The Disenchantment of Katherine Mansfield's Female Characters

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Abstract

Katherine Mansfield is a universally prolific author of short stories. Through the analysis of four of her arguably most popular works, including *The Garden Party*, *Prelude, At the Bay, Pictures,* and *Bliss*, this thesis tackles Mansfield's female characterizations and questions if such characterizations are even feminist to begin with. While each story contains female characters who undergo a small moment of feminist achievement, it is rather in the larger moments of female disenchantment and a return back to life of great marginalization and tradition where we as readers may focus our attention. In much of her work, Katherine Mansfield depicts female characters who experience a progressive realization that their identities are trapped in roles predetermined by a patriarchal-led society. Through a feminist lens, these characters also undergo disenchantment in much of what could otherwise be the hope for recognizing their own feminism and gender-driven strength. At the same time, the real-life character of Katherine Mansfield is of great interest, as well. This thesis explores the woman behind her own short stories, and moments of intersectionality between identity and the written word. Mansfield often felt as if she was struggling with a "Divided Self," which is evident in not only her personal life, but also her life as a career writer. This thesis uses not only a historicist lens within a feminist one to look at the roles of women during the Pre-Modernist Era, but also a seconday postcolonial lens that relates back to the control and ownership of female territory in each of the short stories analyzed within this thesis.

Introduction of Mansfield's Writing

A character can have all the materialistic goods in the world and still never quite be happy. A reader may, in such a case, takes two steps of precautionary understanding. The first step is in understanding the character, while the second is simply trying to sympathize with them. In most, if not all, of Katherine Mansfield's stories, there is an unhappy primary female character. The plot typically starts off happily and light-hearted, such as "The Garden Party's" Laura anxiously waiting for guests to come and flaunt themselves in the decadent, upper-aristocracy party arrangement. Or Kezia's initial bliss at her family moving out of town, only to not ever understand it was due to societal reasons. In short, a central element of Mansfield's work is a narration that frames female characters as moving through life with an unknowingness about their own selves and a merely content way of comporting who they are externally versus what is internal. At the same time, these female characters suffer darker epiphanies that force them to grapple with who they belong to, what they are meant for, and why they are in the normative positions they are in. This is, in terms of feminism, the concept of a "divided self."

Defining the "Divided Self"

Two focal components of the "divided self" is firstly the capability of a person to become Othered in a situation where a male can be perceived as Absolute("Feminist"). The act of othering an individual, but especially a female, completely drains any power or sense of accomplishment a female has in comparison to the commodified social contributions of a male in absolute authority. Out of this Other/Absolute gender binary comes the patriarchal internalization of the female. Not only does the female individual become type casted as the Other, but gradually begins to absorb patriarchal beliefs and traditions. For instance, a Mansfield housewife character, or a young girl whose "Othered" destiny is to become such, as we see clearly in

Garden Party, *Prelude*, and *Bliss*, has a divided desire to remain dutiful and subservient to her husband's secure role as a dominant male figure, yet also yearns for her own source of liberation without any patriarchal influence.

The "divided self" is also an early concept of Modernism, a category of which Mansfield's literature is commonly placed. Elements of the "divided self" that Mansfield incorporates into her narratives also include binaries. In "Reading with the Taint of the Pioneer: Katherine Mansfield and Settler Criticism," Bridget Orr argues that New Zealand critics see Mansfield as focusing on binaries such as "…colonial/metropolitan, regional/modernism and subjectivist feminist/provincial/masculist" (Orr 49). This is seen in the very provincial settings of Mansfield's short stories, and the female characters that are living right in the middle of them. *The Routledge Encyclopedia of Modernism* states, "Mansfield's writing utilizes key themes and dichotomies such as loneliness versus society; woman versus man; nature versus culture. Moreover, her style is characterized by its neutral (as opposed to emotional) tone, and her use of symbolism to depict alienation" (Welch n.p.). These dichotomies are directly connected to gender binaries in how society has presented them as of the primary binary of what is to be considered feminine and what is to be considered masculine.

(Non)Awakening

Exploring gender-imposed limitations, disenchantment of female empowerment, and female class characterization, Mansfield's work can be seen to favor the patriarchal and traditional side of the "Divided Self." But, if Mansfield's female characters end up in mostly the same way that they began in the narrative, why was there a brief and shining moment of empowerment? What does it do to design these female characters as victims in a patriarchal society when ultimately, they can never escape the hardwired thinking of historically many

women of the early twentieth century? What does it lend itself, in the end, to become the colonized and the limitations imposed by societal structure to become the colonizer? Not only can Mansfield's writing be viewed through a feminist lens, but a feminist lens reinforced through new historicist and colonial perspectives. This exploration concentrates not only on the connections made between feminism and social positioning, aristocracy, and materialist decadence, but also on feminism and Mansfield's connection to illness and external circumstances versus internal conflict. The stories considered here all pertain to these very modernist factors and more. In much of her work, Katherine Mansfield depicts female characters who experience a progressive realization that their identities are trapped in roles predetermined by a patriarchal-led society. Through a feminist lens, these characters also undergo disenchantment in much of what could otherwise be the hope for recognizing their own feminism and gender-driven strength.

Katherine Mansfield's Life

Mansfield's own life can serve as a template for why she designed her female characters in the way they appear on printed text. A lot if not all of Mansfield's different turns in her life reveal her own sense of dividedness in not only identity, but also with customs and traditions. In much of her life, Mansfield was caught between two worlds: one where she was a successful writer and career woman who was fulfilled enough, and another where she was desirous of elements of the traditional and aristocratic environment she was brought up in.

In her introductory essay about Mansfield's life, Rhoda Nathan says that Katherine Mansfield once wrote, "I am a writer first and a woman after." (Nathan 3). This quote would later come to define a lot of Mansfield's personal life and her influence as seen within her female characters. Birthed into the New Zealand aristocracy of the latter part of the nineteenth century

(1888), Mansfield is, still to this day, seen as a prolific and widely known short story author. What is not as widely known is that many of Mansfield's short stories are based on multiple facets of her own life. Mansfield was born "Katherine Mansfield Beauchamp" in Wellington, New Zealand as third child out of a six-children family to Harold and Anne Beauchamp. Katherine's paternal lineage came with a strong pride in traditional conservatism, British colonialism, and merchantry, a sector of business which brought her family enormous wealth and a privileged lifestyle. While Harold Beauchamp worked as a banker, Katherine's mother, Anne, lived an upper-class housewife lifestyle. Nathan writes, "Harold, the model for Katherine's recurrent portrait of the 'pa man,' was a conservative, didactic, and materialistic man whose tenderness was reserved for his beautiful and elegant wife, Anne, who clearly admired her domineering husband and just as clearly disdained his aggressive energy" (Nathan 4). As a young child, Katherine was extremely aware of her parents' roles, and later in life attached her mother, Anne, as the primary model for the New Zealand Stories' Linda Burnell. At the age of fourteen, Mansfield traveled to London, which "…marked the beginning of her intellectual, if not emotional, freedom from her country of origin. While some of her stories are rooted there, they are poignant precisely because of that fact of separation, drawing on a long formative period viewed from an unbreachable distance" (Nathan 6). Mansfield's London years turned out to be the most intense and controversial of her lifetime.

Such a factor of separation and distance contributed to not only Mansfield's development into a writer who thought more about gender relations, sexuality, and social environment, but even more so as an individual. In a letter sent to her New Zealand cousin, Mansfield discusses at one point being back in New Zealand and seeing everything in a more divided light:

> I am a 'Colonial'. I was born in New Zealand; I came to Europe to 'complete my education' and when my parents thought that tremendous task was over I went back to New Zealand. I hated it. It seemed to be a small and petty world; I longed for 'my' kind of people and larger interests and so on. And after I struggle, I did get out of the nest finally and came to London, at eighteen, *never* to return, said my disgusted heart. (Martin 2)

If anything, the quote above details Mansfield's inner conflict in having her parents make her decisions for her or for her to be able to become independent on her own terms. In "Why Haven't I Got a Real Home: Katherine Mansfield's Divided Self," W. Todd Martin writes, "…Unlike her Modern male counterparts, though, the middle-class mentality that she hoped to abandon by fleeing her home included…a prescribed identity for women, namely that any sensible woman sought fulfillment as a wife and mother"(2). At the same time, this "prescribed identity" for Mansfield, no matter if she tried to run from it, would frame a lot about her choices surrounding her identity. Mansfield's sexuality during this time period (between 1903 and 1905) is described as "ambivalent" in Rhoda Nathan's *Critical Essays on Katherine Mansfield.* As a child completing her secondary education in Wellington, Mansfield had been reportedly infatuated with a young, equally aristocratic Maori girl named "Maata." In a journal entry, Mansfield claims that she "wants Maata," but feels "savagely crude" and "unclean but true" (Nathan 6). Mansfield's perception of her relationship with Maata in the latter sentence potentially reveals not only an internalized homophobia due to her social status, but also a fear of escaping her own normative environment and having liberation to lead her life by her own free will. These feelings were again played out in a series of lesbian love affairs between Mansfield and other older women during her time in London. Interspersed between these affairs were

another series of heterosexual ones, including the Trowell twins, a loveless marriage to singer George Bowdon, and an Austrian journalist by the initials of 'S.V.'

In 1912, Katherine decided to put an end to what Nathan refers to as "…impulsive, and finally, trivial" affairs after meeting John Middleton Murry, an editor who had published Mansfield's "A Woman at the Store." Immediately before meeting Murry, Mansfield had an abortion after being impregnated by a man named Francis Heineman. This became the start of an illness in Mansfield's life that would last until she would die in 1923. Before the abortion procedure, she was operated on for "peritonitis of gonococcal origin…and was probably rendered infertile from then on" (Nathan 7). Shortly thereafter, Mansfield had her first attack of pleurisy, driving bouts of rheumatism and heart problem for the rest of her life. But nothing was as permanent as when Mansfield contracted tuberculosis. She spent times in Swiss sanitoriums and warm, southern European climates in order to search for a remedy. Murry and Mansfield decided to marry in the throes of her tuberculosis and six years into their relationship. "The bulk of Murry's time with his wife was marked by increasingly long absences [which were]…punctuated by intense correspondence, marked by longing on her part and frustration on his"(Nathan 7). Murry once said, "…The memory of my wedding to Katherine is a memory of *anguish*, not the happiness of love."

Katherine Mansfield and Writing

It is arguable that Mansfield was prepossessed with two intense relationships of her own, that of her writing and her illness. The more ill she became, the more her writing flourished in popularity and recognition. While Mansfield's writing started off as decidedly feminist with subtleties of rebellion against class, colonization, and social expectations, her later stories share more traditional ideals, such as having children(maternity), being in a comfortable relationship,

and choosing family over career. “Pictures,” and “Bliss” are Mansfield stories that allude to her earlier writing period, while stories such as, most notably, “The Garden Party,” “Prelude” and “At the Bay” hint at what came later. These are all elements that many Mansfield readers still find shocking and almost ironic decades later. In May of 1915, Mansfield wrote a letter to John Murry detailing her newfound traditional desires:

> Why haven’t I got a real “home,” a real life-Why haven’t I got a Chinese nurse with green trousers and two babies who rush at me and clasp my knees-I’m not a girl-I’m a woman. I *want* things. Shall I ever have them? To write all the morning and then to get lunch over quickly and to write again in the afternoon and have supper and *one* cigarette together and then to be along again until bed-time-and all this love and joy that fights for outlet-and all this life drying up, like milk, in an old breast. Oh, I want a life-I want friends, and people and a house. (Martin 4)

Katherine Mansfield had lived a thirty-four-year-old life comprised of personal tragedy, an aristocratic lifestyle, career success, and a divided sense of identity by the time she died in 1923. These are all elements she chose to very openly write about, especially with the creation of feminine selves in her short stories who interestingly deal with similar if not exact components of Mansfield’s own life. In each of her female characters exists a piece of Mansfield’s character herself-empowered yet victimized time and time again, successful yet rebellious, and independent yet craving of a traditional familial structure that arguably brings Mansfield back to her own roots and creates her own sort of disenchantment with maintaining a feminist self.

The Garden Party

In “Katherine Mansfield’s World,” Simon During creates a list of seven staple elements of Mansfield’s writing, In it, During makes his fifth and arguably most important point about

how "…Mansfield's fictions do not elicit our sympathy or empathy, since that would demand readers to be engaged with, rather than just to experience, their world"(During 14). *The Garden Party* is one of Mansfield's most prominent short stories and connects the notion of female youth empowerment with societal restraint. Almost immediately Laura Sheridan is elected to be the representative to talk to the band outdoors about where they should play, which reflects the very restraint upper class aristocracy has in socializing with classes below theirs. The fact that Laura was chosen by the fellow women in the family show that there is a great hesitancy in upper-to-lower class and female to male interaction. "Away Laura flew, still holding her piece of bread-and-butter. It's so delicious to have an excuse for eating out of doors, and besides, she loved having to arrange things…" (Mansfield 197). Laura's immediate characterization is a young and entitled girl with a rich amount of upper-class confidence and demeanor. Laura's copying of her mother's voice in communicating with the band displays a sort of social redundancy of female domestic value. Laura describes her mother's voice as being "fearfully affected" (198), which reflects more of her mother as the traditional female homemaker and Laura's imitation as literally her taking on a traditional female identity. Laura's conspicuous attempt to copy her mother's voice, followed by her realization that she sounds 'so fearfully affected,' indicates the artificiality of the Sheridan way of talking. Laura, who despises 'stupid conventions,' cannot act a role, but her mother and sisters do" (Hankin 238). This is also seen in Laura's sensitivity to the band workman's sarcasm towards her wanting to initially place the band in a hidden location. This shows her inability to reveal who she really is as a young girl hiding in the shadows of her aristocratic family, as she constantly struggles to be more "businesslike" with her kind of upbringing. Another argument that may be made is that Laura's ability to talk back to the work man is empowering from a feminist standpoint. Yet we see the initial throes of reverting back to

social norms when she allows the band to play against the Karaka trees. Rather than be empowered and stand up for where she wants the band to play, Laura "…is searching for an identity of her own when she inwardly voices her dislike of the 'absurd class distinctions' and 'stupid conventions' which pervade the Sheridan world" (Hankin 238). In a way, this shows Laura as completely unable to locate her own self in the face of what everyone else wants her to be.

Laura is face-to-face with death towards the end of the story because of being asked by Mrs. Scott's sister-in-law to stay. This is a liberating feat from restricted social identity norms, to see two women of a lower-class stature asking a young girl of a higher one to pay respects to the dead. Not only does Laura choose to stay, but she also submits herself to facing the "real-life drama…versus…the artificial drama enjoyed by Jose" (Hankin 240). It is extremely important that Laura's introduction to mortality and fatal aspects of the human condition are by two women who are, least of which, members of the lower class. In a letter from Paris in 1922 addressed to William Gerhardi, Mansfield writes:

> And yes, that is what I try 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 out to happen differently. First one and then another. But life isn't like that. We haven't the ordering of it. Laura says, 'But all these things must happen at once.' And Life answers, 'Why not? How are they divided from each other?' And they do *all* happen, it is inevitable. And it seems to me there is beauty in that inevitability. (qtd. in O'Sullivan 250)

What is initially seen as empowering in how Laura feels obligated to stay at the Scott household quickly slips into a debatably patriarchal worship of the dead. Laura's opinion of seeing the dead

Mr. Scott converts from a sort of fear of potentially sympathizing with other women who are in mourning(solidarity) to observing every "peaceful," "wonderful, beautiful" and "happy" man in the casket in front of her. Here again the concept of "Divided Self," emerges where Laura battles between female solidarity and giving into patriarchal dominance. Laura initially utilizes her awareness of her class and empowered self to grieve with members of the lower class, but gradually falls victim to giving in once again to the idea that death is something that happens solely to poor members of society. In "Katherine Mansfield: A Study of the Short Fiction," J.F. Kobler further clarifies by stating that *The Garden Party* as a short story shows Laura walking just down the street to experience a glimpse into another walk of society and "…something her family knows cannot really be life, not there among the poor, who do not want to make anything of their lives"(Kobler 62). Not only does Laura see her aristocratic family as being at the top of the social hierarchy (as it was historically), but she also assumes that the poor lack in the ambition she has. The irony is that the female characters in *Garden Party* depend on male characters to keep the wheel of tradition and patriarchy spinning. Another major part of *Garden Party* is Laura's inability to finish a sentence at the very end, and more importantly, one where she was just about to speak on the nature of human existence. When her brother Laurie asks Laura if it was "awful" to see the dead Mr. Scott, Laura responds, "No. It was simply marvelous…isn't life- "(Mansfield 210). Before Laura completes her sentence, Laurie fills in the blank by reflecting her question right back at her. This is a classic example of a missed opportunity for Laura to truly understand life and death on her own terms, but the completion of the sentence by Laurie, a male, suggests an opportunity for the reader to glimpse Laura's own existence, filled with patriarchal domination and maternal bliss.

Laura's mother is a topic of focus as the story's female model in the throes of a traditional and social cycle that is difficult if not impossible to be released from, forecasting Laura's situation. Cheryl Hankin, author of *Katherine Mansfield and Her Confessional Stories*, writes, "…Knowingly, Mrs. Sheridan appeals to the imaginative side of her daughter's personality when she cleverly distracts the girl by placing her own hat on her head…the attractions of illusion triumph over the demands of reality" (Hankin 239). Laura's investment in what Mrs. Sheridan has to say shows her what her place in the world of the narrative truly is, which is the bubble of the Garden Party itself, a place full of aristocratic decadence. The inability of Laura to finish a statement on life at the very end of the story ascertains an end to her rebellion against the traditional urges of what her particular society has already mapped out for an individual such as herself. If Laura would have been able to finish that last sentence of the story, "…this would ascribe her as a self-critical awareness that seems an advancement on the matricidal urges of the rebellious teenager" (Day 5). Day's words relate back to the notion that Laura's self-awareness is extremely heightened throughout the story, yet to the eyes of her traditional environment, it is simply a teenage rebellion for a female to desire something so beyond social restriction and favored roles of gender, that it beings about fear to the other characters that Laura will not fulfill her gender and maternal duties. There is a greater significance once again with the changing-of-the-hat scene between Mrs. Sheridan and Laura because it is an "…assimilative instinct…characters assimilate others' words and ways of behaving so as to work their way up in pecking orders" (Day 6). This is an interesting statement because it places Laura in a similar position of a student trying to understand their matrilineal female identity for what it is without the opportunity for individual thought. Using the divided

self through a feminist lens allows readers to see that fine line between the illusion of Laura finding her own sense of liberation and the patriarchal reality that has been made for her.

Prelude and At the Bay

When we think of the environment in which the female characters within *The Garden* Party exist, we can also see that it is extremely limiting in terms of feminist identity and female introspection. This is crossed over in many of Mansfield's Garden imagery is arguably something Mansfield symbolizes as patriarchal. It is also an element Mansfield commonly uses in at least three of her narratives. Many of the female characters who are thought to be characterized in a feminist way are so in how they cross beyond the boundaries of the garden itself. They are able to reach beyond the strict line of class boundaries and sympathize with both male and female genders in a way that removes any sense of binary. In Mansfield's popular *Prelude* and sequel *At the Bay*, Kezia commonly crosses over the boundaries of class with her family. "This garden space…is the site of 'patriarchy's attempt to civilize the landscape and to contain girls and women within it,' a constriction which is subverted by 'internalizing landscape…'" (Brock 59). While comparable with Laura and her literal movement across the garden party to become illuminated by feminist ideology (for a short time), the garden in *Prelude* offers a different perspective of lack of female agency and choice. The *in-media res* narration is extremely significant in that it allows us to see the Burnell's family crossover from a life in a more urban New Zealand area to one way out in the countryside, perhaps representative of the rich and poor binary. While *Prelude* is a narration on the undoing of Kezia's family's aristocratic and urban lifestyle, *At the Bay* is the follow-up story of each female adult character's confined unhappiness that is waiting to be unleashed but never is. Kezia's mother, Linda, is completely unhappy in her marriage situation to Stanley Burrell and Aunt Beryl (Linda's sister) is desiring

of all that Linda embodies- a traditional female structure of the time, yet unable to fully commit to a traditional relationship. Kezia's father is seemingly not a character touting the power of gender equity. In carving duck meat for dinner, Stanley … "hated seeing a woman carve; they were always too slow, and they never seemed to care what the meat looked like afterwards" (Mansfield 36). Beryl's stronger bond with Stanley versus Stanley and Linda's marriage bond represents normative behavior and lack of disenchantment versus wanting more but being confined in the way that Linda and her girls are learning to be. At the same time, the argument can be made that Beryl is closer to Stanley in that she is more liberated without her own contractual marriage situation. "Beryl's life is dominated by two preoccupations: love and personal authenticity…For the Mansfield heroine, Beryl in particular, courtship games, successfully played, are important in that they provide access to male power" (Parkin-Gounelas 154). At the same time, the inability for Beryl to succeed in such games of courtship also prove her inability to rise above that male power, and rather fall right into its trap.

As a female unrestricted, it also seems that Beryl challenges male norms to an extent. In *At the Bay*, she pours Stanley's tea but pushes the sugar basin across the table (Mansfield 169), which is analogous to the type of power Beryl has over the rest of the characters. She only gives in ever so slightly to the all-mighty patriarchy and is fairly immune to gender standards. This, however, creates a problem in defining Beryl as "feminist." While she takes on patriarchal patterns embodied in a female identity, she also gives into the same part of that culture that is confined in female isolation. Fearful of marital constraints and societal structures, Beryl herself is restricted to a sort of isolation from finding herself as foremostly a female but also as an individual who does not know what she wants even at her older age. Beryl's sister relationship to

Stanley also brings her closer to the side of patriarchy than it does in terms of liberating feminism.

Linda Burnell in *Prelude* and *At the Bay* serves as a sort of foil to Beryl, and as a stereotypical wife and mother who desires for more besides her consuming marriage. Towards the end of *Prelude*, Linda has an epiphanic moment of her wealthy and domestic lifestyle as a homemaker and is startled. This startling realization swiftly and without much hesitation turns into a "get it together" kind of moment.

> It had never been so plain to her as it was in that moment. There were all her feelings for him, sharp and defined, one as true as the other. And there was this other, this hatred, just as real as the rest. She could have done her feelings up in little packets and given them to Stanley. She longed to hand him that last one, for a surprise. She could see his eyes as he opened that…'What am I guarding myself for so preciously?' I shall go on having children and Stanley will go on making money and the children and the gardens will grow bigger and bigger, with whole fleets of aloes in them for me to choose from. (Mansfield 39)

Keeping the garden imagery in mind and its connection to patriarchal restriction, it is then much simpler to realize that Linda's prediction that there will be more gardens(insinuating complete patriarchal control) and children(this idea of the feminine as being like plants and their seasonal blooming, signifying maternity) is one that rings not only differently but depicts an uncanny sense of self-awareness. Yet in the sentences that follow, it is almost as if those same sentences never happened to begin with. "Linda will not and cannot tell Stanley she hates him…Too many women in too many Mansfield stories suffer these indignities for Linda to be seen as strange and unusual, as a misfit in this world" (Kobler 20). Linda's ultimate character fate is seen as a

commonality among women in her Mansfield-created identity, and these female characters represent small fish in a bigger pond of patriarchal destiny.

Just as *Garden Party*'s Laura and Mrs. Sheridan being bonded by their blood and maternal lineage, Kezia and Linda exhibit many of the same traits. Both have fears of overly aggressive animals like big dogs and birds, and both their "rushing at" (42) them. "The identity between mother and daughter is so close that the narrative perspective moves from one mind and into another without warning of change" (Parkin-Gounelas 157). Yet at the same time, Linda's dislike for her own children might trace back to Stanley's all-patriarchal characterization. "Linda's rejection of her children, and her persistent wishful malaise, may be viewed as direct consequences of the sexual manifestations of Stanley's patriarchal authority" (Brock 62). Because of the patriarchal authority that Stanley has, Linda had resorted to different mechanisms of coping, including treating animals as creations of her terror over Stanley's nighttime violence. The "wishful malaise" described above is also a symptom of such violence, that is, significantly, not put into greater detail in Mansfield's text. This signals that the actions of Stanley are not as important as what he as an individual character is representative of, which is the power to contain the women around him and to keep them from finding their identities.

At the Bay concludes with the female characters waiting for something or someone to come and rescue them from their traditional confinement. While Beryl performs a cyclical pattern of rejecting wealthy men around her, she is still in the midst of Stanley and the family. Mansfield incorporates more nighttime/daytime binaries as the ending of *At the Bay* draws nearer, with the rough aloe plant imagery only presenting itself during the day, and the cooler and watery plants revealing themselves by night. "…Like the red and white camelias, with which the story ends, the two women stand side by side, part of an endless cycle of passion and peace

(Parkin-Gounelas 159). While the story ends in an empowering sense of nighttime, the daytime is forced to still arrive and ruin the picture. The side-by-side depiction is idealized at best, and knowing the previous narration and character analysis, a conclusion can be drawn that male-dominated hegemony is bound to make its return. The round-and-round formation of feminine florals prove that Mansfield's female characters are dominated by the patriarchal concept of time. In the same way, female choice is dictated by the overwhelming male.

Pictures

What if there was an opportunity for a female of any class to be free-thinking and independently minded? In the case of Mansfield's short story titled, *Pictures*, it initially, as with *Garden Party*, seems there is. The story is centered around Ada Moss, a former contralto singer looking for a job in acting. At first glance, it seems that Ada is supported by her landlady in opening an important letter about a career opportunity, the letter is representative of social façade in the way it instantly converts Ada from an assumed aristocrat into a woman in great debt and dependent upon acting opportunities handed out by men. *Pictures* depicts a woman who makes choices throughout the story about her career and actively tries to pursue such a profession, but ultimately is so severely degraded as a poor and a dangerous object to society that she is thrown into prostitution. Many critics ponder whether this was Ada's active decision to submit to a powerful patriarchal system in the end. Others argue that women living in the modernist period had no agency if they were not homemakers and mothers. In "Why haven't I got a real 'home? Katherine Mansfield's Divided Self, Todd Martin writes:

> While the Modernist tradition typically undermined middle-class values, women-who had for so long been relegated to the home-did not have the recognized rights necessary to fully embrace the liberation from these values. Typically a woman

> pursuing a career-writing or otherwise-had to be resigned to forego any desire for a home and family, for '[I]t was generally accepted that the role of wife and mother was incompatible with a career, not only because of the time and energy required, but also because of the very different qualities and characteristics it demanded. (Martin 5-6)

Therefore, it is interesting to see that Ada Moss, an arguable "careerwoman" turned into a social-falling (versus climbing) prostitute who cannot afford her hotel rent. This is surely a commentary not only on the inability of a society to allow female empowerment and feminism, but also the objectification of women throughout. This is captured when Ada is warned by another struggling female actress about her career choice. "'I just missed a lovely job yesterday…The manager said I would have got it for certain if only I'd been robust enough" (Mansfield 96). Not only is this a statement on gender standards, but it also shows to a female that the maternal self, the female who is meant to give birth and nothing else, is the preferred image of a woman of that time. Thus, through this characterization, Mansfield shines a spotlight on a female character who experiences two sides of the "Divided Self" binary, a childless woman who wants a career as an actress.

Bliss

While *Prelude* and *At the Bay* can be read from a feminist perspective in terms of society and gender roles, there is another historical binary that strongly pits female against male, and has provided for a hopelessness for a woman, which is that of illness. The separation and following isolation of the female characters in these short stories creates a sense of hysteria in Linda, Beryl and the grandmother. Mansfield's choice in connecting hysteria to maternal lineage is fascinating in that it shows that especially for Kezia, there is no way to become anything different, that her

life is intricately mapped out because of the attributed illness. Yet the grandmother figure is also necessary to understand the traditional fate of the female characters in these stories. In *Illness, Gender, and Writing:*

> Mrs. Fairfield, the grandmother, offers such guidance for all the women of the Burnell family. She is the mythic midwife who helps her daughters through the agonies of birth and who urges them to reject hysterical fantasies so as to take responsibility for the next generation. Mrs. Fairfield's changelessness and imperturbability link her with a simple acceptance of nature that neither of her daughters can manage completely. As a final comment on the anxieties of sex and birth, Mansfield thus provides a vision of eternally recurrent nature which both troubles and consoles. (Burgan 116)

By placing a hysterical tag upon the female gender in *Prelude* and *At the Bay*, creates a negative portrayal of these women as unable to find a cure for themselves and passing on traditional "hysterics" generationally. Mansfield's penchant for writing about women in isolation is also evident in her short story, *Bliss*, where Bertha Young is "…presented as a thirty year old woman, overcome by energy and vitality, by a warm feeling that burns inside her and makes her regress to infancy"(D'Arcy 252). Not only is Bertha seen as hysterical but also infantilized, rendering her unable (much like Laura Sheridan) to express her feelings. Bertha's realization towards the end that her husband is having an affair after realizing herself that she is still in love with him, can be seen under a few different lights. While it could be Bertha's real sight-seeing of her husband whispering in the ear of Miss Fulton, it could very well also be her self-conscious female psyche giving into what the patriarchy wants her to see.

Conclusion

Through a feminist lens, these characters also undergo disenchantment in much of what could otherwise be the hope for recognizing their own feminism and gender-driven strength. Through windows of domesticity, tradition, social class, and psychological illness, Mansfield has created female characters ultimately trapped in their own realities of the factors listed above. In a poem written by David Semanski envisioning Mansfield writing to John Middleton Murry, Semanski writes:

> …There was a child;
>
> It was never born
>
> That room on the second floor
>
> So still; a warp
>
> In the mirror;
>
> A smudged thumbprint. (Semanski L14-20)

It seems that Mansfield herself was trapped in her own reality of the same things; not feeling like she was fit enough for a wife and female individual after failing to have children, envying the happiness of a long life with the onset of her tuberculosis, and having her career take over center stage and her regrets that came with it. A lot of these real-life events contribute to Mansfield's creation of domestic spaces owned by patriarchy that females can have no say over.

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