

IS THERE A WOMAN IN THE TEXT? A FEMINIST EXPLORATION OF KATHERINE  
MANSFIELD'S SEARCH FOR AUTHENTIC SELVES IN A SELECTION OF SHORT STORIES

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**Summary: Is there a woman in the text? A feminist exploration of Katherine Mansfield's search for authentic selves in a selection of short stories.**

Katherine Mansfield (1888-1923), British Modernist writer whose search for authentic selves in the lives of the characters in her short stories, is reflected in her innovative style of writing in which she examines the interior consciousness of their minds.

Mansfield questions the inauthentic lives of the characters, revealing that the roles they play are socially imposed forcing them to hide their true selves behind masks.

The stories which have been chosen for this study focus on women characters (and men also) who grapple with societal prescriptions for accepted actions, and are rendered mute as a result. The women characters include all age groups and social classes. Some are young and impressionable (*The Tiredness of Rosabel*, *The Little Governess* and *The Garden Party*), others are married and older (*Bliss*, *Prelude* and *Frau Brechenmacher attends a wedding*), while there are also middle-aged women in *Miss Brill* and *The Life of Ma Parker*.

**Key terms:**

British Modernism; innovative style of writing; women isolated in society; constricting prescriptions for actions; mute; gender differences; examination of interior consciousness of characters; identification with women's experience; masks; suppressed anger and despair.

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## Chapter 1

### Introduction

#### Katherine Mansfield : her position within the historical and literary context of Modernism

Katherine Mansfield (1888-1923), woman writer, vibrant with new ways of reporting perception, passionate about technique, keenly interested in women's concerns and identifying with women and women's experience, is considered by Ian Gordon to have

had the same kind of directive influence on the art of the short story as Joyce had on the novel. After Joyce and Katherine Mansfield neither the novel nor the short story can ever be quite the same again (1964:105).

The directive influence initiated by both Mansfield and Joyce centres on their dispensing with the novelistic convention that requires a beginning, a middle section and an ending. The entire tale becomes the depiction of the inner life of characters, rather than an exposition of external events. External events appear as important, but incidental props to the vital information that is gleaned from the exploration of the mind of the character itself. Superficially at least, the new way of writing appears to be without art or method or form; the "life depicted in words" seems just to go on and on. Yet it is original, and carries its own kind of coherence; inevitably such originality will be problematic in its reception by the reading public, and also by fellow writers.

It is interesting that some of Mansfield's contemporary male writers did not have Gordon's view of her. Lytton Strachey, at the heart of Bloomsbury, gave an account of Mansfield's writing as follows: "[s]he wrote some rather — in fact — distinctly — bright storyettes in a wretched little thing called the *Signature*, which you may have seen, under the name of Matilda Berry" (Woolf and Strachey, 1956:82). T.S.Eliot's comments echo Strachey's, but with a stronger emphasis on smallness. He claimed that she "handled perfectly the minimum material — it is what I believe would be called feminine" (Eliot, 1934:38).

Further comments on Mansfield, by Strachey to Virginia Woolf, continue the less than complimentary tone by noting the mask-like features of her face: "an ugly impassive mask of a face — cut in wood, with brown hair and brown eyes very far apart; and a sharp and slightly vulgarly fanciful intellect sitting behind it" (Woolf and Strachey, 1956:81). The comments by male writers reveal their unease and alarm at what Bertrand Russell thought of as the "penetration in discovering what they least wished known and whatever was bad in their characteristics" (Russell, 1986:21).

A.R. Orage, the editor of the *New Age* wrote a scathing satire, *Tales for men only*, on Mansfield, and based a fictional character, “Mrs Foisacre” on her. This character is accused of an unbecoming lack of indifference to sex (the fact that she married early is proof of her sexual precocity), of promiscuity, and of conducting herself in an independent manner by renting a flat and entertaining at all hours. She suffers from both moral and intellectual “depravity”, and reveals by her tastes that she displays the characteristics of the mob. The mob, for Orage, lacks refinement and a sensitive appreciation of the written word, is generally dull and given up to the satisfaction of the baser senses. Consequently the meaning of culture evades them completely. These characteristics Mrs Foisacre absorbs passively, and reflects them with equal passivity. According to Orage, this was proof that the education of her tastes was a well-nigh impossible task. It is said that her education was comparable to educating the mob. He felt that if the mob came into existence it should be “be kept under” (Orage, 1912:112). The satiric response from Orage most likely originated in the perception that he had formed of Mansfield’s person, her literary ability, and the effect that women writers, in general, had on the Modernist literary scene at that time. Another dubious comment by contemporary writer Frank O’Connor vividly conveys his sense of the effect of Mansfield’s writing on the literary scene. He writes of her as “the brassy little shop girl of literature who made herself into a great writer” (Stead, 1977:29).

Mansfield’s own wry comment, about male Modernists, Joyce and Eliot, points primarily to their disregard for the Russian writer of short stories, Tchekhov, as they craft the techniques of Modernism by their own set of standards. In a letter to S.S. Koteliansky, in early August 1919, she noted:

I wonder if you have read Joyce and Elliot [sic] and those ultra modern men. It is so strange that they should write as they do *after* Tchekov. For Tchekov has said the last word that has been said, so far, and more than that he has given us a sign of the way we should go. They not only ignore it: only think Tchekov’s stories are almost as good as the ‘specimen cases’ in Freud (*Letters*, II, 1987:345).

Mansfield’s own meaningful thoughts on the craft of writing are expressed before her comments on the style of the male Modernists, when she writes to Ottoline Morrell in July 1919, and notes:

[i]t only makes one feel one adores English prose — how to be a writer — is *everything*. I do believe that the time has come for a “new word” but I imagine the new word will not be spoken easily. People have never explored the lovely medium of prose. It is a hidden country still — I feel that so profoundly (*Letters*, II, 1987:343).

The discovery of the “hidden country” of prose by Mansfield, and another contemporary woman writer, Virginia Woolf, supports the claim made by Kaplan that “[w]omen are at the center rather than the margins of British Modernism” (1991:6). They were women writers at the centre of a new way of shaping language, and in the course of such change, of structuring reality in order to communicate thoughts, feelings and experiences that their masculine counterparts, steeped in the culture of male-centred being, would neither accept nor allow, nor consider worthy of attention.

After the publication, in New Zealand, of the early vignettes in 1907 in *The Native Companion*, and the 1908 story, *The Education of Audrey*, the youthful example of innovative attempts that best illustrates Mansfield’s creative potential is *The Tiredness of Rosabel* (1908). The evidence of interior monologue, and the spatial rendering of the passing of time in the form of flashbacks in the mind of the fictional character, allows for the creation of an emotionally evocative picture of a young woman’s dreams and dream state. The apparently incongruent and flimsy wishes of the girl Rosabel are linked by a single image, the Parma violets. This image symbolizes the luxury, the warmth and the love that she does not have at present. The use of interior monologue concentrates within a single moment, a whole episode or even a series of significant moments. In *The Tiredness of Rosabel*, Fullbrook notes that

[t]he inaccessibility of the meaning of the story, with its two disparate sets of images that only the reader can pull together, to the consciousness of the central character, forms a crucial aspect of the story’s meaning (1986:38).

Mansfield’s style is characterized by indirection, where thoughts and ideas are conveyed obliquely by means of implication, suggestion and symbolism. In *The Doll’s House* (1921) symbolism is used to convey the implicit meaning which the little lamp suggests, because this minute object is clothed with a deeper and lasting significance. It is imbued with a life of its own, as it becomes the means of linking the individual parts of the story to create an organic whole. The closing words by Else, “I seen the little lamp” (505), suggest that the lamp symbolizes an interior world in which peace, contentment, and psychological closure have been achieved.

The use of the “stream of consciousness” technique is ideally suited to Mansfield’s needs as she dispenses with an external narrator, and employs multiple viewpoints (within a single character). In *Prelude* (1918), the focus of Linda’s revelation of motherhood occurs in a single moment of truth that has lasting implications for herself and her family. In commenting on *Miss Brill* (1920), Mansfield writes to her brother-in-law, Richard Murry on 17 January 1921 that “I chose not only the length of every sentence, but even the sound of every sentence” (*Letters*, IV, 1996:165). In that

story, the juxtaposition of the two young people and Miss Brill, as they share a park bench exposes the stark reality of societal cruelty and ostracism. Miss Brill's moment of truth occurs as a shocking revelation amidst her pleasurable excursion in the park. In the story, *Life of Ma Parker* (1920), the literary gentleman's sentimentalized view of the baking trade is juxtaposed with the reality of Ma Parker's hard life, and the mask that she wears. She is forced into silence and into inauthentic living, and is on the brink of insanity. He is unaware of her discomfort, and merely shudders and continues with his writing.

The stories for the dissertation were chosen because in each one Woman is depicted as trapped within the expectations of patriarchal society. These expectations stifle her potential for authentic growth and development. The early stories are youthful examples of a writer who is experimenting with technique and the craft of writing. The later stories, written in 1921, reveal a refinement of technique and a sharper focus on the intricate workings of the minds of the characters themselves, and their search for authentic selves. The stories are grouped in each chapter to reflect Mansfield's awareness of woman's entrapment in society, and do follow the chronological development of a writer's growth and development of technique and subject matter. The stories in Chapter Three, *Prelude* (1918) and *At the Bay* (1921), were written with an interval of three years between them, but are usually grouped together because they consider the life of the same family, the Burnells. Those in Chapter Two, *Frau Brechenmacher attends a wedding* (1911) and *The Woman at the Store* (1912) are examples of the feminist thrust that characterized her early work, and reveal that the female characters are robbed of effective speech and not in a position to express even the most basic of needs. These two stories demonstrate Mansfield's anger at the effect of the female traditional role, and reveal her own understanding of this role. The two stories in Chapter Three are *Prelude* (1918) and *At the Bay* (1921) and reveal the female character in the story to be a reluctant sexual partner to her husband, and a languid mother to her children. She is partnered by a paternalistic and self-centred husband, whose sexual embraces frighten her, and make her aware of her potential to bear children, unwillingly. The stories in Chapter Four are *The Daughters of the Late Colonel* (1921) and *The Doll's House* (1921). The female characters in these stories are outcasts of a society that places no value on them. The daughters live on the fringes of their father's life, and the two lower class children live on the fringes of a social system that ostracizes them. The first story is an indictment to the patriarchal system, and the second story reveals the cruelty of societal codes of behaviour. Chapter Five deals with a young female character trapped by a detestable male character, Raoul Duquette whose prime objective is to further his own artistic life at the expense of a young English woman, who cannot speak French. The woman character is revealed as weak, and not able to deal with the arrogance and selfishness of the French writer when he deserts her. Her English

lover deserts her too, and she remains in Paris, alone and forsaken. Chapter Six deals with Mansfield's *femme seules* stories, *The Little Governess* (1915), *The Life of Ma Parker* (1920) and *Miss Brill* (1920). These stories were grouped together because each one depicts female characters who are vulnerable and alone, and who belong "to no familiar community." (Parkin – Gounelas 1991:151). They are the victims of circumstances which they cannot control, and are the outcasts of society. The interval of five years between *The Little Governess* and the other two stories did not diminish Mansfield's concern for the plight of women, but rather intensified it since she produced two stories on similar themes in the same year. The final chapter deals with the short story, *The Voyage* (1921). This is a story in which the female character is a little girl whose mother has died, and, together with her grandmother, she embarks on a voyage to a new life with her grandparents. Her immediate loss is immense, but the potential for authentic growth and development is present. In all the stories, the female characters search for authentic selves and strive towards growth and development within a wilderness of opposing forces, societal or personal. None of the characters' search is completely successful, but for some the insight gained is the first step towards a more balanced life. The male characters are subject to the forces of societal pressures as they too are engulfed by prescriptive codes of behaviour and expectations.

### **An examination of Mansfield's sense of self.**

Katherine Mansfield was born Kathleen Mansfield Beauchamp and adopted the pseudonym, Katherine Mansfield nineteen years later. She was known in the family circle by the affectionate name of Kass, and became her grandmother's special reserve, her "Granny's Kass" (Alpers 1980:3). At school, and in the early days in London, she was known as Kathleen, but as the focus of her life changed so also did her names. She used over twenty different names and pseudonyms in her personal and professional life, but chose Katherine Mansfield and K.M. when she started writing for *The New Age*. This name remained as her professional identification until her death.

A Journal entry in 1920 reveals a mature awareness that the multitude of names by which she chose to be known in her youth was no safeguard against isolation in the world. Mansfield's doubts find expression in her questioning the nature of the self, and she writes:

[t]rue to oneself! which self? which of my many — well, really, that's what it looks like coming to — hundreds of selves? For what with complexes and repressions and reactions and vibrations and reflections, there are moments when I feel I am nothing but the small clerk of some hotel without a proprietor, who has all his work cut out to enter the names and hand the keys to the willful guests. Nevertheless, there are signs that we are intent as never

before to puzzle out, to live by, our own particular self. *Der mensch muss frei sein* — free, disentangled, single. Is it not possible that the rage for confession autobiography, especially for memories of earliest childhood, is explained by our persistent yet mysterious belief in a self which is continuous and permanent: which, untouched by all we acquire and all we shed, pushes a green spear through the dead leaves and through the mould, thrusts a scaled bud through years of darkness, until one day, the light discovers it and shakes the flower free — and we are alive — we are flowering for our moment upon the earth? This is the moment which, after all, we live for — the moment of direct feeling when we are most ourselves and least personal (*Journal*, 1954:205).

The very Modernist enquiry prompted by the assumption of a stable, pre-existing self changes to an exasperated tone that reflects self-doubt and uncertainty as — she tries to convince herself of the existence of one self among “hundreds of selves.” She feels disempowered by the magnitude of the change of values regarding the self, from one period in history to another, and explains her feelings by using the image of a nameless clerk in a small hotel who merely hands out keys to wilful guests, and records their names. Doubt is cast as to the ownership of the hotel, as the owner is absent. The hotel without an owner is paralleled by Mansfield’s depiction of a sense of a self without a continuous thread that connects and binds the fragments of its being.

There is a moment of emotional reprieve in the next paragraph of the *Journal* entry, as she changes to the third person in order to achieve a measure of detachment from her own personal situation. The tone of the rest of the passage is lyrical and nostalgic, and is achieved by her use of words that are organic, Romantic and mystical. Her vocabulary is Romantic in its reflection of the awakening of the consciousness of the individual amidst the solitude of floral growth. The metaphor of the green spear forcing its way, “through years of darkness,” (*Journal*, 1954:204) heightens the parallel awakening of the “flowering of our moment on earth.” (*Journal*, 1954:204) The recognition of the moment of flowering on earth brings with it the discovery of the self as opposed to the construction of the self. Mansfield alternates between self-discovery and self-making throughout her life, and is aware that the discovery of the self is dependent upon “the moment of direct feeling when we are most ourselves and least personal” (*Journal*, 1954:205). The predominant Modernist concern with impersonality is clearly seen in the latter part of the passage. Some of her early stories, collected in *In a German Pension* (1911) rely on the first person narrator to convey the meaning she wishes to achieve, but her later stories such as *Prelude* and *At the Bay* reveal primarily the minds of the characters themselves and reflect Mansfield’s desire to move towards impersonality of expression. Mansfield’s words on the impersonality of the artist echo the words of Murry, her husband, when he wrote in April 1920, that the great artist is one “whose work manifests an incessant growth from the

merely personal immediacy to a coherent and all-comprehending attitude to life.”(Middleton Murry, 1920a:13-14). The “personal” which Mansfield sought to defeat is contained in the “all comprehending attitude to life,” and encapsulates a life in which the writer was in a position to be free of conventional social restraints, and reflect and interpret the world truthfully in a chosen literary form.

Freedom from conventional restraints meant that Mansfield had decided, at an early age, to “try all sorts of lives — one is so very small — but that is the satisfaction of writing — one can impersonate so many people” and wrote of her intentions to her cousin Sylvia Payne on 24 April 1906 ( *Letters*, I, 1984:19). This desire was motivated by her awareness, fairly early in her life that her own psychological composition was not easy to define, and that the individual expression of the self would come through her writing. In a *Journal* entry in January 1907, she affirms her decision to be a writer by saying, “[t]he fact remains at that — I must be an authoress” ( *Journal*, 1954:8). Her search for her “own particular self” ( *Journal*, 1954:205) was vested in moments when she felt that she was one with Nature and the natural world. At such times, she felt that

[n]ature said to [her], “now that you have found your true self — now that you are at peace with the world accepting instead of doubting — now that you love — you can see.”

Beloved half the world is blind, as you say — I cannot understand how they pass their days, but, since you have held and dominated my life, I feel the last veil between me and the heart of things has been swept away — ( *Letters*, I, 1984:72-73).

Her words are from a love letter written in October 1908, to Garnett Trowell, before her writing career had been established, and point to the unifying image of love. Ironically this image contains the potential loss of the new-found autonomy that love brings, as Mansfield stresses the domination of love and the possibility that the discovery of the effects of love may be yet another impersonation, with pain and doubt as great as before. The contradiction within Mansfield’s, and other Modernist writers’ view of the self lies in their disavowal of the belief in the old stable ego of character, but at the same time their attempts at disavowal reflect their need to discover individual ways to imply an invisible “tougher self.” Fullbrook notes Mansfield’s attraction to the idea of an underlying unified self. She writes:

[w]hile she is attracted to the possibility of a unified self, even if knowable only in infinitesimal moments, there is a final hanging back. And it is in this hesitation, this honest uncertainty in the face of desire and need that finally makes Katherine Mansfield one of the toughest and darkest of the Modernists (1986:19).

Mansfield's hope that the self, as it "pushes a green spear through the dead leaves" (*Journal*, 1954:205) would achieve a moment of pure being, and be able to exist without the aid of masks and roles is not possible since the mask, artificial and contrived as it was, provided a measure of protection from social forms. Woolf's comment in April 1919 about Mansfield's own mask is revealing, because she notes that, "the hard composure is much on the surface" (Woolf I, 1977:265). This echoes Mansfield's advice to Murry in February 1920 concerning the wearing of a mask, "but don't lower your mask until you have another mask prepared beneath — As terrible as you like — but a *mask*" (*Letters*, I, 1984:318).

Mansfield encouraged her friends to see her as a "masked woman," and Ottoline Morrell noted that Mansfield had a curious smooth unruffled face that resembled a Japanese mask. Morrell noted that the younger woman would inevitably have hidden her sensitive soul behind a mask because "[i]f she explained herself at all she would say 'I was really a child'" (Morrell, 1974:236). The mask provided Mansfield with the means to move very close to the edge, between being isolated from the throb of humanity and being in the centre of a mystical appreciation of the world. The mask provided her too with a surface covering which allowed her the freedom from personal chaos when her attempts to achieve autonomy were not wholly successful. Beneath the mask, Mansfield could indulge in impersonation and experience a sense of freedom that such role-playing brought. She could be an artist to whom all truths are known, and she could say with Marie Bashkirtseff "[*m*]oi marier et avoir des enfants! Mais quelle blanchisseuse — je veux la gloire." (Baskirtseff, 1890:338). Her glory was to be in her one thousand lives. She had planned to write something beautiful yet modern.

Impersonation implies the notion of multiple selves, and brings to the fore the question of the authenticity of each individual self amidst an array of selves. The female characters, and also the male characters that are discussed in the chosen short stories are presented by Mansfield in the guise of inauthentic identities. Their masks support their inauthentic selves, and only reveal their vulnerable selves beneath the mask in very private moments. The protection of the mask ensures that their lives are characterized by familiar and trusted actions that meet the expectations that society prescribes for men and women. An example that illustrates Mansfield's idea of the mask that protects multiple selves is to be seen in the life of Beryl Fairfild in *Prelude*, when she recognizes her "false self" (258) or her "other self" (256) as she masquerades as the beautiful, but unmarried sister-in-law. She recognizes the "tiny moments" (258) when she is most herself only on rare occasions, and wishes she were less dependent on the mask she wears. Linda Burnell too, wears a heavy mask as the wife of Stanley Burnell, and shares the relief of the women in the household

when her husband leaves for work. She retreats to a fantasy world which provides a modicum of escape from the reality of her daily round of married life and motherhood.

**Sexual differences: gender disguise.**

Katherine Mansfield's secret life, as she recorded the details in her *Journal* entries, revealed her sexual nature, and did not reflect the outlook of a conventional woman of the time. She became aware, early in her life, of her own sexuality but more significantly, of her own bisexuality. She wrote, as early as 1907 of a madness, which she felt was

too real for sanity — it is a rosary of fierce combats for two — each bound together with the powerful magnetic chain of sex — and at the end — does the emblem of the crucified — hang — surely (Mansfield *Notebook 39*, O'Sullivan, 1975:117).

As she matured, she did not cease to think of the effect of gender and sexual differentiation on the individual, and wrote as late as 1921 of her wish that the societal differentiation into sexes/genders, and the subsequent interpretation of these two aspects of life could be dissolved by a situation where

[w]e are neither male nor female. We are a compound of both. I choose the male who will develop and expand the male in me; he chooses me to expand the female in him. Being made "whole"... (*Journal*, 1954:259).

She also felt that Art (and by implication the artist) is beyond sex or gender, that the artist apprehends life, providing a transformation of the way consciousness is perceived. Consequently she rejected the idea of a self that was stable and constricted by social forms, and thought rather of a genderless, multiple, shifting, non-consecutive consciousness. This underwrites her awareness of the danger of pre-cast sexual determinants. Fullbrook reaffirms the above, by noting

that the Modernist movement is usually portrayed as a largely male affair. But it is not only the case that women writers had a decisive effect on this literary revolution, it is also true that one of the organising principles of the avant garde writing of the period was centred on a new examination of gender, its origins and its instability (1986:11).

Mansfield's portrayal of the differences between the sexes reveals the importance of her examination of gender, and was vested in her questioning the nature of the inauthentic lives of both the men and the women figures in her fiction. She explores the enforced dependence of women on the static nature of definitions that were socially imposed upon them, and highlights the need for the exposure of a women's reality and vision. This sense of subjectivity is defined as culturally Other

and has not defined itself, but has been defined by others. In order to be true to her calling as a writer during the Modernist period, Mansfield had to deal with the question of influence from sources such as Anton Tchekhov and other Russian authors, from Oscar Wilde and the Aesthetes. She had to decide, by way of experimentation, on the genre that would best suit her literary needs. The refinement of technique would be the final seal to the outcome of her writing, and her emergence as a woman writer. The actual process of writing, as it is revealed from documentation other than the selected short stories, is reflected in the letters, the journals and the poems. The latter documents reveal an image of the woman writer, in a state of unselfconscious creativity that is often not considered by male critics as a legitimate part of a writer's literary works. The *Journal* contains astute observations of stories in progress, while a mark of the letters is the range of personae that appear with fresh originality, together with Mansfield's own perceptive enquiries into creative endeavour. The comments and observations in the letters that cover the eighteen months from her return from France to England in the spring of 1920, and her decision in the Swiss Alps at the end of the next year to live independently, are crucial to her development as a writer, and as a shaper of modern fiction. During those months of fairly sustained writing she produced stories like *The Daughters of the Late Colonel* (1921), *Miss Brill* (1920), *At the Bay* (1921) and *The Garden Party* (1921). These stories reveal her inner conviction that the achievement of the necessary honesty in her writing, and the shedding of the accumulated "false selves", was vital to a sincere desire to reshape, and refine herself as much as her prose.

The question of sexuality in Mansfield's works has its origin in her own experience of being a woman. The implication for her growing sexual awareness, and the awareness of sexual difference was influenced, during her formative years within the nineteenth century maxim of women as "angels in the house," and a sense of sexuality was created that was shrouded and veiled in unspoken fantasies. Oscar Wilde changed this for Mansfield, and for the society in which she lived by being the object of a trial in which homosexuality was the charge. This created a public image for the "homosexual," a term which became current, and which exposed the boundary between acceptable and abhorrent behaviour.

For Mansfield the influence from Wilde gave her male models of sexuality, but this served only to kindle a renewed awareness that her sexual interest spanned "the whole octave of the sex" which she noted in her *Journal* in November 1906 (*Journal*, 1954:5). An awareness of the multiplicity of sexual desires was beginning to develop. She writes, also in 1906 (on a sea voyage home to New Zealand ) about a young man she encountered during the voyage. He is compared to a Grecian statue, and Mansfield wrote longingly of "his absolute self-confidence, the beauty of his body"

(*Journal*, 1954:5). Mansfield admired the force of his body, but within her apparent desire for the young man, the current Wildean thought appeared, “[w]e deny our minds to the extent we castrate our bodies.” It is paralleled immediately with a comment of her own in her mind, “I am thinking that it most certainly is” (*Journal*, 1954:5). Her attraction to men was masochistic, and she “desired to be strangled by his firm hands” (*Journal*, 1954:5). This is transferred in equal measure to women. It appears as if her attraction to both the sexes was becoming a telling feature of her existence. She can include in her thoughts on sexuality, the possibility of lesbian sexual behaviour. Jeffrey Weeks notes that “[t]he lesbian identity was much less clearly defined, and the lesbian subculture was minimal in comparison with the male and even more overwhelmingly upper class or literary” (1981:5).

During her residence as a student at Queen’s College, London, (1903-1906) she met Ida Baker, the girl who acted as the “wife,” in her life. Ida was a colonial like herself, and she remained with Mansfield until days before her death. Mansfield’s parents, especially her mother, feared the unnatural liaison with Ida, and strongly disapproved of it. Such was her disapproval that Mansfield’s mother sailed from New Zealand and organized that her daughter be “sent to a convent in the mountains” (Alpers, 1980:94), and that Ida be sent on a holiday to the Canary Islands. Ida herself was puzzled, as she admitted “I did not know then what a ‘lesbian friend’ meant.” (Alpers, 1980:94). The strong attachment to Ida was fraught with personal difficulties, and was subject to Mansfield’s illness and the mood swings it brought. It continued through her marriage to Murry and her short-lived affair with Francis Carco (a friend of Murry’s). For Mansfield it was difficult to make the shift in feelings from women to men because “her lesbianism was submerged in all her involvements with men, and it is never really resolved” (O’Sullivan, 1975:118-119).

Even the passionate desire for Garnet Trowell, who was the first heterosexual focus of her desires, was clouded by what she herself called “the Oscar-like thread”, in an entry for November 1906 (*Journal*, 1954:16). Association with Wilde’s philosophy of life meant that the example of male homosexuality, together with Mansfield’s uncanny physical resemblance to Wilde himself, created images of sexuality that fanned her own images (and desires) for what even she considered forbidden. She illustrated this in her comments in 1907 about her Maori friend, Maata Maphupuku,

I want Maata — I want her as I have had her — terribly. This is unclean I know but true.

What an extraordinary thing — I feel savagely crude — and almost powerfully enamoured of the child. I had thought that a thing of the Past — Heigh Ho!!!!!!!!!!!! (*Journal*, 1954:13)

Kaplan observes that even though Mansfield will choose male objects of sexual desire, “she would love them in the *style* of a man loving other men” (1991:39). Mansfield sought many and varied

outlets for sexual expression which were irrevocably linked to her idea of the artist and of artistic endeavour. The influence of the thought patterns of Wilde, the Decadents and the Aesthetes were not merely a fashionable interlude that would pass with time. They became, for her, a model which contributed “toward the idolization of art as a means of controlling the forbidden while allowing it nonetheless oblique expression” (Kaplan, 1991:35). The Aesthetes’ credo included the call “to burn oneself out for Art,” to push as far as the body could be employed in the service of art and to don an exaggerated aesthetic pose or poses. These reflected a predominantly masculine imitation of Art where the aesthetic pose was an integral part of the realization of True Art which, for the Aesthetes meant a release from moral codes that imposed societal modes of behaviour. They believed that the concept of Ideal Freedom could be achieved by its sensual depiction in Art. In this way their mode of living that appeared to be excessive and immoral, could be validated.

For Mansfield the woman writer, the expectations of her life as a woman were often in conflict with the life-style of the committed writer, and she discovered with growing insight that the credo of the Aesthetes, and the spirit of Modernism intensified her awareness that “I’m a writer first and a woman after” (*Letters*, IV, 1996:133). In her writing, Mansfield merged the sexual and the artistic, and gave expression to topics that it was forbidden to speak of in proper circles. For Mansfield, acknowledging her own bisexuality, and writing of it in her fiction, was to enter

“difficult territory” because she was not only exposing in fiction the motivations of women whose psychology resembled her own; she was writing about a subject which in the aftermath of the Wilde trial, was considered morally wrong, if not forbidden (Hankin, 1983: 66).

In her fiction, Mansfield writes knowledgeably and sympathetically about female sexuality, about women alone and women trapped unwittingly in impossible societal and sexual situations. She writes openly of a bisexual attraction in *Bliss* (1918) where Bertha, the privileged young woman becomes aware of a dual focus of attraction for both her husband, Harry, and her friend Pearl. Her attraction is unashamedly sexual, and becomes a startling experience of awakening and betrayal for her.

The discussion of the sexual and the artistic aspects of her life, and the subsequent writing that was the result, is closely linked to Mansfield’s expression and interpretation of the feminist thrust in her writing. This was clearly evident in her early writing. The political questions of the period (such as the Woman Question which will be discussed later in this chapter) are rooted in social and historical factors that led to a surge of creative writing (by women) which is centred not only on the lot and plight of women, but also on new forms and techniques of expression. Kaplan is adamant that

“without above-mentioned grounding in social history, discussion of ‘feminism’ in Mansfield’s life and work becomes deadlocked at the level of the personal” (1991:127). She rightly asserts that the problem in discussing Mansfield’s feminism is an adequately theorized definition of feminism. Varying references to either the suffrage movement, or in a broader sense, a defence of women against oppression by men, or to the differences between men and women, are all considered to be within the sphere of what is broadly termed feminism. As far as Mansfield herself is concerned, Hanson and Gurr refer to

what must be called a feminist awareness running through her writing, in the sense that there is always a strong sense of division and discontinuity between the male and female experiences of life (1981:13-14).

### **Historical background: The New Woman.**

The historical events that led to the emergence of the Modernist woman writer are centred on the birth of the ‘New Woman.’ During the 1880’s and 1890’s, ideas about the ‘New Woman’ were frequently discussed in the periodical press. The phrase itself, now famous but then infamous, comes from Sarah Grand’s essay, “The New Aspect of the Woman Question.” (Grand, 1894:270-276) The accepted social behaviour for nineteenth century women was a selfless, submissive demeanour which reflects women as the “angel in the house.” Virginia Woolf speaks of the “angel” in her essay, *Professions for women* in *Killing the angel in the house* and mentions that it was

she who used to come between me and my paper when I was writing reviews. It was she who bothered me and wasted my time and so tormented me that at last I killed her (1995:3).

The New Woman was very much a *fin-de-siecle* phenomenon. Contemporary with the new socialism, the new imperialism, the new fiction and the new journalism, she was part of the concatenation of cultural novelties which manifested itself in the 1880’s and 1890’s (Ledger, 1997:1). The appearance of an article in *Nineteenth Century* by Blanche Alethea Crackanthorpe caused an uproar, as it stated that an unmarried girl had the right to be considered “as an individual as well as a daughter” (Ledger, 1997:11). She should be allowed to travel freely, visit music halls and enjoy better education. She deserved the option of a future other than that of wife and mother. The threat to traditional marriage was considered the chief reason for the distrust and opposition to the New Woman. A woman ensconced in the safety and security of an established marriage was not likely to

show her independence by dealing freely with the relations of the sexes. Hence all the prating of passion, animalism, the natural workings of sex, and so forth, with which we are nauseated.

Most of the characters in these books seem to be erotomaniacs. Some are amorous sensitives; others are apparently sexless, and are just at pains to explain this to the reader. Here and there a girl indulges in what would be styled, in another sphere, ‘Straight talks to young men’, (Stutfield,1895:836).

Such straight talks can take many forms, but the “talks” that created a lasting impression and encouraged further talks were those at the heart of what was to become the Bloomsbury circle. Virginia (whose married name is Woolf), and Vanessa Stephen’s brother, Thoby is generally credited with inaugurating Bloomsbury Thursday Evenings. His two sisters were avid albeit silent and fierce listeners. It was noted that Virginia spoke only to the person sitting next to her, though with her teachers of Latin and Greek, Miss Pater and Janet Case, “she was more open and less reserved” (Noble,1989:27-30). By listening and observing, she gained valuable material for later appropriation.

In contrast to Woolf’s more literary background (she had access to the books in her father, Leslie Stephen’s library), Mansfield’s literary origins are rooted in a time in her personal history when her discovery of a novel in 1908 by feminist Elizabeth Robins marked the beginning of serious considerations about the position of women, and the role they would play in society in the future. Her comments in her *Journal* and in her letters are revealing in their youthful, adolescent fervour, and redolent of what she calls her admiration of “[t]he first of a great never ending procession of splendid, strong women writers” (*Journal*,1954:36-37). Mansfield’s awareness that the future for women would be different from the Victorian ideal of “the angel in the house” is ironic, because it reflects a youthful self-assuredness that does not consider the reality of some women’s lives. She reflects on

what women in the future will be capable of achieving. They truly, as yet, have never had their chance. Talk of our enlightened days and our emancipated country — pure nonsense; we are firmly held with the self-fashioned chains of slavery. Yes, now I see they are self-fashioned and must be self-removed (*Journal*, 1954:36-37).

Robins’s book broadens her vision so that it can be woven into “the intricate tapestry of one’s own life.” She becomes aware that life should be lived by utilizing the skeins of information and experience that are already available so that a tapestry can be woven for the sake of harmony — “it is well to take a thread, from many harmonious skeins — and to realize that there must be harmony” (*Journal*,1954:36-37). She combines the idealism of youth with mature, insightful perception that knows that “independence, resolve, firm purpose, and the gift of discrimination, mental clearness — are the inevitables, the realisation that Art is absolutely self development”

(*Journal*,1954:36-37). She sums up her deliberations by noting that “power, wealth and freedom” (*Journal*,1954:36-37) are all that a woman really needs to succeed, and that a life for herself which contains those elements will set the tone for success in writing. She also reveals an intellectual comprehension of the social and psychological basis for her own personal rebellion. The living out of such ideals is to bring the pain and suffering that she had, ironically, hoped to avoid. She is to regard Virginia Woolf’s freedom to write and live as she does, with a feeling of the dearth of such privileges in her own life. She writes with envious preoccupation of Virginia Woolf’s apparent happiness, and of Leonard’s love and constancy,

[h]ow I envy Virginia; no wonder she can write. There is always in her writing a calm freedom of expression as though she were at peace — her roof over her — her own possessions around her — and her man somewhere within call. Boge what have I done that I should have *all* the handicaps — plus a disease and an enemy” (*Letters*, III, 1993:127).

She was unaware of Virginia Woolf’s own silent enemy, insanity.

During her childhood in colonial New Zealand, political events in the 1880’s and 1890’s mirrored events in the rest of the world, as women in that country agitated for the vote. This did not awaken in Mansfield a zeal to do the same, but it did awaken a new awareness of her constrained situation at home in 1906 amidst “butcher’s bills, dirty laundry” (*Journal*, 1954:21). The rebel in her was awakened, and she was to write openly later in her fiction of matters concerning women’s position in society, and of the subtle oppression of women in New Zealand.

For Mansfield, experiences of feminism probably led to an ambivalent attitude towards the opportunities which such an enlightened approach could bring. Throughout her life, she was to vacillate between the desire to reject the conventional feminine role, and a desire to accept it. Her identification with this role borders on self-annihilation. Clare Hanson notes that the question of Mansfield’s own bisexuality probably led to sexual ambivalence which in turn produced a stronger, more direct kind of fiction. She comments that “Woolf was shocked (and frightened?) by K.M.’s exposure of the emptiness behind stereotypical female role-playing in the story, *Bliss*” (1985:19).

Fullbrook notes that “[i]t is a fact that Mansfield’s early fiction is both more overtly aggressive and more obviously politically embattled than the later work” (1986:35). If the plight of women, trapped in domesticity and drudgery across class and age boundaries awakened Mansfield’s awareness, nothing kindled her perception of such entrapment more than her own position within her marriage to Middleton Murry. It is put into stark perspective as her striving for creative recognition had been rewarded with the publication of her first collection of short stories, *In a German Pension* (1911).

She had become a fairly well-known young author, while her involvement with the avant-garde came about through her joint editing with Murry of *Rhythm* and *The Blue Review*. She was also developing an interest in current painting, sculpture and literature. Yet her creative energy was being squandered in menial, meaningless tasks at home. Personal experience taught her that the shackles of the traditional woman's role are not cast off easily. Her comments in a letter to her husband, dated May or June 1913, reveal her dissatisfaction at not being able to work at her writing as constantly as she wishes,

[a]m I such a tyrant — Jack dear — or do you say it mainly to tease me? I suppose I'm a bad manager and the house seems to take up so much time if it isn't looked after with some sort of method. I mean...when I have to clean up twice over or wash extra unnecessary things I get frightfully impatient and want to be working. So often, this week, I've heard you and Gordon talking while I washed dishes. Well, someone's got to wash the dishes and get food.

Otherwise — “there's nothing in the house but eggs to eat.” Yes. I hate, hate, HATE doing these things that you accept just as all men expect of their women. I can only play the servant with bad grace indeed. It's all very well for females with nothing else to do... & then you say I am a tyrant & wonder because I get tired at night! (*Letters*, I, 1984:125).

As she began to align herself more and more with literary endeavours, she wrote in 1911 in her *Journal*, of “other artists” but did not qualify their sex, but referred to them merely as “artists”

and wonders whether they feel as I do — the driving necessity — the crying need — the hounding desire that [ will ] never be satisfied — that knows no peace? I believe there was a time when I might have stopped myself, and days even weeks would have drifted by — but now there is not an hour. I breathe it in the air. I am saturated with it. Then Catherine, what is your ultimate desire — to what do you so passionately aspire? To write books and stories and sketches and poems (*Journal*, 1954:47-48).

After mature deliberation, she herself was in a position many years later, to define her individual role within the world of writing, by stating in a letter to Murry in 1918, before the war had ended, that she “had two kick-offs in the writing game,”

[o]ne is joy — real joy — the thing that made me write when we lived at Pauline, and that sort of writing I could only do in just that state of being in some perfectly blissful way *at peace*. Then something delicate and lovely seems to open before my eyes, like a flower without thought of a frost or a cold breath — knowing that all about is warm and tender and ‘steady.’ And *that* I try, ever so humbly to express. The other “kick-off” is my original one, and (had I not known love) it would have been my all. Not hate or destruction (both are

beneath contempt as real motives) but an extremely deep sense of hopelessness — of everything doomed to disaster — almost wilfully, stupidly — like an almond tree and *pas de nougat pour le Noel* — There! as I took out a cigarette paper I got it exactly — a cry against corruption that is absolutely the nail on the head. Not a protest — a cry, and I mean corruption in the widest sense of the word, of course (*Letters*, II, 1987:54).

Mansfield's realization that by contemplating the meaning of a life given to creativity, a renewed and mature awareness arose that such a life is composed of intensely joyful moments, and of being "in some perfectly blissful way at peace," but that peace and joy are contradicted by substantial moments of suffering and pain and "an extremely deep sense of hopelessness." Such moments are inexorable and cannot be evaded.

Her awareness of the difficult position of women in pregnancy, and of the horrors of childbirth was probably fuelled by contact with Beatrice Hastings, who worked with Orage on *The New Age* and who had befriended her when she first began to publish there. Kaplan traces the influential position held by Hastings in terms of Mansfield's writing career by noting her "crucial role in initiating, encouraging, criticizing and eventually countervailing the dominant thrust of the Modernist movement" (1991:143). She notes that Hastings was nearly a decade older than Mansfield, of colonial origins and like Mansfield, had returned to Europe by the age of twenty. She and the older woman wrote several pieces collaboratively for *The New Age* and in doing so were immersed in the intellectual currents of the day. Intense debates were conducted in articles about contemporary art (on Epstein, Gaudier-Brzeska, Wyndham Lewis, Picasso), philosophy (on Bergson and Nietzsche) politics and psychoanalysis. The topics of Hastings's contributions were often women's victimization in marriage, mistreatment of imprisoned suffragettes, or the limitations of women's access to higher education.

Mansfield's *In a German Pension*, was reviewed pseudonymously by Hastings and important criticism offered. Hastings presented herself at a crucial time in Mansfield's life as earlier preoccupation with the Nineties Aesthetic doctrine gave way to socially aware, realistic treatments of contemporary life. *The New Age* led her to the development of her gift for satire, parody but more importantly, "it centred her apprenticeship as a writer in a milieu in which feminism and Modernism are connected" (Kaplan, 1991:143). Hastings' role in Mansfield's creative existence came to an end as new contacts with Virginia Woolf occurred in April 1919.

**Creative interaction: Woolf and Mansfield.**

Woolf had wished to meet Mansfield for some time and noted that “Katherine Mansfield has dogged my steps for three years — I’m always on the point of meeting her, or of reading her stories, and I have never managed either” (Woolf, I,1977:82).

In April 1919 Virginia Woolf and Katherine Mansfield were at tea. They were not alone, and could not exchange ideas about one of the most important things in their lives at present: their writing. The “new word” they both wished to create included a new way of recording perceived reality and its expression in words. Fullbrook notes that for Mansfield,

the invention of a new way of speaking, a new way of ordering the reportage of perception that encoded a change in the nature of perception itself by enunciating a change in what could be perceived was achieved through the application of technique (1986:25-26).

It was the mutual recognition of the similarity in the perception of reality that linked Woolf and Mansfield. The similarity is expressed in different genres as Woolf chose to write novels while Mansfield attempted a novel, but discovered that the short story was her preferred means of expression. Discussions that related to literary expression flowed with greater ease between the two women as Woolf noted that, “she (Mansfield) gives and resists as I expect her to; we cover more ground in much less time” (Woolf, I, 1977:265). For Mansfield, writing on the 27 December 1920 to Woolf, named her as “the only woman with whom I long to talk *work*.” (*Letters*, IV, 1996:154). The awareness of a mutual desire to write was expressed by Mansfield a few months after meeting Woolf, on 23 August 1917, thus:

[w]e have the same job, Virginia, & it’s really very curious & thrilling that we should both, quite apart from each other, be after so very nearly the same thing. We are you know; there’s no denying it (*Letters*, I, 1984:327).

The potential for competition between two fellow writers lay close to the surface, but more appropriate to their contact was the suggestion and possibility of a sexually charged intimacy. The little Woolf knew of Mansfield’s “past”, with its implicit sexual impulsiveness she probably found disturbing. It was very different from her own experiences as a young woman, but this sensitivity receded into the background as only writing became the common voice of communication.

Virginia Woolf’s writing career commenced with *The Voyage Out*. From the point of narrative technique, it was characterized by an older form of phrasing and diction even while foregrounding the life of a young woman. Katherine Mansfield’s early story *The Tiredness of Rosabel*, written in 1908 at Beauchamp Lodge, revealed an innovatory approach from the start. This continued, and developed until she produced the short story, *Je ne parle pas francais* (1921) and *The Fly* (1921). Both stories reveal an advance in narrative strategies that portray the characters of the main

protagonists with biting accurate satire. Both fictional characters in Mansfield's stories are deluded in their respective moments of revelation, and fail to achieve a valid and lasting recognition of their moral failure. Mansfield's passion for technique allowed her to excel in the seemingly objective description of reality in a short story, and an example of this is her emphasis on the visual impact of the colours of the fruit on Bertha Young's dinner table in *Bliss*,

[t]here were tangerines and apples stained with strawberry pink. Some yellow pears, smooth as silk, some white grapes covered with a silver bloom and a big cluster of purple ones. These last she had bought to tone in with the new dining-room carpet. Yes, that did sound rather far-fetched and absurd, but it was really why she had bought them. She had thought in the shop: "I must have some purple ones to bring the carpet up to the table." And it seemed quite sense at the time (338).

The detailed description of the effect of the arrangement of the fruit masks the irony that Mansfield wishes to convey about the youthful Bertha's hopes for the future, because such hopes disappear in disillusionment and despair. The overall description in *Bliss* is bold in outline, vital and heavy with compound meaning. The use of implicit suggestion portrays the insubstantial nature of Bertha's apparently perfect existence. She lives her life through the anticipation of the success of the party and is always, in effect, the spectator of potentially volatile events. Mansfield's depiction of Bertha's isolation is reflected in her expression of the significance of "these hesitations, these doubts" in the inner workings of a character's mind. She wrote to Arnold Gibbon on 24 June 1922:

overtones, half tones, quarter tones, these hesitations, these doubts, beginnings, if we go at them *directly* ...I do believe there is a way....It's the truth we are after, no less (which by the way, makes it so exciting) (Mansfield, *Letter 119/12*, Turnbull Library Record).

It is the oblique meaning of the words *not* spoken by Bertha when she becomes aware of her friend Pearl and her husband's association that makes a parallel with Woolf's accounts of men and women. Bertha's mute recognition of her friend Pearl's affair with her husband, shares the intensity of emotional upheaval that Clarissa Dalloway experiences when, in Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway*, Peter Walsh visits Clarissa after an absence of years. The fictional characters' discourse takes up many pages, but their spoken dialogue only a few sentences. It is the internal monologue expressed in bodily gestures that reveal the reality of the characters' lives. Woolf describes a day in the life of Clarissa Dalloway in *Mrs Dalloway* (1925), and relates the memory of the moment that Peter Walsh cuts into her high moment following Sally Seton's kiss, with his "musing among the vegetables" (Woolf, 2004:1). Mansfield allows Bertha Young to contemplate the beauty of the pear tree which her husband Harry fails to notice, but also to witness the surreptitious contact between her husband and her friend. Woolf, in turn, describes the course of the conversation during Peter Walsh's visit,

and recalls his inability to appreciate the beauty of the day or “the trees and the grass” (Woolf, 2004:4-5). The conclusion both writers come to is that the fleeting moments of mental and emotional contact between a man and a woman are imbued with images that reflect different levels of consciousness and planes of perception for each sex. Such singularly differing communication is experienced as an acute failure of communication by the woman and as boredom by the man. But the importance of their communication lies in the fact that the characters Clarissa Dalloway and Peter Walsh are aware that they are engaged in an internal conflict that is only resolved through a breakthrough of emotions when Peter bursts into tears, and after Clarissa takes and kisses his hand.

In Mansfield’s *Bliss*, it is the appearance of another female character that illustrates the pinnacle of spiritual and (sexually charged) communication,

[a]nd the two women stood side by side looking at the slender, flowering tree. Although it was so still it seemed, like the flame of a candle, to stretch up, to point, to quiver in the bright air, to grow taller as they gazed — almost to touch the rim of the round silver moon. How long did they stand there? Both, as it were, caught in that circle of unearthly light, understanding each other perfectly, creatures of another world, and wondering what they were to in this one with all the blissful treasure that burned in their bosoms and dropped in silver flowers, from their hair and hands?

For ever — for a moment? And did Miss Fulton murmur: “Yes. Just *that*...” Or did Bertha dream it? (347).

Enclosed within this scene is the representation of Mansfield’s sense “that fixed social forms are laughably flimsy and arbitrary but powerful sources of an otherwise unattainable communal illusion of certainty about individuals” (Fullbrook, 1986:17). Sexual desire remains repressed within the multi-levelled depiction of reality as the intensity of the “moment,” and the need to translate the interconnectedness that does exist between individuals’ sense of reality, into writing. Also implicated in this scene is the possibility of masculine intrusion into feminine thoughts and interaction. This does occur when Harry, Pearl’s husband, breaks into his wife’s intimacy with Miss Fulton. The ironic content of the words describing the apparently perfect trio bursts forth as Bertha’s entire world collapses when she becomes aware that both she and Harry are in love with Miss Fulton.

Mansfield recognized the spirit of her own writing in that of Woolf, after she had read Woolf’s essay, *Modern Novels* in *The Times Literary Supplement*. Mansfield’s response is reflected in a letter she writes to Woolf on 10 April 1919,

Virginia, I read your article on *Modern Novels*. You write so *darned* well, so *devilish* well. There are these little others, you know, dodging and stumbling along, taking a sniff here and a stare there — and there is your mind so accustomed to take the air in the ‘grand manner’ — To tell you the truth — I am *proud* of your writing. I read it and I think ‘How she beats them — ’ (*Letters*, II, 1987:311).

The sense of literary comradeship was established with Woolf, but at Mansfield’s death the older writer admitted, in an honest comment, recorded by her husband, Leonard, in his *Memoirs*, “and I was jealous of her writing — the only writing I have ever been jealous of” (Woolf L, 1964:207). In their individual rendition of the beings of women (and men), both Woolf and Mansfield seek to reveal the interior landscape of each fictional character’s mind. For Woolf, it is her ability to “examine for a moment an ordinary mind on an ordinary day” (Woolf, 1925:154). For Mansfield, writing in a *Journal* entry in March 1918, it is the questioning of what occurs in the “moment of suspension” in which the “whole life of the soul is contained” (*Journal*, 1954:150).

Illness, and the knowledge that time is ephemeral, forced Mansfield to write with feverish haste to capture the “moments of suspension” that she wrote of in her *Journal*. She says:

[i]t is timeless. In that moment (what *do* I mean?) the whole life of a soul is contained. One is flung up — out of life — one is “held”, and then,— down, bright, broken, glittering onto the rocks, tossed back, part of the ebb and flow (*Journal*, 1954:150).

Aware of Mansfield’s situation, Woolf still accused her of being shallow or not delving deeply enough into a character or a situation, and for gushing forth brilliant insights into short pieces of writing, and then moving onto the next piece. The similarity of Woolf’s and Mansfield’s subject matter and techniques of writing, show that hastily penned, brilliant insights in short pieces of writing are as valid as carefully deliberated ones. The theme in *The Voyage Out*, Woolf’s early novel, is similar to the awakening of the nine-year-old Kezia, in *Prelude*, as she proceeds from the security of childhood to the realities of the adult world. Rachel Vinrace in *The Voyage Out*, moves from the security of girlhood to the responsibilities of marriage and maturity and finally death. In another story, *The Garden Party* (1921), Mansfield depicts Laura, the young protagonist, in a state of immense agitation as she discovers that during the preparation for the family’s garden party, a carter has been killed. She fails to verbalize the experience in words other than “[i]t was simply marvellous...Isn’t life” (499). In similar manner, Clarrissa Dalloway in Woolf’s *Mrs Dalloway*, learns of Septimus Smith’s suicide during her party. She is confronted with the absurdity of life that reflects the inexplicable inherent paradox of life, as she reflects upon an

extraordinary night! She felt somehow very like him — the young man who had killed himself. She felt glad he had done it; thrown it away....he made her feel the beauty; made her feel the fun (Woolf, 2004:165).

In *Prelude*, Stanley's words become an example of a masculine voice interrupting a leisurely flow of associations by Linda on the purpose of her life on earth. Linda functions on a level in which the thoughts of the feminine are gleaned mainly from bodily gestures and symbolic actions. Feeble attempts to surmise the reality of the other occur by means of internal monologue that is often misconstrued by the other, especially when it is translated into words. In contrast to Linda's viewpoint, the other female characters present multiple viewpoints in the short sections while the portrayal of Stanley Burnell's consciousness "works as a counterpoint in a minor key" (Kaplan, 1991:115).

Mansfield's story, *Bliss*, was not well received by Virginia Woolf, but by 1934 Eliot had selected the short story as an illustration of the dominant experimental tendency of contemporary fiction for his book, *After Strange Gods*. He commented however that "the moral implication is negligible... we are given neither comment nor suggestion of any moral issue of good and evil, and within the setting this is quite right..." (Eliot, 1934:38). Alpers notes that in spite of the often scathing comments from Modernist male writers, "it was, an important event: a fresh way of seeing, a new voice in English prose" (1980:326).

The predominant question remains: what are the implications of a gender disguise for a woman writer like Mansfield, who writes during a literary movement such as Modernism, in which the norms are noticeably masculine in origin? She develops her own innovative style, capturing the immediacy of the moment within the inner functioning of the minds of the characters, and in so doing challenges the received notions that society has of women. In her writing she examines with careful insight the difference between masculine and feminine modes of consciousness, and their respective experiences of reality.

The next chapter will consider the awareness of a German woman in the short story, *Frau Brechenmacher attends a wedding* from the collection *In a German Pension* (1911) that the life she lives is false, and that she is trapped within a static definition of the role of woman.

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## Chapter 2

### Two early stories: *Frau Brechenmacher attends a wedding* and *The Woman at the Store*

In this chapter, the focus is on the way Mansfield gives expression to her acute awareness that her creative art points to the psychological effects of gender barriers and codes in the lives of the female characters in two early stories, *Frau Brechenmacher attends a wedding* (1911) and *The Woman at the store* (1912).

The first story dealt with in this chapter comes from a collection of stories, *In a German Pension* which was an early work published in 1911, when Mansfield was twenty-three years of age. Her own feelings about this work, when Murry suggested that it should be re-issued, were “hostile” because, as he pointed out in the introductory note to the stories, which was published by Constable in 1926: “[i]t represented for her a phase of youthful bitterness and crude cynicism which she desired to disown forever” ( Middleton Murry, 1975:7). She herself felt that the publication of such a youthful work would defeat her achievement of persuading “reviewers that I don’t like ugliness for ugliness’s sake.” She also commented:

[i]t is far too immature, and I don’t even acknowledge it today. I mean I don’t ‘hold’ by it...*It’s not good enough*....It’s positively *juvenile*, and besides that, it’s not what I mean; it’s a lie. Oh no, never! (Mansfield, quoted by Middleton Murry, 1975:8).

Her acute awareness that she had grown and developed as a writer and was in a position to regard the early work as “juvenile,” is clearly seen in a comment in a letter in May 1920 to Violet and Sydney Schiff. She writes:

[d]elicate perception is not enough; one must find the exact way in which to convey the delicate perception. One must inhabit the other mind and know more of the other mind and your secret knowledge is the light in which all is steeped — (*Letters*, IV, 1996:4).

Her perception of a character’s mind is no longer an expression of a self-conscious performance of a modernist technique, but a reflection of her absorption into the lives of her characters, and a certainty of gesture that displays self-confidence and authenticity of purpose.

Mansfield is aware that authenticity of self is born only when the masks imposed by society are removed from the lives of individuals. As the discussion of the stories unfold, Mansfield reveals that the female characters become aware that the image of a “self” without a mask is illusory, and that they become impersonators within the culturally sanctioned norms that govern the relationships between men and women. In order to convey the full extent of their role playing, and reveal the

terror and fear of an existence lived behind a mask, Mansfield employs techniques of writing that depend on satire and irony as a vehicle. She presents situations in the stories that are dependent on the juxtaposition of the characters, such as the contrast between the Frau's servile actions and those of her bombastic husband. The second story, *The Woman at the Store*, reflects the use of irony since it presents the juxtaposition of a woman whose prospects for her future life appeared to be attractive and appealing, but in reality are the opposite, because she suffered abuse from her husband, and is alone on the ranch where they lived. Another man who appears and with whom the woman takes up to assuage the loneliness of the isolation of the ranch, is unaware of the abuse. Nor does he know that she has murdered her husband, and that he may suffer a similar fate. Mansfield's ironic treatment of the events in the life of the female character, stresses the same outrage on the part of the woman in this story as she responds to abuse, as the reader sees in the little Frau. The difference is that the woman on the ranch murders her husband, and the Frau remains a reluctantly silent partner.

The use of satire as a vehicle is clearly seen in the stories which are collected in her short story collection, *In a German Pension* (1911). The short story *Frau Brechenmacher attends a wedding*, is from this collection, and makes an overt comment on women's position within a realm of existence that limits autonomy of action and thought. The satire in this story is not expressed as a direct, or even an indirect comment on German culinary and gastronomic custom (as is the case in many of the other stories in the collection), but as an example of Mansfield's keen eye for "injustice" and "a profound feeling for the isolation of individuals" (Fullbrook, 1986:31). The physical isolation of the little Frau is marked, since her entire existence is centred on her traditional role as wife and mother. The psychological isolation she experiences is intertwined with injustice, and disregard for her as a person. She acts out a role determined by society in general, and her husband in particular, at the expense of her own autonomy and authenticity. The Frau's poorly understood disillusionment with the traditional role of wife and mother is expressed in a muffled indistinct voice as she questions the meaning of it all, "[n]a, what is it all for?" (47). She continues to ponder the significance of her life, and life in general by expressing it in indirect discourse, and observes that it is "[a]lways the same," she said — 'all over the world the same; but, God in heaven — but *stupid*'" (48).

In the Frau's story there is no first person narrator as in some of the stories in the collection. The absence of a sardonic commentator intensifies the tone of female abasement as there is no commentary to distance the reader's perception of the main character's misery. An apparently superficial aspect of her misery lies in the need for social identification. For the Frau, this lies in the surname she has acquired from her husband. She is known throughout the story only as the Frau,

and is coupled to the surname of her husband. Mansfield chooses satire as a structural and rhetorical device not only to expose a particular aspect of a given situation, but to reveal an alternative which expresses or relieves the discomfort of individual characters. The satiric focus reveals the strong feminist thrust in this story that is vested in the exploration of the traditional role of women, and the patriarchal expectations that maintain such a role.

The reader of the Frau's story is immersed directly in the domestic details of the Brechenmacher home, because the story opens with an image that signifies that "[g]etting ready was a terrible business" (43). There is no discussion of peripheral details, such as the reason for the difficulty of getting ready, nor is there an introduction of characters in the story, or an account of a detailed description of setting, since Mansfield's innovative style of writing depicts the minds of the characters against the backdrop of external events. These external events are commonplace, but are vital to the unfolding of the deeper significance of the narrative.

Events in the story reflect the situation that the Frau's tenuous authority is vested only in her role as subservient care-giver. The role of the "father" as the authority figure in the house is expressed by her husband as the sound of his voice is heard on his return home when he presumes that "[n]othing [is] ready, of course" (43). His offhand instructions to attend to her clothing, "[y]ou're not dressed. You can't go like that." (43) appear incidental and without real significance, but they underpin a world in which hierarchical dominance by her husband is the accepted norm for daily living, and instead of questioning the obvious imbalance, she reinforces it by her subservience.

The Frau is mute, as she endures the cruel savagery of the emotional and physical abuse, and the claims for supremacy on the part of her husband. She merely

hooked her skirt and bodice, fastened her handkerchief round her neck, with the beautiful brooch that had four medallions to the Virgin dangling from it and then threw on her cloak and hood ( 43).

The symbol of female servitude, embodied by the medallions, represents the woman in biblical history whose unquestioning obedience reflects the culturally sanctioned norm for the behavior of women. This becomes the model that the Frau subscribes to on a level that she herself does not fully comprehend. The Frau and Rosa echo words of obedient praise: "[w]onderful," and in the same breath Rosa is called to "come and look at your father" (44). Their attention functions as a mirror that supports, and reflects the masculine image of Herr Brechenmacher as the head of the household, and his position as the postman of the village. There is satiric irony in this action, as it is

the Frau herself, as the victim, who issues the instruction, and corroborates with the victimizer and perpetuates the culturally sanctioned superiority of the masculine.

The lantern she lights casts a moon-like ambience in the room, and emphasizes the symbolic presence of the feminine. There is biting satiric irony in the image of the lamp, because the Frau herself is not permitted to make use of the light from the lamp, but her husband is reliant on the pervading feminine presence to maintain his own poorly developed sense of self. The Frau's symbolic entrapment is expressed in the juxtaposition of the light of the lamp with the dark passage in which she has to dress, "[d]ressing in the dark was nothing to Frau Brechenmacher" (43). She grapples with an unarticulated expression of anger that is the result of inauthentic living. Her position in the dark passage is a reflection of one of the peremptory signs of meaning that Mansfield presents throughout the text.

Amidst the banter of voices and merriment at the wedding reception, the "landlord voiced his superiority by bullying the waitresses, who ran continually with glasses of beer, trays of cups and saucers, and bottles of wine" (44). The thoughtless actions of the landlord parallel Herr Brechenmacher's actions when he forgets "his rights as a husband as to beg his wife's pardon for jostling her against the banisters in his efforts to get ahead of everyone else" (44). The irony in Herr Brechenmacher's actions lies in the expression of his poorly understood "rights" that he presumes he has, by virtue of his position as a husband. The forgotten action of begging pardon to his wife is merely a display of societal norms that he adheres to, and is used to enhance his own position of presumed superiority as the masculine head of the house, and is in no way a consideration of her person, or her sense of self.

Mansfield introduces another woman into the story, the bride, but positions her within the gaiety of the bright glow of oil lamps that is cast on the faces of the guests in their best clothes. This reflects an ironic contrast to the image of the bride sitting in her white dress "trimmed with stripes and bows of coloured ribbon, giving her the appearance of an iced cake all ready to be cut up and served in neat little pieces to the bridegroom beside her" (44). This image of the young woman in the story underlines her position as the mute victim in a primitive sacrifice. It is an extremely powerful image as it reflects the extent of woman's confinement within the "female ghetto." In that space woman is "patronized and robbed of effective speech" (Hanson, 1989:61). For Mansfield the symbolism of food and eating is an image that is often associated with being sexually devoured. The anxiety that Mansfield herself felt about physical relations is expressed, even in her juvenile writing, in terms of

eating. She writes in a Journal entry (*Journal*, 1954:5-7) in 1906 of her father, whose appetite at meal times appeared to match his sexual appetite of which she, as a young person, was dimly aware.

The Frau's poorly developed authenticity of self is reinforced as she is the "object of fun" of the older married women at the wedding, because the tape of her petticoat is showing. She is mute and distraught, and cannot appreciate the reassurance of her friend, Frau Rupp, "that it is over now" (45). For these other women, the Frau's discomfort is a source of enjoyment, but her neglected appearance is a reflection of her servitude to those within her home, especially her husband.

The Frau poses disturbing inner questions to herself, when the older women objectify the person of the bride as if she is to be sold to the highest bidder. She asks herself: "[w]here is the other one? [W]hy didn't he marry her?"(46), and sets in motion thought processes that will be the source of her own questions about marriage, her relationship with her husband in particular, and patriarchal expectations in general. The little Frau wonders too, and mirrors the other women's verbal expressions of criticism by non-verbal gestures that echo her previous questions relating to marriage: "Frau Brechenmacher looked down at her beer and blew a little hole in the froth and said "That's not how a wedding should be," she said, "it's not religion to love two men" (46). The implicit question which the Frau asks is whether a woman can love one man whose entire existence is expressed as the need for sexual dominance and superiority. The telling line comes when Frau Rupp says to Frau Brechenmacher "[a]h, every wife has her cross. Isn't that true, my dear?" (46). As the words are uttered, the good Frau looks up and sees her husband and his colleagues drinking far too much, and "gesticulating wildly, the saliva spluttering out of his mouth as he talked." Her subdued reply, "[y]es, that's true. Girls have a lot to learn" (46) sounds the recognition of an awareness of the marginalized position of women in society. Awareness of her position will become ever more distinct as she views her life with growing detachment, and incipient sadness.

The memory of youthful freedom does not assuage the emotions that the Frau experiences when she dares to allow her thoughts to wander to a former time in her life. Her contemplation of this state of mind is linked to its distinct loss, while the only response she permits herself is a faint smile with a little nervous tremor round the mouth like a cat that sees a bird high in a tree, but is unable to reach it. Her inability to grasp the freedom of enjoyment is paralleled by the implicit message of the contents of the big silver coffee pot that her husband hands to the bride and groom. The Frau is trapped because she is part of a biologically determined destiny which is crudely reinforced by her husband's speech. His actual words are not recorded by Mansfield, but their impact is reflected in the Frau's reaction. She is well aware of the derisive impact of the words spoken that reduce women

to sexual objects, and vessels of reproduction. The gift becomes a sexual insult to not only the bride, but to all the women present.

The coffee-pot contains a baby's bottle and two little cradles holding china dolls — unspoken symbols of the “social mythology” that claims that women are naturally suited to domesticity and that the roles of wife and mother are biologically based (Janeway, 1971:14). Ryan claims that motherhood often “happens to women” (1991:24). The new role brings with it a loss of personal identity as the traditional view of motherhood does not provide a psychological paradigm for adult womanhood. The question of motherhood becomes an unvoiced problem without a name, and in that guise it corrodes and undermines women's self-esteem and self-worth.

Mansfield conveys the feelings of isolation and dissociation that engulf the Frau, as she stares at the laughing faces with a renewed accuracy of perception. Their all too familiar faces become caricatures of their persons, as her perception of them becomes distorted and alien. She feels that her only wish is to go home and “never come out again” (47). She wishes to hide from a world that sets up values that are destructive, and retard personal growth. Her paranoia, as she imagines that she is the object of their laughter, is translated into hysteria that intensifies her disillusionment and dismay as she experiences the reality of the situation.

The final part of the story mirrors the couple's departure from home earlier in the story. They walk back home, and “Herr Brechenmacher strode ahead, she stumbled after him” (47) in silence, as the doubtful merriment of the wedding reception recedes irrevocably into the recent past. The little Frau experiences an inexplicable “cold rush of wind [that] blew her hood from her face” (47) which symbolizes her growing awareness of the lack of warmth and care in her current relation with her husband. The memory of the first time she and her husband came home together, elicits a wistful response since her notion of happiness during that walk home did not include the notion of sexual initiation as sacrifice. Her disillusioned comment, “[n]a, what is it all for?” (47) reflects an awareness of the reality of her existence that now includes five babies and twice as much money. These facts merely intensify her growing isolation, and awareness that she has lost the possibility of authentic growth. She is angry, but helpless within an impossible situation. She cannot view her husband dispassionately as he consumes his supper of bread dipped into fat, “and chewed greedily” (47). His comment of “[n]ot much of a wedding” (47) reflects his egocentric experience of the function. His less than reassuring appraisal of her personal significance to him is underlined in his reminder to her that she was an innocent one, giving him “such a clout on the ear”(48). He claims superiority of sexual knowledge and sexual prowess, and reinforces his position by a direct

accusation that “I soon taught you” (48). The words she does speak as she undresses are her final utterance in the story, as no-one except herself would understand the true meaning lurking behind the apparently innocent words contained in “[a]lways the same,’ she said — ‘ all over the world the same; but, God in heaven — but stupid’” (48). Her resentment is also directed at what she perceives as a divine plan for making women’s situations, “‘all over the world the same’” (48).

Marek notes

Mansfield’s brilliant compression of the structural conjunction of children, sex and pain in the last sentence [that] leaves an aperture in which sex is the unstated but overwhelming source of anxiety for women, linked in this instance less to childbirth than to masculine self-centredness, that segues directly into rape (2001:286).

Herr Brechenmacher, true to the meaning of his name, lurches into the bedroom, his mind befuddled with alcohol, ready to ‘break and make ’( Brechen/macher) the little Frau. She covers her face with her arm, but her protection is ineffectual, as he will exert his superiority over her by claiming her body as his own possession. Insight into her situation has come gradually, and has been coupled to events as they have presented themselves at home, and at the wedding. She has become aware of her subservient position, and together with awareness has come the need to escape, even if only in her imagination. She knows that freedom will not come easily, and that all she has now is the knowledge that her life lived as it is, is stupid.

The second story to be discussed in this chapter is *The Woman at the Store* (1912). For Mansfield the continued exploration of gender-related behaviour finds expression in the harsh landscape of her own home island, New Zealand. *The Woman at the Store* is set amidst the heat and dust of a lonely, semi-deserted ranch. Her identity is confined to being known only by the impersonal title of the “woman,” and is depicted with greater objectivity than the little Frau of the previous story. The details of the woman’s life are conveyed through the eyes of the narrator, and are not forthcoming from the female character herself. The authenticity, worth and validity as a person of the woman is at stake, as repeated attacks of an emotional nature drive her beyond hysterical madness to murder her husband, who wilfully and deliberately breaks her spirit, destroys her looks and operates as the nominal head of the home, but with regular and cruel departures from home. Ironically, she continues to degrade herself by demeaning actions that emphasize her vulnerability as a sexual commodity. Her loneliness exacerbates a situation in which she is undermined, because her self-esteem is poor, and her sense of self is weak and insubstantial.

The opening lines of the story, “[a]ll day the heat was terrible” (109) convey a feeling of unbearable heat from the sun. The actual heat from the sun prefigures the symbolic effect of the approaching masculine presence that is once again to become part of the homestead, as one of the travellers takes up with the woman, and sets the inexorable cycle of trust and abuse in motion again. The symbolism of the masculine presence is continued in images that reinforce the destructive element in the “wind blew to the ground” and the use of verbs such as “rooted”, “slithered,” “swirled,” “settled and sifted” (109). The effect of the heat on the beasts of burden is as destructive as on the human elements, because the pack horse endures unbelievable suffering

with a big, open sore rubbed under her belly. Now and again she stopped short, threw back her head, looked at us as though she was going to cry, and whinnied (109).

One of the masculine characters appears on the horizon as a rider covered in dust with “[w]isps of white hair [that] straggled from under his wideawake — his moustache and eyebrows were called white — he slouched in the saddle — grunting” (109). The narrator and Jim, the other rider, follow. The enticing prospect of seeing the store, the paddock and the woman “with blue eyes and yellow hair, who’ll promise you something else before she shakes hands with you.” (110) is only a flimsy encouragement to continue, because there is no certainty in it. The existence of the store or the woman is founded on hearsay, and lacks certainty. It is Jo who reminds Jim of the dubious promise of the store and the woman, but he believes it to be a figment of his friend’s imagination as a result of the heat. Ironically, the appearance of the woman does not meet the expectations of beauty they had hoped for.

Mansfield positions the woman in a vulnerable location with only a dog and a child as companions, and the “black stick” which is a rifle, for protection. The woman offers careful reassurances to herself that the “three brown things” (110) on the horizon are “hawks.” She dons a mask of fearless self-sufficiency by carrying the rifle. She hopes this will be interpreted as such by the riders, by telling them in off-hand manner, “[o]h, the ’awks about ’ere, yer wouldn’t believe” (110). The appearance of the woman’s vulnerability is superficial and insignificant, as the unsuspecting travellers are unaware of the anger and resentment that have been expressed in the past, and in their absence. This is only revealed at the end of the story, after the little girl’s drawing exposes the mother as the murderer of her father.

The image of the sun that “pushed through the clouds, and shed a vivid light over the scene” has symbolic value as “[i]t gleamed on the woman’s hair, over her flapping pinafore and the rifle she was carrying” (110). This is an image of the approaching masculine presence, as the travellers make

their way to the homestead. The sun radiates warmth and light, and gleams on her hair and includes in its rays her clothing and her firearm, but it also represents a powerful source of oppression and destruction that saps Nature of vitality, if it is too severe. Neither her firearm nor the depth of her anger will be sufficient to withstand the inexorable influence of the masculine on her life and person, as it approaches her home.

The woman the travellers find at the ranch is

a figure of fun. Looking at her, you felt there was nothing but sticks and wires under that pinafore — her front teeth were knocked out, she had red pulpy hands and she wore on her feet a pair of dirty ‘Bluchers’(110).

She has become a figure of fun, because the circumstances of her life have destroyed all but the modicum of a sense of self-esteem, and the lack of authenticity that results from such a sense of worthlessness. Her poor sense of self is intensified by her loneliness, and her vulnerability as a woman open to sexual exploitation is emphasized as she watches the approaching travellers. Her hesitancy of purpose hides the extent of her loneliness, and is expressed in her unwillingness to allow the travellers onto her property. She says,

I’d rather you didn’t stop — you can’t and there’s the end of it. I don’t let out the paddock any more. You’ll have to go on; I ain’t got nothing!” (111).

The irony of the words in the last sentence, in which she claims that she has nothing for the travellers is subverted in the last paragraph as Jo calls to his fellow travellers, “I’ll pick you up later” (117). The woman has “nothing” except her value as a sexual commodity, and is exploited by verbal comments from Jo himself. He refers to her being “too much alone, *you know*” (111) and implies that his (male) company will be the remedy to cure her loneliness.

The narrator follows the woman into “a large room, the walls plastered with old English periodicals. Queen Victoria’s Jubilee appeared to be the most recent number — a table with an ironing board and wash tub on it....” (111). The reference to Queen Victoria intensifies the irony of the woman’s position in the “colonies,” as the said queen’s reign epitomizes stability and propriety of social behaviour, especially for women. The murder of her husband places the woman outside the bounds of the Victorian ideal of womanhood. She relies on her poorly understood attachment to domestic duties, like ironing, to give her a sense of meaning and purpose in life. She tells the narrator that “I ’aven’t ’ad time to fix things to-day — been ironing” (111). This fact appears as distorted an image as the symbol of Queen Victoria herself. Both the queen and the iron belong to a world where the boundaries of civilization are confined to the superficial veneer that holds such reflections of propriety in place, and are unmistakably bourgeois in nature. The ironic comment by the masculine

narrator on the bizarre lifestyle of the woman is reflected in words that question the validity of her lifestyle, and of her existence itself. He comments revealingly:

[g]ood lord, what a life! I thought. Imagine being here day in, and day out, with that rat of a child and a mangy dog. Imagine bothering about ironing — mad, of course she's mad!

Wonder how long she's been here — wonder if I can get her to talk (112).

Madness is the conclusive diagnosis of the woman's condition by the masculine narrator, but it is a specific madness brought on by being an "Angel in the House," and at the same time being undermined by socio-economic conditions of poverty and cultural conditions of loneliness, and possibly guilt. The narrator's friend, Jo, sees the woman either as the "old bitch" (112) or conveniently as "female flesh!" (113) and is not aware that his perception of her threatens her sense of self, and her authenticity. The action of ironing becomes a symbol of her servitude, but it also becomes a means to maintain and bring about a semblance of order that she clings to, even in the most trying circumstances.

The conversation between the woman and the narrator reveals that the undermining role as caregiver has not ceased, as she offers to provide scones and supper for them. She is inadvertently drawn from her initial reserve to provide the offers of victuals and shelter, and finally to the entertainment of the evening. Yet her superficial friendliness is changed to a quick retort when asked about the paternity of the child, and this is shouted to the narrator:

"[s]he's not like you — takes after her father?" Just as the woman had shouted her refusal at us before, she shouted at me then.

"No, she don't; she's the dead spit of me. Any fool can see that" (112).

Memories of the former masculine presence of her husband elicit a severe answer, and point to her distaste for the hierarchical imbalance of power that she had been subjected to as the wife of a vagabond and exploiter, and possibly to guilt about his death.

The conversation among the men focuses on the changed appearance of the woman as her past history is discussed:

"[y]ou had Jo about her looks — you had me, too."

"No — look here. I can't make it out. It's four years since I passed this way, and I stopped here two days. The husband was a pal of mine once, down the West Coast — a fine, big chap, with a voice on him like a trombone. She'd been a barmaid down the coast — as pretty as a wax doll. The coach used to come this way once a fortnight, that was before they opened the railway up Napier way, and she had no end of a time! Told me once in a confidential moment that she knew one hundred and twenty-five ways of kissing (113).

The woman's lost looks, and the recollection of her former lifestyle, reflect the power struggle between the woman and her husband. It takes on tangible proportions as the effect of the commanding presence of his voice alone corrodes her authenticity and her self-esteem, and destroys any hope that she may have of establishing her own voice. The internal conflict generated by such oppression is initially internalized as passivity and mute response, and then into frivolous sexual pursuits to advertise "one hundred and twenty-five ways of kissing" (113). For this woman, passivity is not manifested as hysterical symptoms common to such suppression of emotion, but is transferred to action as she resorts to the use of the rifle, and fires the gunshot that kills her husband.

The bitter irony of the woman's life is reflected in Jo's emotional manipulations as he "got 'er round," and secured an invitation for them all to "have a comfortable chat" (114). The futility of the woman's assertive action in freeing herself from past oppression is about to be annulled by her human need for company and for attention, ironically of the kind that has brought about her present position. The preparation of the room that serves as a dining room, by embellishments such as a "bouquet of sweet williams on the table" (114) echoes the detail of the cake at the wedding feast in the story of Frau Brechenmacher discussed earlier in the chapter. This unsophisticated dinner party will become the site of another primitive sacrifice that perpetuates the ritual of submission, and male dominance. The evidence of such dominance is echoed in the woman's revelations of her past. She tells them:

"[i]t's six year's since I was married, and four miscarriages. I says to 'im, I says, what do you think I'm doin' up 'ere? If I was back at the Coast, I'd have you lynched for child murder. Over and over I tells 'im — you've broken my spirit and spoiled my looks, and wot for — that's what I'm driving at." She clutched her head and stared round at us. Speaking rapidly, "Oh some days — an' months of them I 'ear them two words knockin' inside me all the time — "Wot for" but sometimes I'll be cooking spuds an' lift the lid off to give 'em a prong and I 'ears, quite sudden again, "Wot for," Oh , I don't mean the spuds and the kid — I mean — I mean, "she hiccoughed — you know what I mean, Mr Jo"(115).

The indignation that the woman experiences at the treatment by her husband is coupled to despair that is linked inextricably with the ragged nerves of a frustrated and battered animal, or woman. She comes close to revealing the truth of his whereabouts when she alludes to the itinerant actions of her husband, but keeps the true knowledge a closely guarded secret. She does break down, and wails "Jim, 'e's gone shearin' and left me alone again" (115). The travellers suspect that her husband has deserted her, and do not entertain the reality of a deed as savage as the one she has committed. She reinforces this notion by blaming "the loneliness...and being shut up 'ere like a broody hen" (115).

Significantly, she and Jo clasp hands at the same time as the child attempts to reveal the truth of her mother's lonely state. This is seen as the woman rises from the table to prevent the child from showing her drawing, but is powerless to stop her own inexorable slide into what can only become a worthless sexual encounter.

The tragi-comedy of Jo's situation is that he is too drunk to notice the subtle coercion in the arrangements for the accommodation for the night. For the woman herself, the irony of her careful preparations are not immediately clear because in the loneliness of desperate action, she fails to be aware that Jo is as great a sexual exploiter as her husband. Jo in turn is unaware of the fate of the husband, and of the danger that could possibly await him as the woman expresses the hostility that she harbours against men. His two friends who are observers, and not participants of events are overcome with derisive laughter as they "— laughed and shouted to each other, and came back to the whare to find the kid already bedded in the counter of the store" (116), and prepare to retire for the night. The child senses the unspoken hostility that the men have towards her, and she retaliates by flying "into a rage and beat [ing] herself with her hands. "I won't be laughed at, you curs — you" (117). She is enraged, with her voice mute since her mother has forbidden her to speak of the murder. Ironically her "voice" is dramatized in the drawing on the paper, "[t]he kid had drawn the picture of a woman shooting a man with a rook rifle and then digging a hole to bury him in" (117).

In the final paragraph, the two men who saw the drawing are waiting until dawn to leave, and steal out of the paddock as the clouds float over the sky and "a chill wind" (117) blows. Mansfield reflects in the natural surroundings, especially the "chill wind," the portents that are contained in the simple action of Jo who "motioned them to ride on" (117). The final sentence closes the events for the present, but does not resolve the possibilities for further catastrophe, neither does it provide a dissolution of the highly complex interpersonal relationships that will characterize the interaction of the inhabitants of the ranch in the future. Mansfield leaves the suggestion of such events to chance.

The stories discussed in this chapter reveal some of the details of the lives of two women who are exploited as sexual commodities, and robbed of individual autonomy and authenticity. Both stories are early works, and appear to lack the lyrical qualities, half-tones and muted gestures of the writing that characterized Mansfield's later work, but are successful in their own terms. Their success lies in the aggressive exposure of the brutality, and the mutual exploitation of men and women inside and outside of marriage. Mansfield may have considered *In a German Pension* (1911) "a lie," but the evidence of similar themes in her late fiction reinforces her keen and lasting interest in the treatment of the relationships between men and women. She returns to the subject of the polarity of marriage

partners, and of the cruelty that each inflicts on the other, in her other New Zealand stories such as *Prelude* (1918) and *At the Bay* (1921), and treats the psychologically stifling position of lonely women, in *The Daughters of the late Colonel* (1921) and *Miss Brill* (1920). In her intuitive understanding of the psychology of the female, she explores the effect of the masks they wear in order to survive in this world, and discovers that the masks are more firmly in place as the pressures from society confine and constrict individual action, and that the anger borders on despair.

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### Chapter 3

#### Two New Zealand stories: *Prelude* and *At the Bay*

Mansfield's continued quest for authenticity as a writer is reflected in a Journal entry, and a letter to an unnamed correspondent. The first written in January, and the second written in November of 1921, convey her desire to write "simply, fully freely" (*Journal*, 1954:123). She comments that "[i]t's only by being true to life that I can be true to art. And to be true to life is to be good, sincere, simple, honest" (*Letters*, IV, 1996:170). This parallels her characters' search for authenticity, as they seek honesty and simplicity in the intricate details of their complicated lives. The events in the life of the character, Frau Brechenmacher, in *Frau Brechenmacher attends a wedding*, discussed in the previous chapter, reflect the antithesis of authentic living, since the Frau is not acknowledged as a woman and as a human being. This leads to a hierarchical bid for dominance by the representative of the stronger party, Herr Brechenmacher, over the party who appears compliant and mute, and which is represented by Frau Brechenmacher. Examples of inauthentic living will be explored in this chapter, when the women (Linda Burnell and Beryl Fairfield) in *Prelude* (1918) and *At the Bay* (1921), are confronted with the patriarchal presence of Stanley whose dominance is perceived and experienced as constricting. In these stories, gender differences are juxtaposed to the creative potential of the matriarchal order, with a definite attempt to examine closely the consciousness of the characters themselves and to move away from interpretation by an omniscient narrator.

Mansfield reveals the complexity of the inner workings of each character's mind by centring the revelation of meaning on single moments of intense and significant emotion, known as epiphanies. The idea of a "blazing moment" is underpinned by James Joyce's idea, and use of the "epiphany" which he applies with skill in *Dubliners*. Ellman notes that Joyce's character Stephen Hero (211-213) defines the epiphany as "the whatness of a thing," captured in the moment in which "the soul of the commonest object...seems to us radiant," casting the author in a totally new relationship with the reader, by presenting an unstated meaning that is intended to reveal the essence of the story." (1959:87). Mansfield wrote to her friend, Brett, on that topic and asked:

[h]ow are we to appreciate the importance of one spiritual event rather than another ? What is to prevent each being unrelated — complete in itself — if the gradual unfolding in growing, gaining light is not to be followed by one blazing moment?" (*Letters*, 1989:30).

For Mansfield, authenticity as a writer is closely linked to writing with fluency, and ease of thought and expression. She writes to Murry, as early as 25 April 1915, and says:

I had a great day yesterday. The Muses descended in a ring, like the angels on the Botticelli Nativity roof....and I fell into the open arms of my first novel. I have finished a large chunk... tell me what you think, won't you? It's queer stuff....Yesterday I had a fair wallow in it, and then I shut my shop and went for a long walk along the Quai — very far. It was dusk when I started, but dark when I got home. The lights came out as I walked, and the boats danced by. Leaning over the bridge I suddenly discovered that one of the boats was exactly what I want my novel to be. Not big, almost 'grotesque' — I mean *heavy* — with people rather dark and seen strangely as they move in the sharp light and shadow ; and I want bright shivering lights in it, and the sound of water (*Letters*, I, 1984:167).

The importance of the creative muse that awakened her sensibilities, on that occasion, opened the way for the writing of *The Aloe*, which was finally published as *Prelude* by Leonard and Virginia Woolf's Hogarth Press in 1918. The creative awakening is highly significant as the preceding years had produced only a collection of short stories, *In a German Pension*, and had involved Mansfield in co-editing literary material for the magazines *Rhythm* and *The Blue Review*.

Mansfield wrote an early story *The Tiredness of Rosabel* in New Zealand in 1908, but refined the technique in *Prelude*. The early technique uses unusual and interesting methods to convey temporal and spatial organization of material within the story. It is built around a single scene with a flashback, and a daydream to enhance the story itself, and is modelled on a written sketch that explored the psychological functioning of the mind, and was common in literary practice in the eighteen nineties. The story represents three levels of time that run at intervals within the mind of Rosabel as she experiences the present time as the girl who has to climb four flights of stairs, her recent past as a shop assistant, and the future that she wishes for, as the privileged escort of a wealthy young man. In the bus journey home, boredom with the advertisements that Rosabel reads and has read so often, sets in and her romantic and youthful turn of mind escapes into an image of fantastic splendour as she looks at a part of the city that she imagines to resemble Venice,

at night, mysterious, dark, even the hansoms were like gondalos dodging up and down, and the lights trailing luridly — tongues of flame licking the wet street — magic fish swimming in the Grand Canal (17).

In fantasizing about the area that she passes, she externalizes her feelings by associating them with a suitable concrete correlative such as hansoms that look like boats, lights looking like tongues of flame and magic fish swimming. These images prefigure the fantasy of her emotional and possible

sexual involvement with the young man in her dream later in the story, and evoke the mood of her hopeful and expectant youth. Rosabel herself buys a bunch of violets, and does without a good meal, while the young man in the dream buys her “great sprays of Parma violets, fill[s] her hands with them” (19). In the dream, the image of the violets becomes the symbol for abundance as the scent permeates her daily life with Harry. The symbols of flowers, good food and luxurious surroundings reveal the intensity of the story as no linear account of the action can give.

Mansfield’s disillusionment with the novel as a genre reveals that the narrative strategies that she had used at age seventeen, such as narratives that did not rely on plot for their organization, the concentration of mood and rhythm, and the expression of sensory impressions, were best suited to her desire to experiment with different narrative possibilities. Yet the period between *Maata*, the novel she began in 1913, and *The Aloe* saw her grappling with fluency of expression, with a pointed reference to her frustration in a Journal entry of 2 April 1914. She writes:

[i]f I could write with my old fluency for *one day*, the spell would be broken. It’s the continual effort – the slow building up of my idea and then, before my eyes and out of my power, it’s slow dissolving (*Journal*, 1954:58).

In contrast, a significantly insightful reprieve from psychological malaise and the ensuing writer’s block appears in an entry for 7 April 1914:

[t]he heavens opened for the sunset tonight. When I had thought the day unfolded and sealed, came a burst of heavenly bright petals... I sat behind the window, pricked with rain, and looked until that hard thing in my breast melted and broke into the smallest fountain, murmuring as aforetime, and I drank the sky and the whisper. Now who is to decide between “Let it be” and “Force it”? J. believes in the whip: he says his steed has plenty of strength, but it is idle and shies at such a journey in prospect. I feel if mine does not gallop and dance at free will, I’m not riding at all, but just swinging from its tail.... (*Journal*, 1954:59-60).

In this entry, she broaches the subject of the difference between male and female thought processes as they engage in the creative business. This prefigures her own engagement with gender differences, and the accompanying modes of thought in *The Aloe* and then later in *Prelude*.

By March 1915 Mansfield was in Paris, and had commenced with the first sections of what was *The Aloe*. She writes of her progress in writing in a letter to Murry on May 12, 1915, and says: “[m]y book *marche bien* — I feel I could write it anywhere — it goes so easily — and I know it so well. It will be a funny book — ” (*Letters*, I, 1984:186). She completes the cycle of writing by noting in a letter of 14 May 1915, that “[m]y work is finished, my freedom gained....Besides which I have only to polish my work now; it’s really accompli” (*Letters*, I, 1984:188).

Mansfield's return to England from Paris on 19 May, 1915, signalled a cessation of writing for about ten months. Even though actual writing ceased, the period of time before her brother, Leslie Heron Beauchamp was killed, was spent talking to him of their home, and provided a closer focus for her imagination on the ideas about the family that she had already formulated. The creative impulse set in motion by her brother's presence was broken by his untimely death at Ploegsteert Wood in France on 7 October, 1915. She wrote a month later that "I'm just as much dead as he is" (*Journal*, 1954:89) and also "[t]hen why don't I commit suicide? Because I have a duty to perform to the lovely time when we were both alive. I want to write about it and he wanted me to" (*Journal*, 1954:90).

A *Journal* entry of 22 January 1916 confirms the duty that she feels she owes to her brother, and she writes with a desire that is focused and intense. She wishes to

write recollections of my own country...till I simply exhaust my store. Not only because it's a "sacred debt" that I pay my country because my brother and I were born there, but also because in my thoughts I range with him over all the remembered places. I am never far away from them (*Journal*, 1954:93-94).

Her emotional involvement with her subject material is clear, as is her wish for it to be written in "a kind of *special prose*" (*Journal*, 1954:95). She writes *The Aloe* during February 1916, and acknowledges the impact of the talks she and her brother had together before his death. The certainty in her mind that "[i]t simply fascinates me, and I know that it is what you [her brother] wish me to write" (*Journal*, 1954:94) brings reassurance of artistic purpose, and clarity of vision within an emotionally difficult decision.

*Prelude* is a multi-voiced piece of writing that, in its particular method, seeks to eliminate the personal intrusion of the author. Mansfield terms it the "defeat of the personal," and recognizes that in striving to write as she does, her art will undergo "an inevitable change." This she noted in a *Journal* entry as late as 19 December 1920, when she says:

[e]verything in life that we really accept undergoes a change. So suffering must become Love. This is the mystery. This is what I must do. I must pass from personal love which has failed me to greater love (*Journal*, 1954:96).

The expression of her desire to "defeat the personal" and embrace a "greater love," with its accompanying authenticity, is a key focus for the revisions from *The Aloe* in *Prelude*. She wishes to transform the love that she gave her brother into an expression of forceful creative energy.

The opening paragraphs of *Prelude* reveal that there is no room on the buggy for Kezia and Lottie Burnell as they move from one home to another. Their mother, Linda Burnell “could not possibly have held a lump of a child on [her lap] for any distance” (223) and their grandmother, Mrs Fairfield is occupied in seeing to their mother, and also to the rest of the luggage. The reference to a lack of space, both on the buggy and on Linda’s lap, appears innocent in itself, but it prefigures Linda’s indifference to her children. Linda does not consider her children to be a part of the “absolute necessities” (223) which she will not let out of her sight, but commodities that can be dispensed with at will. “Hand in hand, they [Kezia and Lottie] stared with round solemn eyes first at the absolute necessities, and then at their mother” (223), perplexed that at one of the most uprooting and potentially traumatic moments of their lives, their mother considers them less important than her inanimate possessions. The children are classed as utility articles such as chairs and tables, and in Linda’s mind, should be standing on their heads as well. The perception of themselves as commodities that the children absorb, reinforces their lack of personal value, but prepares the way for the crucial role that the grandmother will play in their lives as care-giver, more especially in Kezia’s life.

Their enclosure within another family, the Samuel Josephs, is temporary but enforced. The boys, whom the Burnell girls join for tea, are rough, and elicit from Kezia an unequivocal response of hatred in “[s]he did hate boys” (225). They continue their insensitive interaction with the girls, while Kezia instinctively realizes that her only defence is silence, and an escape into fantasy. For Kezia, being separated from her family in this manner brings new insights of not only a startling awareness of gender difference, but also of abandonment, defencelessness and fear of physical attack from the Samuel Josephs boys. Suppression of her authentic self begins early, as societal pressures demand specific rites of behaviour that are expressed as mute acceptance. She swallows a tear, and with it the psychological discomfort that accompanies her position as female child growing up in a world dominated by values that reflect the masculine. Mansfield portrays the effect of childhood fear, distractibility, hostility, and the tyranny of the peer group in the interaction with the neighbour’s children. After tea, Kezia is left to wander about on her own, and finds relics of her past life in her old home. She notices the coloured glass in the dining room as if for the first time and experiences the world as unrecognizably blue or yellow — presaging her later experiences with “IT.” As the darkness seeps into her former home, she feels she is being watched and almost succumbs to the terror of “IT.” She is a highly sensitive, impressionable little girl, for whom the presence of supernatural forces is real and influential, and her response to these forces draws her emotions away from the real world of moving house, and even from the naughty Samuel Josephs

boys, to another world peopled by fantastic beings that only she can identify. Parkin – Gounelas notes that Kezia has an imagination “vivid to the point of frenzy” (1991:137).

Her sensitive, receptive nature is revealed in her ride home with the storeman, who “smelled of nuts and new wooden boxes” (228), innocent and earthy in themselves. But considered in the context of Kezia’s awakening awareness of sexuality and sexual difference, such an encounter brings to the fore, not only novel olfactory sensations, but an image of sexual difference as it occurs in Nature. It is voiced as a question to the storeman, about the difference between a ram and a sheep. The storeman typically avoids the truth by saying “well, a ram has horns and runs for you” (228). His reply, in an embarrassed adult-to-child manner, has the possibility of being interpreted as patronizing adult superiority by the child herself, who appears to be without the necessary intuitive comprehension of the situation. The key words are “runs for you” (228), and reflect an image of male predation which confirms Kezia’s suspicions that a ram is dangerous and threatening. For Kezia, who does intuitively comprehend his meaning, her reply is emphatic:

I don’t want to see it frightfully, I hate rushing animals like dogs and parrots. I often dream that animals rush at me — even camels and while they are rushing, their heads swell enormous... (225).

For Kezia, the images of rushing animals are nightmare experiences, as they infer the orthodox polarity that designates the male as the active predator with the female, the defenceless prey. She shares the distaste for rushing things with her mother. Fullbrook notes:

[b]oth are searching for sexual rhythms in life that are other than mere animal pouncing, and both represent Katherine Mansfield’s understanding of women’s response to the convention of sexuality that declare this predation typical and necessary (1986:82).

Kezia’s fears of rushing animals whose heads swell enormously anticipates Linda Burnell’s dream of the tiny bird that she finds in a green paddock when she is out walking with her father. It ceases to be tame and loveable as the head swells and becomes bigger and bigger, “and its round eyes seemed to smile knowingly at her” (233). The tiny bird is changed to a grotesque caricature of a bird that becomes “a baby with a big naked head and a gaping bird-mouth, opening and shutting” (233). Linda’s growth to authenticity is dealt a severe blow, as she becomes the unsuspecting recipient of a cruel and deceitful trick played by a male figure, who appears to have her interests at heart. Her father’s insensitive laughter at her baffled discomfort seals her unconscious fear of the intrusive presence of the male. The equally intrusive presence of the bird/baby is paralleled by Stanley’s actions when he rattles the “Venetian blind up to the very top” (233) as she wakes up after the dream. The assumption of romance in the form of sweet baby birds, caring father figures and

considerate husbands, represents the insubstantiality of the romantic notion of received traditions surrounding patriarchy, and is in direct contrast to the reality of women engaged in childbirth and child care.

Kezia's sensitive awareness absorbs the message of the light from the lamp that her grandmother carries through the passage of the new home. In Mansfield's writings the lamp is a recurring symbol of feelings that convey images of the generational cycle that is specific to the female, as it is passed from the woman to the girl. In this story, it is deliberately centred on the grandmother, as she is the only representative among the women who is in a position to bear the burden of the light. The implication of the grandmother's words to Kezia about the lamp is unequivocally clear, as she asks whether "I can trust you to carry the lamp?" (228). The choice of her granddaughter Kezia, is significant, because Kezia is the potentially free subject, and has the possibility of learning from her grandmother a set of values other than those she observes in her mother, who plays the role of invalid, and reluctant mother.

The scene in the new house is a microcosm of the daily life of the Burnell family in which the centre of the action appears to be vested in Stanley Burnell, whose paternalistic behaviour, as he interacts with the women in the family, is evident in the minutiae of his continual demands and requests. His request for "five-eighths of a cup" (229) underlines a tone of ostensible worldly dominance that reflects his egocentricity, and also his fear that he is not receiving the devotion that he believes is his due. His actions underline his tenuous authority within his own family, when he foists his authority and rules onto Mrs Fairfield to comply with his requests for slippers, and victuals for the hired man. In order to support the false prestige that his actions bring to him, Stanley prides himself on his awareness of business matters, and the essential value of productivity. He voices his resentment at Beryl's apparent unwillingness to accept her position of financial dependence on him by assisting in the home.

[w]hat the hell does she expect to do? asked Stanley. Sit down and fan herself with a palm leaf fan while I have a gang of professionals to do the job? By Jove, if she can't do a hand's turn occasionally without shouting about it in return for.... (230).

In ironic contrast to his indignation at Beryl's insensitivity to her financial dependence on him, Stanley returns home from the office bearing purchases that reflect his purchasing power and authority, as his purchases are not essential to life, but are clearly luxuries. His impulsive thoughts as he drives home reflect his self-satisfaction, as he reinforces his personal image of the patriarchal

head of his home, when he imagines the family at church on a Sunday morning, and his recreation on the tennis court on Saturday afternoons.

Linda and her mother are “bathed in dazzling light” (253), and when the image of the aloe is introduced, Mrs Fairfield believes that it is going to flower that year. The older woman’s observation of the aloe and her interpretation of its meaning is underpinned by dispassionate appreciation, and is different from Linda’s, since the older woman neither fears nor resents the prospective fruit in the new season. She experiences only the wonder of the natural world as she contemplates the flowering of the aloe in the future, and does not associate the fat swelling plant with future pregnancies. The possibility of continued pregnancies is one of her daughter’s constant fears. Mrs Fairfield’s child-bearing years are over, as is the possibility of sexual involvement since she is elderly and widowed. The moment of unity for two generations of women (who have both experienced childbearing) is centred on the force of communication that is vested in the “special voice that women use at night to each other as though they spoke in their sleep from a hollow cave”(243-254). There is empathy between the mother and the daughter as they both gaze up at the aloe, but by virtue of their differing perceptions of the experience of being a woman their interpretations of the same image are vastly different. For Linda it is metamorphosed into a fantasized ship, “with oars lifted. Bright moonlight hung on the uplifted oars like water, and on the green wave glittered the dew” (253). The image of the ship is reminiscent of the protection of a prenatal world which nourishes and protects. Linda’s wish to return to this world is an example of her seeking a refuge in regressive and asexual activities, and is expressed in her childlike dependence on her mother. The comfort of seeing her mother in the kitchen leads Linda to think that “her mother looked wonderfully beautiful with her back to the leafy window. There was something comforting in the sight of her that Linda felt she could never do without” (238).

She continues her fantasy of escape in the ship as she dreamed

that she was caught up out of the cold water into the ship with the lifted oars and the budding mast. Now the oars fell striking quickly, quickly. They rowed far away over the top of the garden trees, the paddocks and the dark bush beyond.... How much more real this dream was than they should go back to the house where the sleeping children lay and where Stanley and Beryl played cribbage.... (254).

She imagines that in rowing away, “...Nobody would dare to come near the ship or follow after” (254). Her imaginary escape is an expression of liberation from the demands of patriarchal society, from the rigid prescriptions of motherhood, and its accompanying association of sexuality that she perceives to be an inescapable component of being a woman.

The image of the moon as it appears in the story becomes associated with Linda, since her initial response is merely the observation that “there is going to be a moon” (243). She is unaware that the moon is about to cast its influence over her, and ironically feels exposed in its light, and “shiver[s]” (243) at that very moment. The telling moment in this scene is an instinctive response to move away from the window, and to sit “down upon the box ottoman beside Stanley” (230). Her initial response reflects an abhorrence of the idea of sexuality. She shies away from the influence of the moon and its sexual implication, but at the same moment is drawn to the very man who elicits feelings of aversion and revulsion when he initiates a sexual encounter on other occasions. Her recognition of the reality of her own sexuality is poor, and viewed within the context of her negative response to sexuality in general, her response to Stanley reflects the action of “another woman”. This woman flees in fantasy from the prospect of anything sexual, as she “saw herself driving away (in a buggy) from everybody and not even waving” (233), but ironically, is willing to draw near to what she perceives as the protective presence of the masculine in the person of Stanley.

Although Mansfield does not endorse the expression of womanhood that Mrs Fairfield represents, the role of the older woman is placed significantly in juxtaposition to the roles played by her daughters and her granddaughters. Mrs Fairfield experiences contentment that Linda does not, and this is a reflection of her having wholly absorbed within her sense of self, the idea and the limitations of the traditional role of woman. Her daughters attempt to question this role by either withdrawing from the accepted activities associated with the feminine, like Linda, who fears and is repulsed by sexual contact and childbirth, or by being a person who is ruled by self-doubt and a ‘false self,’ like Beryl. Mrs Fairfield’s wish that she “should like to see those pantry shelves thoroughly well stocked with our jam” (255) reflects her desire to be one with the natural world that contains fruit-bearing trees from which she can make jam. For her the demands of social activities associated with sexual pressures are removed. The sexual pressures that her daughters feel are associated with childbirth, and the allure of the opposite sex. She is free of both, and fulfills her role in society as a care-giver by expressing understanding and affection for the needs of her daughters and grandchildren.

The aloe that mother and daughter gaze upon, with its grotesque appearance, is the central image of the story. It has

thick, grey-green, thorny leaves that were so old that they curled up in the air no longer; they turned back, they were split and broken; some of them lay flat and withered on the ground (240).

Linda and Kezia are united in a rare moment of communication that concentrates their attention on the aloe as a mysterious plant, but at the same time underlines its symbolic importance as a representative of the female body, since it is linked to the flower and fruit bearing element in the reproduction of human life. For Linda, the appeal of and identification with the aloe, rests in the knowledge that it bears only once every hundred years. Linda's half-shut eyes as she looks at the aloe reveal her contemplation of a possible escape from the constrictions of her life. Kezia, for whom the comprehension of the vicissitudes of life is still intuitive and not culturally bound by prescriptive rules, fails to be aware that the image of the "claws" and the "curving leaves" that appear to be hiding something, are linked to her mother's unspoken wish to be able to "cut into the air as if no wind could ever shake it" (240), and to withstand the punishing, tyrannical oppression of the intrusion of patriarchy in her life.

Fullbrook extends her reading of Linda's position, as a sexually subservient woman within her household, by suggesting that this is a reflection of a "mental disturbance that is obvious, as is her incapacity to deal with the world" (1986:83). This mental disturbance is associated with "madness linked to sexual subservience and claims that it can cause breakdown as a direct outcome of inauthentic feminine behaviour" (1986:83). Linda is unsuccessful in her attempts to convey her feelings of sexual aversion to Stanley, and can resort only to an emotionally charged rebellion, and a poorly expressed explanation of her delicate psychological condition. She tells him:

[y]ou know I am delicate. You know as well as I do that my heart is affected, and the doctor has told you that I may die at any moment. I have had three great lumps of children already...." (254).

An inauthentic mode of existence brings her to the brink of hysteria, since she can define her feelings in the form of little parcels of hatred, but is unable to move beyond an expression of resignation that she will go on having children and "Stanley will go on making money and the children will grow bigger and bigger, with whole fleets of aloes in them for me to choose from" (255).

Linda's daughter, Kezia, is the young protagonist whose role in the story traces the path of an awakening of awareness of sexuality in nature, and an awareness of the importance of interpersonal relationships (with her mother, grandmother and the hired man) that initiate self-awareness and self-knowledge. Kezia is confronted with images of roles that are clearly defined for each member of the generational cycle by virtue of the particular circumstances within the Burnell family. She observes her father as the undisputed head of the household, her mother as languid and lacking in obvious

energetic participation, her grandmother the care-giver and her aunt hoping for release through marriage from the isolation of the countryside. Her potential for a stable maturity is present but unformed, and as an observer of the interactions of her family, she absorbs the unspoken dynamics of individual personality traits that each member reflects, together with the interaction that ensues. Kezia functions on a relatively self-sufficient level without seeking obvious rewards from adults. She makes independent enquires about the difference between a ram and a sheep, she makes her grandmother an ally on her developmental path, and is observant enough to question the value of the strange-looking plant in their garden. She is at the centre of the pivotal scene of conflict as the duck is slaughtered, and experiences a moment of awareness in her Aunt Beryl's bedroom at the end of *Prelude* that introduces her into the world of artifice and pretence.

Conflicts that do arise are often resolved in extreme ways in the consciousness of the family, but no one person is actually killed in the stories. The displacement of such actions and the accompanying emotions, are transferred to the slaughter of a duck for the evening meal. In order to heighten the importance of such actions, Mansfield prepares the way to the actual slaughter by depicting images of slaughter that prefigure the actual killing of the duck when Pat, the hired man's personal possessions are considered. His coat "hung from the door-peg like a hanged man" and in his room "a bird cage" (232). Pat even carries a little tomahawk to perform the brutal deed. Kezia's outburst, in response to the decapitation of the duck brings to the fore a reaction of uneasiness in the other children, as they withdraw from their primitive blood lust that propels them to enact a mock cannibal dance.

When the children saw the blood they were frightened no longer. They crowded him and began to scream. Even Isobel leaped about crying: "The blood! The blood!" Pip forgot all about his duck. He simply threw it away from him and shouted, "I saw it. I saw it," and jumped round the woodblock....

"Watch it!" shouted Pat. He put down the body and it began to waddle — with only a long spurt of blood where the head had been; it began to pad away without a sound towards the steep bank that led to the stream .... That was the crowning wonder.

"Do you see that? Do you see that?" yelled Pip. He ran among the girls tugging at their pinafores.

"It's like a little engine. It's like a funny little railway engine," squeaked Isabel.

But Kezia suddenly rushed to Pat and flung her arms around his legs and buried her neck as hard as she could against his knees.

"Put head back! Put head back!" she screamed.

When he stooped to move her she would not let go or take her head away. She held on as hard as she could and sobbed: “Head back! Head back!” until, it sounded like a strange hiccup (248-249).

It is a pivotal scene in the story, as it unites the destruction of childhood innocence with a devouring, murderous presence in the form of Pat, the handyman. He himself is unaware of his role as destroyer and thinks only to amuse the children. Kezia’s trust in the established order is broken as her plea to “[p]ut [the] head back! Put [the] head back!” reverberates through centuries of adult rites of killings, in the form of savage attacks on fellow human beings. That evening, the wonder of the duck as a living creature, is replaced by the image of Stanley, carving, with self-satisfied enjoyment, the basted duck on the dinner table. Kezia’s comprehension of the male as devourer is unformed and undeveloped, as she can associate neither Pat with barbarism nor her father with overt savagery.

In an indirect way, Pat partly redeems himself in the eyes of Kezia, as she discovers that he is wearing earrings. This symbol of the female placates her hysteria to a subdued calm. Her equilibrium restored, she resumes her reliance on her grandmother, who imposes order and stability within the dwelling place and within the emotional lives of the family. Kezia’s awareness that Pat wears “little round earrings” (249), raises an image of mixed gender representation, that is an extension of Mansfield’s idea of the self, as being neither male nor female. Her expression of such representation is the likelihood that one can go in and out of gender in the costume of the chosen gender, and yet remain in the gender of one’s origin. She cites a similar idea as an ideal in a Journal entry of 1921 when she says we are a compound of male and female, and the choice of the male will expand her and she in turn will expand the male. She considers this action to be “our refuge, our shelter. Here the tricks of life will not be played. Here is safety for us to grow” (*Journal*, 1954:259).

A significant moment in Kezia’s life is her experience at Beryl’s dressing table at the end of *Prelude*. She examines the contents of the top of the dressing table and “under her arm she carried a very dirty calico cat” (259). The dirty calico cat is the toy that links her childhood with the adult world of pretence and artifice. It is dirty because it belongs to a child who has played with it, and it is a cat because cats are adept at employing winning ways to get what they want. Such winning ways will be part of Kezia’s life as an adult woman unless sharp perspicacity of vision allows her to rise above it, and realize her potential for growth towards authenticity. As Kezia sniffs at the face cream she absorbs the fragrance of the world of artifice that the face cream represents. In placing the lid on the cat’s ear, it flies off as the toy topples to the floor. It doesn’t break, but her perception

of the world will never be the same again, as the spontaneous questioning of visual and auditory sensations will be measured by societal standards that will, in turn, be responded to in a socially acceptable manner.

But for Kezia it had broken the moment it flew through the air, and she picked it up, hot all over, and put it back on the dressing table. Then she tip-toed away, far too quickly and airily.... (259).

Kezia trips away far too quickly, since she dons the mask of what is really her false, socially acceptable self. Yet Kezia is prepared to look at the cat (and herself) in the mirror, and confront a personal reflection that her mother is too frightened to bear when she sees her reflection in the mirror. Kezia's reflection of herself in the mirror is the recognition of an "obsessive means of psychological revelation" (Harmat, 1989:117). But her courageous awareness is the redeeming feature that contributes to the realization of herself as an authentic adult, with the potential capacity for growth and development.

It is significant that it is in her Aunt Beryl's room that Kezia experiences the effect of the introduction to the artifice of social existence, because her aunt is mistress of such artifice. On another occasion, in the same room, Beryl too is drawn to the mirror as she gazes at her self, in self-gratifying satisfaction that borders on pathological narcissism. The mirror reveals an image that is immobile, until it becomes fragmented by movement. It exposes a deeper self that shrinks from the self-confrontation that such unmistakably visual duplication brings,

[t]here was a mirror on the mantel. She leaned her arms along and looked at her pale shadow in it. How beautiful she looked, but there was nobody to see, nobody.

"Why must you suffer so?" said the face in the mirror. "You were not made for suffering....Smile!" (244).

Beryl is trapped within the romantic illusion that her discovery as the belle of the ball, "[t]here is a ball at government house....Who is that exquisite creature in eau de nil satin?" (231), is dependent upon her timely exposure to circumstances that will provide a marriageable man, and that she will become an "awful frump in a year or two" (256). She expresses in mock-comic manner her concerns about the isolation of her present life, but there is an unnatural urgency, fuelled by social conditioning, in her desire to enter what she considers at the time to be "a state of fulfillment". There is cruel irony in this image as this kind of fulfilment will make her a victim of the very system that her sister, Linda, fears and wishes to flee from. The expression of the conflict she experiences brings her close to a schizophrenic rift within her personality, as she recognizes the

presence of a false and a real self. She experiences too the disgust at the despicable duplicity in her nature which makes her “cold with rage” (258) in a moment of self-condemnation and self-hatred.

She is aware, when she writes to her friend, Nan, that her “other self who had written the letter. It not only bored, it rather disgusted her real self” (256) and that it reflects an inauthentic falseness. The recognition brings only momentary insight, however and is not enough to bring about lasting and substantial change. After contemplating the insight she gains by introspective thought, she admits to herself that “I’m always acting a part. I’m never my real self for a moment.” (257). But the irony of her role is that she herself perpetuates patriarchal expectations that reinforce the acceptability of marriage for women (and her own inauthenticity), by emphasizing her highly acceptable physical attributes such as “greeny blue” eyes “with little gold points in them,” “[l]ovely, lovely hair...It had the colour of fresh fallen leaves, brown and red with a glint of yellow” (257), as the first step to attracting a potential suitor. Beryl longs to play the courtship game, and be in the arms of a suitable suitor who will recognize her desirable physical attributes, flatter her and applaud her every word and gesture.

But Beryl’s desire to live a life of authenticity, and a discovery of her true self is present, and is reflected in the distant memories of “the tiny moments she was really she,” times when she felt that “life [was] rich and mysterious and good, too” (258). These memories have a dream-like quality, and lead her to question whether she will be that Beryl for ever, “[s]hall I? How can I? And was there ever a time when I did not have a false self?” (258). The tiny moments are memories of what appears to be a sincere desire for authenticity. They reveal the wish to dispense with pretence, and a need to move beyond the social importance of the “appearance” of things, to a position where the individual experiences contentment with circumstances, and consequently self-acceptance. A release from “acting a part,” from the “special trilling laugh” for visitors and being the “little girl pretending to pout when she is asked to play the guitar” (258) will bring the contentment of authentic living. Such contentment should not be contingent upon the sex of the individual, and the accompanying rewards for being a member of a particular sex, but should embrace the idea of authentic personhood.

Beryl balances on the brink of self-revelation, and her immediate response to Kezia’s matter of fact information that “[f]ather is home with a man and lunch is ready” (258), intrudes upon her thoughts of a nobler life of greater authenticity in the future. She is aware that the “man” with Stanley is the object of her desire, and that she will probably continue to play her accustomed part as the unmarried female in search of a husband.

*At the Bay* (1921) is a continuation of the story of the life of the Burnell family, and reveals the interior consciousness of several characters. The intensity of the sexual hatred and the sexual polarity within the family, and its dynamics is revealed in the story. Linked to these particular dynamics is Mansfield's use of the universal images of the sun and the sea that reflect the interconnection between the natural world and the human beings. The human beings are unavoidably immersed in the effects of the natural elements, which in turn reflect Mansfield's own immersion in her dramatic discovery of her feelings for her home island. She writes as early as 11 October 1917,

[t]his is about as much as I can say about it. You know, if the truth were known I have a perfect passion for the island where I was born. Well, in the early morning there I always remember feeling that this little island dipped back into the dark blue sea during the night only to rise again at gleam of day, all hung with bright spangles and glittering drops....I tried to catch that moment — with something of its sparkle and its flavour. And just as on those mornings white milky mists to rise uncover beauty, then smother it again and then again disclose it, I tried to lift that mist from my people and let them be seen and then to hide them again.... It's so difficult to describe all this and it sounds overambitious and vain. But I don't feel anything but intensely a longing to serve my subject as well as I can (*Letters*, I, 1984:83-84).

She writes with affection of the images that “bright spangles and glittering drops” and “white milky mists” conjure up in her mind. Together with the timeless reflection of Nature that is an integral part of the construction of the story, Mansfield's awareness of the ephemeral nature of life itself is reflected in the description of the perceptible diurnal changes that occur within a day. The opening paragraphs of *At the Bay* are an indication of a primordial period of time when the earth was devoid of human life and the signs of such life. The solidity of the road, the paddocks and the bungalows that are assumed as real and functional during the day, are strangely without form and function, and the surrounding plant life is drenched in life-giving water and moisture. There is a womb-like stillness and peace that embraces all existence, that is reinforced by Mansfield's image that “if you waked up in the middle of the night you might have seen a big fish flicking in at the window and gone again....”(441).

The first sign of human life is the old shepherd who is dressed in clothes that are reminiscent of another time in history. His appearance and nature are congenial, and this instils in his sheep and

their canine herder, a sense of security and safety that is reinforced by his innate awareness of the natural rhythms of the world. He looks up and sees that the “[t]he sun [was] rising” (442).

The sun is a distinctly masculine symbol in the story, and is embodied in the person and actions of Stanley Burnell. It is significant that he is the first human being to appear on the beach, as his movements parallel the movements of the sun as it rises and sets at night. As the patriarchal head of the household he considers himself to be an embodiment of the active centre of the life of the family. His activity contrasts with the sure-footed tread of the shepherd for whom success in the world is measured by the welfare of his sheep. Stanley is disgusted when he realizes that his weed-like brother-in-law, Jonathan Trout, is already in the sea, swimming. The pride he takes in being the first person in the water reflects his need to be in control of practical affairs, and to be the undisputed owner even of the sea he swims in! He feels cheated by the intrusion of the other man whose unvoiced comments point to the very essence of Stanley’s character, “[t]here was something pathetic in his (Stanley’s) determination to make a job of everything. You couldn’t help feeling he’d be caught one day, and what an almighty cropper he’d come” (444). Jonathan Trout, by comparison is bent on living “carelessly, recklessly, spending oneself” (444). His philosophy of life reflects an easy association with “the ebb and flow of life, but to give way to it — that was what was needed” (444). He believes that the “getting and spending” is the source of all tension and consequently disharmony in life. An intrusively discordant note rings unexpectedly in his reverie when he experiences the debilitating effects of aching muscles, and a feeling of discontent that he too had “stayed in too long” (444). The sea is an image of the feminine, and for Jonathan the continued close contact with the feminine depletes his resources of masculine energy.

Stanley Burnell’s obsession with time is in contrast to Jonathan’s need to follow the “ebb and flow” of life. As Stanley prepares to leave the house, he emphasizes the time he has available and specifies in a highly rational manner, that he has only “twenty-five minutes” (444). Time as embraced by Stanley reflects the masculine element, and represents his attempts to foist his interpretation of it onto the women in household. He intensifies his control over the household and traps the women in the clutches of patriarchal power, as he commandeers them all to look for his walking stick. He also sets every female member of the family to work in order to uphold his undisputed position as head of the house, by requests to bring his pair of shoes, or to stop the coach, or to search for his bowler hat. Instinctively he senses the relief that the women feel at his departure, especially as he sees Beryl give “a little skip and run back to the house. She was glad to be rid of him” (446). His immediate response is one of childish hurt, frustration and resentment, but never

does he reach a point of self-insight, and awareness that change and revision are needed for his own actions.

The general relief that the women feel is tangible, and sincerely expressed in “[g]one?”(446). The reply, with the significant presence of the exclamation mark, “[g]one”! (446) points to the final seal that will mark the difference in the tone of the day, that the absence of a particular man will bring in the house. Ironically, Stanley’s presence continues to be felt as much as his absence is celebrated, because at the back of the women’s minds lurks, not only their knowledge of his return home that evening, but also the unspoken and unconscious stamp of authoritarianism that permeates their every action, and which will set the entire process of authoritarian power in motion again. No single woman in the household fails to experience the liberating effects of the masculine absence, from Beryl whose offers of tea are the result of spontaneous interaction, to Mrs Fairfield’s similarly spontaneous response to the baby that is reduced to the level of easy baby talk. Even Alice, the servant girl is not excluded, as the conscious act of immersing the teapot into the water and holding it there for a few minutes, is a symbolic action that embraces her response to both the absence of the masculine presence as master, (in her subservient position as servant in the household) and the masculine presence in general. The feeling of unity that the women experience as they are temporarily released from the shackles of this particular bondage, is captured in an instant of time, and is cathartic in its intensity, “[t]hey sounded warm and loving and as if they shared a secret” (446). It passes, and the day continues along its appointed path as each fulfils her accustomed duties. For Alice, the idea of drowning “being too good” (447) for the man masquerading as the teapot, is reinforced by her visit to Mrs Stubbs’s shop for tea. The shop owner is outspoken in her repeated expression that “freedom’s best” (460). For Alice, the concept of freedom is an alien thought, and one that she rarely entertains because her sense of self is fashioned according to the patriarchal specifications that determine the actions of the servant class.

Stanley’s possessions, such as his walking stick, are of minor importance to Linda, as her recollection of even the existence of the stick is vague and indistinct. She is unwilling to extend her entrapment beyond her immediate existence, and to become the carer of his possessions as well because she is already trapped within the image of a Stanley whom few people see. She identifies this man as “timid, sensitive, innocent” and someone “who longed to be good” (453). She sees him on rare occasions when “[t]here were glimpses, moments, breathing spaces of calm” (453). For the majority of the time, her life consists of “rescuing him, and restoring him, and calming him down, and listening to his story” (453). She is the mirror that casts a reflection back to Stanley himself that ensures that he will continue to see himself as competent, and the undisputed head of the household.

Stanley Burnell is the boy whom she never thought she would marry. As she recalls the events of her childhood, and remembers when her father had called him “Linny’s beau,” her surprise is great when his apparently idle words are made concrete, and entrapment within marriage becomes her appointed lot.

She shies away from the effect of the masculine on her in the form of the sun when she seeks a quiet, shady spot with her baby son. Entrenched within the difficulty of reconciling differences between the sexes, is the recurrent theme of woman’s resentment of motherhood and fear of male sexuality that was seen in *Prelude*. But it appears in *At the Bay* with greater intensity and energy, as Linda identifies in words, the source of her unhappiness, of the destruction of her authenticity and her identification that “her real grudge against life” and her questioning of whether it is “the common lot of women to bear children.” She argues:

[i]t wasn’t true. She, for one could prove that wrong. She was broken, made weak, her courage gone, through child-bearing....As to the boy – well, he was anybody’s who wanted him. She had hardly held him in her arms. She was so indifferent about him as he lay there.... (454-455).

Her indifference to the baby boy is associated with her fear and hatred of child-bearing. Her dispassionate glance at the child borders on superficial interest, until her full attention is directed at him as she moves closer, and “drops off her chair on the grass” (454). His winning ways are interpreted by her as a reflection of an appealing confidence that awakens within her a response that “was so new” (454). The novelty of her emotional response occurs in the midst of ambivalent emotions about motherhood, and will not erase such feelings from her mind completely. But the unconscious recognition and acknowledgement of such feelings is a sign that the arduous path to authenticity will be continued as it has started, not without great difficulty and much psychic pain. She is largely unaware that she herself has set the modified pattern of thought in motion. Mansfield depicts the convolutions of intense emotions in the Burnell family. Cather puts it thus:

[e]very individual in the household (even the children) is clinging passionately to his individual soul, is in terror of losing it in the general family flavour. As in most families, the mere struggle to have anything of one’s own, to be one’s self at all, creates an element of strain which keeps everybody almost at breaking point (Cather, 1936:152-153).

For Linda, the notion of “breaking point” within the family is put into perspective when she spends the late afternoon with her brother-in-law, Jonathan Trout. He laments the fact that his incarceration within the four walls of his office is about to happen again, in fact, “on Monday” (263). Linda notices that he has a look of hunger in his eyes, that couldn’t be satisfied by the music he loved, the

books he had read and the schemes he had entertained. The “new fire blazed in Jonathan” (464) in a different manner to Stanley’s “habit of catching on fire” (453) as Jonathan never achieves a goal set in a moment of inspiration. Stanley’s goals are achieved as he embraces fully the moment of patriarchal power that is generated by his own personal brand of activity. Jonathan’s lament borders on a moan of painful discomfort as he elaborates on his personal misfortune. His inability to step beyond the confines of his prison cell parallels Linda’s emotions confinement within motherhood. She achieves a modicum of insight in her awareness of unexpressed feelings and emotions, but neither of the two masculine figures achieves this level of insight, and they continue on their set ways.

The summer afternoon closes with the prospect of a future that looks bleak for Jonathan, and by his own admission, he identifies his character as “[w]eak...weak. No stamina. No anchor. No guiding principle, let us call it” (465). In symbolic terms, his futile attempts to rise above his impossible circumstances are reflected in the image of the sun that has set, which means that the day is over and the opportunities for change have also ceased. The descriptions of the sky, with complementary colours of blue and gold are powerful pictures of patriarchal dominance. But Linda’s immediate response to such images is tempered by her perception of a gentler image of patriarchy than before, as the jealous God, the Almighty didn’t appear as powerful and terrifying as before. The feminine image of the sea echoes Linda’s more relaxed position, and her moment of insight into a less authoritarian world as it too “breathed softly as if it would draw that tender, joyful beauty to its own bosom”(465). This prefigures her awareness that the brother-in-law for whom the ebb and flow of life is important, is a decidedly gentler version of her customary image of patriarchy but that, in being less autocratic, he is also more weed-like. Her sudden awareness that Jonathan’s sense of self is “not resolute, not gallant, but touched already with age”(465), contrasts with the image of Stanley whose pride in his physique borders on obsession.

The special bond that Mrs Fairfield and Kezia share is reinforced by their discussion of Kezia’s Uncle William who “went to the mines, and he got sunstroke there and died” (456). Mrs Fairfield’s sense of self is secure as she replies to Kezia’s question of the recollection of the loss of her son. Her reply reflects a philosophical acceptance of the inevitability of death. For Kezia, the contemplation of the loss of life is more traumatic than her grandmother’s, as her reluctance “to leave here, leave everywhere, for ever, leave — leave her grandma”(456) conjures up images of isolation and extreme emotional deprivation that reinforces the incredulity at the idea of her own death. The intensity of the moment of contemplation is diffused by the manner of avoidance that Kezia employs as she tickles her grandmother, and tries to extract from her a verbal promise never

to die. For the two characters, the brevity of life not only governs their movements in their lifetime, but also determines the solidity of their sense of self, as each contemplates death from the individual perspective of youth and age respectively.

In *At the Bay*, Beryl's fresh beauty is contrasted with the emaciated, sun-dried body of Mrs Harry Kember who "spent her time lying in the full glare of the sun. She could stand any amount of it, she never had enough... All day the sun exerted its effect as parched, withered, cold, she lay stretched on the stones like a piece of tossed driftwood" (450). She is compared to driftwood not only by virtue of her sun-dried appearance, but also because her personal life places her in a position that none of the other women of the summer colony can contemplate. She is childless, but in a different way to Linda's wish for childlessness, because Mrs Kember's sexuality and sexual preference is questionable. Her treatment of the opposite sex lacks the customary feminine use of artifice, and reflects a level of communication that occurs on an equal footing. Her position as "horrible caricature of her husband" prefigures her openly lesbian attitude to Beryl when they prepare for their swim. Her complimentary phrases to Beryl about her beauty and looks flatter the younger woman, whose initial shyness gives way to "a quick, bold, evil feeling"(451) that lures her to a position of temporary identification with the values of the older woman. Beryl's path to authenticity is marred by a sense of self that is weakened by her desire to assert herself as a worldly-wise young lady who should, according to Mrs Kember, "have a good time" (452). Beryl's ambivalence to Mrs Kember is reflected in the knowledge that she is being poisoned by the older woman but that "she longed to hear" (452). The lesbian-like advances that Mrs Kember make to Beryl, and which Beryl does not fully understand, emphasizes the ambiguity of her (Mrs Kember's) sense of self, as her husband's name is her only means of identification, and her association. She swims away, like "a rat" (452), and reinforces her desertion of Beryl who has been brought to the brink of wickedness, and an incomplete knowledge of a sexuality that is as yet unexplored. Mrs Kember "turned turtle" (452), and as she capsizes she does so literally, but also symbolically because by removing herself from view, she retreats to the underworld of sexual perversion in which she feels more comfortable. She returns, ready to make another onslaught of corruption on Beryl. The recognition of her physical ugliness and distortion as she swims back and surfaces with her head above the water, and looks like a "horrible caricature of her husband"(452) reinforces her sexual perversion once again. The comparison with her husband is an odious one as his own sexuality is fraught with ambiguity. The physical perfection of his face is mask-like and portrayed like an illustration in an American novel. His face reflects the measured perfection of the image portrayed in the illustration because it lacks vitality and warmth, and is merely a cardboard

figure. He has no words to speak other than the display of motions of socially approved actions, like tennis and dancing.

In the final section of *At the Bay*, Beryl disappears into the world of fantasy as she absorbs the mystery of the night time. She feels conspiratorial in the collusion that the half light, cast by the moon on familiar possessions like dressing-tables and bed-posts, brings. A secret world shrouds the joy of being encased in the safety and the possession of worldly space, her bedroom. Within the apparent safety of her own room, the magic of the effect of the moon unites her person with nature, in a vision that the “the flowers were bright as by day; the shadow of the nasturtiums, exquisite lily-like leaves and wide-open flowers, lay across the silvery veranda”(467). She is drawn to the window as she contemplates the difficulty of her lonely life. Intertwined within her own confused, desperate thought patterns, and as a counter balance to her own social conscience, is the voice of Mrs Harry Kember saying “...[o]h, go on! You enjoy yourself while you are young. That’s my advice” (468). The conflicting voices of the older woman together with her own insistent voice reflects the complex nature of behaviour, as the characters discover that individual behaviour is not as straightforward as they wish to believe, and that authenticity is not automatic.

Beryl’s self-absorption directs her to a vision of supreme “power over people” (468) that lifts her out of the longing for the “he” who does not come. A momentary flashback from the present to the future places her beauty and loveliness into a bracket that has frozen in time. She reflects on her celibate state, and is dismayed by the prospect of a lifetime of celibacy.

Beryl is lured to the window by a male figure who invites her for a walk “at that time of night” (468). Her virginal innocence makes her an attractive object to lure in this manner. His manner is persuasive, and the smell of his cigarette smoke is intoxicating. She is torn between the thought of being daring, and the fear of being overwhelmed by the novelty of the emotion. She does accept his invitation to come to the garden gate, but resists his advances and recoils in horror at the sight of his “bright, blind, terrifying smile” (469). She is alarmed at the sight of his smile, and questions her own actions and wonders “[w]hat was she doing?”(469). His actions as he attempts to draw her to himself are compared to the agility and rapacity of a cat. His attempts at violation end in Beryl being the stronger and wrenching free as she “slipped, ducked, wrenched free” (469). In the final analysis, she dubs him “vile, vile” (469). Her need for love is embodied in “it [being] so frightfully difficult when you’re nobody” (468) but is paralleled by her fear of sexual encounter. She fails to reply to his question, “[t]hen why in God’s name did you come?” (469) because her authentic self asserts itself, and she is able to resolve the confusion and the conflict that precedes her wish for

adventure. She becomes aware that the discrepancy between the fantasy encounter and the real one is an example of the delusion that accompanies socially motivated oppression, and can lead only to self-betrayal and the destruction of the potential for growth of her authentic self.

Mansfield ends the story of the Burnell family in *At the Bay*, by foregrounding the feminine in both the symbol of the moon and of the sea. The “moment of darkness” (469) obscures the authenticity of woman, as the small serene cloud floats over the moon, and at the very same moment the sound of the sea is “deep, troubled” (469) echoing the “darkness,” that reflects a mute, impoverished female self. The reversal of this situation is implied in the words that indicate that after the “the cloud sailed away, and the sound of the sea was a vague murmur, as though it waked out of a dark dream” (469); the position of the female is open to autonomous new growth, and by implication, authenticity.

In *Prelude* and *At the Bay* Mansfield reveals that the worlds of male and female are tenuously linked, with the women comfortable in a world that the men often find alien. She reveals too that individual female characters live uncomfortably within the bounds of their appointed positions in society, and withdraw into the doubtful safety of a role they barely understand themselves. The men too betray their discomfort in their appointed roles as they are portrayed either as paternalistic and chauvinistic, or ill at ease with such an expression of the masculine role. The position of gender in the short stories emphasizes the significant role that it plays in the greater sphere of human beings’ lives. Mansfield’s personal history reflects her confrontation with the debilitating effects of gender in a changing world, recorded in May 1908, in which she felt women should be breaking loose from the “self-fashioned chains of slavery” (*Journal*, 1954:36-37). But in her expression of gender roles in the stories, she claimed, writing to Sarah Gertrude Millin in March 1922, that the only way

to live as a writer is to draw on one’s familiar life. The life we return to over and over again, the “do you remember” life is always the past. And the curious thing is that if we describe that which seems to us so intensely personal, other people take it themselves and understand it as if it were their own. (Mansfield quoted in Boddy, 1988:159.)

Mansfield’s “familiar life” was the source of her search for authenticity as a writer, and also as a woman. She sought the expression of authenticity of self, in the lives of the characters she created, and portrayed them with an accuracy of perception that conveyed her keen knowledge of human nature as it was represented in society.

In the next chapter, Mansfield explores gender roles when the characters in the stories are confronted with the reality of death, and discover that authenticity of self has much to do with real life, as it has to do with understanding the meaning of the cessation of life.

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## Chapter 4.

### Stories of death and loss: *The Daughters of the late Colonel*, *The Garden Party* and *The Doll's House*

Mansfield was often alone and extremely ill in foreign locations: this was the impetus for her to broach subjects such as death and loss. Her late fiction reflects an intensity of purpose that incorporates the unspoken anger and the despair of women, as they are confined to the tombs that are the making of those for whom they mourn. Ironically, the psychological “tombs” that the ‘daughters’ in *The Daughters of the late Colonel* (1921) are confined to, were constructed by their late father, whose patriarchal dominance invaded every aspect of their lives. Such tyrannical dominance destroyed their sense of self by curtailing opportunities for authentic growth.

In this story, two women are powerless in their hopeless lack of autonomy, as they deal with their ostensibly altered condition after the death of their father, who had been a colonel in India. The psychological impact of the effects of their economic and social dependence on their father, is reflected in the indecision whether they ought to have their dressing gowns dyed, or whether they should invite Nurse Andrews “to stay for a week as our guest” (388). Interestingly, they both agree at once to the invitation, but fear the consequences of the prying eyes of the nurse. Ironically, the nurse’s perception of their lives is distorted by her own narrow and limited experience of life. The loss of their dressing gowns, by dyeing them black, cancels not only their claims to ownership of these garments, but also destroys an image of their authenticity. The dressing gowns are in contrasting colours that intensify their individuality, and underline the image that “women’s clothing is more closely connected with the pressures and oppressions of gender....because clothing powerfully defines sex roles” (Gilbert, 1982:195). In an ironic reversal of the common assumption that the focus of the story is exclusively on the two women in their response to their father’s death, Mansfield points to their father’s masculine role as the defining power in the story. His dominance, albeit powerful, does not include interference with the purchase of dressing gowns and their matching slippers, because they are components of the secret, hidden world of the feminine. This world is completely separate (and safe from) the societal pressures that rely on alerting the conscience of women not only to the propriety and impropriety of appropriate dress, but also to the public possession and display of personal garments of clothing. The acquisition of the sisters’ personal items of clothing is based on an independent decision that involves freedom of choice.

In yet another thrust of irony centred on a choice that reflects their functioning in the public sphere as opposed to their private life, Josephine and Constantia Pinner are forced into greater indecision and doubt when they consider the burial of their father. Their doubt intensifies to terror as they consider that

neither of them could possibly believe that father was never coming back. Josephine had a moment of absolute terror at the cemetery, while the coffin was being lowered, to think that she and Constantia had done this thing without asking his permission. What would their father say when he found out? He always did. “Buried. You two girls had me *buried!*” (391).

Their father is dead and has been buried, but the patriarchal authority vested in his living presence remains as a ghost to haunt the daily lives of the sisters. They are aware that his discovery of their action of burying him would outrage him beyond belief, and in their imagined terror of being “found out” (391), they reinforce their poor sense of self and lack of authenticity. The symbol of their servitude is centred on their father’s walking stick, which within Josephine’s consciousness, can still be heard as a “thumping” sound (391), and which is the auditory cue that usually “signalled” his authoritative presence within the confines of their home. It is the symbol of patriarchal dominance, in that it has a two-fold purpose in supporting the walker, and of beating the follower into submission. The two women are submissive, and lead a cloistered existence that suffocates their authentic selves, and guiltily awakens in their consciousness the unthinkable question of keeping their father “unburied” (391). They perceive that it is the size of the flat that dictates their decision, and not their own common sense judgment. They have no recourse to independent, common sense judgments, and appear not to be able to make any decisions without their father’s approval. This is reflected in Josephine’s words:

“I don’t know,” she said forlornly. “It’s all so dreadful, I feel we ought to have tried to, just for a time at least. To make perfectly sure. One thing’s certain” — and her tears sprang out again — “father will never forgive us for this — never” (391).

The memory of their father on his deathbed intensifies their already diminished sense of an authentic self, as

he lay there, purple, a dark angry purple in the face, and never even looked at them when they came in. Then, as they were standing there, wondering what to do, he had suddenly opened one eye (389).

The impact, on both Constantia’s and Josephine’s sense of self, of the image of their father when he “had suddenly opened one eye” (389) and then shut it again, is an example of Mansfield’s narrative skill in using symbols to enhance the text. The image of the “eye” at the moment of death, as it opens and closes, is a symbol of their father’s watchful eye that terrorized every moment of their lives. The selves of the women are locked within that gaze by its brutalized character because

without their father's psychological oppression, they would have realized their potential as human beings, and also as women. Their united attempt to open the door of their father's room, and actually enter his room, reveals their vulnerability in the presence of the unseen force of their father's power. Their father's power continues in inexorable fashion to exert an influence in their lives. There is a deep sense of icy frigidity within the room, suggesting that the life that was lived in it exuded no love: "Constantia timidly put out her hand; she almost expected a snowflake to fall. Josephine felt a queer tingling in her nose, as if her nose was freezing" (392).

Both sisters are psychologically frozen within the confines of their father's house, with their bondage symbolized by the attempt of the little tassel on the blind that they draw up, as it too, is "trying to get free" (392). Their victimization is seen in the gestures that each make as they attempt to muster courage to pursue the enforced task that involves having to "[g]o through father's things and settle about them" (391). They converse in whispers as they personify chests of drawers and wardrobes into the person of their father. Mansfield's depiction of Constantia and Josephine Pinner is not without the realization of some awareness of authentic selfhood, because in the midst of the icy wastes of their father's room, Constantia asserts strength of purpose by calling for the acceptable recognition of human weakness. She claims for herself and for her sister the right to ask "[w]hy shouldn't we be weak for once in our lives, Jug? It's quite excusable. Let's be weak — be weak, Jug. It's much nicer to be weak than strong" (393). Subsequent to this statement, Constantia locks the wardrobe, and reaches into a level of consciousness that hitherto has been untapped and unknown. By integrating her new decision into everyday life, she reveals the mystery of a self that is impenetrable to others, and is inscrutable to any representative of patriarchal society. The act of locking the wardrobe is the embodiment of locking away the stultifying presence of the Colonel, and the beginning of the recognition of her restrictive role as his daughter. This finds expression in a rejection of arbitrary standards. She imagines the force of the wardrobe that falls onto Constantia, and experiences a startling emotion when "the room seemed quieter than ever and bigger flakes of cold air fell on Josephine's shoulders and knees. She began to shiver" (393). The mask that Josephine wears, and has worn as the "daughter of the Colonel," shifts slightly to allow a sardonic smile of antagonism to show on her face. The exposure of a self that is cruel and antagonistic reveals that Josephine's mouse-like demeanour hides a self that is false because her true nature is not mouse-like. In her imagined actions, the "cold air" (393) of sadism reveals that she is no different from her father who did not inflict physical pain, but rather psychological pain that maimed and destroyed.

Linked to Josephine and Constantia's experiences in their father's bedroom, is the mutual decision that they attempt to reach about their servant Kate. She pertly demands to know whether they require their fish boiled or fried, and this sets in motion memories of the disdainful treatment they had received from her in the past, and their disempowerment in the face of her demands. They are pitted against each other as doubt and self-doubt reflect the intensity of their qualms. The final conclusion is centred on the difficulty of coming to a decision when Constantia observes that "[i]sn't it curious, Jug," she said, "that just on this subject I've never been able quite make up my mind" (399). There is bitter irony in her words as every subject, that enters her (or her sister's) mind, is fraught with indecision, reflecting a weak and insubstantial sense of self. They come close to a real attempt to reach a decision by simply voicing their difficulty, but retreat into "[y]ou come, Jug, and decide. I really can't. It's too difficult" (400).

Grenfell-Williams (1989) applies the ideas in Don Kleine's article (1973), in which he claims that the story of the daughters is Mansfield's outcry against a universe in which "the clock is a masculine principle" (1989:71). The controlling force of the precision and rational accuracy of the clock echoes the manner in which the masculine principle functions in society. The spinsters' father represents an extreme example of this principle as his training in military affairs is transferred directly to his household of subservient women. They are powerless to withstand their father's hold on them, and become strangled within a weak sense of self and lose the potential for authentic growth. Grenfell-Williams applies the image of time as it controls and regulates daily lives, and relates the image to the un-lived lives of the sisters as it is reflected in their self-doubt and indecision about trivial matters, and the ensuing waste of time. Their life and their time is spent "looking after father, and at the same time keeping out of father's way" (401). The irony of their serious doubt as to their daily occupation for the days that stretch ahead of them after his death, is centred on the abundance of time they will have now, and which they did not have while their father was alive. They fail to be aware that the time that was spent "looking after father" (401) was the time that their own lives ought to have been lived.

The time available in the days that stretch ahead of the two sisters is in contrast to what Kleine (1973:430) refers to as "profounder forces" that represent "cyclical time" with its association with the moon as it controls tides and suggests fluidity, repetition, cycles of reproduction and even death itself. The cyclical process of the moon mirrors the cycle of life and death itself, because 'death' is the end result of a rhythmic process begun at the first signs of life in the reproductive cycle. Constantia experiences something akin to such forces when

she walked over to the mantelpiece of her favourite Buddha. And the stone and gilt image, whose smile always gave her such a queer feeling, almost a pain and yet a pleasant pain, seemed to-day to be more than smiling. He knew something; he had a secret. 'I know something that you don't know,' said her Buddha. Oh, what was it, what could it be? And yet she always felt there was... something (401).

Evidence of a mystical, hidden power is contained in the figure of the Buddha, and appears to be in collusion with her. For Constantia, the memory of creeping "out of bed in her nightgown when the moon was full and she had lain on the floor with her arms outstretched as though she was crucified" (402) reinforces the idea of sacrifice as it is conceived in Christianity. This idea underwrites renewal and awakening that can be applied to the growth of the feminine towards authenticity, since Constantia's response is unified and without the self-division of person that her father, as the representative of patriarchal society, imposes upon her. The emphatically feminine image of the moon is the root of her action as she lies "on the floor with arms outstretched" (402). The image of the moon is the antithesis of the masculine, and by implication the authority represented by her father. She examines her thoughts and the effect they have on her. She looks at the leering dancing figures on the carved screen and questions herself about her actions, "[w]hy? The big, pale moon had made her do it. The horrid dancing figures on the carved screen had leered at her and she hadn't minded" (402). Importantly, she makes an independent decision, and detaches herself from the effect that the "leering figures" usually have on her vulnerable psychological state. The identification with the moon leads to further identification with the elemental forces of the sea as she

remembered too how, whenever they were at the sea side, she had gone off by herself and got as close to the sea as she could, and sung something, something she had made up while she gazed all over the restless water (402).

Her realization of another self ensconced within another life is akin to an experience within a "kind of tunnel" (402). Constantia's exposure to elemental forces such as moonlight, the sea or a thunderstorm is restorative, and she feels "really herself" (402) in such moments. The contrast is achieved by the image of the "thieving sun" that devours, and is associated with intractably prescriptive values predominant in patriarchal society, and which Colonel Pinner represents. Their mother's photograph is not exempt from the effects of the sun; her image has virtually disappeared and reflects the ineffectuality of her own life as the wife of Colonel Pinner. For her, conformity to the masculine standards of behaviour within marriage and motherhood precluded any awakening to spiritual development, because her psychological death preceded her physical one.

The central image of *The Daughters of the Late Colonel* is death. This refers not only to the actual death of the colonel but more terrifyingly to the psychological death of his daughters. In commenting on the position of the two sisters who have lost their father, and are dealing with the practical considerations of such a death in *The Daughters of the Late Colonel*, Mansfield was angered by the accusations of “cruelty” and “sneering” and the possibility of “poking fun at the poor old things” in the story. She explained to William Gerhardi in a letter that the

story was meant to lead up to the last paragraph, when my two flowerless ones turned with a timid gesture, to the sun. Perhaps now... And after that, it seemed to me, they died as surely as Father was dead” (*Letters*, IV, 1996:249).

Gehardi’s reply reflects Mansfield’s own feelings about the ending when he says, “and in particular the last long paragraph towards the end, [is] of quite amazing beauty” (*Letters*, IV, 1996:249).

The final paragraphs of the story in which Constantia and Josephine attempt to verbalize their feelings and wishes for the future, reveal that their psychological death, begun in infancy, is complete. This is reflected in their individual attempts to continue and complete the sentence that each begins, and fails to finish. The enlightenment towards authenticity from the Buddha that appeared as a momentary illumination for Constantia, is lost and “[she] turned away from the Buddha with one of her vague gestures” (402). Her gesture is vague, and the words she wants to speak lose their significance as she and her sister hesitate to utter “something frightfully important, about — the future and what...” (402). Both Josephine and Constantia are aware that the opportunity for a new life is at hand, and that decisions and discussions are called for. Neither sister can bring herself to a significant moment of detachment from the hold of the past and their father’s presence. They relapse into the frailty of amnesia:

[a] pause. Then Constantia said faintly, “I can’t say what I was going to say, Jug, because I’ve forgotten what it was...that I was going to say.”

Josephine was silent for a moment. She stared at a big cloud where the sun had been. Then she replied shortly, “I’ve forgotten too” (402).

Mansfield herself notes the outcome of the desire of the “two flowerless ones as they turned, with a timid gesture, to the sun” (*Letters*, IV, 1996:249). They turn to the sun in an ironic gesture that reflects their desire to draw power from the symbolic representation of the masculine, and at the same time to become strong in authenticity in order also to withstand the debilitating effects of the sun. As Josephine looks up she discovers that there is a “big cloud where the sun had been” (402). All hope of change and growth is crushed and destroyed by this symbolic representation. Both sisters forget their plans for the future, and in the final words of the story, “[t]hen she replied

shortly, ‘I’ve forgotten too,.’” Mansfield seals their loss of a sense of self, and the possibility of a path out of the unreality of the feeling that “a kind of tunnel”(402) characterizes their lives.

*The Garden Party* (1921) shares a common central image of death with *The Daughters of the Late Colonel*, but the emphasis is on the ethical aspect within the story, that expresses outrage against a society that allows privilege to be indifferent to the misery of others, and ignores sincere recognition of it. The recognition of the ethical wrong in the story of the Pinner sisters becomes an integral part of the awareness that is revealed after the pointless minutiae of their lives are removed, and only the shell of their selves remains. For Laura, the minutiae of her life are also stripped away as she breaks with an externally imposed sense of self, and initiates for herself the possibility of a counter-pattern of personal growth, development and authenticity. Significant thoughts that run parallel to her thoughts about the preparations for the party are her mother’s thoughts of the social significance of the event, and of the ideology that supports such thinking.

For Mansfield, the need to convey the pressure of the immediate present in her writing is captured in significant moments as they occur in the opening paragraphs of *The Garden Party*. The seal for the success of the occasion is set by the “ideal weather” (487) as it becomes one of the symbols of the confidence of the genteel bourgeoisie,

[a]nd after all the weather was ideal. They could not have had a more perfect day for a garden party if they had ordered it. Windless, warm, the sky without a cloud....As for the roses, you could not help feeling they understood that roses were the only flowers that impress people at garden parties; the only flowers that everybody is certain of knowing. Hundreds, yes, literally hundreds, had come out in a single night (487).

The narrative displays not only the richness of the surroundings by the descriptions of the flowers, but also conveys the image of the outward perfection of the surroundings in the picture of the neatly manicured lawns and the lovely marquee tent. Just as the day can be ordered to enhance the perfection of the party, so lilies purchased from the florist’s shop can reinforce the purchasing power of members of a certain social class, and financial means are associated with the successful execution of activities. The suitable impression that the garden and the tent will make on the guests, suggests the social framework that supports a venture such as the one the Sheridans stage,

[t]here, just inside the door, stood a wide, shallow tray full of pots of pink lilies. No other kind. Nothing but lilies — canna lilies, big pink flowers, wide open, radiant, almost frighteningly alive on bright crimson stems.

‘O-oh, Sadie!’ said Laura, and the sound was like a little moan. She crouched down as if to warm herself at the blaze of lilies; she felt they were in her fingers, on her lips, growing in her breast.

‘It’s some mistake,’ she said faintly. ‘Nobody ever ordered so many. Sadie, go and find mother.’

But at that moment Mrs Sheridan joined them.

‘It’s quite right,’ she said calmly. ‘Yes, I ordered them. Aren’t they lovely?’ She pressed Laura’s arm (490).

Laura recognizes the vitality of the flowers as they masquerade as “frighteningly alive,” especially since they appear to grow through her perceptual observation of them. Her tactile sense, her sense of taste, even the very core of her being, absorbs every fraction of their presence. In the midst of such emotional engagement, she is brought to a halt, and questions the validity of such a purchase. She refers the matter to her mother immediately, as a means of reassurance. Her response to such abundance is ambivalent because she feels both delight and a measure of guilt at the sight of so much natural wealth that is confined to pots, and is not in Nature itself. In a moment of enhanced consciousness, she taps the resources that support an authentic personhood, but does not extend the thought at that moment, beyond the assurance her mother gives. Mrs Sheridan temporarily stifles any independent thought or opinion that Laura might have with regard to the purchase.

The organization of the marquee tent is left to Laura “who loved having to arrange things; she always felt she could do it so much better than anybody else” (487). She is also considered to be the artistic one, and feels she is up to dealing with workmen who come with “staves covered with rolls of canvas, and big tool-bags slung on their backs” (487). She considers each of them in turn and affects a mode of speech that is reminiscent of the socially conditioned mode of her mother. She makes suggestions for the position of the tent, but one of the workmen over-rules even her childish protestation that the karaka trees will be obscured. These trees are like the ones “you imagined growing on a desert island, proud, solitary, lifting their leaves and fruits to the sun in a kind of silent splendour” (488). The image of the trees that are “proud, solitary,” and that are to be hidden by the tent prefigures Laura’s position as lone objector to the continuation of the garden party when the news of the workman’s death breaks. Their “silent splendour” reflects her mute acceptance of the workmen’s suggestion for the position of the tent. Her awareness of an authentic self is remote and undeveloped as she pretends to be mistress of the situation by imitating her mother (“copying her mother’s voice” (488)), and at the same time refuting accepted social codes of behaviour (the sense of unity of class with the workmen as she identifies their easy mode of communication and also

identifies with their manner of being when “she felt like a work-girl” (489)). Her conflict is resolved by an acceptable upper-class mode of communication; the telephone. She answers it, and relays her mother’s instructions to her friend about “a sweet hat” (489) which prefigures Laura’s own experiences with the hat in the carter’s cottage.

The preparations for the party continue, with orders given, the piano being moved and played, and songs sung.

*Pom!* Ta-ta-ta *Tee-ta!* The piano burst out so passionately that Jose’s face changed. She clasped her hands. She looked mournfully and enigmatically at her mother and Laura as they came in.

This Life is *Wee-ary*,

A Tear — a Sigh,

A Love that *Chan-ges*,

    This Life is *Wee-ary*,

A Tear — a Sigh.

A Love that *Chan-ges*,

And then... Good-bye!

But at the word ‘Good-bye’, and although the piano sounded more desperate than ever, her face broke into a brilliant, dreadfully unsympathetic smile.

‘Aren’t I in good voice, mummy?’ she beamed (491).

Her sister Jose’s song is an ironic comment on the near-perfect preparations for the garden party. It reinforces the opposite emotion to the one which the luxury of the surroundings reveals. It is a veiled allusion to the presence of death as an unannounced and unwelcome visitor in the midst of life. The song she sings mimics the sadness associated with a life in which circumstances are different, where a tear and a sigh signal the death of hope. The depth of emotion within her rendition of the song is exaggerated to emphasize the lament of loss that is conveyed by the words. She fails to comprehend the implications that such a difference in circumstances brings, nor that it presages the death of the carter in the lane, and associates it merely with her self-centred thoughts that focus on her skill in singing. Her former mockingly mournful smile changes to a “dreadfully unsympathetic” one (491), reflecting the social mask that she wears as a matter of course. Her privileged social standing and her carefree youth are caught up in the preparations for the party, and her limited sphere of social awareness leads her to mimic deep feelings and detach herself from the growth that could be the result of an examination of the relevance of such feelings to her life as a whole.

The abundance and variety of the victuals for the party reinforces the social standing of the Sheridans, as the sandwiches have fifteen different kinds of fillings, and the cream puffs come ready-made from Godber's. In the midst of such abundance the news of the carter's death reaches their door, which is blocked by the cook, Sadie (the housemaid), Godber's man and Hans. They belong to a social class that is closer to the carter's than the Sheridans, and in an unconscious gesture of protection for the dead man, form a temporary buffer against the distressing nature of the news that is about to be revealed. For Laura her observations of "the awfully nice men" (492), probably from the same class as the carter, who are putting up the marquee at that moment, are conveyed to Jose as a wish to include her sister in her new-found camaraderie that she believes she has established with them. The knowledge that a life has been lost outside their doorstep propels Laura, into a state of fervid agitation, and she makes an urgent request that the party be stopped. Her own family experiences her suggestion as absurd. Their response is in contrast to her own experience of the immensity of the loss, and her state of disbelief at their insensitivity to the Scott family, for whom the loss is real. The cottages, one of which is occupied by the carter and his family

were little mean dwellings painted a chocolate brown. In the garden patches there was nothing but cabbage stalks, sick hens and tomato cans. The very smoke coming out of their chimneys was poverty-stricken. Little rags and shreds of smoke, so unlike the great silvery plumes that uncurled from the Sheridans' chimneys (493).

The difference in living conditions between the two classes is visible and evident. The outward signs of affluence in which even the quality of the smoke is different, reveals that the Sheridans are their wealthy counterparts. They are also their close neighbours. The severity of the conditions is summed up in a sentence, "[i]t was disgusting and sordid" (493). The insistent desire hidden behind "[b]ut still one must go everywhere; one must see everything" (493-494) displays the curiosity of adolescent Laura, and her brother Laurie, and their need to explore and investigate everything, albeit on a superficial level. She and her brother need to "see everything" and succumb, according to Fullbrook, to a form of "social voyeurism" (1986:121). The little homes and their appalling living conditions are nothing but a curiosity to the two children, but the perception of this state of affairs changes in the mind of Laura, when the stark awareness of loss and the heartlessness of the Sheridans' attitude, sharpens her awareness of the implications of continuing with the party. Her awakening to authenticity brings her into conflict with the opinions of the other members of the family as they contest her concerns. Her mother, with the degree of awareness that only familiarity of the codes of social behaviour brings, steers her daughter's thoughts away from the carter, to the decorative trimmings of the garden party — another hat. The decorative hat symbolizes the essence

of a garden party, and transforms the face of the wearer into a magical image by means of the play of light and shade cast by the brim of the hat. Laura's hat is dramatic in "black, trimmed with gold daisies, and a long black velvet ribbon" (495), and the pleasing reflection in the mirror confirms her mother's observation, "I have never seen you look such a picture" (495). She herself is astounded by her transformation and steps, without much effort, back into the world and the values of the social order that govern the code of the garden party. She is confronted with an image of a socially positioned sense of self which fits an image that reflects the pleasures of her privileged life, but does not resemble her authentic self. Conflicting thoughts of her wish to be part of the party, but also her wish to honour her social duty, fill her mind. The immediate unreality of the death blurs her perception, and she removes her immediate attention from it, saying "I'll remember it again after the party's over" (495).

The decision to take a basket of sandwiches and cream puffs to the bereaved family is preceded by the awkward little silence that ensues when Mr Sheridan mentions the accident. The commiseration in the form of a basket of "scraps from their party" (497) assuages Mrs Sheridan's ill-developed social conscience. Laura's mother's enthusiastic display of energy is met with doubt and uncertainty by her daughter, who questions the validity of the idea. She is reluctant to go to the cottages because her immediate response questions the widow's reaction to such an action, "[w]ould the poor woman really like that?" (497). She does not utter a socially accepted platitude, but expresses empathy for the carter's wife and her unenviable position. She does not fully comprehend that by the end of her visit to the mean cottage, she will have stepped beyond mere empathy to embrace authenticity of self, and new insight into life itself. Her untapped courage and determination that lead her forward now, will be the force that will lead her in the future as she is confronted with an image of death. Even as she is on the verge of reaching the house, she repeatedly doubts the wisdom of her decision, "[s]hould she go back even now?" (497).

Laura embarks on her journey to the carter's cottage, as it was "growing dusky" (497). It is significant that it should be almost dusk as her awakening to the perception of the still beauty of death, is intensified by her return home to the actual light of her home, and to the light of her newly discovered awareness. Her own attire is a study in light, "how her frock shone" (497) while her youthful vitality is in sharp contrast to the "young man [who was] fast asleep — sleeping so soundly, so deeply, that he was far, far away from them both" (498). She embarks on "her first real voyage of discovery" (Hanson and Gurr, 1981:116). It is a journey of discovery because the vital images of the party, "the kisses, voices, tinkling spoons, laughter, the smell of crushed grass [that] were somehow inside her" (497), are about to be displaced by the perception of a very different

scene as she makes her way to the carter's house, with men hanging over palings and children playing in the doorways,

Laura enters the house very reluctantly and feels as if the oily voice of the woman, like the easy persuasion of the workman putting up the tent, crushes within her all hope of an independent answer. She sees the face of the woman, puckered and swollen, and cannot utter a compassionate reply, but only wishes "to get away" (498). She is detained by the woman whose invitation to see the young man reveals that he "looks a picture" (498). She could never know that Laura herself looked like a picture at the garden party earlier during the day, and that she had been enthralled by her own reflection in the mirror. The mirror image is without imperfection in its immobility and unbroken nature, and is the only way an image can be seen by the person herself. The dead carter cannot see himself, and the only comment on his position is Laura's observation that he is "fast asleep — sleeping so soundly, so deeply, that he was far away from them both" (498). Laura's comments on the peacefulness of the carter's sleep reflects her own sense of peace, and wonderment that in death "he was wonderful, beautiful" (498). Her poorly developed comprehension of the absence of life is channelled into the knowledge that in spite of it, "all is well" (499). She senses that it is well, because events like "garden parties and baskets and lace frocks" (498) are remote and far away, and the socially ordered need for such things no longer applies to him, or his life. The dead carter, released from the possibility or yearning for such social bondage, conveys to her only a message of contentment.

It is Laura for whom the adjustment to real life will be considerably more difficult than for the other members of her family who, with the exception of Laurie and her father, think of the accident as a nuisance, and not sufficient reason to stop the party. She will be forced to come to terms with the existential belief that authentic living will require the death of socially-induced beliefs that govern the manner in which she lives. It will demand courage to turn the death-in-life experience into truthful living. The words "beautiful", "marvellous", "wonderful," "dreaming" will never be used idly again, because their meaning has been revealed to Laura in a manner that has left an indelible impression on her life.

I believe that unlike Constantia and Josephine in *The Daughters of the late Colonel*, Laura releases energy for the growth of an authentic self by virtue of the verbal expression of her experience. When her brother asks her she can reply, "[i]t was simply marvellous. But, Laurie-...Isn't life", she stammered, "isn't life —" (499). She cannot complete her sentence, but this does not discount the validity of her experience, or the potential it has released. Her new awareness makes her realize that

garden parties are only a small part of the greater sphere of humanity, and that all human beings, rich or poor (including herself) are also part of the whole. The realization of her potential for growth in the future will be vested in her ability to reconcile pictures of beauty and pictures of ugliness, in the world in which she lives.

Mansfield's own comment about *The Garden Party* is significant as she writes in a letter to William Gerhardi in March 1922,

[a]nd yes, that is what I tried to convey in *The Garden Party*. The diversity of life and how we try to fit in everything, Death included, that is bewildering for a person of Laura's age. She feels things ought to happen differently. First one, then another. But life isn't like that. We haven't the ordering of it (*Letters*, II, 1987:196).

In writing of the discrepancy of the appearance of events in life, Mansfield raises the conflicts that Laura deals with very pointedly, because the narrative is experienced from her point of view. Laura's experience is not entirely unrelated to the common assumption that foregrounds a rigid definition of responses to particular emotional situations, as her inner contradictions, with their roots in social situations, break with difficulty into new consciousness. For Laura the need to identify her true self as distinct from an imposed sense of self, is reminiscent of Mansfield's words to Garnet Trowell in October 1908, when she expresses a need to define a natural moment (linked to Nature) as opposed to an artificial one. She writes:

[s]unlight was drenching the trees, but the road was in shadow. I was so happy that I felt I must fling myself down on the warm grass — feel *one* with the whole great scheme of things. You know the sun-filled world seemed a revelation — I felt as tho' Nature said to me "now that you have found your *true self* (my italics) — now that you are at peace with the world accepting instead of doubting — now that you love — you can see" (*Letters*, I, 1984:72-73).

Even though Mansfield refers to the awakening of her self through love of another, it is as applicable to Laura's awakening to ideas of philanthropic love as it is to heterosexual love. *The Garden Party* according to Fullbrook treats "the confusion of motivations and principles in life as opposed to the clarity of abstract ideas" (1986:123), while the woman who has lost her husband, huddles like some primitive wounded thing by the fire with "her face, puffed up, red, with swollen eyes and swollen lips" (498), and fails to understand either the motivation in life or abstract ideas, but only the devastating loss of life.

For Mansfield, the growth and development of a character towards authenticity, is as important a topic for women as their victimization. Both growth and victimization are connected to the

destructive silence imposed by traditional patriarchal society; growth implies release from such silence, while victimization implies the opposite.

In the closing lines of *The Doll's House*, (1921) little Else Kelvey brings about a new version of meaning by breaking through the silence into audible speech, and by refuting the social definition of being “less than human” because of her low social status, and steers the way to new growth. For Else and her sister, Lil, the epiphanic moment occurs at the end of the story, and is the sight of the prized “little lamp” (500). The doll’s house is perfect because it has all the necessities for living a happy life and judging by its appearance, this is the case. The appearance of perfection is merely a masquerade to display the romantic illusions that all families are happy, and that such interaction encourages the development of authenticity. Mansfield uses the detailed description of the doll’s house to enhance the sensory effect of the colours of the paint, together with the smell of the paint,

[t]here stood the doll’s house, a dark, oily spinach green, picked out with bright yellow. Its two solid little chimneys, glued to the roof, were painted red and white, and the door, gleaming with yellow varnish, was like a little slab of toffee (499).

The intensity of the colours are associated with spinach, much disliked nursery fare but nevertheless nourishing food, and with toffee, a not-often-had nursery favourite. These vital details are an ironic comment on the lack of real and vibrant life within the house itself, where there are only dolls “that were really too big for the doll’s house” (500) and where authenticity cannot bloom and grow. The opening of the front of the doll’s house, and the display of the entire contents of the house in one instant is the impetus that forges a gasp of amazement from the Burnell children, “[o]h-oh!”(500) who had never seen anything like this before.

In contrast, there is the little lamp which is positioned in the centre of the dining room table, with its lifelike qualities that display a light ready for the lighting, and an oil-like liquid that moves. It is in the centre of the table as a symbol of life amidst what would be a well-laid table in a privileged home. It is “perfect” (500), because even though the images of light from the toy lamp are images of fantasy, they dispel the darkness and the falsehood of social class distinction, and reveal that the wonder of the house is vested only in its “pictures on the walls, painted on the paper, with gold frames complete” (500). The lamp is the only “real” (500) object in the house. It is the symbol of vitality and by implication authenticity of life, and is in direct contrast to the lifeless cardboard figures of the father and mother dolls that sprawl very stiffly in the drawing room. Mansfield’s reference to the lifeless dolls is a comment on the masculine and feminine roles that society imposes on men and women. These roles are rigid and prescriptive, and perpetuate the myth that an authentic sense of self can only be achieved within the confines of marriage and family life.

The vitality that the little lamp symbolizes encompasses the experience of peace and contentment, that comes from an authentic sense of self that requires no societal props and prejudice. The Burnell family, with the exception of Kezia, lack this level of authenticity because they aspire to social pretension, but the Kelveys, although poor and deprived materially have an instinctive appreciation of the qualities that the lamp symbolizes. Their response is a heartfelt one that, though not fully understood by themselves, reflects a sincerity of purpose that exudes love and goodwill. The doll's house is to be seen by appointment, with only two girls being permitted at a time. The illusory superiority of the Burnell household is revealed in the rigidity of the rules that apply to the movements of children who come to hear of the doll's house, and are "[n]ot to stay to tea, of course, or to come traipsing through the house" (501). The anticipation that the Burnell children have an important secret to share heightens the general excitement in the playground. Isabel Burnell has a gathering of little girls around her, comparable to that of the court of a queen. The dignity becoming the court of a queen is missing as the children giggle and nudge one another, and behave like eager children bent on their own pleasure. They take for granted the presence, on the fringes of the group, of two mute figures for whom exclusion from special activities is accepted and commonplace, and for the ostracized ones keeping away is preferable to being chased away, "[t]hey knew better than to come anywhere near the Burnells" (501). Every social class is represented at the school, and meeting members from lower classes is inevitable. The two little girls excluded from the gathering to hear of the doll's house are from such a class, and are "the daughters of a spry, hard-working little washerwoman, who went from house to house by the day" (501). Social ostracism by their schoolmates is an extension of parental voices that render the ostracized children mute, and without a definable sense of self. The parental voices of the Burnells and the other villagers are hollow as they recite platitudes that reflect centuries of social codes that condemn and harm, and consequently instruct their children to "draw the line at the little Kelveys." The particular code of behaviour expressed by the Burnells sets the tone for the rest of the school, "with their heads in the air" (501). As a result, the Kelveys are shunned by every child. The teacher, too, reveals her short-sighted socially approved code of behaviour, as she reserves "a special voice for them, and a special smile for the other children" (501).

The two little girls' background is suspect, with a father who is said to be in prison, and a mother who goes from house to house for laundry. The "bits" of clothing and the cast-offs given to them as gifts make them appear outlandish, and intensify their existing sense of exclusion as socially inferior parts of the greater whole of the playground, and within the little village itself. Their outlandish yet functional clothing does nothing to complement their appearance, and reveals that they are, in fact, clothed in the discarded articles that had belonged to the other children. The keen

resourcefulness shown by the mother of the Kelveys in using discarded pieces of material and items of clothing to clothe her children fails to meet the standards of propriety and dress imposed by the other little girls' mothers, and merely makes her children a laughing stock and the pariahs of the playground. There is irony in the comments of villagers who claim that by dressing her children as she does, she "made them so conspicuous "(501). Even though Mrs Kelvey does not appear as a character in the story, the actions of thrift and careful living that she is forced to apply to her existence in order to survive, make her a noticeable presence. This fact evades the members of her community. These actions place her in a position to aspire to authentic living, and a deeper sense of self that none of the other women in the village can envisage or hope to envisage in the future. By caring for her daughters, and ignoring the taunts of the comments of adult members of the village who speculate about her absent husband, and consider her children unsuitable company for their children, she is able to rise above the narrow prescriptions of social conformity, and lives her life sincerely by hard work and diligence.

Mansfield describes little Else as resembling "a little owl" (502), and emphasizes the discrepancy of her outward appearance with the insight she exhibits when she sees the "little lamp" (502). She is dressed in what looks like a nightgown and "a pair of little boys' boots" (502). Her marked difference in appearance is exacerbated by her lack of a sense of self as she never smiles, seldom talks and relies on her sister, Lil, in order to negotiate her way in the world. Her sense of self is undeveloped, indefinable and indistinguishable from her sister's, and is given utterance by a primitive form of communication that is expressed as a tug, or a twitch if she is out of breath, or when she wants something. The form of communication between the sisters is primitive, but the comprehension of the needs of the other is perfect and complete. They listen attentively to the details of the furniture in the doll's house, and are made aware of the little lamp as Kezia draws Isabel's attention to it.

The fame of the doll's house spreads among the girls and many see it, but still the Kelveys are excluded. The net of social condemnation closes around the Kelveys as the playground decides to form a menacing gang that stings, maims and is bent on destruction by insinuation and gesture. A single little girl, Lena Logan, confronts the Kelveys as they eat their lunch. She slides up to them, challenging and fearless, and places them on instinctive alert, as Lil immediately wraps up her dinner and Else stops chewing in mid-air. Lena poses the question of her future prospects as a servant to Lil, who responds to the retort with a disarmingly vacant smile. The disappointment of such a response brings to the fore an even greater onslaught of verbal violation. "Lena couldn't stand that. She put her hands on her hips; she shot forward. 'Yah, ye father's in prison!' she hissed,

spitefully” (503). The effect of such verbal attack extends beyond the confines of learnt propriety that all the little girls have acquired in their homes, in order to become the models of correct social interaction. The nasty, daring words release a primitive sense of savagery, carefully channelled into intensive skipping and “daring things” (503) with the skipping rope. They are “wild with joy” (503), not with joyful delight or a sense of wonder, but at their own powerful sway over two mute fellow beings.

The afternoon after the savage encounter at school with the two little Kelveys sees Kezia swinging on the gate at her home. She notices two dots in the distance, and realizes that they are the two little Kelveys. She alone rises above the imposed prescriptions of social behaviour that cripples all the other female members of the household, when she identifies the two figures approaching “with their shadows walking” (504), and after a moment’s deliberation she makes up her mind and she decides “to [swing] out” (504),

[n]obody was about; she began to swing on the big white gates of the courtyard. Presently, looking along the road, she saw two little dots. They grew bigger, they were coming towards her. Now she could see that they were the Kelveys. Kezia stopped swinging. She slipped off the gate as if she was going to run away. Then she hesitated. The Kelveys came nearer, and beside them walked their shadows, very long, stretching right across the road with their heads in the buttercups. Kezia clambered back on the gate; she had made up her mind; she swung out (504).

Her “swinging out” is a symbolic acknowledgement of her own awareness of the futility of social codes of behaviour, and a recognition of the voice of authenticity that releases her own sense of self, and in turn that of the two little girls. The two little outcasts are hesitant to enter the hallowed area of the Burnell property, but Else’s desire, expressed in “big imploring eyes”(504), a frown and a twitch to her sister’s skirt, to see the doll’s house over-rules any doubts that may exist. Their waif-like appearance is intensified by Mansfield’s description of them as “two stray cats” (504). As they gaze in wonderment at the “drawing room and the dining room” (504) with the one breathing loudly, and the other “as still as a stone”(504), the sudden shrill voice from Aunt Beryl shatters the sacred moment of unity that links the house and the children to an extended focus of existence within humanity itself. She is appalled that they have dared to set foot in the courtyard, and in a peremptory tone of voice, demands that they leave immediately. Aunt Beryl, Lottie and Isobel are without an authentic sense of self, as they conform to the societal mould that patriarchal society imposes on women as they defend what Fullbrook calls their “class territory” (1986:114). They are unaware that they fit into “a mould” and continue to function within a false consciousness that maims and distorts their individual sense of self.

The little Kelveys are the object of Aunt Beryl's expression of social savagery that parallels the savage actions of the little girls in the playground earlier in the day. She vents her frustrated anger at her own personal inadequacies of purpose, and releases onto "those little rats of Kelveys" (505) and the other accomplice in the deed, Kezia, a thorough scolding. The emotionally charged words and actions of Aunt Beryl reflect an awareness of her social standing, but more particularly an awareness of herself as a woman who seeks the social approval of a male companion, and ultimately a husband. Ironically, in her position of dependence on societal approval, she is as much a victim of external circumstances as the low-born Kelveys are. She loses her temper, and displaces her terror and discomfort at the demands of her friend, Willie Brent, onto the Kelveys, and gains a satisfactory level of release, as well as power over human beings who cannot defend themselves. She feels a great sense of relief because "that ghastly pressure" is gone (505). Beryl achieves a false sense of authenticity, because she has done so at the expense of the happiness of defenceless human beings unable to retaliate or reply, and who barely understand their own social position. Interestingly, she asserts her apparently superior social position early in the story in her response to the gift from Mrs Hay by a condescending remark about the strong smell of the paint on the doll's house, "[s]weet of old Mrs Hay, of course; most sweet and generous" (499), but really thinks the smell of paint will make anyone seriously ill. Her later response to relieve "the ghastly pressure" (505) by her treatment of the Kelveys is merely a perpetuation of a pattern of social conditioning, presumably begun early in her life.

For Kezia, welcoming the Kelveys to her home allows her to reach into a deeper level of consciousness that becomes the vehicle that Mansfield, the woman writer, uses to give literary expression to the hidden, unsaid aspects of female consciousness. The image of the lamp unites Kezia and the little Kelveys by recognizing their common female origins, and by opening the way to an alternative pattern of thought, free from prejudice and malice. The significance of the little lamp lies in its definition of light and beauty because it is considered "...perfect. It seemed to smile at Kezia, to say 'I live here'. 'The lamp was real'" (500). It encompasses the image of the "spry, hard working little washerwoman, who went from house to house" (501) and her lack of a socially acceptable husband, it embraces the outlandish dress of the little Kelveys but more especially it includes the image of

our Else, [who] wore a long white dress, rather like a nightgown and a pair of little boys' boots. But whatever Else wore, she would have looked strange. She was a tiny wishbone of a child, with cropped hair and enormous solemn eyes — a little white owl. Nobody had ever seen her smile (502).

But the sight of the “little lamp” elicits from her an emotional response that is far removed from the malicious mayhem of the playground. It elicits a “rare smile” (505) that originates from an unknown, and an unrevealed source that sustains the little pariah through the teasing and the cruelty of the children at school. The cruel taunts of the children are not comparable to the revelation that Else has when she says “I seen the lamp.” For her it is a moment in which she ceases to be compared to a “stray cat” (504) or a “rat” (505), but is a human being whose sense of self reaches into authentic consciousness. The silence between the two girls seals the sacred moment, as they share their vision and renew their inner strength of purpose. For Mansfield, it is a moment in which she reveals the vulnerability of human beings, and their loneliness in the face of social ostracism, a moment that is encompassed in the symbolism of the image of the little lamp.

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## Chapter 5

### Late Fiction : *Bliss* and *Je ne parle pas français*.

Mansfield's words, as she writes to Murry on 26 December 1922, reveal a sincere wish to reshape and refine herself as much as her writing. She says: "I want to be REAL, until I am that I don't see why I shouldn't be at the mercy of old Eve in her various manifestations for ever" (*Letters*, IV, 1996:282). This wish rings true for the female characters in the stories to be discussed in this chapter, as much as they do for herself. "Being real" is living and working as an authentic being, whose origin is undisputed, and being what he or she purports to be, neither false nor fictitious.

Mansfield's desire to present a subjectivity that was transformed, and that ceased to be dependent on a rigid definition of the self is reflected in a letter to her friend, Dorothy Brett, with whom she shares the following observation:

[i]t seems to me so extraordinarily right that you should be painting Still Lives just now. What can one do, faced with this wonderful tumble of round bright fruits, but gather them and play with them — and *become them*, as it were. When I pass the apple stalls I cannot help stopping and staring until I feel that I, myself, am changing into an apple too — and at any moment I may produce an apple, miraculously, out of my own being like a conjuror produces the egg. When you paint apples do you feel that your breasts and your knees become apples too?...But that is why I believe in technique,...just because I don't see how art is going to make that divine *spring* into bounding outlines of things if it hasn't passed through the process of trying to *become* these things before creating them (*Letters*, I, 1984:330).

Mansfield's emphasis in her artistic claims for purity of artistic purpose is really an acute awareness that she could strive for and achieve distance and detachment from an object of description, but at the same time she could merge self and object to intensify the emotion associated with the object.

In this chapter, Mansfield's depiction of Bertha Young in *Bliss* (1918), and Mouse in *Je ne parle pas français* (1921) reflects the existence of individual female characters whose search for authenticity is marred by the poses and the posturing that shape their fictional lives, and is revealed in their often futile attempts to rise above impossible circumstances. Mansfield relates the actions that result from the societal and personal constraints in their lives, to a lack of authenticity, and

then to a gradual loss of self, and finally to the experience bordering on disillusionment, either within the isolation of an established marriage in a city (*Bliss*), or as an unmarried woman alone in the city (*Je ne parle pas français*). In these two stories, the established short story sequence in which individual characters face decisions, plots develop and then lead to a recognized resolution is adapted by narrative that focuses on the inner lives of the female characters.

The stories are set in the cities of London and Paris respectively, where Mansfield herself had lived. During her stay in London, she had imagined that a life of bohemian and artistic freedom would provide the recognition as a writer, and the freedom from the constraints of being a woman, that she craved. She wrote in her Journal that “I’m a writer first and a woman after” (*Journal*, 1954:205) and attempted to refine the idea of woman as a metaphor for inadequacy by saying “[p]rove yourself...Be *more than woman*” (*Journal*, 1954:205). She only learnt the truth of ‘city life’ after her own periods of isolation and loneliness in cities, and in a marriage that failed to give her the necessary support: she discovered that the reality of such a life is different from the image conjured up in her imagination. In consequence, she could write with sensitivity of women in situations that resembled her own, without resorting to the presentation of romantic images of bohemian life that she had known only by adventurous interludes as a young Queen’s College student. Such a life existed on the fringes of the protective world that her father’s money provided, and was an illusion of the freedom and unrestrained life she had hoped to live.

*Bliss* is depicted on two distinct levels. One level reflects Bertha Young’s inner life, with its emotional turmoil and suppressed vitality that is expressed as an almost uncontrollable experience of bliss. Associated with these overwhelming feelings of bliss are the unexpressed sexual feelings for Pearl Fulton (her friend and her “find”), and the veiled feelings of inexplicable ambivalence for her husband, Harry, which are offset by the contemplation of a frighteningly newly awakened sexual desire for him as she imagines them in bed later that night, and by her desire to “get in touch with him for a moment” (202) on the telephone. She has never been able to make the necessary emotional contact with him, as he himself is far removed from genuine communication with her inner consciousness. Harry finds an emotionally sterile marriage acceptable, reflected in a relationship that finds expression in being “really good pals” (308). Bertha is caught in the grip of self-deception, and resorts to an immersion within a world that provides the superficial trappings that appear to constitute happiness,

[r]eally — really — she had everything. She was young. Harry and she were as much in love as ever, and they got on splendidly and were really good pals. She had an adorable baby. They didn’t have to worry about money. They had this absolutely satisfactory house and

garden. And Friends — modern, thrilling friends, writers and painters and poets or people keen on social questions — just the kind of friends they wanted. And then there were books, and there was music, and she found a wonderful little dressmaker, they were going abroad in the summer, and their new cook made the most superb omelettes...(308).

She lists her requirements for happiness without difficulty, in a similar way to Mansfield's own expression of her list of personal needs for a successful future life, quoted in Chapter One. There is really no difference between the contents of the two lists as both women feel inextricably confined within specific personal situations of entrapment, but for Mansfield the realization of her own set of needs is the way to an artistic career as a writer. For Bertha, the superficial appears to be sufficient as unrestrained access to assistance from the cook and the dressmaker, and sufficient money, masks her real needs for love and care, and communication with her husband.

Her real needs continue to be masked, as images that reflect the reality of Bertha's revulsion towards the sexual are presented. A significant image that appears early in the story, and underlies her sexual frigidity is Bertha's response to the grey cat "dragging its belly," (308) followed by the black one. The pear tree is juxtaposed with the grey cat, and in its natural state appears to be perfect "as though becalmed against a jade-green sky" (308). Its appearance remains as perfect throughout the story, but ironically it has produced no buds, and consequently cannot produce any fruit either. The horrific implications of the feline image becomes a reflection of the sordid concentration on the sexual that pervades the story when, in the final scene of the story, Bertha sees Eddie "following [Pearl] like the black cat following the grey" (315) after her friend has directed an intimate piece of communication about "[y]our lovely pear tree!" (315).

On another level, Bertha's exuberance functions against the backdrop of the physical world in which she lives. She is positioned squarely within the social, political and cultural milieu of her world, where the natural rhythms of life such as passivity and receptivity, usually associated with female sexuality, are encased in restlessness. Her life in the city removes Bertha from the natural world of Nature, as the artificiality of social forms controls action and feeling with a keen severity, and forces her to accept such action as civilized and correct. The norms of the civilized world dictate the actions of grown women but, in contrast to the prescribed sedate and subdued behaviour, her sense of vitality surpasses these constraints, and an exaggerated description of her actions reflects her inability to contain her desire

to run instead of walk, to take dancing steps off the pavements, to bowl a hoop, to throw something up in the air and catch it again, or to stand still and laugh at — nothing — nothing, simply (305).

She is aware that if she examines and analyses her actions, and the psychological force behind them and the image of the self propelling her forward, she is liable to be accused of being “drunk and disorderly” (305). Her actions are outside the confines of what even she considers appropriate to the constraints of an image of “idiotic civilization.” Drunkenness and disorderliness are viewed as alarming characteristics of the uneducated lower classes, and are traits that lead to the lower classes being termed an unruly mass of humanity, incapable of self-control and decorum. The lower classes are considered “unruly” and “uneducated” in comparison to the more sedate and restrained behaviour that characterizes the actions of the upper classes. The upper classes conceal their desire to be unruly behind decorous and rigid codes of conduct. Mansfield’s reference to “civilization” as an influential force, supports the existence of levels of emotion and feelings that are not part of what is considered civilized behaviour, and which appear only on rare occasions and are then equated by Bertha herself, to a waste of life-energy that is incurred when a body is “shut up in a case like a rare, rare fiddle” (305). The image of Bertha’s clothing reinforces the idea of the “fiddle in the case” because she is encased and suffocated, within a sheath of clothes (and traditions), barely able to breathe. Bertha Young’s use of the analogy is significant as it points to an acute awareness of her position within a situation that Fullbrook calls the “fine mesh of social definition” (1986:96). The fiddle has a significantly ovate shape which prefigures the heterosexual and lesbian involvement of Bertha Young later in the story. Bertha’s recognition of being shut up like a fiddle in a case is quickly countered by a confused denial that “[n]o, that about the fiddle is not quite what I mean” (305). Her confused perception of her world continues until the end of the story when the facts of Harry’s actions are revealed, and she has to confront the reality of Pearl’s attraction to Harry.

In an ironic twist of narrative, Mansfield allows Bertha to experience the sensations of bliss, but does not equip her with the means to verbalize her state of mind, and to give sufficient expression to her emotions. Her response to such intense emotions is encased in mute physical activity, and reflects, on an emotional level, a weak sense of self, pointing to the lack of the necessary foundations required for a strong authentic self. It reflects her alienation from a culture and a language that is unable to accommodate such feelings. Such deportment reinforces her initial allegiance to childhood, when she wanted “to bowl a hoop and throw something up in the air”(305), and reflects the levels of vitality associated with such youth, while the restraint she applies to her activity is a reflection of the societal rules that govern appropriate conduct in her class and station.

For Mansfield, the Modernist woman writer, the knowledge of the existence of revolutionary Freudian approaches to sexuality and psychological disorder is not without significance. A.R. Orage, the editor of *The New Age*, and her friend, Virginia Woolf were followers of Freud's ideas, and Leonard Woolf, Virginia's husband, published his works. The clinical picture described by Freud in *A Case of Hysteria* relates how "...an impulsion towards the discharge of an unconscious excitation will so far as possible make use of any channel for discharge which may already be in existence" (Freud, (1895), 1990:87-88). For Bertha, the unidentified spurt of energy points to the lack of a channel for the discharge of unconscious excitation, and is related, not only to a rebellion against the confinement and sexual suppression of women, but also to a lack of an appropriate outlet for the expression of undefined sexual and emotional energy. For her, the only "channel" that is "already in existence" is her home, her baby and the prospects of the party later in the evening. Her anticipation is heightened by the knowledge that Pearl Fulton, whom she refers to as Miss Fulton for most of her visit, will also be present, and that she will be fully engaged in a pose of social activities that she believes will enhance her sense of self and reaffirm her position in the world of social engagement.

The triviality and surface shallowness of *Bliss* disconcerted Virginia Woolf, who exclaimed on reading it that "[s]he's done for!...she is content with superficial smartness, & the whole conception is poor, cheap, not the visions, however imperfect, of an interesting mind" (Woolf, 1954:2). Yet in the portrait of Bertha Young, Mansfield's aim is not to reveal contentment with "superficial smartness," but to expose it by means of harsh and clear satire, since the prime focus is the depiction of the confinement of the sexual suppression of women, and the lack of authenticity that accompanies that particular lifestyle.

Bertha channels her emotional exuberance and her artistic flair as she arranges fruit for the party, into her conception of "freedom," and by implication sexual freedom. Her perception of the arrangement links her, unconsciously, with the image of her own body and the expression of her own sexuality. Bertha's expression of the conflict between her own sexuality and the conventions that outlaw women's physicality as taboo, is channelled into the safety of the observance of the domestic role, as it reinforces the pose and the posture she adopts to meet the societal demands for a good wife. She is obliged to seek an escape for the intensity of her emotions, and fulfils another societal requirement of expressing maternal feelings, by rushing up to the nursery to see her daughter. The ornamental nature of her status is emphasized by her immersion in events that appear to be so insignificant that they are almost too trivial to describe. She becomes an ornament in the nursery where her child is being cared for, and is in direct competition with the Nurse for the

affection and attention of the child. She seeks out her daughter, Little B, who is, significantly, named after her mother. She is without the complete name borne by her mother, and is at risk of being reduced to only the letter B of her name. Bertha's own interaction with her child is in sharp contrast to the exaggerated expression of bliss that she herself expresses about her own person, as she is able only to address her baby as being "nice" — "you're very nice!" said she, kissing her warm baby. "I'm fond of you. I like you." (307). Her words are merely a reassurance to herself that she is able, in spite of her ambivalence to the sexual, to respond with maternal feelings for Little B. Consequently, her daughter is a little doll that is to be admired, and loved as something rare is to be treasured. Little B will be without the resources to build a strong sense of self and authenticity. Her father claims he will only be interested in her once she has a lover. This statement reveals the shallowness of his own poorly developed sense of self. It is poorly developed and shallow because the pretence at being a young man, who claims indifference to the loyalties of marriage and family life, leaves him uttering platitudes of verbal emptiness. He himself reflects a self-seeking attitude that hides his own insecurity, and anxiety about his position within his avant-garde set of friends. His perceptions of the life of the baby as an important element in his own life are warped by the superficial ideas of his avant-garde friends as he too attempts to be as modern as they appear to be. Mansfield's satire of artists and writers who wish to appear modern and liberated reflects her awareness of the dangers such shallowness holds for the growth of authenticity for a writer like herself.

For Mansfield, the Modernist writer, the actions that Bertha are engaged in become a satirical comment on the gullibility and naivete of woman as she attempts to be "modern." Her friends, "modern, thrilling friends, writers and painters and poets or people keen on social questions — just the kind of friends they wanted" (308), and her husband's "talk about food" reflects the cannibalistic imagery that creates the impression that for them sexual love and the consumption of food are almost interchangeable. Her friends reflect conventions of propriety, but believe they are liberated and knowing. One of the guests, Mrs Norman Knight arrives in a monkey coat that "so upset the train that it rose to a man and simply ate me with its eyes" (309). The glaring irony of the monkey-clad guest is that she "did look like a very intelligent monkey" (309), and is unaware that her actions portray a weak sense of self, and a lack of authenticity. Her pretence at being so comfortable in her comments about the stodginess of the middle classes, is channelled to her unease with a secure sexual identity, because she and her husband call one another 'Face' and 'Jug' among friends, and at home. There is tragic irony in Bertha's perception in viewing the party as a stage play by Tchekov, and by accommodating within her sense of self, Harry's enjoyment of his dinner. She believes that

[i]t was part of his — well, not his nature, exactly, and certainly not his pose — his something or other — to talk about food and glory in the shameless passion for the white flesh of the lobster and the green of the pistachio ices — green and cold like the eyelids of Egyptian dancers (311).

She fails to be aware that his appetite for food is merely an expression of his carnal desires. His display of feeling is superficial, and is reserved for neither Bertha nor Pearl, because at the end of the story he resembles a vicious dog “with a hideous grin” (315). His obsessive nature is reflected in his blatantly disgusting comments about Pearl when he mentions that her “liver [is] frozen, my dear,” or that she suffers from “pure flatulence” or “kidney disease” (308), which reinforces his wife’s naïve self-deception. An example of such self-deception occurs just before Pearl arrives at the party. During the interval, “came another tiny moment, while they waited, laughing and talking, just a trifle too much at their ease, a trifle too unaware” (310), and reflects her blind acceptance of Harry’s derogatory comments about Pearl. Her role-playing as the blissful little girl is so perfect, that she interprets her attraction to Pearl as merely falling “in love with beautiful women who have something strange about them” (307). The strangeness of her modern friends does not register any discomfort or doubt in her mind about their credentials as authentic beings. It appears as if she regularly falls in love with such women; and in her neurotic approbation of her own actions, and in her relationship with the women, she repeats a pattern of action that perpetuates the destruction of the potential for an authentic self.

Bertha’s allegiance to a world that is the antithesis of the inauthentic, false world of “civilization,” is her identification with the unspoiled glory of the pear tree. As she rearranges the cushions on the couch to make them appear less stylized, “she seemed to see on her eyelids the lovely pear tree with its wide open blossoms as a symbol of her own life” (308). Her happiness, and more particularly the “bliss” she experiences, becomes an absurdity and she feels “quite dizzy, quite drunk” (308). The feelings of exhaustion that follow such an expression of emotion are a precursor to the exhaustion of emotions of joy, and her newly awakened sexual feelings that are spent in disillusionment and dismay at the end of the story. Ironically, her “drunken state” does not resemble Harry’s “passion for fighting,” and is rooted in a sincere, if poorly understood desire to deal with a novel emotional upheaval that could hold promise, but is not realized. Harry’s vulnerable emotional position

made him just occasionally, to other people, who didn’t know him very well, a little ridiculous perhaps....For there were moments when he rushed into battle where no battle was ....(310).

Harry's desire to engage in imaginary battles reflects his own poor sense of self, and lack of authenticity. He, just like Bertha, resorts to role-playing, and chooses the role of a paramour of women, and at the end of the story is symbolized as an animal ready to pounce and devour its prey.

In contrast to the surface triviality of her life, her sense of vitality instinctively draws her to the image in the mirror that reflects "a woman, radiant, with smiling, trembling lips, with big, dark eyes and an air of listening, waiting for something...divine to happen...that she knew must happen" (305). For Mansfield, the image of the mirror becomes an obsessive confrontation of the character with its self and its own authenticity, as the moment of exhilaration is frozen, and the onlooker (Bertha) is powerless to cling to or rely on the moment of intense emotional involvement as a true reflection of who she really is. Bertha's immediate response to her mirror image alternates between feelings of attraction and revulsion.

These are ambivalent feelings even bordering on hatred, that are linked to the uncertainty of the position of her authentic self within the greater sphere of her life. As a means to reconcile the uncertainty of her perception of herself in the mirror, she seeks to relate her present state of happiness to the unfamiliar image that is reflected back to her. The image is unfamiliar because it does not resemble her hidden feelings of uncertainty and insecurity, and she finds it difficult to reconcile the two conflicting emotional states. For Bertha, the reflection in the mirror is a revelation of a hidden, psychological life that brings to the fore the existence of "another self." The effect of acknowledging the existence of another "self" reflects Bertha's enslavement to a position of "waiting for something to happen," and who is portrayed by Simone de Beauvoir as a controlling force in the life of Woman, and is named

the Sleeping Beauty, Cinderella, Snow White, she who receives and submits....She is locked in a tower, a palace, a garden, a cave, she is chained to a rock, a captive, sound asleep; she waits (de Beauvoir, 1970:271-272).

For Bertha, the passivity of waiting is replaced by hysteria that brings her to the verge of an inward spiritual and emotional exploration, as she tugs at the chains on the rock, and as she prepares to wake up to the implications albeit horrifying and shocking, of being a grown-up woman. She also prepares to face the significant latent homosexual feelings that are about to assert themselves in her life, possibly not for the first time. After the success of the party with her very modern friends, the anticipation of the departure of the people and of the house being "quiet — quiet. The lights will be out. And you and he will be alone together in the dark room — the warm bed" (313), initiates for the first time a feeling of anticipation comparable to the feelings of a bride on her wedding day

and of the feelings of physical desire for her husband. She is really unsure of the authenticity of her feelings, and it is her intention, when she is alone with her husband, to explain to him about her feelings for Pearl because the forces tearing at her are in the shape of Pearl and not Harry. For her the awakening to newly experienced sexual desire for her husband, will be a violation of her authentic self that leaves her disillusioned and unsure of the future, as the object of her husband's affection is centred on the same person that she has chosen as an object of affection. In realizing her awareness, she will forfeit not only the attention of her husband, but also the attention of her newfound friend, Pearl, because, within the triangle of possible sexual involvement, Bertha will be the one on the outside of meaningful emotional contacts. She will discover that the only thing that she and Pearl will share is Bertha's husband, Harry.

Faderman notes that in the nineteenth century and early twentieth century, attachments between women, such as the one between Bertha and Pearl, were documented as "the love of kindred spirits," or as a "Boston marriage" or even as "sentimental friends," but for the later twentieth century imagination, the association between lesbianism ( the perception of the "not so innocent" friendship between Pearl and Bertha) and the resultant unorthodox sex is firmly entrenched, and "usually shows love between women as a disease"(Faderman, 1981:20). For Bertha, close attachment to Pearl is still on the level of sentimentality, but as her own involvement increases and the images of what they can share appear in her mind, her feelings intensify to a frenzied pitch of intimacy. As Bertha contemplates her "brimming cup of bliss" (311) over dinner, the image of the pear tree is an insistent image "in the back of her mind" (312), and it is associated with "Miss Fulton, who sat there turning a tangerine in her slender fingers that were so pale a light seemed to come from them" (312). Ironically, Pearl is dressed as a bride "all in silver, with a silver fillet binding her pale blond hair" (310). As the two women gaze at the pear tree, Bertha turns her attention to the reciprocity of mood that she experiences with her friend, and marvels at the accuracy of their mutual perception. She believes that Miss Fulton shares her mood, and considers that the nature of her contact is something that "does happen very, very rarely between women. Never between men" (312). The feeling of mutual appreciation of the tree, and the touch of her friend on her arm ignites within Bertha a "fire of bliss that [she] Bertha did not know what to do with" (313). After Pearl arrives, Bertha smiles "with that little air of proprietorship that she always assumed while her women finds were new and mysterious" (310). The incidence of specifically feminine imagery such as the pear tree and the moon, Miss Fulton herself and the image of the tangerine that is held so seductively by her, lead Bertha to expect her friend to "give her a sign" (312). Bertha interprets Miss Fulton's words "[h]ave you a garden?" (312) as the sign she is waiting for,

[a]nd the two women stood side by side looking at the slender, flowering tree. Although it was so still it seemed, like a flame of a candle, to stretch up, to point, to quiver in the bright air, to grow taller and taller as they gazed — almost to touch the rim of the ...moon. How long did they stand there? Both, as it were caught in that circle of unearthly light, understanding each other perfectly, creatures of another world, and wondering what they were to do in this one with all this blissful treasure that burned in their bosoms and dropped in silver flowers from their hair and hands (312-313).

The image of a walled garden such as Bertha and Pearl gaze upon, has been a symbol of unawakened female sexuality since medieval times. For Bertha it is particularly significant as her attempts to reach out to Pearl Fulton are attempts, on an unconscious level, to establish a foundation for an authentic self within the confines of her newly awakened but poorly understood, feelings of bliss.

Although both Bertha and Pearl are bathed in moonlight and the symbolic colour of female sexuality, Fullbrook considers that Pearl Fulton “already *is* the moon,” and Bertha is merely “the guardian of a garden, hidden behind windows and curtains, stunned by the moonlight” (1986:101). The climax of Bertha’s disillusionment and betrayal is the image of Harry with nostrils quivering and lips curled back in a “hideous” grin, and the horror of seeing such an animal being caressed by her friend, Pearl. Her friend’s reply to Harry’s whispered “[t]omorrow” is a barely audible affirmative to their meeting. There is never any certainty of the true nature of Pearl’s feelings, as the narrative is seen through Bertha’s eyes, and it is her belief that she has shared a special moment of intimacy comparable to “a blissful treasure...burned in their bosoms and dropped, in silver flowers, from their hair and hands”(313), with her friend. The ending of the story is bleak, with images of a woman secretly wishing she were not like a little girl, unable to deal with grown-up pressures. Bertha’s perception that Harry “really disliked her” (Miss Fulton) (313), is shrouded in a veil of betrayal and untruth, because Harry’s actions are saturated with pretence and artifice. The expression of her subordinately passive role is an allusion to her inner conflict, and reflects her incorrect reading of her husband’s actions and motives. She says

[o]h, Harry, don’t dislike her. You are quite wrong about her. She’s wonderful, wonderful. And, besides how can you feel so differently about someone who means so much to me? (313).

Her words are revealing because she does not fully comprehend that her present confusion about the nature of her attention is perverse, and that as Harry’s wife her allegiance is to him. Her

immaturity and her latent lesbian tendencies silently will him to accommodate Pearl as the object of her attention, and to establish what appears normal to her, a happy threesome in her home.

The experience surrounding the pear tree is seen as a symbol of a mystical union with the world and its creatures, as Nature and the natural rhythms and response of human life co-exist and meet in order to illustrate their mutual dependence. It is also the depiction of a fragile romantic illusion that is waiting to be shattered into fragments, as the suspicion that Harry and Pearl have a liaison, becomes a reality. For Bertha, the shattering of such an illusion is the repudiation of the belief that she held at the beginning of the story that “[r]eally — really she had everything” (308) and that whatever she possesses or has access to, is an insubstantial foundation for happiness and contentment.

An observation by Helene Cixous on the characteristics of a feminine text reflects accurately upon the nature of a character like Bertha. Cixous writes:

[a] feminine text cannot fail to be more than subversive. It is volcanic; as it is written it brings about an upheaval of the old property crust... There's no room for her if she is not a he. If she's a her/she, it's in order to smash everything, to shatter the framework of institutions, to blow up the law, to break up the “truth” with laughter (Cixous, 1980:258).

Bertha Young is a “she” who succeeds in “breaking up the truth” and “shattering the framework of institutions”, though not by “laughter” but by distorting her authentic self, by perpetuating her own breathless immaturity in word and deed. Her release into voyeuristic appropriation of a woman friend (“a find”), Pearl Fulton, whose anaemic body and languid movements are in stark contrast to her own excessive vitality, signals the change of focus of women writers, as suggested by Woolf:

... women are beginning to explore their own sex, to write of women as women, as women have never been written of before; for of course, until very lately women in literature were the creation of men (Woolf, 1979:49).

Mansfield wrote *Je ne parle pas francais* in 1918, a few weeks after completing the short story, *Bliss*. The themes of both stories are centred on a dual betrayal in which a husband or lover or friend is involved. The ominous overtones and images of darkness in *Bliss* are repeated and presented in an intensified form in *Je ne parle pas francais*. The corruptive interpersonal relationships between Raoul Duquette, Dick Harmon and his woman friend, Mouse, reflect their

respective actions, as they hope to gain questionable personal rewards from their associations with one another.

Mansfield's personal feelings about the story are expressed in a letter to Murry:

I am rather diffident about telling you because so many sham wolves have gone over the bridge — that I am working & have been for two days. It looks to me the real thing. But one never knows. I'll keep quiet about it until it is finished (*Letters*, II, 1987:51).

The realization that the story is “the real thing,” is juxtaposed by thoughts about life in general as she expressed them to her friend, Ottoline Morrell. She writes to her, and comments on the “ugliness of life — the intolerable corruption of it all — Ottoline. How is it to be borne?” (*Letters*, II, 1987:192). Her “*cry against corruption*” that she mentions in a letter in February 1918, is tempered by a reaffirmation of the ugliness in the world, but with a distinct glimmer of melancholic personal hope in the conclusion. She writes,

[y]ou see, I cannot help it. My secret belief — the innermost “credo” by which I live — that although Life is loathsomely ugly and people are terribly often vile and cruel and base, nevertheless there is something at the back of it all — which if I were only great enough to understand would make everything indescribably beautiful. One just has glimpses, divine warnings — signs. Do you remember the day we cut the lavender? And do you remember when the Russian Music sounded in that half empty hall? Oh those memories compensate far more than I can say.... (Mansfield quoted in Morrell, 1983:125).

The information is relayed to the reader entirely through the consciousness of the single protagonist, Raoul Duquette, and reveals his point of view of a selection of significant events of his past life. More particularly it reveals his perception of women. He sees them either as prostitutes, mother figures or asexual innocents. The technical skill that Mansfield exhibits in the story reveals that Duquette is not only the source of information in *Je ne parle pas francais* for his own life, but that he also draws, somewhat maliciously, the portrait of Mouse. She is seen through his eyes, as he preys on the stereotype of femininity that is reflected in her person. By remaining a flat character, Mouse's own character is elusive, and keeps Duquette grasping at a means of comprehending her suffering. He fails in the same way to comprehend the true nature of his friend, Dick Harmon's suffering. Mouse finds herself in a relatively modern, urban setting, and provides a meaningful contrast to its ugliness by presenting innocence as a means of dealing with harsh reality. Hankin notes that Mouse and Duquette are “doubles” of one another (1983:161). The image of the butterfly recurs as both Duquette and Mouse are associated with it in descriptions of their person. Mouse is described by Duquette as something that

came upon you with the same kind of shock that you feel when you have been drinking a cup of tea out of a thin innocent cup and suddenly, at the bottom, you see a tiny creature, half butterfly, half woman, bowing at you with her hands in her sleeves” (368).

Duquette refers to himself as Madame Butterfly who has been deserted by *ce cher Pinkerton*. He is dressed very elegantly, in his blue kimono (287). His comparison to the delicate Japanese woman is ironic and revealing, as it points to his allegiance with the feminine that he derides in word and deed, but more particularly to his own insecure sexual identity. Although he appears more pathetic than evil in this instance, the inherently evil working of his mind have been clear since the early part of the story. In a twist of irony he aligns himself with the feminine, and exposes unconscious nostalgic thoughts about the woman he could have been. As butterflies, both Mouse and Duquette are liable to be caught in the net of societal expectations and demands, but it is Mouse for whom the trap is linked to personal disparagement. In its turn this is reflected in economic and emotional dependence, vulnerability and loss of authenticity.

The time scheme of the story reflects that of Modernist works as it flickers from the present to the childhood of Duquette, and then to the painful intensity of a memory recalled in a Parisian café. The image that the protagonist draws of himself is the product of a distorted imagination that becomes more odious as each malicious thought crystallizes into selfish deeds that harm and destroy a tiny, virginal woman called Mouse. Mansfield draws upon personal experiences and recollections of abandonment in her own life by Murry, when he failed to be content with living abroad until she had fully recovered from consumption, and his frequent returns to England. She also draws upon the Lawrence/Murry connection in Cornwall, as she writes of the French pimp, gigolo, poseur and bisexual fraud, Duquette and his friend, Dick Harmon: D.H. Lawrence, in his homosexual attraction to Murry, attempted to include him into what he termed a “blood brotherhood”, while they shared the beauties of the countryside along the Cornwall coast. For Mansfield it became a situation of a woman caught between two men’s desires for each other. Murry rejected Lawrence’s ideas of such a scheme, and returned to his former affection for Katherine.

Significantly, she does not allow these facts to overshadow her technical skill in writing. The protagonist’s self-revelation exposes his own weaknesses and warped nature, by providing what appears to be an account of admirable character traits, but which is the opposite of the true facts of his personality. It is retold in dramatic form, and reveals the posturing and narcissistic play-acting that characterizes Duquette’s entire existence. It is especially evident at the beginning of the story as he is positioned in a corner of a café, reveling in the cleverness of his own superior skills of

human observation, when the waiter, ostensibly poised at the scene of a murder, fills a creative niche in his artist's mind. His dramatic presentation is reinforced by his constant need for reassurance as an appealing sexual commodity, and for recognition as a clever and successful writer. This reassurance he seeks in his own reflection in the mirror, and his words are revealing as he says

[s]uddenly I realized that quite apart from myself, I was smiling. Slowly I raised my head and saw myself in the mirror opposite. Yes, there I sat, leaning on the table, smiling my deep, sly smile, the glass of coffee with its vague plume of steam before me... (279).

He asks himself

[h]ow can one look the part and not be the part? Or be the part and not look it? Isn't looking — being? Or being — looking? Any rate, who is to say it is not? (288).

The mirrors on the wardrobe that reflect his image are not paid for: "I read it standing in front of the (unpaid for) wardrobe mirror" (287). The mirrors represent only the accoutrements that an actor requires to practise a role. In practising the role, he spills over into self-parody that is interrupted by a significant moment of recognition that confirms the life he has chosen, as an artist, and (in his estimation) a true one. He is reflected as an aesthete whose male-bonded nineteenth century approach to writing emphasizes the artificiality of existence, and the importance of materiality as a means to view the world. The aesthete's insistence on the pursuit of sensual gratification, as a fulfillment of the duty of the artist, to pursue experience for its own sake, is reflected in Duquette's sexual and moral perversity and degeneration. His claims that "I am going in for serious literature. I am starting a career" (282), reflect the stance of the writer he intends to become as he will "write about things that have never been touched before" (282), and also of the 'submerged world':

[v]ery naively, with a sort of tender humour and from the inside, as though it were all quite simple, quite natural...Nobody has ever done it as I shall do it because none of the others have lived my experiences (282).

The sign or "geste," that is the cue only granted to a true writer, is the discovery of the piece of pink blotting paper on the table, with the telling words, *Je ne parle pas francais*. It is the moment of epiphany that seals its importance, as it initiates a revelation when he "opened my eyes wide. There for all eternity, as it were and now at last I was coming to life..." (279). The life of the artist that he awakens to, carries the seeds of others' destruction in it, as his egotistic derision of humanity reflects his disregard of people, and he considers them merely as

portmanteaux — packed with certain things, started going, thrown about, tossed away, dumped down, lost and found, half emptied suddenly, or squeezed fatter than ever, until finally the ultimate Porter swings them on the ultimate train and away they rattle.... (277).

The memory of the encounter with Mouse and the man who abandons her, is recalled so vividly that the emotional impact of it fills him with “[a]gony, Agony, Agony,” and he is astounded at his depth of his feeling,

[g]ood God! Am I capable of feeling as strongly as that? But I was absolutely unconscious! I hadn't a phrase to meet it with! I was overcome! I was swept off my feet! I didn't even try, in the dimmest way, to put it down (280).

The memory is as clear and as untainted as the image of his role. The image of the benign fox terrier to which he had sworn allegiance, fades. By his own admission he says that “of course I knew that I couldn't have kept it up” (298), but he places the burden of his failure to sustain a role on Mouse herself, “[b]ut how she makes me break my rule” (299). He cannot allow nostalgic or nostalgic thoughts of Mouse to intrude and spoil the role he lives, but such indulgence does call up images of an innocent childhood with Mouse. His thoughts of such a nostalgic childhood are changed quickly to depravity, as his offer of Mouse to “some dirty old gallant” (299) destroys and distorts her unvoiced claim to authenticity. She cannot offer an adequate defence against his actions neither can she extricate herself from being the object of his perverse thoughts, because she features merely as an object within his mind, warped by moral and psychological depravity. He stifles thoughts of sadness at the memory of a lost Mouse, by quickly adopting an attitude which reinforces his personal policy of never regretting any thing in his life,

I have made it a rule of my life never to regret and never to look back. Regret is an appalling waste of energy, and no one who intends to be a writer can afford to indulge in it: it's only good for wallowing in. Looking back, of course, is equally fatal to Art. It's keeping yourself poor. Art can't and won't stand poverty (280).

His resolution never to return again to the place of a possible attachment, good or bad, displays a poverty of spirit, that finds a dubious outlet in an image of “my other self” that has been chasing up and down in the dark” (280). His imagined search for Mouse ends in an emotional breakdown that is filled with yearning and longing, and is given expression in rhetorical questions that echo aimlessly back to their origin, Duquette himself. He reveals for those few moments, not regret at having lost an enticing victim like Mouse, but dismay at the abandonment of a fellow human being, who, for a short while, is more to him than a mere victim. The image of the fox terrier as faithful dog in the allurements of Dick Harmon and then Mouse herself, is quieted, stilled and robbed of its territorial superiority as he commands it to “[l]ie down then. Lie down!” (281).

Duquette claims that the effects of being repeatedly molested by the African laundress led him to a life of prostitution, and her provision of payment in the form of “a little round fried cake covered with sugar” (281) is the source of provision for his adult life. Kaplan notes that the little sweet cake is connected to sexuality, and links it “with a bisexual male character” (1991:41). The obsessive nature of his sexuality finds expression in narcissistic admiration of his own sexual prowess, and the rewards that are forthcoming from both his male and female clientele. He names the material rewards with the pride of possession like that of a woman, as he says,

I have quantities of good clothes, silk underwear, two evening suits, four pairs of patent leather boots with light uppers, all sorts of little things, like gloves and powder boxes and a manicure set, perfumes, very good soap and nothing is paid for (282).

In this story, Mansfield re-examines the relationships between men and women, and by subverting the received order of romance in literature, she questions the narrowly conceived and socially endorsed version of heterosexuality that assumes female protection and support from men. Her writing does not assuage the truth about pimps and members of the underworld, but is a truthful indictment that points to the lack of moral standards, that are reflected in deeds of corruption and of egotism. She handles a multiplicity of sensory detail, but keeps her focus clearly directed at Duquette as the core of action that determines the course of the lives of the other characters in the story. This fact is borne out by thoughts of the pleasure that Duquette derives from viewing people as objects, and reveals a strong voyeuristic trend that delights in human suffering, and an unawareness that his own self-delusion bolsters a weak sense of self. Mansfield positions Duquette in stark contrast to Mouse, the abandoned woman in the story, in order to reveal the extent of her suffering. Her authenticity is threatened from the outset, as she is lured by appealing prospects of love, marriage and security. She too has a weak sense of self, as she fails to understand, on an intuitive level, the full implications of her association with Dick Hammon, and still believes that the loving support of men cannot be illusory. She agrees to travel to Paris with him, assuming that she will be married in that city. Her surprise at his letter of rejection startles her, but does not prepare her for the life that she will be forced to lead in future in order to survive. Her vulnerable position is made more acute as it is placed in relief against that of Duquette. She is the symbol of innocence, and his depravity contrasts with her sexual innocence. Such innocence does not elicit a response of sincere protection from Duquette, but brings to the fore emotions within him that reinforce his rootless double life. This is reflected in an image of another self that occurs in his imagination. This self is chasing up and down and it brings him close to honesty, but not close enough to be truly honest with himself, in order to reach an awareness of the level and extent of his

posturing and role-playing. He slips easily into a life of deception that he combines with a homosexual attachment to Dick Hammon, whom he tries to impress and cajole into believing that the revelation of “both sides of my life” is the result of his taking “immense pains to explain things about my submerged life that really were disgusting and never could possibly see the light of literary day” (285). His disappointment at the departure of his friend to England brings on an emotional response that is expressed as an insult, “I have been insulted — insulted” (287) and he responds like a woman whose lover has departed for ever. He relates his escapades with the African laundress, whose kisses initiated him to a life of prostitution and depravity, and which he attempts to relive with Dick Hammon. The Englishman’s sexual preferences are not stated explicitly, but it is he who initiates the contact with Duquette. Dick sustains this contact by keeping in touch with him, and when his arrival in Paris is imminent, he renews his ties with Duquette. His attraction to Duquette is undoubtedly encouraged by the Frenchman’s flattery, and of Dick’s limited knowledge of his ‘submerged life’ in the underworld of prostitution and depravity.

His recollections of sadistic enjoyment at the humiliation of women destroys their potential for authenticity, and the women’s chance to fulfil their potential because he views them as objects that are valued only in sexual terms. He also regards them as the source of monetary and material gain he accumulates in his position as the contact person between the prostitute and her clients. The African laundress, and the women he serves as gigolo, set the tone for his role as pimp, and demeanor of women. His horrifying cynicism when he describes the pregnant Virgin Mary riding into the “the dirty and sad” little café whose proprietress has “an air of fatigue and hopelessness” (278) reinforces the dubious ethos by which he lives. Duquette’s comments about women are scathing, as is his dislike of them. He refers to an “old hag,” “an old bitch” and uses the analogy of “a rag-picker on the American cinema, shuffling along wrapped in a filthy shawl with her old claws crooked over a stick” (287) in relation to life, thus debasing the object of his analogy.

There is satiric irony in his vicious hatred of women. Despite the rebellion he voices and displays against women and the feminine, at the same time he loses sight of the significance of his own feminine-looking body and feminine-like attachments for Dick Hammon, and of his depth of feeling at the epiphanic moment of recognition. He also forgets that these emotions are all part of a sensitivity that has become warped and distorted by his submersion in the underworld. His self-satisfaction with his appealing physical attributes cannot fail to fan the self-importance underlying all his actions. His reference to Madame Butterfly as she is deserted by Pinkerton is linked to his lament at the loss of his English friend, and his grief and bitterness is comparable to hers. His expression of emotions are just a little too studied and artistic, and his response to Dick’s advances,

and the expertly planned interaction between them, is dependent on his keeping up the fox terrier pose that he initiated at their first meeting.

Dick Harmon's betrayal of Mouse is as odious as Duquette's social and sexual ensnarement of the English writer at a literary party. Ironically, at the point where Duquette thinks of him as suitable and desirable prey, the photograph of his mother falls out of his wallet, and the allegiance to another love is revealed. Dick's physical resemblance to his mother is uncanny, as both look "haggard, wild and proud" (286). Mouse in comparison, looks like a baby, because she is youthful and childlike, and lacks the proud look of Dick's mother. Her outward demeanour makes her resemble a little girl tending the luggage, Duquette notes that she is

beautiful. She was exquisite, but so fragile and fine that each time I looked at her as if for the first time...She had dark hair and blue or black eyes...She wore a long dark cloak...Where her arms came out of it there was grey fur-fur round her neck too, and her close-fitting cap was furry.

"Carrying out the mouse idea," I decided (291).

The outcome of Dick's allegiance to his mother, and his refusal to accept adult responsibility for his actions, is a letter written to Mouse with feelings of regret and dismay, calling her

[m]OUSE, MY LITTLE MOUSE,

It's no good. It's impossible. I can't see it through. Oh, I do love you. I do love you Mouse, but I can't hurt her. People have been hurting her all her life. I simply dare not give her the final blow. You see, though she's stronger than both of us, she's so frail and proud. It would kill her — kill her, Mouse. And, oh God, I can't kill my mother!...(298).

The irony in Dick's pitiful letter is in the hurt inflicted on Mouse, because it is more painful than any inflicted on his mother. Mouse's worst fears are contained in her expectation of his letter, and are then realized after its receipt. The defence of his mother and her needs, to the exclusion of the possibility of his own autonomy and growth to adulthood, points to an unresolved Oedipus complex. This psychological state once again crushes any hope of the development of Mouse's authenticity as she masquerades in furry garments that make her an appealing prey for any fox terrier. She sheds tears, and is not fully aware of the reason for her tears except that Dick has abandoned her, Duquette is about to abandon her (a dubious release), and she herself is open to more exploitation as a result of her conforming to the stereotype of the feminine, and by "her acquiescence to a tradition of feminine honour and feminine passivity expressed in her mouse disguise, her name and her remark about marriage" (Fullbrook, 1986:94). Mouse's innocence is not triumphant in the face of malevolence, and merely reflects the universal distortion of desire and

the twisted sets of values that are embodied in the *français* that Mouse does not speak. She fails to understand a language that reinforces duplicity and egoism.

As Mansfield recounts the story of Mouse and Duquette, her aims are two-fold. She conveys a moral message by focusing on impoverished moral standards in a society peopled by artists and writers of the underworld. She then presents a plea for a revised sense of human sexuality that includes authenticity, but which goes beyond the legally and politically endorsed plan that forces women to be submissive and men to be thrusting, dominant and willing to desert women without compunction. Mouse is drawn into the inherent, but unvoiced homosexual struggle between Dick and Duquette, and this action reinforces the narrow rigidity of sexual relations and the received notions of sexuality.

The final debasement and humiliation of women in the story is contained at the end, in Duquette's acceptance of his next victim's invitation to dinner. He claims to be temporarily engaged and delays seeing her by saying "[n]o, not yet Madame" (299). He speculates on the course of the rest of the evening, and then, in his imagination, rejects her by wondering whether she will be pale all over and concludes, "[b]ut no. She'd have large moles. They go with that kind of skin. And I can't bear them. They remind me somehow, disgustingly, of mushrooms" (299). Duquette appears not to understand that for all his seeming sexual and artistic sophistication, his lack of insight into his own position forces him to remain part of a corruptive influence that makes women the prey of evil that in turn perpetuates the social patterns that appear in the story.

Mansfield's two "kick-offs" in the writing game are woven into the fabric of her writing as she engages herself, in formulating a writing credo, with the discipline that reflects the self-definition as a writer that she strove for. She writes:

[o]ne is joy — real joy — the thing that made me write when we lived at Pauline, and that sort of writing I could only do in just that state of being in some perfectly blissful way *at peace*. Then something delicate and lovely seems to open before my eyes, like a flower without thought of frost or cold breath — knowing that all about is warm and tender and steady. And that I try, ever so humbly to express.

The other kick-off is my old original one, and (had I not known love) it would have been my all. Not hate or destruction (both are beneath contempt as real motives ) but an extremely deep sense of hopelessness — of everything doomed to disaster — almost willfully , stupidly — like an almond tree and pas de nougat pour Noel — There as I took out a cigarette paper I got it exactly — *a cry against corruption* that is absolutely the nail on the

head. Not a protest — a *cry*, and I mean corruption in the widest sense of the word, of course — (*Letters*, II, 1987:192).

For Mansfield, human suffering and the frailty of the human condition, as portrayed in *Bliss* and *Je ne parle pas français* are to remain the main thrust of emphasis in her stories, as she exposes oppression and victimization within social relationships. She shares Joyce's vision of the ethical conception of literature's purpose: Joyce writes in *Dubliners* of the epiphanic moment that brings insight and meaning to the life of the fictional characters.

The next chapter will discuss the *Life of Ma Parker*, *Miss Brill* and *The little Governess*, and will reveal the alienating and debasing effect of physical and emotional pain. Linked to the debilitating effects of such pain is the destruction of authenticity in the female characters in the stories, in their attempts to seek a voice from within to deal with the disempowering force of masculine and societal pressures, in the form of rejection, sexual attack and insensitivity.

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## Chapter 6

### The “femmes seules” stories: *The Little Governess*, *The Life of Ma Parker* and *Miss Brill*

Mansfield’s story, *The Little Governess* was published in 1915. The little governess is addressed only by the title of “Fraulein” or “Mademoiselle.” She is never acknowledged as an authentic being whose existence as a human being is considered worthy, valid and genuine. She is the object of warped and distorted male interest when the porter bullies her into submission, the old man on the train and the waiter at the hotel fail to recognize her authenticity, and isolate her within patriarchal power that maims and victimizes. Her position is one of defenceless vulnerability, and her illusory belief that the world is innately good, and that she is a creature of that goodness, exposes her mercilessly to the vicissitudes of life that exist outside the bounds of perceived certainty and security.

The opening paragraph of the story initiates the bitter irony reflected in every aspect of the governess’s life and this will continue to be expressed in clear and unequivocal terms as the story unfolds. The first sentence of the story points already to the governess’s poor sense of self, unperceived on her part, that underpins the lack of personal power to make her own completely independent and rational decisions, and sets the tone for the rest of the story as her attempts at independent decisions are thwarted every time. “Oh dear, how she wished that it wasn’t night-time. She’d have much rather travelled by day, much much rather” (166) is not merely a wish to have travelled at another time, but a decision made by the lady at the Governess Bureau for her. The effect of this decision is exacerbated by its being night-time, where the lack of daylight shrouds the young woman’s acuity of vision in images of mystery.

The “good advice” of the lady at the Governess Bureau to the governess echoes instructions meted out for centuries to women who not only travel alone and in foreign countries, but also those who wish to be navigators of their own actions, and reinforces the prison-like existence that characterizes their movements from one point to another. The instructions given to all young governesses appear easy to follow and equally easy to execute, and are given glibly and as a matter of course. The reassurances from the Governess Bureau are matter-of-fact:

“[a] porter can take you there” .... “I always tell my girls that it’s better to mistrust people at first rather than trust them, and it’s safer to suspect people of evil intentions rather than good ones....It sounds rather hard, but we’ve got to be women of the world, haven’t we?”(166)

Such easily conveyed information by those managing the lives of governesses, fails to take into account the presence of the porter who bullies the governess and undermines her self-esteem, and the old man whose dapper appearance gives no hint of his wicked intentions towards the governess, or the cruel enjoyment by the waiter of her discomfort at the hotel.

The pleasant surroundings of the Ladies' Cabin reflect the safety of an insulated existence where the warmth and the care of the stewardess is reflected by the ordered procedures of the actions of the other female passengers. The warmth and care they exude is reinforced by the repetitive "thud" of the screw of the steamer as it lulls the little governess into thinking that "I like travelling very much" (166). All the outward signs of harmony are in place in the cabin: the "long piece of knitting," the "tight bunch of flowers" in the water bottle," "the green shade over the lamp" and the warm "stove" (166), and are associated with the kind stewardess. The female passengers smile indulgently at her, and reflect the womb-like security from which the little governess has not yet emerged, but from which she will shortly emerge with a rude awakening. She yields to the "warm rocking" (166), just as, on a later occasion, on the train with the old man, the movement of the carriage also lulls her into a position of self-reflective, childlike trust, but with decidedly different consequences.

The warmth and the pleasant tone of the Ladies' Cabin is exchanged for the wind that feels "cold and strange" (167) when the little governess disembarks from the boat. The cold wind is a symbol of the pending danger that awaits the governess as she makes her way along a seemingly safe and predictable path. For Mansfield the writer, the use of such symbolist devices points to the successful incorporation of such technical devices into realist fiction. The influence on Mansfield of the ideas of Arthur Symons, who believed that the symbolist ideal of art is "a kind of religion with all the duties and responsibilities of the sacred ritual" (Symons, 1908:5) became a source of conflict for the young writer as she wished to represent the social world truthfully in order to criticize its behaviour and values. Mansfield conveys her fictional ideals by means of a welding of symbolism to realism, and allows the symbols, in this story, to function as indicators that reinforce the pending isolation of the governess and contribute to the development of the narrative, as the story touches the core issue of the psychological entrapment of the little governess. The cold wind is such an indicator and represents the antithesis of the warmth of the Ladies' Cabin, presaging the verbal and attempted physical attacks later in the story. As the action of the story takes place in the mind of the little governess, her perception of the surroundings at the harbour as being inimical to her, is only because she is outside of the protection of the Ladies' Cabin. Her identification of images of humanity as "strange muffled figures [that] lounged, waiting" (167) reinforces her vulnerable and

defenceless position and prefigures her entrapment later in the story. She moves along with the crowd of people, and is aware of emotions that register fear and uncertainty as she doesn't really know where to go or what to do. Yet she perseveres, and makes her way through the ticket office and steadies herself as she "balances" (167) herself on her heels, unaware that at that moment a porter is about to intrude in her life, and force her to follow him. He grabs her dress basket, and in her overwhelmed confusion she unconsciously identifies him as someone who may steal, "a robber" (167). By this observation she instinctively puts into practice the words of the lady at the Governess Bureau, to avoid trusting doubtful looking figures. Her perception of the real "robber" couched in the guise of a friendly old man evades her completely.

She can't afford to travel first class, and requests a "[l]adies compartment" (167). The porter's insinuation that she belongs in the second class reinforces her dependency and poverty. Her poverty is the reason for her having to travel second class, and this is reflected in the smallness of her purse as she opens it to find something small to give him. Mansfield reinforces her smallness of stature as the literal and the symbolic meaning of "little" refers to the perception that the world has of her, and also of its treatment of her. After conveying her luggage, the porter repeats over and over the amount that he charges for carting luggage. Her attempts to counter his unjust action in grabbing her suitcase, are expressed by her clinging to a semblance of personal authority in a mental soliloquy, that assuages her psychological pain as her thoughts reflect an image of assertion and power, "he imagine[s] that she was going to give him a franc for playing a trick like that just because she was a girl and travelling alone at night?" (167). She reinforces her decision by stating explicitly to him, "[t]hat's all you're going to get" (167). Her poorly developed authentic self hardly sounds convincing in its plain speaking, as it reassures her that, in spite of her being quite white with big round eyes, that "[i]t's all over now" (168), and that the indescribable cruelty of the porter is thankfully a thing of the past. There is irony in her misguided self-delusion as the confidence that she instills into the mirror face, is about to be shattered.

There is a welcome emotional reprieve as the little governess views the appearance of daytime images, such as the woman pushing the barrow and the little boy with the huge tea wagon in the middle of the night, but sees them in the guise of fantastic nocturnal creatures. These daytime images become nocturnal creatures as the play of light and shade on them is combined with the governess's overextended, sensitive imagination. Her visual acuity compels her to recognize them as real, but at the same time she needs to convince herself that they are outside of her immediate range of fear and terror. She continues her self-delusory action by voicing her independence of purpose, "I can look after myself — of course I can. The great thing is not to — (168)," until it is

shattered by the intrusion of four young men in bowler hats as they peer into the carriage that has the *Dames Seules* notice gummed to the window. It is an intrusion that makes her, as “the little girl” (168) shrink into the corner of her compartment, but her shrinking away cannot shut out their voices because their cruel jests insinuate themselves into the safety of the carriage. The tone of their insistent, sarcastic voices is an extension of the voice of the porter who cries “[e]ntre voiture. En voiture” (168). The shocking awareness that the voice belongs to the insolent porter, who, with arms full of luggage, deliberately tears off the label that reserves the carriage for women passengers only. This is a gesture that blatantly disempowers the young woman. She replies in a weak, emotionally impoverished voice, and claims that it is a “ladies’ compartment.” This comment is brushed aside, and her voice is silent, and two big tears blur the image of a grandfatherly old man with “a white moustache and big gold-rimmed spectacles with little blue eyes behind them and pink wrinkled cheeks. A nice face — ” (169). The porter’s openly cruel treatment of the governess prefigures the subtle destruction of her fragile barriers of vigilance by the old man as he uses kindnesses, and his “nice face” to reinforce her initial belief and face-value judgment that the people in this world are good, and that the world itself is good.

Her sense of self is weak, and she cannot assert herself when she has to choose whether to be alone in the carriage, or to let the old man remain as a fellow passenger. The notion that her philanthropic decision is correct is reinforced by her perception that the old man is a buffer against the young men in the compartment next door. She contemplates the situation without him in the compartment, and in another ironic twist of fate, decides that “ I never could have dared to go to sleep if I had been alone” and “that I couldn’t have put my feet up or even taken off my hat” (169). In her perception of the old man as a source of safety, she fails to perceive that she is an autonomous being, and she consequently does not set the necessary boundaries that differentiate her self from his self. The little governess studies the old man and identifies the details of his dress as pleasing, especially the pearl pin in his black tie and the white silk handkerchief in the pocket of his double-breasted jacket, and thinks that he looks spick and span, when “most old men were so horrid” (169). She sees that this old man has none of the usual signs that she associates with old men, such as a “disgusting cough” and “a beard” (169). In the midst of her contemplative reverie on the acceptability of this old man, “down went the German paper” (169), and at the same moment the governess lets down her guard as he addresses her in German, offering the illustrated papers to page through. She succumbs to his kind attention, and her enjoyment of “looking at pictures” (170) reinforces her almost unnatural prolongation of emotional childhood in an adult woman. Her childlike, infantile self overrides the potential for the development of an authentic self. Flattered by his attention she prepares, unconsciously, to break down her already fragile reserve by removing the visible and tangible

symbols vested in garments of dress. Ironically, these are the very symbols that protect the person of a woman from the prying eyes of the world. She very methodically

unpinned the brown straw and put it neatly on the rack beside the dress basket, stripped off her brown kid gloves, paired them in a tight role and put them in the crown of her hat for safety (170).

She is unaware that the “kind” old grandfatherly man is a debauchee and a rake, and that in removing the outward layer of protective clothing, the cheeks and lips of the old man in front of her become flushed, not in sympathy for her lonely unprotected state, but for his own sensuous and veiled sexual pleasure at watching the bare hand, and the copper hair blazing under the light.

As the governess converses with the old man, a suggestion that she see Munich, before she takes up her employment as governess, is broached. Her former “innocent” coquetry that masqueraded as childlike dependence changes to an immediate and adamant refusal that “I am afraid I could not do that” and “also, if one is alone....” (170), and is an ironic reversal of actual events. Her reply presages the unenviable state of loneliness, and being alone that she will experience as an exploited young woman whose prospects of resuming her appointed course in society in the future will be doubtful.

The little governess falls asleep in the carriage with rain pouring down outside, and is awakened by yet another intrusion from the young men in the carriage next door. Her psychological bewilderment is channelled first to an instinctively reassuring hand on her hair to ensure that the intrusion wasn't a dream, and then to an apologetic excuse that she was about to wake up anyway. This is the antithesis of her true state of mind and one which her authentic self cannot substantiate without resorting to lies and illusion. Mansfield introduces the concept of time in the governess's life “as she took out her silver watch to look at the time” (171), and links this reference to the watch as a symbolic indicator that will presage the startling events later in the story, when her watch stops and she faces abandonment. She looks out of the window and engages her emotions in the scenery, revels in the cold weather and the foreign-looking pink clouds, but above all revels in self-delusory happiness.

This self-delusion is transferred to the mirror image that is no longer frightened by strange events, but is confident that what is reflected back is an image “of a girl who is old enough to travel by herself and has nobody else to assure her that she is ‘quite all right behind’” (172). The confidence reflected by the mirror image is in stark contrast to the unheeded presence of weakness reflected in the actual bodily need of thirst that threatens to overcome her, as her psychological defences against

the pending attack from the old man become more insubstantial. Her smile is disarming as she “dimpled at him as though he were an old accepted friend” (172). He presents her with the gift of strawberries and she hesitates with exaggerated caution before she accepts the gift. His apparently kind act of generosity becomes the death-knell for the possibility of growth of a sense of self that is able to discern the true nature of a sexually charged situation. She is swept along by the current of sensual pleasure as she eats the strawberries and is, in turn absorbed in the piercing gaze of the old man. The gaze of the old man is paralleled by the appearance of the sun in a sky in which the pink clouds are eaten by the blue. Mansfield represents the image of eating and sexuality as interchangeable, and uses the masculine sun as an image that devours the delicate, flimsy clouds overhead. The image that she draws of sexuality as dangerous is emphasized when the actions of the oppressor are incorporated into the sense of self of the oppressed, and treated as sources of enjoyment and pleasure. The little governess has vague misgivings about her agreement to accompany the old man on an excursion to Munich, “but he was so old and he had been so kind — not to mention the strawberries” (173), and she reinforces her doubtful indecision with the fact that it is her “last day in a way, her last day to really enjoy herself in” (173).

The little governess gives herself up to the pleasure of the presence of the old man after accepting his offer of strawberries, and she experiences an unnatural feeling of familiarity and unity with him. Her unsophisticated actions reflect a careless abandonment to the immediate pleasure of being in the care of the old man, as “her grateful baby heart glowed with love for the fairy grandfather” (174). The feeling of security that being cared for brings is intensified by the ease with which the old man manages the daunting practical affairs of luggage, “the bewildering crowd” (173) and the manager at the hotel where she is to stay for the day. The speed of efficiency is reassuring to the young woman, and as a token of thanks she places her small hand into the “big brown suede ones” (173) but unbeknown to her, she is pledging her allegiance to the norms and the values of the old man’s world. The eyes of the outside world, represented by the waiter at the hotel, pry and bore into the heart of her personal existence, as he shows her the room that has been reserved for her. It is a dark room that has a dusty blind at the window. Mansfield presents the image of “a cold room” (173) as the governess comments about the accommodation. This image functions as a symbol of the pending fate of the governess, and intensifies the irony of her “grown-up” sounding comments about the room, “[i]s this the room Frau Arnholdt ordered ?” (173). She is unaware that the waiter has merely observed the outward show of congeniality between herself and the old man, and has come to conclusions that are not favourable to the young woman in her position of dependence. She, in turn, cannot comprehend the reason for his lingering at her door, and for the acrid comment as he leaves, “[a]nd the gentleman,” he said, “shall I show the gentleman upstairs when he comes?”

(173). In her position as the naïve female figure, she interprets the events that happen to her only as part of a fairy tale that transforms a poverty stricken girl's life, and provides her with the feeling that she "wanted to run, she wanted to hang on his arm, she wanted to cry every minute, "Oh, I'm so frightfully happy" (174). She does not, and cannot know that her carefree allegiance to childhood is slowly being absorbed by a whirl of worldly pleasures such as drinking wine that is claimed not to be intoxicating, and eating "white sausages and two rolls of fresh bread" (174). She expresses her pleasure in gesture and words by cupping "her burning cheeks in her hands and watching her old friend instead" (174). The climax of her self-delusion is centred in a feeble attempt to discover the time of day, as she discovers that her watch has stopped, because she forgot to wind it. This fact reflects an ironic reversal of fate, as time is a masculine element in the portrayal of the polarization of the sexes, and a representative of the force at work that unbeknown to her, undermines her self-esteem. Time as a masculine element represents the rational aspects of life that are usually associated with precision and the measurement of the passing of time which govern both masculine and feminine action. In this story it represents a distorted manipulation of the regularity of the function of time because it assumes a role as an undermining agent.

The potential for an authentic self recedes into the background, and she becomes a mute instrument in the hands of agencies beyond her control. She is unaware, too, that as she agrees to more and more of the old man's suggestions for continued pleasures of sight and sound, she is entrapping herself deeper and deeper in the net that will close on her, as he makes a suggestion that will serve as payment for all his efforts at being a grandfather. He wants "one little kiss" (175), and questions the loss of it as negligible. For the little child/woman the "happiest day of my life" that she has "never even imagined" (174) becomes the most terrifying, hopeless day of her life. The terror commences when the old man insists on showing her his "little "home""(175), and in her emotionally impoverished and sexually unaware state, she laughingly agrees because she has never seen "a bachelor's flat in her life"(175). Mansfield continues to depict the precipitation of the governess into an abyss of despair as the old man offers her wine, and then goes on to drink her health, demanding the kiss as payment. She attempts to escape his attentions, but at the height of her refusal he presses "against her his hard old body and his twitching knee" (175), and kisses her forcibly. She feels violated and suddenly feels that the old fairy grandfather is no longer "a near relation" who, as a family member, may kiss her on the mouth.

She runs out into the street, and in a frenzy of anguish she sobs her way onto a tram and to the Hauptbahnhof. Mansfield shifts the narrative from the mind of the little governess to the comments of the onlookers on the tram. The attempted violation of the body is irrevocably associated with the

violation of bodily parts such as the teeth, and as representatives of areas of pain infliction, the one can be replaced by the other. The psychological pain experienced by the governess is comparable to the physical pain, but is not as easily identified for what it is. For the onlookers, the governess is merely a child who “hasn’t one left in her mouth” (176), not a young woman who has come close to sexual violation.

The waiter at the hotel, not knowing the true circumstances, but only surmising the details of the governess’s late arrival, takes delight in her predicament as she enquires after Fra Arnholdt, her new employer, and is told that the lady has left. The face-value judgment by the waiter and the manager of the hotel reflects the appalling result when the true circumstances of the female figures (in this case the governess) are not known. The retribution by the waiter, the steward and the old man in the form of hierarchical power over those who have not yet learnt to recognize the subtleties of the psychological warfare between the sexes in society is inexorable, and perpetuates the distortion of human and aesthetic values when there is an imbalance of power. As the waiter swings the new arrival’s box onto his shoulders, the symbolic action of doing so perpetuates the pattern of evil and injustice set in motion by his mincing words to the governess, and which will probably be uttered to yet another new female arrival in similar circumstances in the future.

The words of the woman in the fragment in *The Lost Battle* (1915) question the attitude of waiters towards female passengers, and she asks:

[o]r could there be any truth in the feeling that waiters — waiters especially — and hotel servants adopted an impertinent, arrogant and slightly amused attitude towards a woman who travelled alone? Was it just her wretched female self-consciousness? No, she really did not think it was. Even when she was feeling her happiest, at her freest, she would become aware quite suddenly, of the tone of the waiter or hotel servant, and it was extraordinary how this wrecked her sense of security. It seemed to her that something malicious was being plotted against her, as though everybody and everything — yes, even to the inanimate objects like chairs and tables — was secretly ‘in the know’ — waiting for the ominous, infallible thing to happen to her which always did happen, and which was bound to happen to every woman on earth who travelled alone (*Journal*, 1954:33-34).

The inexorable thrust of inhumanity meted out to the governess continues unabated in the story of the *Life of Ma Parker* (1920). Ma Parker is an aged, isolated woman as opposed to the youthful ingénue governess in the previous story. Mansfield’s story tells of the crippling isolation of the individual. It reflects too the injustice of society, and is a satirical comment on the manner in which

an ideological fabric, that functions by its own laws within a society, destroys and maims the potential for the development of an authentic self of the female character, Ma Parker. The events in the story are told from a feminist perspective, and reveal how Ma Parker is kept firmly in her appointed place by the laws that govern female actions. Mansfield positions the young gentleman in opposition to and as a contrast to the aged Ma Parker, and reflects the polarity of gender positions within society. In drawing attention to gender positions, Mansfield cannot but emphasize that within the considered gender reality, the differing social positions of the two characters contribute to the hierarchical disparity between them. For Ma Parker, the woman within the hierarchical dyad of the sexes, the tide of events in her youth lead her to make her own insightful and objective comment that she has “had a hard life” (404). She deals with the illness and death of her husband, the difficulties of her children and also the recent death of her grandson, Lennie, with mute equanimity and unparalleled trust in the powers that stoicism, born of continued suppression of her authentic self, brings to the difficult situations of her life.

The older woman is employed by a literary gentleman whose ease of existence is in complete contrast to the hardships of his employee, and whose interest in her stretches no further than polite, but superficial comments about her grandson and his state of health. The nature of his enquiries reflects his detachment from the world as he is immersed only in the contents of the tomes he studies, and fails to comprehend the nature of the world beyond. The awareness that he should make an appropriate reply after the news of the grandson’s death is in keeping with the demands of social propriety, and in making enquiries he meets the prescribed requirements. Her reply, “[w]e buried ‘im yesterday,’ she said quietly,” summarizes her quiet acceptance of the tragedies that life has brought to her, but it does not assuage the painful memories that the mere thought of her little grandson brings. Mansfield employs a narrative technique in which the intensity of the workings of the mind of Ma Parker is contrasted with her humdrum existence as cleaner of homes. Her actions as she unhooks her “worn jacket” and “tied her apron and sat down to take off her boots” (403) when she prepares to commence her duties, reflect a sense of self that has been crushed and silenced. As she sighs and rubs her knees, wrapped in the isolation of her own thoughts, the memory of little Lennie, rubbing her cheek and asking her to give him a penny, threatens to crush her fragile hold on reality. In her interaction with him, she bargains with him for recompense if she gives him the desired penny. The impact of his reply, as she hears his shy little laugh and she feels the quiver of his eyelid against her cheek, hurtles her back to the reality of the sink and the sound of rushing water that deadens her pain and blurs the immediate knowledge of the loss of her grandson. Ma Parker is depicted in a position where the true needs of her inner self are secondary to her immediate concerns of caring for the literary gentleman. Circumstances force her to forfeit the

possibility of authentic growth because she does not have the opportunity to identify or examine her own needs and provide a solution for her difficult position.

She endures the disorder and disarray of the literary gentleman's kitchen as dispassionately as she endures the share of her "hard life" (404). The kitchen floor looks like a "gigantic dustbin" that is mirrored by an image in Nature of clouds that "looked very worn, old clouds, frayed at the edges, with holes in them, or dark stains like tea" (404). Mansfield links the images of litter on the floor and the frayed edges of the clouds, and depicts them as a reflection of the fragmentation of Ma Parker's sense of self. There is irony in this depiction because the litter and the sardine tails can be cleared away and the kitchen cleaned, but the constriction of her own emotional torture threatens to overwhelm and destroy her by its very silence.

In a moment of nostalgic recollection she recalls her birthplace, and the literary associations that "Stratford-on-Avon" (404) has for most people. For her, the memory of the town is a distant recollection of a former way of life in which the warmth and carefree life of her unsophisticated girlhood home contains an image of "stars through the chimley," and a "side of bacon 'anging from the ceiling" (404). The visual image of stars and bacon from the ceiling is reinforced by an olfactory perception of a sweet-smelling bush (possibly lavender) that the passing of time has erased almost completely. The memory of being enclosed within the security of a home is in stark contrast to her experience of her first place of employment where time is governed by her co-employer, the cook. The cruelty of the cook suppresses all recollection of her former home, as even letters from home were snatched away before they were read, "because they made her dreamy...." (405) and consequently unproductive. The effect of social suppression by the system which the cook represents, prepares the way for Ma Parker's increasingly diminished sense of self that is completely mute at the end of the story. Her lack of knowledge of insects like beetles that infest homes and properties, reinforces the contrast between the comfort and cleanliness of her former childhood home, and the stark reality of a place of employment in the city. The difference presages the increasing influence of societal and personal elements that will be like beetles infesting her life, threatening to destroy the essence of her psychological existence.

She conveys to the literary gentleman, in a rare moment of personal communication, the information about her marriage to a baker. This elicits from him a socially acceptable reply as he considers the merits of "[s]uch a clean trade" (405). The reality of her existence as the mother of thirteen children evades him completely, as does the comprehension of the reality of the co-existence of life and death when she describes her life as either at "the 'ospital" or at the

“infirmary” (405). The literary gentleman pauses from the security of the philosophical world of his books, only long enough to comment on and shudder at the details of her life.

In recalling and retelling the details of her life, she slips unseen into the memory of the events leading up to her husband’s illness and death. The horrific insensitivity of the doctor’s description of her husband’s condition is countered by the fact that her remaining six children were still very little and needed her constant care, and that she had only herself to rely on for support. The doctor describes the possibility of her husband having “white powder” on his lungs, and in a moment fraught by a distortion between fantasy or reality, she sees a “great fan of white dust come out of her poor husband’s lips....” (405). His struggle ends and hers continues, as she faces bringing up the six little children alone, but more significantly she will do battle to “keep herself to herself ” (405).

Her circumstances are exacerbated by the arrival of a member of her husband’s family who comes to help her raise her children, but who injures herself two months later. The memory of her children focuses on loss rather than on gain, as each one of them goes his or her own way in the world. Her daughter Maudie went wrong and so did her daughter Alice. Her son Jim left home and went to India, and her daughter Ethel married a worthless waiter who died of ulcers the year Lennie was born. Lennie is the only true object that gives unconditional love to Ma Parker, and for whom his Gran means the world, and he is “Gran’s boy from the first....” (406). He is not strong in health, and even his angelic looks fail to safeguard him against the ravages of illness. His mother and his grandmother try every cure the letters in the newspapers claim will give him an appetite. Mansfield depicts the memory of “Gran’s boy” (406) in endearing terms that are understated in their intensity of feeling as the “little voice, so warm, so close, it half stifled her — it seemed to be in her breast under her heart — laughed out, and said, ‘I’m Gran’s boy’ ” (406). Ma Parker revels in the memory of the voice of her grandson, but at that very moment, juxtaposed next to the child’s voice, is the intrusive voice and presence of the literary gentleman. He insinuates himself into her unexpressed grief by checking on the details of teaspoonfuls of cocoa left in the tin, and prides himself on his domestic vigilance. Ma Parker’s crushed and weak sense of self replies with practised submission, and she continues with the tasks in hand. She attempts to absorb the emotional intensity of her memories in the purposeful attention to the detail of making the literary gentleman’s bed. The continued recollection of memories threatens to rob her of even the modicum of authenticity that she has left, as the image of the suffering of the little boy becomes as real as the actual event. The anger and resentment at his suffering does not assuage the fact that he is no longer subjected to any physical suffering. The impact of his suffering rests in his inability to understand the true nature of his own illness and to understand the implications of it for his future. His coughing produces no

relief for his congested chest, and his response is to remain silent, not to speak or simply to pretend he didn't hear. His actions arouse feelings of helplessness in his grandmother, and bring her to the point where she questions the validity of an existence without him. She considers the effect of the loss of her grandson, and the recollection of her ineffectual mode of survival as she admits that "[s]he'd borne it up till now, she'd kept herself to herself, and never once had she been seen to cry. Never by a living soul" (407). She reaches breaking point and blames herself for his suffering, but is unprepared for her own mobility of purpose, "[s]he did not know what she was doing" (407) as she "suddenly let fall her brush" and "walked out of the flat like a person in a dream" (407). She lacks a strong sense of self but succeeds in drawing courage from a hidden source of energy. She wills herself to walk away from the shackles of an existence that maims and cripples her, but in her secret heart she knows that it requires more than a mere "walking away" to escape from it.

The air outside is cold and the wind is like ice. Humanity is oblivious to her suffering, because "men walked like scissors; the women trod like cats" (407) and as they carry out the motions of their individual lives, she realizes that even a breakdown of emotions will be insufficient to still the pain of psychological hurt. Her desire to cry is stemmed by the thought of Lennie leaping into her arms, whereas the knowledge of the events in her life that are the cause for tears can be named in sequence, and in direct relation to the pain that each caused. Insight into her personal situation drives her to seek a safe place to release the tension of the years, but she knows that there is nowhere to go. In her pressing need, she is overcome by a deep realization that those who share her present life like Ethel, her daughter, and the literary gentleman for whom she works, will not be able to understand her crisis. Neither will her environment be able to provide a place to weep for any length of time. Mansfield intensifies Ma Parker's dire personal position by re-emphasizing and repeating her difficulties in virtually the same form, but in different words during the course of the last six paragraphs. The final paragraph seals the death of the potential for the growth of an authentic self, as the sentences become shorter and staccato-like in nature. "There was nowhere" (408).

Ma Parker has "nowhere" (408) to go on earth to relieve her loneliness and despair. The wind allows her apron to balloon out in a manner that is symbolic of her wish to fly away from the world as she knows it. She makes her way "in the icy wind" (408) to a point where death and oblivion are the only relief. She seeks only the lightness of a "balloon" to waft her away from her pain for ever.

For Ma Parker, the prospect of actual death and the oblivion that follows her release from life will be a relief from a lifetime of psychological suppression that is the result of accumulated emotional

trauma. But for the female character in *Miss Brill*, (1920) the immediate effects of emotional deprivation and loneliness are absorbed in the fantasy world of her own making as she spends each Sunday afternoon on a park bench in the Jardins Publiques. The park bench becomes the vantage point from which she views the outside world as it passes in front of her, but does not communicate with her. Mansfield confines Miss Brill to the emotional dependence of the routine of the park on Sunday afternoons, and to the observations she makes of the regular visitors as they share her bench or become the animated figures on her mental canvas.

The opening paragraph of *Miss Brill* (1920) is telling in the importance it affords to the fur that Miss Brill wears to the park, “ — Miss Brill was glad that she had decided on her fur ” (373). There is irony in her display of happiness as the faint chill in the air, for which she believes she will need the fur, is perceptible only “when you opened your mouth” (373), and Miss Brill only opens her mouth to address the fur or engage in dialogue with her inner self in moments of fantasy, but never to communicate meaningfully with her fellow human beings. Yet her choice of that garment is not solely motivated by the actual chill in the air, but because it is also a love-object in a neurotic relationship. She addresses the fur, and fantasizes about the life of the “little rogue” (374) as she endows the beloved inanimate object with vitality and warmth. She engages in a flirtatious interlude with it, and says “... [l]ittle rogue! Yes, she really felt like that about it. Little rogue biting its tail just by her left ear” (374). Miss Brill addresses the fur from a position of psychological dependence that relies on brief moments of communication, breaking through the insular rigidity of her life as a single woman on a park bench. Her inner dialogue with herself is conducted with the depth of feeling and sincerity of purpose that is a substitute for communication with real people. The sensual qualities that she associates with the fur, she transfers to her own person as she obliquely believes that she is not beyond sexual and sensual appeal. The depiction of the contrast between the “brilliantly fine” (373) day and the chill in the air by Mansfield, is deliberate as the coldness of the chill presages the final chill of psychological death awaiting Miss Brill at the end of the story.

For Mansfield, the importance of *Miss Brill* cannot be underestimated, as it is a landmark in the development of her “craft” as a writer. She chose the subject matter with care and noted with perceptive insight that

[i]t’s a queer thing how craft comes into writing. I mean down to details. *Par exemple*. In *Miss Brill* I choose not only the length of every sentence, but even the sound of every sentence. I choose the rise and fall of every paragraph to fit her, and to fit her on the day at that very moment. After I’d written it I read it aloud — numbers of times — just as one would play over a musical composition — trying to get it nearer and nearer to the expression

of Miss Brill — until it fitted her....If a thing has really come off it seems to me there mustn't be one single word out of place, or one word that could be taken out (*Letters*, IV, 1996:360-361).

There is irony in the depiction of the self of the character who herself becomes subject to the norms of perfection, as it reflects her perception of the world that holds only perfect reflections of her fellow human beings. *Miss Brill* is a landmark not only in terms of the development of the “craft” of writing, but is also a voice for the expression of a direct ethical protest against injustice against humanity and more specifically against women. In this story (as in the two preceding stories discussed in this chapter), Mansfield combines the Modernist aversion to the alienation and decay of the post-war world in general, and reflects her own long-standing feminist emphasis that affords awareness of women's victimization and oppression in a particular cultural setting. For Miss Brill, the irony of the cultural setting is an enclosed place of safe familiarity that affords her the necessary protection from direct contact with the world. Her contact with the world at one remove from reality provides her with a vicarious pleasure as the visitors to the park are not aware of her perception of them, neither do they impose their wills and ideas on her. It is a perfect fantasy world with Miss Brill as the director of the proceedings.

Miss Brill is a female character for whom the past is inextricably interwoven with the present as she recalls the number of people who are “out this afternoon” (374), and notices that there are more than the previous Sunday. The reason for the increase in numbers is the commencement of the Season that brings with it the perception that the band is playing “louder and gayer” (374). She notices that the conductor appears to be wearing a new coat, and to be exerting additional energy in the execution of his duties. The tune the band plays reinforces her subjective interpretation of the meaning of happiness as she particularly enjoys the “a little ‘flutey’ bit — very pretty! — a little chain of bright drops” (374). Her interpretation of the music salves her immediate enjoyment of life, but fails to take into account the distortion of her authentic self. She ignores, and is unaware of the true nature of her personal needs, reflected in unvoiced communication with other human beings.

Miss Brill notices that the “fine old man in a velvet coat” and “a big old woman” (374) who on that Sunday share her ‘special’ seat do not speak, which means that she cannot lend her ear to the conversation. She has developed eavesdropping to a fine art, and exonerates herself from the blame of prying into other people's lives by congratulating herself on her insight into the words of other people by becoming “really quite expert, at listening as though she didn't listen, sitting in other people's lives for just a minute while they talked around her” (374). She glances at the “old couple”

(374) and compares the previous Sunday's visitors to them, noting that the visitors were an Englishman and his wife "in button boots" (374) whose tedious and one-sided conversation about "how she (the wife) ought to wear spectacles" (374) wears thin after she brings all her husband's suggestions to naught by rejecting every one of them. In a single sentence, after the futile discussion by the English couple, Mansfield allows Miss Brill a moment of inner emotional response that comes close to being a moment of authentic expression in her wish "to shake the woman" (374). The moment evaporates before it is expressed because Miss Brill's sense of self is weak and insubstantial, and her thoughts and emotions remain mute inner utterances, never to be heard except in the closeted enclosure of her own bedroom at the end of the story. The consolation that the passing parade offers assuages the disappointment of the company of the silent old couple and on an unconscious level, absorbs her own mute voice. The constant activity of the park in which children run around dressed in their finery, and mothers rescue toddlers contrasts sharply with the other people who sit on the park benches "Sunday after Sunday" (375). These people, Miss Brill observes are all "odd, silent, nearly all old, and from the way they stared they looked as though they'd just come from dark little rooms or even — cupboards" (375). Mansfield presents an image of irony that presages the final outcome of *Miss Brill*. The character is unaware that she herself looks odd, is silent and appears as if she and her beloved fur have been dusted off and extracted from the depths of a forgotten cupboard. The scathing comment from the young couple about herself and her fur is evidence enough of the visual image she presents to the outside world.

The panorama of life that passes her as she sits on the park bench, not only reinforces the variety of life within the confines of the park, but also points to the flood of sensory details that Mansfield juxtaposes with the physical (and human) objects in the park. Mansfield concentrates on sight, sound and internal feelings and positions herself as a writer within the Modernist "mastery" of technique that deals with the successful integration of much sensory detail in one piece of fairly short writing. Miss Brill does not regard the flood of detail into her consciousness as an intrusion, but absorbs it into her being. The details of the visitors become so familiar that she can hardly separate them from her own narrow life. The myriad variety of people include young girls in red and soldiers in blue, peasant women with donkeys, a nun and a beautiful woman who throws away her violets when they are picked up for her. Miss Brill views the latter action with ambivalence of thought and is unsure whether to admire the action or not. Her poorly developed sense of self is not able to steer her to a definite reply because she cannot muster the necessary resources to do so. A figure of a woman past her prime appears on Miss Brill's horizon wearing an ermine toque and dabbing her lips with a tiny yellowish paw" (375) that masquerades as a hand. The lady in question is pleased to see the gentleman who approaches her but, in her exuberant, excessive display of

emotion is the recipient of a rebuff from him. In a brusque gesture of superiority of person, he degrades her by blowing smoke in her face and “flicked the match away and walked on” (375). She pretends not to notice his rudeness by smiling “more brightly than ever” (375) and hiding her hurt beneath gestures of mute rebellion. The band on the bandstand plays in sympathy with the feelings of the injured woman as the drum beat echoes the theme “[t]he Brute! The Brute!” (375). In an instantaneous reversal of emotions that emphasizes her practised skill at pretence, the ermine toque waves at someone else who seems nicer than the previous gentleman. This character reflects the actions of Miss Brill herself as the latter’s entire life is an example of what Fullbrook describes “a consciousness distancing itself from its own suffering isolation with a tremendous degree of pain and yet with a dignity that is in itself a kind of virtue” (1986:105).

In the midst of the life of the park, Miss Brill’s keen skills of observation don’t fail to notice that the old couple get up and march away, and that a funny old man hobbles in time to the music and is “nearly knocked over by four girls walking abreast” (376). Her awareness of the activities of the park is acute and filled with the dubious joys that come from being a spectator who believes that watching the passing show is “like a play” (376). As she is swept up by the intensity of greater and greater enjoyment of the scene that looks like a play, she believes that all the people at the park are on the stage and that everyone is acting a part. The irony of her belief is that she includes herself as one of the performers, and is certain that “somebody would have noticed if she hadn’t been there; she was part of the performance after all” (376). Her entire world becomes the stage on which she lives her life. She shyly admits this fact to her English pupils whom she teaches, and revels in the thought that her narrow existence is full and abundant as she masquerades as Miss Brill, the actress, in the park. Every other personal activity of her life is included in her self-delusory perceptions as she tells the old man to whom she reads that she is an “actress” (376). This rouses him from his customary state of slumber and she admits that “I have been an actress for a long time”(376). Mansfield stresses the irony of her words as the stage on which she lives and has her being is about to collapse. The urgent signs of unease that are scattered throughout the text reach a climax, as Mansfield first presents a symbolic image of a “faint chill” in the air, and then absorbs it into the general feeling of joyous participation that the woman who is the spectator, unselfconsciously feels in her heart. Her eyes fill with tears at the subjective contemplation of the scene of young voices and men’s voices that soon join them, and she enters a reverie that lulls her into an expression of supposed comprehension of the incomprehensible as she thinks to herself, “[y]es, we understand, we understand, she thought — even what they understood she didn’t know” (376).

The appearance of the beautifully dressed boy and girl complete the picture as the hero and the heroine of the perfect fantasy world that Miss Brill is immersed in. She is unprepared for the cataclysmic effect of their words during the brief conversation that the two young people have about the world that she has created and of the effect on herself in particular. Their words sting with relentless vigour as they comment on her aged face, but their words cut more deeply as the girl compares her fur to a fish and says that it looks “exactly like a dried whiting” (377). Miss Brill forgoes her usual Sunday treat of honey cake as the memory of their insensitive comments sting her into seclusion and withdrawal. The Sunday treat of the slice of honey cake is enhanced by an almond in the centre and is the impetus to strike the match for “the kettle in quite a dashing way” (377). Her slim round of pleasures is centred mainly on her vicarious participation in the ritual of the park, but the enjoyment of the honey cake afterwards is the assuagement of a psychological and possibly sexual need by consuming victuals that are sweet to the taste. The almond in the inside of the cake provides the incentive to keep repeating the same ritual of observing the crowds and then purchasing the cake every Sunday.

The final paragraph seals Miss Brill’s uncertain fortune as she hurries home, passes the baker’s and foregoes the pleasure of the honey cake, and retreats to her room that is like a box-like cupboard. The image of her room as dark and confined echoes her own words earlier in the story when she thought that the pinched appearance of the people in the park and made them look as if they had been in cupboards for a long time. She sits still for a long time and finally unclasps the necklet around her neck and without looking, “laid it aside” (377). As she lays the necklet aside and closes the box, real life floods into her being, and with it ends the fantasy of a life lived through the actions and words of others. As she places the fur into the box, she does not look at it, but has never ceased to look at the activities in the park. There is irony in her action as she reverses the visual sense and turns it into a sightless cry for a lost way of life.

In the three stories discussed in this chapter, the three female characters represent youth, middle age and old age. The portrayal of each character is sympathetic and detailed in observation, and highlights a particular aspect of a life lived in psychological and inauthentic isolation and condemned by sex, age, beauty, poverty or simply by being a woman alone in a big city. The portrayal includes examples of the manner in which they are condemned and maimed by the particular code of appraisal that society imposes upon them. This particular emphasis reinforces Mansfield’s abiding interest in a search for an authentic self, and her perception of the impossibility of direct and honest communication between individuals. Her own words in a letter to Murry, dated 13 October 1922, best express her deepest thoughts on the matter, “[w]e are all hidden, looking out

at each other; I mean even those of us who want not to hide.” (*Letters*, 1951: 575). For the little unnamed governess, the old cleaning woman and the middle-aged teacher of English the definition that others have imposed upon them, as they themselves are symbolically “looking out at each other” (167), stresses their lack of a strong sense of self, and also their lack of authenticity. It stresses too the reduction of their status to that of a mute object that accepts inauthentic definition, rather than insisting upon urgent and pressing individuality. Freedom from objectification is achieved only by recognizing the need for authentic behaviour, and rejecting the impossibility of change. Mansfield questions the forms and ideas that bind women into moulds of inauthenticity and keep them positioned in static and stationary roles in society. Showalter, in commenting on women as artists, notes the mythological content of their lives as they pretend to be someone they aren’t, and uses Mansfield’s characters as prime examples of this as they “are seen repeatedly at this moment of realization and collapse” (1982:246).

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## Chapter 7

### Conclusion

#### The Voyage

Debilitating illness and an early death did not preclude Katherine Mansfield from producing letters, diary entries and short stories that reflected her time, her growth and her development as a Modernist writer. More importantly, her position in relation to other Modernist writers, notably male writers like Joyce, Eliot and Lawrence and also to female writers like Virginia Woolf was established by her own innovations in writing that reflect and convey Modernist aesthetic principles. She wrote to Ottoline Morrell in July 1919:

I am infinitely grateful to you for these chapters of *Ulysses*. Heaven send the drain that will soon receive them. I think they are loathsome & if that is Art — never shall I drink to it again. But it **is** not Art; it is not even a new thing... (*Letters*, II, 1987:318)

In writing to her friend she clearly positioned her own work outside the sphere of contact with particular male writers in whom she detected a “peculiar male arrogance that revolts me more than I can say — it sickens me” (*Letters*, II, 1987:343). She set herself and her creative ideas apart, but two years later, she could write to Sydney Schiff on 25 December 1921, “[h]aving re-read *Portrait* it seems to me on the whole awfully good.” (*Letters*, IV, 1996:352). Her awareness grew that not only were she and her friend, Virginia Woolf “after the same thing” in their search for the truth, but she realized that Joyce was as well. She had stripped her perception of truth of its gender aversion, and in the same letter to Sidney Schiff on 25 December 1921, she confessed that

it seems to me the *new novel*, the seeking after the Truth is so by far and away the most important thing that one must conquer all minor aversions. They are unworthy. (*Letters*, IV, 1996:352).

As a woman writer Mansfield’s status at the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth was influenced by her immersion in an avant-garde lifestyle, her complex and non-conforming approach to sexuality and her frustrating and conflict-ridden relationship with her husband, John Middleton Murry. Her literary innovations such as “plotless” stories, and her emphasis of the moment, were the hallmark of her stylistic evolution. Her awareness that her evolution as a writer was closely bound to the recognition that she was a woman writer in a social milieu in which women’s position was changing rapidly and radically, is clear. She was aware too of the uncovering of previously hidden psychological aspects of human nature, more particularly women’s nature, and the dynamic expression given to such emotions in literature. Such emotions were centred on interiority, and on the intensity of the moment and were not confined exclusively to

her female fictional characters, but included the male characters as well. As a creative artist, Mansfield drew on her knowledge of writers such as Arthur Symons and Walter Pater by accepting their ideas on symbolism, but by questioning their allegiance to the Aesthetes' credo that failed to consider the importance of the authority of women and women writers. For women and women writers, patriarchal entrapment proved to be ironical, as their traditionally powerful positions as mothers and lovers were undermined and devalued. Mansfield recognized the need to expose women's position in her stories even as she herself, as artist, considered and partly embraced the credo and life-style of the Aesthetes as well. The final discussion of Mansfield's works in this dissertation is one of her late works, *The Voyage*, which was written in 1921, two years before she died. She returns to her home island, New Zealand for inspiration for this story and relives her own memory of a sea voyage with her maternal grandmother. The story itself reveals the potential for growth and development of a young female child as she faces a new life without the presence of her parents.

For Mansfield, memories of New Zealand and her life there only became significant in retrospective contemplation. She left her home island in 1908, never to return in body, but in spirit she returned many times as her thoughts, shrouded in personal reveries, reflect the details of past happiness. A particularly poignant memory of her past is her contact with her beloved grandmother, who for her represents authentic living and sincere contact with the world at large. The value of this contact is evident during her very traumatic sojourn in the Bavarian village of Woerishofen in 1909, as she writes to Garnet Trowell in June 1909 and thinks lovingly of her grandmother as a haven of comfort and love as "the only adorable thing" (*Letters*, I, 1984:92) she could imagine. In writing of her grandmother the memory of journeys by sea are relevant, as Mansfield describes in a letter to Garnet Trowell dated 25 October 1908:

[a] rough sea journey is a strange conglomeration of sensations — I, in a moment, am caught in a web of a thousand memories — am a child again, sitting on the deck in my grandmother's lap, & me in a red riding hood cloak! And then going over to Picton and Nelson, to England for the first time and the second time (*Letters*, I, 1984:78-79).

The short story, *The Voyage* (1921) is prefigured by the above quotation, and is an account of a voyage by a little girl and her grandmother on the Picton boat. It is filled with impressionistic details that underpin something of the mystery and enigma, and even the trauma of being at sea. The effect of the significant details in the opening sentence of the story, "[t]he Picton boat was due to leave at half-past eleven." (470) positions the action within a definite time frame, and this continues to marshal events until Fenella and her grandmother arrive at their destination. The

painted quotation on the wall of her grandparents' bedroom at the end of the story reinforces yet again the significance of the opening lines of the story, as every action by Fenella's grandmother is governed by an awareness of the importance of time. It is important to Fenella and her grandmother because although both of them are aware of their own feminine natures, neither can fully indulge in the contemplation of an existence that is not ruled by the precision of clocks and rational agencies. The reminder of the significance of a loss of time is reinforced by the quotation on the wall above her grandfather's bed,

Lost! One golden Hour  
Set with Sixty Diamond Minutes  
No Reward is Offered  
For It is GONE FOR EVER (476).

There is comic irony in the disclosure to Fenella by her grandfather that her "grandma painted that" (467) because it means that her grandmother is the agent who imposes time and with it the limitations of movement and expression. Fenella's grandfather's merry disposition is given expression in his tongue-in-cheek observation of the painted words as "he looked at Fenella so merrily she almost thought he winked at her" (476). He himself appears to be outside of linear time, ensconced as he is in protective bedclothes, reminiscent of a womb-like existence, and can view the results of the tyranny of time with dispassionate humour. In contrast, Fenella's grandmother's experience of time becomes a force in her life that robs her of an awareness of the difference between the feminine experience of time and the masculine. The feminine experience of time is ruled by the moon, its cycles of light and darkness, its control of the tides with the suggestion of fluidity, repetition and definite rhythms that reflect the mystical feminine side of gender differentiation. Interestingly there is no moon visible on their voyage. For Fenella's grandmother the importance of meeting the practical requirements of the moment, such as the correct time of departure of the boat, her son leaving the boat at the appropriate time, and disembarking to find Mr Penreddy there with his horse and cart, are of greater importance than even the feelings of loss and sadness at the death of her daughter-in-law (Fenella's mother), or recognition of the mystical beauty of the Picton Boat, "all beaded with round golden lights, the Picton boat looked as if she was more ready to sail among the stars than out into the cold sea" (470).

Mansfield conveys the image of a mild starry night that presents an almost perfect picture of the harbour and its surrounds, but includes as well the presence of a "faint wind blowing off the water" that "ruffled under Fenella's hat" (470). The wind is not of gale force strength as it would be on a rough sea at night, but is the symbolic reminder of the approaching loss that awaits Fenella, as she faces the loss of her mother through death, and also faces the loss of her father through enforced

absence for an indefinite period of time. She is not fully aware of the implications of leaving her father and living with her grandparents, and merely observes and absorbs the novelty of the surroundings of the harbour and the ship itself. The phantoms of the daytime activities such as “the wool sheds, the cattle trucks, the cranes standing up so high, the little squat engine” (470) appear as if they are moulded from the darkness itself. The little lantern on the Old Wharf is afraid to unfurl its hesitant light, and is symbolic of the little girl, Fenella, who has lost her mother and for whom life beyond the borders of her grandparents’ home, and without her own mother will most probably be fraught with hesitant and uncertain steps, and without a clear bright light. The symbol of hesitant steps reaches an intensity as it is reflected in the “quick, nervous strides” (470) of Fenella’s father and the determined steps of the grandma who “bustled along” (470). The speed of movement, related inexorably to the passing of time, signifies the urgency of their mission that is strangely devoid of any displays of obvious emotion. They are bent only on reaching their goal. Mansfield continues to depict images and to use verbs that reflect the speed of movement in the course of reaching a destination. The details of human beings who are in a hurry like her family, fill Fenella’s field of vision,

[m]en, their caps pulled down, their collars turned up, swung by; a few women all muffled scurried along; and one tiny boy, only his little black arms and legs showing out of a white woolly shawl, was jerked angrily between his mother and father ....(470).

The single image of certainty and security in the frenetic pace of the characters discussed, is the grandmother’s umbrella “which had a swan’s head” (470). The swan’s head is a unifying image and reflects the natural world of calm beauty, but ironically is also pecking at Fenella to encourage her to hurry too. There is irony in this action because the pecking action depicts the antithesis of the natural peace which the swan is supposed to represent. The irony of the image of the swan is irrevocably linked to the actions of Fenella’s grandmother as she bustles along, very aware of the passing of time, and not appearing to pause to reflect on life. Amidst the noise and confusion of the departure, a whistle sounds that makes Fenella and her grandmother leap up into the air, and brings to the fore the pending parting from her father. The depth of the sound is ear-piercing, and it prefigures the awakening of her loss because she has not fully come to terms with it.

The actual events surrounding the departure of her father are encased in the practicalities of tickets, and the certainty that he will be able to disembark safely. Fenella watches the proceedings with unconcealed interest, and would like to enquire as to their true nature, but can only witness the embrace her father gives his mother with mute, embarrassed anxiety,

[t]o her surprise Fenella saw her father take off his hat. He clasped grandma in his arms and pressed her to him. "God bless you, mother!" she heard him say.

And Grandma put her hand, with the black thread glove that was worn through on her ring finger, against his cheek, and she sobbed, "God bless you, my own brave son!"

This was so awful that Fenella quickly turned her back on them, swallowed twice and frowned terribly at a little green star on the mast-head (471).

The irony of the parting from her father is that he himself is bidding his mother goodbye just as she has been forced to do to her mother. Both partings carry the germ of great sadness and psychological destruction within their make-up. The difference lies in her being a child, with an undeveloped sense of self, whose future is uncertain and without definite form, while her father relies on a socially constructed sense of self to deal with the loss of Fenella's mother. The doubt Fenella experiences as she parts from her father becomes self-doubt as she grabs hold of the lapels of her father's coat, and attempts to engage him on an emotional level. His reply to her is vague and insubstantial and corrodes her insecure sense of self. He substitutes a shilling for a truthful authentic reply, and when Fenella enquires how long she is to stay, his reply is gentle but indefinite as he leaves his daughter, with only a dim outline of his person as he moves off the ship. For Fenella's father, who is known only as "father" and "son" to his daughter and mother respectively, the confrontation with death is traumatic, and best dealt with by silence and avoidance. As he leaves he fails to wave or turn around to have a last look at his daughter. For Mansfield, the terrifying isolation of the individual is depicted in terms of the stark reality of a lonely existence that reinforces her conception of the self as multiple, shifting, without essence and perhaps even unknowable. In the midst of such vulnerability of the self, lies the contrasting need to reach out to fellow individuals as a guarantee against complete and total isolation. Fenella too tries to reach out to her father and "strained with all her might" to see "was that father turning around? — or waving? or standing alone — or walking off by himself?" (471). The gulf of physical and psychological separation from her father widens as the "[t]he strip of water grew broader, darker. Now the Picton boat began to swing round steady, pointing out to sea. It was no good looking any longer" (471).

Mansfield describes the wind as "freshening", (471) when Fenella returns to her grandmother, and attempts to resume a normalcy of existence. The perception of a spry little woman sitting on two sausages of luggage, moving her lips in prayer, intensifies the practical approach to life that characterizes and embodies the grandmother's sense of self. Her approach to life is practical because she is aware that luggage requires careful packing that will withstand the ravages of a sea voyage. Her lips are moving in quiet prayer because her authentic self conveys to her the awareness of the danger of a sea journey, and the need to commit the safety of herself and her granddaughter to

the care of a Higher Power. In this image of her grandmother, Fenella experiences an example of authenticity that is sincere in its intentions to solve practical difficulties such as finding cabins and looking after umbrellas, and at the same time provides a measure of order and protection from the “dark figures of men” as they “lounged against the rails” from which a “nose shone out” or “the peak of a cap”, or “a pair of surprised looking eyebrows” (472). Mansfield’s presentation of masculine images in the story is significant because the effect of such presences on the little girl is never expressed explicitly, but serves only as a reminder that the social subordination of women is a real, and not an easily dissolved aspect, of the difficulties that surround gender roles. Fenella and her grandmother are not only at sea and exposed to immediate danger from shipwreck, but are also exposed to the presence of the “pale steward in a linen coat” (472). Another steward’s rude retort reflects his insensitivity to customers’ needs as he conveys the exorbitant price for the sandwiches to the old lady. He does this with a sly wink to his companion. The tension and conflict between youth and age is inextricably bound to a similar tension and conflict between masculine and feminine in the characters’ position during the course of the narrative, as gender representations that reveal the oppositions between the two. The practical perils of mobility on the ship are reinforced by the inimical presence of the rude steward. He represents the masculine presence that Fenella has experienced earlier on, and intensifies the difficulties of the two female characters when they make their way down perilously dangerous “high brass-bound steps” and then “down such a terribly steep flight of stairs” (472). The visible and almost tangible relief from the said dangers is embodied in the presence of “a very nice stewardess” (472) whose neat and polished appearance reflects the blue of a calm and welcoming sea. The feminine presence of the stewardess is in direct contrast to the previously cited inimical masculine presence of the steward, and embraces care, when she enquires if the grandmother wants a cup of tea. The stewardess, like Fenella’s father, is at a loss how to deal with the reality of death, but is able to verbalize trite platitudes about the “certingty” (473) of death. Her perception of the scene, as she looks at the black clothing they are both wearing, reflects a superficial understanding of the implications that the loss of the mother has for the child.

The dark, box-like cabin is dominated by the round eye above the washbasin that “gleamed at them dully” (473). Fenella does not see her reflection in the mirror, but discovers that even the possibility of self-confrontation makes her feel uneasy: “Fenella felt shy” (473). The image of herself in the mirror in the cabin symbolizes a reflection of the self in a moment of unselfconscious contemplation, when the mask designed as protection from societal influences is lowered. For Fenella the lowering of her childish mask brings to her the knowledge of her grandmother “with her head uncovered” and the awareness that she looks “strange” (473) and unlike the customary image she has of her grandmother. She comes to realize that her grandmother is encased by under-

garments and black clothing, and that the operation of preparing for bed is a lengthy and a fairly arduous one: “[t]hen she undid her bodice, and something under that, and something else underneath that,” she is able to breathe “a sigh of relief” (473), is significant. The purpose of the journey is recalled when Fenella’s grandmother smiles at her granddaughter “tenderly and mournfully” (473) as she winds the fascinator that her daughter-in-law crocheted for her round her head. The grandmother’s mournful smile betrays her grandmother’s intimate knowledge of death and loss, and the manner in which this loss will affect the future life of her granddaughter. Fenella’s undeveloped authentic self fails to recognize the social veneer that such comments hide.

Fenella’s grandmother dispenses with the “elastic-sided boots” (473) and the “stays” (473) and suddenly becomes the epitome of agility and nimble movement as she climbs up onto the top bunk in the cabin, and proves that she is an experienced traveller. The contrast between the old woman who has to place both feet on a single step to descend a steep flight of stairs earlier in the story, and the nimble-footed person “who peered over the high bunk at the astonished Fenella” (473) is significant as the release from the socially constructed clothing (stays) brings overall comfort that also provides light relief in the midst of the sadness of loss, “[t]he old woman gave a small silent *laugh* before she mounted nimbly” (473) and “and as she sank back Fenella heard her light laugh again” (474). For Fenella the novelty of the circumstances on the ship is embodied in the “hard square of brown soap” and the difficulty of turning down the stiff sheets that “you simply had to tear your way in” (474). The comic side of the preparation for the night is extended to the effort that is required to get into the bed as Fenella lay there “panting,” (474) after her successful attempt to actually tear the sheets away. Within the trauma of loss, the potential for authenticity breaks through for Fenella, because of her awareness that if circumstances had been different, she “might have got the giggles....” (474). The little girl is bound by the constrictions of social propriety that demands the stifling of these “giggles”. This threatens to crush the expression of her authentic self as she conforms to social codes and rules of propriety. For Fenella and her grandmother the validity and truthful expression of existence lies in their being able to maintain the balance between present circumstances and past losses, and to channel their emotions into expressions or potential expressions of laughter. For Mansfield the comic relief in the story comes close to her own expression of freedom that she experiences when she writes of her awareness that the awakening of the self lies in the movement of a green spear as it pushes

through the dead leaves and through the mould, thrusts a scaled bud through darkness, until one day, the light discovers it and shakes the flower free — and we are alive — we are flowering for our moment upon the earth (*Journal*, 1954:205).

As the Picton boat pitches, the swan-necked umbrella is at risk of being broken, but a simultaneous thought of the umbrella by both Fenella and her grandmother, “at the same time” (474) saves it from harm. This augurs well for the development of Fenella’s authenticity as the practical example of her grandmother’s actions has already been transferred to her and is evident in similar thought patterns. The stewardess willingly obliges when the umbrella needs care and links her enquiry about Fenella, who is fast asleep, to the tale of woe that the grandmother tells of the loss of the child’s mother.

The sea voyage is nearing its end and the preparations to disembark are under way as the grandmother begins to step off the upper bunk that she ascended so nimbly. Fenella assists her and displays a comfortable familiarity with her surroundings as she “hopped out of her bunk” (474). She peers through the porthole, and makes the contact with the world of nature that has been temporarily lost on the voyage as the “rocks were scattered over with foam; now a gull flipped by” (474). The temperature in the harbour is considerably lower than on the ship and in the cabin, and the motherless mite hugs herself and trembles to keep warm, and to stem the sadness of her loss. The excitement of the journey is juxtaposed with the sadness that Fenella acknowledges for one brief moment as she questions her personal, apparently insurmountable situation by saying, “[o]h, it had all been so sad lately. Was it going to change?” (475). She registers the lower temperature and the cold weather and it functions as a symbol of the acute awareness that her present life is without the insulated warmth and care that the enclosure of the cabin and her grandmother’s presence brings. Her grandmother’s matter-of-fact reply brings her back to the reality of the vulnerability of her position as she encourages her to “[m]ake haste, child. I should leave your nice banana for the stewardess as you haven’t eaten it” (475). The symbolism of donning her black clothes again reinforces her need to confront the implications of her immediate loss. Her inability to retrieve the button on her glove that has sprung off intensifies the symbolic significance of her loss.

As they approach the coastline, the mystical appearance of the land beyond the waters is intensified by “a white mist “that “rose and fell” (475). The vegetation of “umbrella ferns” and “strange silvery trees” contributes to the mystery of the landing where little houses appear “like shells on the lid of a box” (475). The comfort of seeing Mr Penreddy with the little horse waiting for them lightens Fenella’s grandmother’s burden, and the delight of seeing the landing-stage swimming towards them heightens the awareness that home comforts, and a new way of life for Fenella, are close by. The use of the verb “swimming” heightens as well the impressionistic imagery of the movement of the water of the sea. The extremely cold weather reflects in the blueness of the grandmother’s waxen cheeks, her trembling chin and her pink little nose. Her concern for the umbrella, “[y]ou’ve

got my – ” (475) points to her concerns for practical matters as she and Fenella prepare to disembark. The image that Mansfield uses to suggest swift and continuous movement is contained in “bowling away” (475), that is intensified by the sound of the little hooves of the horse as they “drummed over the wooden piles” (475). The isolation of the road and the quiet of the surroundings is noted:

[n]ot a soul was to be seen; there was not even a feather of smoke. The mist rose and fell, and the sea still sounded asleep as it slowly turned on the beach (475).

For Mansfield the purpose of drawing Nature close to the hearts of both Fenella and her grandmother before they arrive home, indicates that the primeval world and the world of human beings are inextricably linked by a common bond of vitality and growth that requires the effects of life-giving water. The arrival at the grandmother’s home continues the image of the interlinking of human life with Nature as the “the big trembling dew-drops soaked through her glove-tips” and “the drenched sleeping flowers on either side” (475) are part of the little pebble-strewn path. The big red watering can on the side of the verandah reinforces the need and presence of water to sustain the life that exists in the garden. Authenticity of life and consciousness depends on the recognition that the life reflected by the actions of the characters is fed by the awareness of the worthiness and the validity of human beings. The warmth of the little house in which Fenella’s grandfather and grandmother live is an authentic life-sustaining environment that will nurture and protect Fenella’s undeveloped and vulnerable sense of self. The white cat, comfortable and completely at ease on the table, allows Fenella to bury her little hand in its white fur, and by this action the reassurance of the safety of the environment is extended to the comforting sound of grandma’s gentle voice as it is contrasted with “the rolling tones of grandpa” (476). Fenella enters the bedroom and her grandpa welcomes her by jokingly referring to her ice-cold nose. She smiles in response, and the presence of the swan-necked umbrella crooked over the bed rail, functions as a reminder that Nature and its inanimate representations are a comforting and reassuring feature in human life. Ironically it is a fragile representative as it can easily be broken and decapitated by unexpected knocks and bumps.

For Mansfield, the experience of a moment of being in which there is freedom from masks and pretence, and close to true authenticity is likened to the sentiments when she writes in a Journal entry:

I don’t want to be sentimental. But while one hangs, suspended in the air, held, — while I watched the spray, I was conscious *for* life of the white sky with the web of torn grey over it; of the slipping, sliding, slithering sea; of the dark woods blotted by the cape; of the flowers on the tree I was passing; and more — of a huge cavern where my selves (who were like

ancient sea-weed gatherers) mumbled, indifferent and intimate...and this other self apart in the carriage...Shall one ever be at peace with oneself ? (*Journal*, 1954:202-203).

The character that Mansfield created in the little girl, Fenella, hovers between the reality of the loss of her mother, and the wonder of the landscape, as she and her grandmother approach land, and finally the little home that resembles a shell. For her, being “at peace with oneself” will include a heightened awareness of her sense of self and of the mask she wears as protection from social pressures to conform, and at the same time an awareness of being pursued by time and of the passing of time. Mansfield herself recognized this emotion and in a *Journal* entry of 17 January 1922 stated, “I am pursued by time myself ”(*Journal*, 1954:204) reflecting her acute knowledge of the brevity of life and her knowledge of the mask that time itself had imposed on her life. She sought deliberate liberation from it at the Gurdjieff Institute at Fontainebleau, but for Fenella her immediate environment with her grandparents will be the prime source of inspiration and growth to sincere authenticity of self. She has only that life to be lived completely and fully. Mansfield did not have such an opportunity.

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