

For *A Girl Asleep* by Jan Vermeer: *The first movie*

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A love-story, in the form of a movie scenario, built around the *impression* formed by the painting “A Girl Asleep” (or “A Woman Asleep at Table”) by Johannes Vermeer, is presented.

The story-line for the first of two planned movies, devoted to the painting “A Girl Asleep” by Jan Vermeer, follows. Not only are the events listed, which would provide the formal construction for a “scenario”, but their meanings are also explained, in a very subjective manner. These meanings can be conveyed by the actors, using their individual artistic techniques, which I cannot “orchestrate” here; but why, a professional will ask, is this subjectivism needed at all?

Well, with all due respect to its main academic aims, Art History cannot completely ignore *the psychology of the impressions* produced on us by this or that work of art, because without these impressions we would not be able to care strongly enough about Art to be interested in its History, or to understand the Artist or to perceive the real themes of the picture. Thus, some basic philosophy, *comprehensible to everyone*, would not be redundant, and perhaps naïvely, we hereby “award” Jan Vermeer the gold medal for Sentimentalism in European Art, for the happy ending of the story which follows. I really do not know any other artist who succeeded in making such simple situations and simple faces so significant, achieving his effects through the tool of a heart-felt sentimentalism that is the opposite of perfectionism (which Vermeer never tried to depict), and which is an important feeling that should not disappear from this world.

Sentimentalism need not be passive, and one need not wait for someone to say: “*I have a dream*”; one may understand this by himself.

The face of the sleeping girl is seen here as expressing a *dialog*. Such “dialogs” are usually shown by Vermeer by means of reading or writing a letter, sensitive glance, etc. The freedom of interpretation, or the freedom of understanding (each generally much more typical of poetry than of painting), provided by showing only one of the persons involved in the “dialog”, makes such pictures by Vermeer very “poetical”, just as “A Girl Asleep”.

Finally, the author does not feel guilty that the sleeping girl has chosen *him* among all art-lovers to be *thus* impressed by her

There are two difficult and very interesting female roles in the movie, real challenges for a young and an older actress.

To meet her parents

I

A boy from a good, highly educated family became a student and rented a room in a village close to his university placed outside his town, in a small house belonging to a simple family where the mother had died and a girl takes care of her father who became completely paralyzed after a war in which he was shell-shocked. The girl needs money and thus decided to rent out the room. Besides the room, there is a small living-room in the house where she lives with this silent old man and a very small kitchen with a corner for the washing machine (or just washtub).

She falls in love with the boy, but he does not notice, or want to notice this, because they both understand the difference in their social and educational levels, and that his plans for the future cannot joint those of her, at least what the latter should be.

The girl was good at mathematics in her secondary school, but this is absolutely irrelevant because she could not even dream continuing with her education. She kept her old notebook with some complimentary remarks of the teacher, and once had shown it to the boy, but he said that logarithms are not the recent advance in mathematics. This was the honest truth, and was said so politely and with such great tact, that she silently cried the whole night overwhelmed with emotion. Indeed, from where did such a well educated, nicely behaved boy appear? There was no other such person in the village. Can it be that the requirement to be polite should be added to the ten commandments?

Yes, he is well-educated and knows how to behave so as not to hurt anyone! By the way, politeness is important for one's career, and the Professors and Politicians appearing on TV screens are not sleeping sweetly close to the tables as one would, perhaps, like to see them, but are attacking each other as politely as possible. And, of course, the career has to be timely, because it is *impolite* not to look like the others, in particular to be an elderly Professor among the young.

The girl never dares to show her feelings to the boy, but, in any case, it is a good thing to love somebody, because this brings some good feelings into a difficult life!

II

If you could see the boy's mother! She has a leading position in an important modern office and long ago bought a beautiful silk dress embroidered with lilies for the glorious unforgettable moment when she will meet the parents of the fiancée of her wonderful son, their only child! Be sure that she *will* know how to conduct this meeting! She will not give her treasure away so simply; but one fiancée, the best among a million, must be found! This fancifully-staged intention to "meet her parents" became the Northern Star and the South Cross of the mother's dreams, and even her diet is partly motivated by the necessity to be gracious at the moment of this historical acquaintance, this great celebration. One sees, that she will have to shake hands not only with the fiancée's mother, but also with her father, which is a very different scenario, of course.

The boy's father, a Chief Engineer of a big firm, is less occupied with these plans, but quite well fits his spouse. They are a wonderful pair leading a respectable and interesting way of life, – one would say a noble one, just as they are.

The girl never saw the boy's parents. And this would be redundant, anyway. Once she occasionally noted, from the open documents on his table, his previous address, which would be absolutely meaningless, of course, if it were not for the Great Lord who gives, and just when it is needed, – ideas to our heads and impulses to our hearts. Though we all live in an intellectual era, and, thank God, are sufficiently clever by ourselves, it may be that some such events as the following one are still arranged in Heaven

We thus jump over many ordinary days during which nothing remarkable happened, just except that the girl's despair was accumulated and intensified, because this case was not just as "*look at these walls, -- what do I have apart of my love?*"; it was something *more than that*, and one knows that there *are* some processes, just as her love, whose enhance in time should be described on the logarithmic scale.

III

One winter day when fresh snow covered everything around, several old school friends of the girl came and tempted her to join them in their sledge, lined with bear skins inside, with older ones on the backs of the horses, for some fast riding from the village to the town. She agreed, found her hare-fur hat, put on her already rather tight old coat, and climbed into the sledge.

Oh, which Russian does not love riding quickly! Her cheeks became pink from the cold wind, and the stronger the wind was, the nicer this was for her. She was laughing and almost forgot her troubles. She felt a lot of energy and confidence streaming in. Indeed, why should she, -- the good girl who takes care of her father so skillfully and successfully, better than all the nurses in the world, -- just like a good angel, -- not feel confident? She simply *deserves* this rest, this riding, and this speed for her honest and hard work!

When, already somewhere in the town, the sledge sharply rounded a corner, coming to a wide street, she saw the surprising name of the street. Yes, this was the street where his parents lived! She jumped off the sledge and ran to the house whose number she remembered. With the same impulse, just unbuttoning her coat, she entered the apartment, and with all her force started breaking the luxurious sideboard placed in the living room in front of the door. She didn't even notice that the boy was also in the room, sitting in a corner with a textbook in modern algebra. Indeed, -- how could she know that it was the 25th anniversary of his parents' wedding?

All of the beautiful, expensive glasses and goblets, together with the book shelves carrying the art albums and a famous encyclopedia, were thrown down. Then the girl started trampling the glasses and the books on the floor. "*It is because of this garbage*", -- she cried with despair, -- "*that I shall not have my chance, shall not be happy?! Don't I deserve to be? Who do you think you are?! Not even shell-shocked while defending the country!*"

Having done with this bright wind-sledge philosophy, she wanted to go out, but noticed the luxury side-table with the goblets of best Italian crystal, like lilies in form, and other very beautiful items, ready for the celebration. Her first thought was to graciously thank the boy's parents for the relevant preparations and to overturn the table. She even made a step toward the table, but she *could not do that*, -- so amazed was she by this table from her best girlhood dreams in which she had been arranging *it* after cleaning again and again the selfsame lovely goblets intended for *her* guests, coming, with the help of God, to her wedding Thus, she simply got out loudly banging the door. Only the boy who had been looking just at her face all the time, noticed the tears appearing in her eyes, and since it is not something new in Russia that a girl leaves a house in tears, her friends who waited outside did not ask any question either.

IV

Well, such a pogrom had never been seen in this noble house! And who would imagine that it was just this perfect order that would lead, -- in some strange way directed by God, -- the modest daughter of a silent soldier to thus behave?

It may be only that such obvious, sincere indignation on the part of the girl was the reason why the over-whelmed parents of the boy simply could not move during this strange visit. But after she left, the parents very angrily required explanations from the embarrassed boy. He tried to explain, but this was not easy. At the same time, he was in just the same position as the famous professor saying to his students: "*Even I begin to understand, but you still do not?!*" Yes, this was really so, because a strange feeling of happiness started to fill him more and more during his explanations, as if something very good and very much wanted was on the way to him, so close that he starts to feel it. This feeling was of an even better kind than

that which you have when you start to understand a difficult mathematical theorem! This was as if the walls of one's prison were broken and started to fall, or, rather, like the blessing feeling on entering a hot bath and thawing out after a long trip in the terrible cold, when you do not feel your frozen fingers and toes.

I hope that at least you start to understand both the future professor and the mentioned professor!

V

The parents immediately decided that after finishing their celebration and preparing themselves well for any possible battle, they would visit the house where the boy was renting the room. Indeed, their only child obviously needed their help! They even called to their workplaces and took a special free day for this important undertaking. The actual problem was to decide whether to draw him away from the terrible girl tonight after the celebration, or tomorrow morning.

“You see! What luck that I took my silk dress from this chair to the cupboard just a minute before this pogrom started!” – said the mother, when they finished collecting the glass pieces.

“Yes, your lilies might be broken up into field flowers”, – said the father who was already immersed in the solution of some important technological problem that nobody could understand as well as he.

VI

The girl is informed about the visit and wants to do her best in order to meet the guests, – such a rare event in her life, – but this is not easy because of all the problems and the absolutely inappropriate obstacles associated with the care of her father who at this moment really makes her life less than easy. But she is not angry with him, because he is her farther and anyway this visit will not be good for her, especially after she has behaved so stupidly in their house. The latter thought even caused her to feel so tired that things were sometimes falling from her hands.

At the same time, by his very presence, and despite all of the troubles caused by him, her farther makes her stronger, and if the guests try to carry out a return-pogrom here, then she will know what to do in order to defend him and the home's honor, making clear who is right in all that is going on. Yes, it is her farther who was fighting for the country that can exist without the encyclopedias, but not without good girls like herself... .

You see, how many feelings she had! Who could bear this?

VII

The anxious boy's parents came much earlier than expected, before the boy returned from the university. They knocked on the door without any response coming, but it was not locked, and they entered the house.

They immediately saw the bed near the window, with the paralyzed old man on it, and the signs of the girl's preparations, – a bucket with a rag, and the well-ordered part of the small living room against the disordered rest. Through the open door to the kitchen some cooking processes and arrangements were seen.

At first, they did not see the girl. She sat sleeping at a table with her head leaning against her hand. She intended to sit just for a minute to rest a little bit, but her thoughts – which could not be completely without some vague unformulatable hopes, – captured her, and she fell asleep. Thus she was at this moment in the lovely world of her dreams and tender promises

addressed to the one whom you can guess, and isn't it a good piece of advice for young people *as strong as she is* not to be afraid of daring, and even making mistakes, first in their dreams, and then in reality?

Not wishing to awake her, the boy's parents sat in front of her and for several minutes they just kept silent and looked at her face. There were more of these minutes of looking at, – or, rather, close *studying* her, with the increasing interest and patient understanding that came from genuine nobility and adult wisdom, – than one might expect.

I cannot express how she really looked to them now. Any such attempt on my part would also be redundant since Jan Vermeer did this for us perfectly already by showing such a good angel in his "A Girl Asleep". You just have to change the environment a little in the picture, according to our needs, letting me not leave the boy's parents, in order not to miss something unbelievable, -- something which is the reason why Jan Vermeer is hereby awarded our Happy-Ending First Prize: **they say yes**.

Ooff, ... it took some time, but Vermeer did this, and as simply and easily as only he could! Bravo! ...

VIII

When the boy returned, he was amazed to hear, already from outside, the voice of his mother saying: "*I think I shall change his sheet*", and the voice of his father responding: "*How can you do this without your silk dress with lilies on?!*"

The boy knew that all that is touched by his mother became beautiful. Even in her office, every visitor, asleep or not, sees that *bureaucracy* and *beauty* are the same "*eau!*", and becomes happy (wow!) when shaking her hands!

The boy also knew his father sufficiently well to understand that the girl is already, - - politely but firmly, – drawn from the living room to the now-his-and-her bedroom so that the Chief Engineer could quietly plan how to improve the arrangement in the living room, including new means for taking better care of girl's father, and take some precise measurements for the needed enlargement of the house.

Recalling the girl's tears that he recently saw, the boy understood that it was the time to enter the house in order just to *be* with her, just to do the most important thing in the world, -- to embrace her. But before he did all that, – surely as majestically as only a future professor can do, -- the snow around the house got some strange footprints suggesting that somebody had jumped here from happiness! Or, yes! You see now why at springtime the snow disappears from the streets (consider, e.g., the "View of Delft" by the same Artist), – it is because young people start jumping for similar reasons!

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