous phenomenon; however, they had a counterproductive effect, just like in the times of the Prohibition, when even the moderate ones indulged themselves in heavy drinking, treating it as the bliss of the forbidden fruit. Also the Calvinist clergy took a definite stand on the issue, but paradoxically they were seen secretly giving themselves to the sinful procedure.<sup>18</sup>

The fever resembled the state of war, when even the most fantastic and unbelievable piece of information can drag people from the depths of despair and arouse in them an unjustifiable feeling of optimism. The gamblers' imagination was ignited by the stories of fortunes won overnight thanks to speculation, which spread around very quickly undermining the concepts of living one's life in a laborious, modest and consistent way. There are no any official statistics specifying the number of tulip profiteers in the Netherlands of the Golden Era. The state of mania could not be attributed to one particular social group as the representatives of different walks of life were involved in speculation, which only emphasized its egalitarian character. Ironically, the phenomenon was enthusiastically received in the country, where the ideals of social equality were respected and cherished.<sup>19</sup>

The transactions were often made under cover of the night and took up the working hours of the day that would be normally spent on productive activities, which resulted in feverish delirium, sleeplessness and economic inefficiency of their participants. The tulip growers lived like misers confining themselves to guarding their plantations and installing elaborated alarming systems to prevent theft in their gardens.<sup>20</sup>

The epidemic character of the phenomenon is confirmed by its geographical range. It affected not only the traditional horticultural Dutch centres, such as Haarlem, but also the bigger municipalities, such as Amsterdam, Alkmaar, Rotterdam and Utrecht, where the number of the gamblers who succumbed to the omnipresent folly was the highest. The bacillus of tulipomania was ubiquitous crossing both social and geographical borders.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., p. 215.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., p. 216.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

Nevertheless, there could also be noticed the reaction of the rational and sober citizens of the Netherlands who expressed their resistance and protest towards the destructive rage. But, the state was liberal so people's opinions vary. Apart from the voices of condemnation expressed by the sober citizens, there were also the opinions of approval as the Dutch were an enlightened people who liked to read. It was not only the educated readership, but the representatives of the whole nation that took pride in having wise authors and educated publishers, who taking advantage of the situation, supplied their customers with pamphlets and practical manuals explaining the principles of tulip speculation and instructing how to give publicity to the newly-grown "botanical revelations" so that they could become "a value admitted into circulation".<sup>22</sup>

The speculative bids were made in inns and taverns, and often resembled the ritual of initiation, in which the neophytes were introduced to the forbidden trade in the way typical of the Masonic organizations. Obviously, there was no pomp, nor esoteric background. The events assumed a more ludic character as they were accompanied by excessive eating and drinking, reminiscent of scenes from the paintings by Adriaen Brouwer or Jan Steen. The whole country was covered by a network of secret gambling "dens", which awake a direct comparison with the infamous speakeasies of the times of the Prohibition. Some of those places had well-concealed rooms which were specially designated for their illicit purpose. Striking bargains was fierce and outbidding competitive offers usually resulted in paying horrendous prices for the new varieties of tulips. The mania reached fever pitch between 1634–1637. Thereafter the prices of tulip bulbs plummeted rapidly.

When seeking the reasons for the abrupt slump, Simon Schama in his book *The Embarrassment of Riches* gives the following explanation:

By early 1637, the height of speculation, the point of the purchase had long since ceased to be a tulip bulb and instead had become a negotiable piece of paper with a national delivery date upon it, like some very doubtful bill of exchange. The closer to delivery that the deal was made, the higher the risk of the buyer having to settle with a grower, but the more dazzling the possibility of realizing a profit from prices that rose by the day and the hour. At this point, the craze had gone into orbit on its own thrust, and it took an act of intervention from a public authority to bring it sharply back down to earth – with a tremendous crash.<sup>23</sup>

In his deliberations on the causes of the crash, Herbert also emphasizes the counter reaction of "the healthy portion of Dutch society" to the folly which engulfed the Netherlands. The opposition must have been strong. There were brochures, pamphlets, satires and cartoons being published, the purpose of which was to ridicule the tulip maniacs. They were popularly referred to as the "hooded ones" as in those days the mentally-handicapped often wore hoods drawn over their heads in order to prevent them from being seen by the sane part of the society.<sup>24</sup>

For Herbert the best visual representation of the reaction to the folly is the allegory painted by Hendrick Pot, titled *The Cart of Madmen*. The cart is a transpar-

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., p. 216, 217.

<sup>23</sup> S. Schama, *The Embarrassment of Riches*, London 2004, p. 353.

<sup>24</sup> Z. Herbert, op. cit., p. 219.

ent, satirical paragon of the mania that afflicted the Dutch. On it there sits Flora, Roman goddess of flowers, holding in her hands the three most desired tulip varieties: *Semper Augustus*, *General Bol* and *Admiral Hoorn*. Her entourage consists of the three popular symbolic characters: Good-for-Nothing, Wealth Craver and the Drunkard, who resemble social outcasts, in the company of the two ladies. The merry batch of wastrels on the cart is followed by a crowd of citizens who desperately want to sell the tulip bulbs. The picture is the incarnation of the tulip market which is about to collapse. Tulipomania seems to have reached the point of saturation, when people wanted to get rid of the bulbs they possessed, regardless of the profit, rather than purchase new specimens.<sup>25</sup>

The reversal of fortune was mockingly echoed in popular jokes and paradoxical stories. Herbert points out that the backlash against tulipomania produced tulipophobia, the embodiment of which was the anecdotal character of professor Fortius of Leyden University, who was said to express his hostility towards tulips by devastating them with his cane any time he stumbled upon them.<sup>26</sup>

Similarly to Schama, Herbert is also of the opinion that the decisive factor in fighting tulipomania was the reaction of the authorities which issued government directives the purpose of which was to curb the folly which threatened the foundations of the state economy. In 1637 the Estates General released the decree which annulled the speculative agreements and specified the maximum prize of a tulip bulb for fifty florins. Thus, the bulb of *Semper Augustus* was worth one hundredth of its former prize. However, the truth is that the decision was made when tulipomania was gradually dying out so it could be regarded as the proverbial last straw which contributed to its disappearance.

Herbert's reasoning is also in accord with Schama's postulates in that that they both claim that the mania "was killed by its own madness".<sup>27</sup> At the very beginning the profiteers' gains rose constantly. Nevertheless, they were embodied not in hard currency or liquid assets, but in credit. Tulip bulb owners were considered very rich so they could take big loans. As it soon occurred, it was not the tulip bulbs, but their names that, constantly changing their possessors, became the objects of speculation. The balance between supply and demand became disturbed. Just as it is shown in Pot's allegorical painting, the tulip bulb owners started to be interested not in multiplying the gains, but rather in diminishing the losses. The panic that arose preceded the official intervention of the authorities.

The outcome of the folly was tragic. As the speculative procedures were conducted secretly, it is difficult to specify exact data. Nevertheless, the catastrophic outcome manifested itself in thousands of ruined households and their owners left without work and basic means of existence, very often threatened by law suits as bankruptcy was penalized in the Netherlands at the time. Many Dutch citizens had taken loans which could not be paid back. The only solution to that situation was joining the merchant marine or navy, or else resorting to begging in the streets.

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid, p. 219, 220.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., p. 220.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., p. 221.



Towards the end of the essay, Herbert gives the reason for his interest in the event that took place “on the margin of Great History”.<sup>28</sup> It may be concluded that what he is enraptured by has its grounds in his aesthetic predilections, which can be testified by the following quotation: “It should be honestly confessed: we have a strange liking for presenting follies in the sanctuaries of reason, and we also like to study catastrophes against a gentle landscape”.<sup>29</sup> Further he also points out that tulipomania was the event of a more universal character, which, as a kind of “psychological epidemic”<sup>30</sup> can recur and “afflict us in this or another form”<sup>31</sup>.

Deborah Moggach’s novel *Tulip Fever* is a story describing intricate relationships between a wealthy merchant, Cornelis Sandvoort, his young wife, Sophia and the young talented painter, Jan van Loos. The plot is set in the seventeenth century Amsterdam, seized with tulipomania. The incident, which together with the title of the novel is reminiscent of Herbert’s essay *Bitter Smell of Tulips*, constitutes a background for a passionate love affair which unfolds between the young protagonists of *Tulip Fever*, finally leading to a tragic end. Apart from being a study of love and betrayal, the novel is also a record of the process of painting a family picture which becomes the catalyst for the events that make up the main storyline.

The events in *Tulip Fever* span the period of two years: 1636–1637. Dutch culture and economy are in full bloom. However, it is also the period when tulipomania reaches its fever pitch. Tulip bulb prices are soaring to reach a crescendo in February of 1637. Inflated beyond any expectation, the Dutch tulip bulb bubble pops abruptly. The speculative prices plummet causing a full-blown panic. The tulip market meltdown ends the Dutch Golden Age and hurls the country into a mild economic depression.<sup>32</sup> “The bitter smell of tulips”, the oxymoron which is the title of Herbert’s essay, seems to best encapsulate the prevalent spirit of confusion that lingers on behind the scenes of the main events in Moggach’s novel.

In the acknowledgments of *Tulip Fever* Moggach makes a direct reference to Herbert’s essays from the collection *Still Life with a Bridle* admitting that, among other scholarly books and monographs together with the selected Dutch paintings of the seventeenth century, they served as an inspiration for her book. Herbert is evoked explicitly and implicitly in the two quotations which precede the beginning of Moggach’s novel. In the former case, she draws on one of Herbert’s essays from the volume, *Gerard Terborch: The Discreet Charm of the Bourgeoisie*, in the final paragraph of which the eponymous character in a fictitious commentary describes his aesthetic predilections as well as expresses his admiration for the models who sought to transcend the boundaries of life by posing for his pictures, attired in fashionable apparel and adorned with the accessories of the time:

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid., p. 223.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> J. Colombo, *The Dutch “Tulip Mania” Bubble (aka “Tulipomania”)*, the article written on June 15th, 2012, <http://www.thebubblebubble.com/tulip-mania/>, p. 4, 6.

Yes I knew well the world of poverty and ugliness, but I painted the skin, the glittering surface, the appearance of things; the silky ladies, and the gentlemen in irreproachable black. I admired how fiercely they fought for a life slightly longer than the one for which they were destined. They protected themselves with fashion, tailors' accessories, a fancy ruffle, ingenious cuffs, a fold, a pleat, any detail that would allow them to last a little longer before they – and we as well – are engulfed by the black background.<sup>33</sup>

The other quotation concerns a letter attributed to another painter, Jan Vermeer. It comes again from *Still Life with a Bridle*, but this time from the apocrypha *Letter*, in which the Master of Delft<sup>34</sup> writes to Anton van Leeuwenhoek, a naturalist who contributed greatly to improving the microscope. At the end of the letter Vermeer defines the role of painting as opposed to that of science. Although the two fields of human activity differ from each other considerably, what they have in common is the sense of making discoveries:

Our task is not to solve enigmas, but to be aware of them, to bow our heads before them and also to prepare the eyes for never-ending delight and wonder. If you absolutely require discoveries, however, I will tell you that I am proud to have succeeded in combining a certain particularly intensive cobalt with a luminous, lemonlike yellow, as well as recording the reflection of southern light that strikes through thick glass onto a grey wall [...]. Allow us as well to continue our archaic procedure, to tell the world words of reconciliation and to speak of joy from recovered harmony, of the eternal desire for reciprocated love.<sup>35</sup>

The quotations confirm the fact that besides conducting an intertextual dialogue with Herbert's essays, Moggach is concerned with the intermedial relationships between her novel and the Dutch paintings of The Netherlands' Golden Age. In a very convincing way she interweaves the names of the real painters and pictures of the epoch with, as she openly calls them, the figments of her imagination.<sup>36</sup> Thus, the great painters, such as Rembrandt van Rijn, Essaias van de Velde, the Bosschaert brothers, Jan Davidsz de Heem or Thomas Keyser, to mention just a few, function in the novel on equal terms with the completely fictitious characters, such as the painter, Jan van Loos, his fellow-painter and friend, Mattheus or Jacob Haecht, his trainee.

The reader is beguiled into believing that the pictures described in the book really exist, which is emphasized by the fact that apart from their titles and detailed ephrases, Moggach also gives the names of the museums and galleries where they can be found. The best example of employing this strategy is the introduction of Jan van Loos's family portrait featuring Cornelis and Sophia, accompanied by the elements of a typical Dutch still life, depicted in the interior of their house:

The disrobed tulip, in the painting, will be back in full bloom. Centuries later people will stand in the Rijksmuseum and gaze at this canvas. What will they see? Tranquillity, harmony. A married couple who, though surrounded by wealth, are aware that this life is swiftly

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<sup>33</sup> Z. Herbert, op. cit., p. 234.

<sup>34</sup> The term was used by Herbert as the title of the collection of his essays *Mistrz z Delft i inne utwory odnalezione*, issued in "Zeszyty Literackie" 2008, Warszawa.

<sup>35</sup> Z. Herbert, op. cit., p. 289, 290.

<sup>36</sup> The phrase from my private correspondence with Deborah Moggach.

over (the scales, the scull). Maybe the old man was talking, but he is silent now. They didn't listen then and now nobody can hear.<sup>37</sup>

Another non-existent picture which is endowed with the same quasi-realistic properties is the nude portrait of Sophia painted in her lover's studio, which besides being popularly titled *Woman on a Bed* as well as compared to Rembrandt's *Danaë* is also attributed to a particular place of its exposition:

Centuries later she will hang in the Rijksmuseum. Scholars will quarrel about her identity. Is she Venus? Is she Delilah? Papers will be published about her place in van Loos's work. Ordinary people will wonder: who is she? His mistress? A model? Surely not a model, for she gazes out of the painting with such frank love. She will have no title. She will just be known as *Woman on a Bed*. Because that is what she is.<sup>38</sup>

A similar ploy is applied in one of the final chapters of the book in which Moggach conducts a sketchy analysis of Jan van Loos's artistic output, especially the pictures depicting the mysterious image of Sophia, painted after the lovers' tragic parting:

She reappears in one of his masterpieces, now hanging in the Dresden Museum. It shows a still life: an onion lies on a porcelain plate, its papery skin half peeled. Cards and dice are scattered on the tablecloth, and an open book reveals a page in Latin script: We played, we gambled, we lost.<sup>39</sup>

Towards the end of *Tulip Fever* Moggach introduces yet another painter and his picture which allegedly hangs in the Mauritshuis in the Hague: *Unknown Man, his Wife and Daughters* by Jacob Haecht 1620–1675 (signed and dated 1642). The family portrait was supposed to be painted by van Loos's trainee, Jacob and features Sophia's servant, Maria together with her family.<sup>40</sup>

The effect of creating the ostensible authenticity of the described paintings is also heightened by the fact that Moggach very often lists the fictitious pictures together with those that really exist, which could be illustrated by her juxtaposing Salomon van Ruysdael's *River Landscape with Ferry* and Pieter Claesz's *Little Breakfast* with van Loos's portrait of Sophia<sup>41</sup>. Moreover, she triggers off the train of associations by attributing the pictures painted in different epochs to the characters of her novel. The example of it could be Jan's trainee's chalk sketch of the picture titled *The Expulsion of Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden*, which is reminiscent of the famous painting by Masaccio. Jacob paints the picture in an act of vengeance on his treacherous master:

Jacob is drawing the preliminary sketch. Jan's wooden mannequin is propped in front of his easel. On his last day, in a small act of rebellion, Jacob stole it from the studio. He has posed the jointed doll in a posture of shame – head thrust forward, arm shielding the face. Eve will have her arms up raised in despair. [...] Adam's stooped back, his wretched, naked buttocks... the face, glimpsed behind the shielding arm, will be a portrait of Jan, for it is

<sup>37</sup> D. Moggach, *Tulip Fever*, New York 2005, p. 35.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., p. 128, 129.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., p. 273, 274.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., p. 276.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., p. 128.

his turn to suffer. [...] Jacob returns to his painting. He gazes with satisfaction at the chalk figure, bowed with shame. Let Jan take the blame, for he has sinned and now he shall be punished.<sup>42</sup>

In her essay “*His paintings don’t tell stories...: Historical Romance and Vermeer*” Lisa Fletcher claims that “the artist in *Tulip Fever*, Jan van Loos, is a composite figure, bringing together Vermeer, Nicolaes Maes, and Pieter de Hooch”.<sup>43</sup> Such a comparison is plausible considering the fact that very little is known about the Dutch masters of the seventeenth century and that the pictures of the time were painted according to strictly defined rules. Thus, the topics featured as well as the manner of their execution can be attributed to most of the painters who were active in the Netherlands at the time.

Jan van Loos, one of the pivotal characters in *Tulip Fever*, is a versatile and prolific painter. He does not specialize in one particular genre, which was typical of the seventeenth century Dutch painters.<sup>44</sup> Together with the portraits, van Loos paints still lifes with vanitative motifs<sup>45</sup>, pictures featuring Biblical scenes, such as *Raising of Lazarus* or *Sacrifice of Abraham* as well as landscapes, exemplified in *Landscape with Cows* and genre paintings, represented by *Woman Taken in Adultery*.<sup>46</sup> Even a cursory analysis of the themes reveals that the same titles can be associated with the works by Rembrandt, Ruysdael and Vermeer. Unlike his real counterparts’, van Loos’s life is presented in a detailed way. The years in which he lived are exactly specified: 1600–1661<sup>47</sup> and so is his social, professional and family background. Being a poor painter, he lives in Joordan, a disreputable neighbourhood of Amsterdam.<sup>48</sup> Jan van Loos is a promising artist, specializing in still lifes, landscapes and portraits. He is recommended by Hendrick Uylenburgh, the real art dealer whose *protégé* was Rembrandt himself.<sup>49</sup> Van Loos “comes from a family of craftsmen. His father is a silversmith and his two brothers are glass painters”.<sup>50</sup> As a painter, he was professionally trained in his craft. His teacher studied calligraphy in Rome, which influenced van Loos’s handwriting.<sup>51</sup> Towards the end of his tragic life, he “finds greatness” by painting “*vanitas* paintings-canvas that show, through the humblest of objects, the transience of life”.<sup>52,53</sup>

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., p. 264, 266.

<sup>43</sup> L. Fletcher, “*His Paintings don’t Tell Stories...: Historical Romance and Vermeer*”, Working Papers on the Web, extra.shu.ac.uk/wpw/historicising/Fletcher.htm, p. 11.

<sup>44</sup> For example, apart from portraits, Rembrandt also painted landscapes as well as mythological and biblical scenes.

<sup>45</sup> D. Moggach, op. cit. p. 279.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., p. 155.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., p. 279.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., p. 53.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., p. 2.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., p. 53.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., p. 161.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., p. 273.

<sup>53</sup> The situation of the Dutch painters in the seventeenth century is vividly described by Paul Zumthor in the book *Życie codzienne w Holandii w czasach Rembrandta*. Zumthor points out that the painters were treated as deliverers who completed orders. There was no patronage. The social status of the Dutch painters was rather low and their financial situation precarious, Rembrandt in his heyday

The information concerning the life of Johannes Vermeer is very scarce so in terms of bibliographical details the central character's figure in the book could not have been modelled on that of the great Dutch painter of the seventeenth century. Nevertheless, Moggach makes some hints which could imply that Vermeer might have been a prototype of the fictitious painter in *Tulip Fever*, which is best exemplified by the description of his appearance which Sophia gives while posing for the portrait: Behind his easel the painter is watching me. His blue eyes bore into my soul. He is a small, wiry man with wild black hair. [...] He pulls off his beret and scratches his head".<sup>54</sup>

The image of a painter is reminiscent of what is commonly known as Vermeer's self-portrait, incarnated in the figure of the musician holding a lute and raising a glass of wine in the genre painting *Procuress*, dated 1656, now in the Old Masters Picture Gallery in Dresden.<sup>55</sup> It may be referred also to the *Allegory of Painting* from the Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna, where the figure of the artist seen from the back is usually associated with that of Vermeer.<sup>56</sup>

In the subsequent parts of the novel there are also some allusions to the pictures painted in Vermeer's idiom. For instance, when longing for Sophia, Jan van Loos recollects her image in the form of the typical female characters appearing in Vermeer's paintings: "What is she doing – sawing, gazing out of the window, the sun shining on that beautiful bumpy nose".<sup>57</sup> Another hint is employed in order to create one of the subplots in the novel. Moggach introduces and elaborates on the motif of van Loos's portrait of Sophia reading a letter and in doing so makes implicit references to one of the most famous paintings by the Master of Delft.

Although the theme of a young lady absorbed in reading a letter is immediately associated with Vermeer's works, the epistolary themes frequently appear in the seventeenth century Dutch paintings. Vermeer himself took up the subject in the following paintings: *Woman in Blue Reading a Letter*, 1663–1664, the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam, *A Girl Reading a Letter by an Open Window*, 1657–1659, the Old Masters Picture Gallery in Dresden, *A Lady Writing a Letter, with Her Maid*, the National Gallery of Ireland and *A Lady Writing*, ca. 1665, the National Gallery of Washington. Also Gerard Terborch extensively explored this topic in such paintings as *A Woman Writing a Letter*, ca. 1665, the Royal Picture Gallery Mauritshus, *A Woman Reading a Letter*, 1660–1665, Royal Collection and *A Woman Reading a Letter*, 1660–1662, Wallace Collection in London. The motif

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being one of the very few exceptions. The painters very often fell prey to creditors and finally became bankrupts, ending up in prisons. Being penniless very often resulted in personal tragedies. Rembrandt and Vermeer died in dire debts, Pieter van Laar committed suicide, Herkules Seghers descended into alcoholism. Jan Steen, regardless of his being extremely prolific, died a pauper, Frans Hals, Jacob Ruysdael and Meindert Hobbema ended their lives in poorhouses (see P. Zumthor, *Życie Codzienne w Holandii w Czasach Rembrandta*, Warszawa 1965, p. 177).

<sup>54</sup> D. Moggach, op. cit., p. 12, 13.

<sup>55</sup> Z. Herbert, *Mistrz z Delft*, op. cit., p. 73.

<sup>56</sup> Walicki M., *Vermeer*, Warszawa 1956, p. 38.

<sup>57</sup> D. Moggach, op. cit., p. 156.

was popular with other painters of the time, such as Gabriel Metsu and Frans van Mieris the Elder, to mention just two.<sup>58</sup>

Exploring the popularity of the epistolary subjects in the Dutch painting of the seventeenth century, in the essay entitled *Gerard Terborch: The Discreet Charm of the Bourgeoise*, Herbert makes the following comment:

In Dutch painting the theme of the letter was extremely popular. Formally it is simply a portrait, always of a female, a girl or a woman who puts down the letter or else reads from a piece of paper. For us it does not contain anything extraordinary: a simple monodrama played by one actress with a single prop. For the Dutch of the seventeenth century this kind of painting was particularly exciting, because the piece of paper was not, after all, an object emotionally indifferent like a mug or ball of yarn. As a rule, the women represented in these paintings are reading love letters. Thus we are looking at an intimate scene, intruders in a dialogue with an absentee, but we will never learn the reproaches, complaints, or confessions. The words conceived in solitude, read in silence, are enclosed by the solemn silence of the painting as if with a seal.<sup>59</sup>

Putting aside aesthetic aspects, one could venture a claim that epistolary paintings reflected the level of education in the Netherlands of the Golden Era. The literacy in the society was high so writing or reading letters was commonplace.

When painting the portrait of Sophia reading a letter, Jan tries to capture and record the moment of the sublime. The picture is rendered in his studio during the lovers' secret meeting. Unlike other paintings, it is not meant for sale as it has a symbolic meaning for both of them. The conception of the picture is somehow heralded in the scene in which both Sophia and her husband pose for the family portrait. The girl compares herself to an object – “brown hair, white lace collar and blue, shot-silk dress”.<sup>60</sup> She is dressed in the same attire later in the evening; however, the gold crucifix that hangs from her neck can be perceived as a symbol of religious protection which is supposed to save her evil she is going to be exposed to.<sup>61</sup> Hyacinth blue, a favourite colour of Vermeer's, is a recurring motif that accompanies the process of painting the portrait of Sophia reading the letter. Finally it is shown in the scene in which Jan learns of her disappearance, probably being the result of her suicidal death by drowning in one of Amsterdam's canals:

On the floor lies a sodden blue cloak. “I found it in the canal,” says Mattheus. “I pulled it out with a stick.” He says that that there was no sign of a body. “We

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<sup>58</sup> It is worth noticing that Han Antonius van Meegeren, a famous twentieth century forger of Vermeer's paintings, applied a similar theme in his picture *Woman in Blue Reading Music*, the Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, which like many of his other copies was mistakenly attributed to the Master of Delft.

<sup>59</sup> Z. Herbert, op. cit., p. 230, 231.

<sup>60</sup> D. Moggach, op. cit., p. 12.

<sup>61</sup> D. Moggach, op. cit., p. 16. Sophia is a Catholic, married to Cornelius, a Calvinist merchant. Her religious predicament is the reversal of Vermeer's situation. He was a Calvinist, probably converted to Catholicism. In 1653 he married Catharina Bolens, whose mother, Maria Thins was a committed Catholic maintaining strict relationships with the Jesuit mission in Delft. The married couple lived at Vermeer's mother-in-law's place in the Catholic district of Delft (R. Genaille, *Encyklopedia Malarstwa Flamandzkiego i Holenderskiego*, przeł. E. Maliszewska, K. Secomska, Warszawa 2001, p. 376).

can go back and look”, ha says. But how can we order the canal to be dragged? How can we look for somebody who is already presumed to be dead?”<sup>62</sup>

For the first time Jan ponders over painting the portrait of Sophia in his studio, being filled with love elation. He abandons the commissioned job, which is the family portrait of Cornelis and his wife. He decides to title the new picture *The Love Letter*. He entrusts his trainee, Jacob with completing the previous painting in which he is no longer interested. The rendition of *The Love Letter* begins in his mind in the form of an imaginary dialogue with Sophia. However, he prepares the real foreground for the picture in the same way as it can be observed in Vermeer’s paintings, somehow separating the viewer from the model in the painting:

In the foreground, on the table, Jan has arranged a still life from his own collection - goblets and jewelry he keeps in the chest for this purpose. They are not hers, just as the room is not hers, but in the painting they belong to her. Nor do they have any moral message - no skull, no empty mussel shells, no open lantern lying on the floor. They are simply things of beauty that will exist for this moment, in this painting. They are simply there to celebrate his love.<sup>63</sup>

Next, he considers the setting according to the fictitious account of his lover, in which she describes the interior, where she reads his letters.<sup>64</sup> His train of thoughts leads him to the observation that “all painting is illusion” and that “art lies, to tell the truth”. Thus, he realises the deceptive character of art, which is expressed in his words that “Even straight portraits are an approximation, filtered through the painter’s eye”.<sup>65</sup> The painting of the portrait continues in real with Sophia posing and reading Jan’s letter. As the whole scene is witnessed by Jacob, Sophia reads the letter aloud changing its content and pretending that it is addressed to her husband. At Jacob’s surprise, Jan replies with the conclusion which he arrived at earlier: “All painting is deception.”<sup>66</sup>

When informing the reader about completion of the picture, Moggach employs the shifting point of view. The information is delivered in the form of a mention made by Sophia, who smuggles the painting into her house. From that moment on the portrait, Jan’s *Love Letter*, will be her property that she will never tear up.<sup>67</sup> The motif of the picture recurs once more when Sophia stumbles upon it in the attic, where Maria is secretly going to give birth to her child. Sophia, who pretends to be pregnant, is in the state of apprehension, afraid that the plot will be given away. While looking at the canvas, she starts brooding over her fate and reflecting on her decision. Her bond with the character in the painting seems to be a very remote one:

In the corner leans my picture, *The Love Letter*. There is my painted self, alone with her dreams, poised at her own moment of decision. She looks so virginal, so untried. That decision has long been taken; I can hardly recognize that maidenly creature now.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> D. Moggach, op. cit., p. 257.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., p. 94.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., p. 92.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., p. 93.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., p. 95.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., p. 123, 124.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid. p. 170.

Before the idea of painting the portrait is conceived in Jan's mind, it appears in Cornelis's epiphanic vision. He can see his wife standing motionless half way up the stairs. It is the moment when it occurs to him that he begins to lose his wife:

Sophia stands at a window. [...] The window panes are tinted glass-amber and blood-red. [...] The sun shines through, suffusing her face with color. She stands there, utterly still. Cornelis thinks: she is already a painting – here, now, before she has been immortalized on canvas. Then he feels an odd sensation. His wife has vanished, her soul sucked away, and just her outward form remains in its cobalt-blue dress.<sup>69</sup>

The painterly vision serves two different purposes. In Cornelis's case it anticipates betrayal, for Jan, in the subsequent part of the book, it is the symbol of emotional fulfillment.

In the same chapter Moggach features Cornelis as a busy merchant of Amsterdam. He lives in the prosperous city, the fashionable citizens of which occupy the houses full of pictures mirroring their wealthy life-style. The genre paintings that predominate in their collections reflect everyday events in their lives, such as concerts, meetings as well as reading and writing of letters. What Moggach tries to do is to find the meaning hidden behind the paintings, the epistolary ones in particular:

The mirrored moments are stilled, suspended in aspic. For centuries to come people will gaze at these paintings and wonder what is about to happen. The letter, what does it say to the woman who stands at the window, the sunlight streaming onto her face? Is she in love? Will she throw away the letter or will she obey it, waiting until the house is empty and stealing out through rooms that recede, bathed in shafts of sunshine, at the back of the painting?<sup>70</sup>

When contemplating the vision of Sophia standing by the window, dressed in a cobalt-blue garment, Cornelis realizes that the spiritual bond with his wife has been severed. In the context of the events to follow, his vision assumes a symbolic meaning as his premonition anticipates his wife's betrayal.

The first hints about the portrait are rather sketchy. They are impressions rather than fully-developed visual realizations. The manner of introducing the picture resembles the process of conceiving the idea of a painting in the artist's mind. In the subsequent part of the novel Moggach features a more detailed analysis of the portrait. Her vision is a combination of the two epistolary portraits by Vermeer: the aforementioned *Woman in Blue Reading a Letter* from the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam and *A Girl Reading a Letter by an Open Window* from the Old Masters Picture Gallery in Dresden.

Sophia stands at the window. She is reading the letter. Through the glass, sunlight streams onto her face. Her hair is pulled back from her brow. Tiny pearls in her headband; they catch the light, winking at the severity of her coiffure. She wears a black bodice, shot with lines of velvet and silver. Her dress is violet silk; its pewtery sheen catches the light (Moggach 50).<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> Ibid., p. 28, 29.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid. p. 28.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid. p. 50.



Moggach also introduces the elements that appear in neither of the portraits, such as “a tapestry strung along a wooden trail”, “paintings glimpsed in the shadows” and “the green velvet curtains around the bed pulled back to reveal an opulent bed cover”.<sup>72</sup> Similar ornaments are typical of the seventeenth century Dutch genre paintings. They can be found in other Vermeer’s portraits and allegorical paintings<sup>73</sup> as well as in other works of artists of the time. What predominates in the description are the hues which seem to be the amalgam of the two portraits by Vermeer. From the psychological point of view, what Moggach strives to do is to recreate the aura of anticipation and hesitation, representative of Vermeer’s style:

She stands there, motionless. She is suspended, caught between past and present. She is color, waiting to be mixed; a painting, ready to be brushed into life. She is a moment, waiting to be fixed forever under a shiny varnish. Is this a moment of decision? Will she tear up the letter or will she steal away, through the silent rooms, and slip out of the house? Her face, caught in profile, betrays nothing.<sup>74</sup>

The description is a remote echo of Virginia Woolf’s prose, particularly her concept of “the moments of being”<sup>75</sup>, fragmentary illuminations which came to a standstill. It is also reminiscent of Lily Briscoe’s pondering upon the meaning of life, in which it is the “little daily miracles” that matter.<sup>76</sup> Similarly to Woolf, Moggach employs the impressionistic or even post-impressionistic manner of rendering her visions. The stylistic devices that she uses, such as short, fragmentary statements, resemble quick brush strokes recalling the pointillist pictures by Georges Seurat and Paul Signac. The words and phrases are similar to dots rather than impastos. As Vermeer is commonly regarded as the father of Impressionism<sup>77</sup>, the association with Divisionism, which stems from Impressionism, seems to be plausible.

The motif of a tulip is first featured in the book during the scene of the Sandvoorts’ second posing session for the family picture which is being painted by Jan van Loos. Cornelis decides to incorporate a vase of tulips among the elements that constitute the composition of the painting. A detailed depiction of the whole

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<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

<sup>73</sup> Among many others, the above mentioned ornamental objects appear in such Vermeer’s paintings as *Allegory of Painting*, *Allegory of Faith*, *The Astronomer*, *The Geographer*, *The Girl with the Wine Glass*, *The Music Lesson*, *Woman Holding a Balance* and *The Concert*.

<sup>74</sup> D. Moggach, op. cit., p. 51.

<sup>75</sup> *Moments of Being* is a collection of Woolf’s essays which were published posthumously in 1976. The title, which was chosen by the editor, Jeanne Schulkind, refers to *A Sketch of the Past*, one of the essays from the collection.

<sup>76</sup> V. Woolf, *To the Lighthouse*, Ware 1994, p. 118. Lily Briscoe is the character of a painter appearing in Woolf’s novel *To the Lighthouse*.

<sup>77</sup> Until the nineteenth century Vermeer and his artistic output were completely forgotten. His rediscovery is attributed to Théophile Thoré, a French socialist radical, who claimed that real art must be the reflection of ordinary people’s life. Thoré propagated the slogan *l’art pour l’homme* as opposed to *l’art pour l’art*. He paved the way for such realist painters as Corot, Millet or Courbet. He was a great admirer of Vermeer, his *View of Delft*, in particular. He published the first serious study concerning Vermeer in *Gazette des Beaux-Arts*, which subsequently inspired the Impressionists (A. Blankert, *Vermeer van Delft*, Warszawa 1991, p. 132–136).

setting is delivered in Sophia's account of the first posing session. The description of still life components, which are very much in accord with the Dutch genre painting of the time, is a pretext to introduce the main protagonists in terms of their social, economic and religious background:

We are being painted in my husband's library. The curtain is pulled back; sunlight streams into the room. It shines into his cabinet of curiosities – fossils, figurines, a nautilus shell mounted on a silver plinth. The table, draped with a Turkey rug, carries a globe of the earth, a pair of scales and a human skull. The globe represents my husband's trade, for he is a merchant. He owns a warehouse in the harbor; he imports grain from the Baltic and rare spices from the Orient. He sends shiploads of textiles to countries that are way beyond my small horizon. He is proud to display his wealth but also, like a good Calvinist, humbled by the transience of earthly riches – hence the scales, for the weighing of our sins on the Day of Judgment; hence the skull. *Vanity, vanity all is vanity.*<sup>78</sup>

The selection of the objects is made on the formulary basis and does not differ much from the typical seventeenth century Dutch genre paintings. For instance, a pair of scales appears in Vermeer's *Woman Holding a Balance*, Turkish rugs are to be found in most of his genre paintings, a globe can be seen in his *Astronomer* whereas a skull is a focal point in Herman Steenwyck's *Still Life: An Allegory of the Vanities of Human Life* from the National Gallery in London. What distinguishes the fictitious family portrait created by Moggach from those mentioned above is a vase of tulips perceived in the context of a transitory character of human life.

It is Cornelis's idea to include the tulips among the objects making up the still life in the painting. He is particularly fond of the flowers. The ones that he wants to be incorporated in the arrangement of the objects in the painting are *tulipa clusiana*, a very rare and expensive variety which is grown under glass. Having "the white petals flushed with pink"<sup>79</sup>, they remind him of "the faint blush on the cheek of chaste Susannah"<sup>80</sup>, the character admired by poets, also apparent in the canvas *Susannah and the Elders* which hangs on the wall of the Sandvoorts' house.<sup>81</sup> Cornelis's digressions lead him to conclusions concerning "the transitory nature of beauty" as a result of which "that which is lovely must one day die".<sup>82</sup> Van Loos's reply to Sandvoort's statement is a reminder of Horatian concept of *carpe diem*. Sophia's husband's counterargument that such teachings cannot be found in the Scriptures<sup>83</sup> is an implicit forecast of the rivalry both men will be involved in the subsequent part of the narrative. In the course of the ensuing discussion Cornelis asks the painter about tulipomania, the folly that has enslaved the whole nation, which again leads to a sharp exchange of both men's opinions concerning the nature of passion. Jan's attitude towards passion and business is contrasted with that represented by Cornelis. Without realizing it, both men become contenders

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<sup>78</sup> D. Moggach, op. cit., p. 11.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid., p. 29.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid., p. 3.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid. p. 29.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid.

in the field of tulipomania and love affection. Implicitly drawing on Herbert's *The Bitter Smell of Tulips*, Moggach dexterously uses Cornelis's knowledge of the subject to introduce the phenomenon of the tulip bulb bubble which will constitute the background of the events to come. Cornelis informs Sophia and Jan of the great fortunes made due to the speculations in the tulip bulb market, the symbol of which is the variety of *Semper Agustus* for which a prodigious sum of money, expressed in the value of tangible goods and commodities, must be paid. Next, Sandvoort presents an outline of the history of tulips' popularity in Europe and makes the references to the Bosschaert brothers as well as Jan Davidsz de Heem who immortalised the flowers in their canvas.<sup>84</sup> The picture is painted during the three consecutive sessions and finally completed in Jan's studio by his trainee, Jacob. The combination of tulips and a skull as the symbol of *vanitas* depicted in the fictitious family portrait does not appear very often in Dutch paintings of the seventeenth century. However, it can be found in, e.g., the two still life paintings of the time: Pieter Claeszoon's *Vanitas, Still Life* and Adriaen van Utrecht *Vanitas, Still Life with Bouquet and Skull*.

Moggach's references to *The Bitter Smell of Tulips* are most vividly apparent in creating the social and historical background for the plot in *Tulip Fever*. The development of the passionate love affair between Jan and Sophia coincides with the last phase of tulipomania. Both are follies doomed to failure. The lovers concoct a plot. Jan becomes a profiteer in the tulip bulb market. Thanks to financial machinations accompanied by Sophia's faked pregnancy, they both plan to gain a fortune which will enable them to elope to one of the Dutch colonies. Maria, Sophia's servant gives birth to a child, assisted by a corrupt doctor, while Sophia pretends to die in a prearranged confinement. But, the conspiracy falls through due to the unfortunate mishap. In the state of intoxication, Gerrit, Jan's servant, eats the bulb of the tulip which was meant to be sold, taking it for an onion. Sophia disappears, presumed dead by drowning. The absurdity of the event seems to correspond with the state of havoc in the tulip bulb market, best exemplified in the allegorical picture *Flora's Wagon of Fools* by Hendrick Pot, referred to in detail in Herbert's *The Bitter Smell of Tulips*.<sup>85</sup> The abrupt crisis in the love affair coincides with the economic meltdown caused by the abrupt tulip bulb crash.

Not only the main characters are involved in tulipomania. Willem, Maria's lover also falls prey to the folly. He first mentions the prospective profit he can make due to speculation in the conversation with Maria in which he declares his feelings towards her and the intention to marry her. Without revealing any details, he calls it "a business venture".<sup>86</sup> Willem's opinion of the tulip profiteers is very low. He calls them "kappisten – hooded ones, madmen"<sup>87</sup>, which is a direct reference to Herbert's essay, where the same term is used.<sup>88</sup> Although he does not consider himself a gambler, Willem joins the tulip speculators. Thanks to a few

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<sup>84</sup> Ibid., p. 30, 31.

<sup>85</sup> Z. Herbert, op. cit., p. 219, 220.

<sup>86</sup> D. Moggach, op. cit., p. 57.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid., p. 70.

<sup>88</sup> Z. Herbert, op. cit., p. 219.

machinations, which took place in taverns, he manages to multiply a modest sum of money he bet on tulip speculation, but he does not regard it as lunacy. His reasoning recalls the comparison to the myth of miraculous multiplication mentioned by Herbert.<sup>89</sup> Willem's dealings are justified by the affection he has for Maria. The settings in which his transactions took place are again reminiscent of the scenes described in *The Bitter Smell of Tulips*.<sup>90</sup> The may be also compared to the genre pictures by Adriaen Brouwer or Jan Steen. Due to an unfortunate coincidence, Willem mistakes Sophia for Maria, which leads him to the conviction that he is being betrayed. In a fit of rage and despair, driven by pangs of jealousy, he enters a tavern, where, in the state of intoxication, he is seduced by a young prostitute. Willem loses his money, gets beaten and is thrown into a canal. Nevertheless, he does not die. He seems to represent the sober part of the Dutch society referred to by Herbert in his essay.<sup>91</sup> Miraculously saved, he joins the navy and finally marries Maria, taking over the Vanvoorts' house. Unlike the main characters in the novel, Willem does not become yet another victim of tulip fever.

The intertextual dialogue conducted by Deborah Moggach with Zbigniew Herbert's essay *The Bitter Smell of Tulips* is undeniable. Her references assume both explicit and implicit form, especially in setting the background for the novel. It seems that Moggach treats Herbert essay as a point of departure for developing the plot in her book. Drawing abundantly on the facts mentioned by Herbert, she vividly depicts the Amsterdam of the Dutch Golden Age as well as its inhabitants in their religious and economic diversity. The characters in the book represent the cross-section of the society that populated the city in the seventeenth century. The scenes in the novel take place in bourgeois houses, taverns, city streets, markets and painters' studios. Like Herbert, she is intrigued with the fact that the folly of tulipomania affected the state which was famous for its frugality and sobriety instilled by Calvinist teachings. In her endeavour to recapture the atmosphere of the city engulfed by the state of speculative frenzy she refers to the same sources, directly quoting after Herbert, which is best exemplified by the dialogue between Pieter and Hans, two tulip profiteers who try to strike a bargain.<sup>92</sup> However, in her references she does not confine herself only to *The Bitter Smell of Tulips*. For example, describing the financial condition of the painters and the value of their pictures in the seventeenth century Netherlands<sup>93</sup>, she draws on *The Price of Art*, another essay from the collection *Still Life with a Bridle*. Most of all, however, as she emphasizes herself in the acknowledgments, she takes inspiration from the Dutch paintings of the time, which contributes greatly to creating an intermedial aura filled with both real and fictitious artists and their works.

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<sup>89</sup> Ibid., p. 2014.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid., p. 217.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid., p. 219.

<sup>92</sup> D. Moggach, op. cit., p. 153, 154; Z. Herbert, op. cit. 217, 218.

<sup>93</sup> D. Moggach, op. cit., p. 128.

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