

In Johannes Vermeer's 1657 painting, A Girl Asleep, the scene appears to be merely a young woman napping at a table. Upon closer inspection, the serenity of this painting shows much more detail, suggesting any number of deeper meanings Vermeer may have intended to convey. One thesis of this painting's significance is a symbolic analysis of this woman and her feelings.

The woman in this painting appears to be of a middle class background. Her gown is of a satin like material in a bright rust color. The material has a sheen suggesting some quality to it, while the dark color is resistant to the appearance of dirt. She is adorned with a pair of earrings, as well as a gold necklace, once again suggesting the possibility she has at least some money. Upon inspecting her face, you can see an air of peacefulness. Her eyes are closed with the eyelids relaxed, showing she is asleep and not just sitting with closed eyes or upset over something. Her lips show a faint smile, once again suggesting she's not troubled by anything.

The setting of room suggests some kind of contrast. On the table is a pitcher, as well as a bowl of fruit and bread. In the foreground of the table, the tablecloth is rumpled and appears to have been disrupted by whoever had previously occupied the empty chair also in the foreground. On the table, nearly impossible to detect, is a wineglass, appearing to be partly filled.

In the background of the painting is a view through a hallway into another room. The room in the back is fairly stark in contrast to the clutter on the table. All we see is a table with two paintings hanging over it. The bareness of the expanse of floor seen through to door suggests some kind of emptiness, perhaps in the young woman's life.

There are two light sources in the room. One comes from the right hand

corner of the room, unseen from the painted view. It's a bright light, appearing to be natural with yellow undertones suggesting it was at sunset when there would be a slight orange glow to the light from shadows and the angle of the sun going down. The other light source comes from left side of the room in the background. This light is has very yellow tones to it, suggesting it is not natural light, but from an artificial source, such as a candle or lamp.

This woman appears to be content, although she is alone. The chair partly pulled away from the table suggests that there are other important presences in her life, but the single wine glass may represent that she is a strong woman who doesn't need to depend on others for emotional support. She is comfortable relaxing alone. The quality of the fabric of her dress combined with the jewelry she's wearing suggests she doesn't need to depend on others financially either. The clutter on the table may show that on the surface she is busy and appears to have all she needs for the immediate future, but the emptiness of the room behind her suggests that there is a distance between her and her less immediate needs, or perhaps just the next stage of her life. The fact that there is something in the other room may indicate that there is something in the distance that is on her mind about her future. The warmth of the light in the other rooms suggests that she is not afraid of this distance, and that there is no need to fear it. The amber glow may show that she romanticizes her future while the brighter light in the foreground suggests more of a rational, real understanding of her present.

Vermeer's painting A Girl Asleep is so much more than just [OF] a young woman asleep at a table. It's a woman so content with what she has that she feels comfortable relaxing for a moment instead of rushing on to the next step that everyone expects her to take.