

<p>Introduction To English Literature Stage :First Lecture 10</p>		<p>Instructor :Dr. Mugdad</p>
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Biography: Katherine Mansfield

Katherine Mansfield, one of New Zealand’s most famous writer, was closely associated with D.H. Lawrence and something of a rival of Virginia Woolf. Mansfield’s creative years were burdened with loneliness, illness, jealousy, alienation, all of which is reflected in her work with the bitter depiction of marital and family relationships of her middle-class characters. Her short stories are also notable for their use of stream of consciousness. Like the Russian writer Anton Chekhov, Mansfield depicted trivial events and subtle changes in human behaviour.

Katherine Mansfield was born in Wellington, New Zealand, into a middle-class colonial family. Her father, Harold Beauchamp, was a banker, and her mother, Annie Burnell Dyer, was of genteel origins. She lived for six years in the rural village of Karori. Later in life Mansfield said, “I imagine I was always writing. Twaddle it was, too. But better far write twaddle or anything, anything, than nothing at all.” At the age of nine, she had her first story published. Entitled “Enna Blake,” it appeared in *The High School Reporter* in Wellington, with the editor’s comment that it “shows promise of great merit.”

As a first step to her rebellion against her background, she moved to London in 1903 and studied at Queen’s College, where she joined the staff of the *College Magazine*. Returning to New Zealand in 1906, she took up music and became an accomplished cellist, but her father denied her the opportunity to become a professional musician. During this time, she had romantic affairs with both men and women.

In 1908, she studied typing and bookkeeping at Wellington Technical College. Her lifelong friend Ida Baker (known as “L.M.” or “Leslie Moore” in her diary and correspondence) persuaded Mansfield’s father to allow Katherine to move back to England with an allowance of £100 a year. There she devoted herself to writing. Mansfield never visited New Zealand again.

After an unhappy marriage in 1909 to George Brown, whom she left a few days after the wedding, Mansfield toured for a while as an extra in opera. Before the marriage

she had had an affair with Garnett Trowell, a musician, and became pregnant. In Bavaria, where Mansfield spent some time, she suffered a miscarriage. During her stay in Germany, she wrote satirical sketches of German characters, which were published in 1911 under the title *In a German Pension*. Earlier her stories had appeared in *The New Age*. On her return to London, Mansfield became ill with an untreated sexually transmitted disease she contracted from Floryan Sobieniowski, a condition which contributed to her weak health for the rest of her life. Sobieniowski was a Polish émigré translator whom she met in Germany. Her first story published in England was “The Child-Who-Was-Tired,” which was about an overworked nursemaid who kills a baby.

Mansfield attended literary parties without much enthusiasm: “Pretty rooms and pretty people, pretty coffee, and cigarettes out of a silver tankard... I was wretched.” Always outspoken, she was once turned out of an omnibus (a horse-drawn bus) after calling another woman a whore; the woman had declared that all suffragettes ought to be trampled to death by horses. In 1911, she met John Middleton Murry, a socialist and former literary critic, who was first a tenant in her flat, then her lover. Until 1914 she published stories in *Rhythm* and *The Blue Review*. During the war, she travelled restlessly between England and France. After her brother “Chummie” died in World War I, Mansfield focused her writing on New Zealand and her family, and “Prelude” (1916), one of her most famous stories, comes from this period. After divorcing her first husband in 1918, Mansfield married Murry. In the same year, she was found to have tuberculosis.

Mansfield and Murry were closely associated with D.H. Lawrence and his wife Frieda. Upon learning that Murry had an affair with the Princess Bibesco (née Asquith), Mansfield objected not to the affair but to her letters to Murry. In a letter to the princess, she wrote: “I am afraid you must stop writing these love letters to my husband while he and I live together. It is one of the things which is not done in our world.”

Her last years Mansfield spent in southern France and in Switzerland, seeking relief from tuberculosis. As a part of her treatment in 1922 at an institute, Mansfield had to lie a few hours every day on a platform suspended over a cow manger. She breathed odours emanating from below, but the treatment did no good. Without the company of her literary friends, family, or her husband, she wrote much about her own roots and her childhood. Mansfield died of a pulmonary hemorrhage on January 9, 1923, in Gurdjieff Institute, near Fontainebleau, France. Her last words were: “I love the rain. I want the feeling of it on my face.”

Mansfield's family memoirs were collected in *Bliss* (1920). Only three volumes of Mansfield's stories were published during her lifetime. "Miss Brill" is about a woman who enjoys the beginning of the "season." She goes to her "special" seat with her fur. She had taken it out of its box in the afternoon, shaken off the moth-powder, and given it a brush. She feels that she has a part in the play in the park, and somebody will notice if she isn't there. A couple sits near her. The girl laughs at her fur and the man says: "Why does she come here at all – who wants her? Why doesn't she keep her silly old mug at home?" Miss Brill hurries back home, unclasps the neckpiece quickly, and puts it in the box. "But when she put the lid on she thought she heard something crying."

In "The Garden Party" (1921), an extravagant garden party is arranged on a beautiful day. Laura, the daughter of the party's hostess, hears of the accidental death of a young local working-class man, Mr. Scott, who lived in the neighbourhood. Laura wants to cancel the party, but her mother refuses to understand. She fills a basket with sandwiches, cakes, pastries, and other food, goes to the widow's house, and sees the dead man in the bedroom where he is lying. "He was wonderful, beautiful. While they were laughing and while the band was playing, this marvel had come to the lane." Crying she tells her brother, who is looking for her: "It was simply marvellous. But, Laurie –' She stopped, she looked at her brother. 'Isn't life,' she stammered, 'isn't life –' But what life was she couldn't explain. No matter. He quite understood."

Mansfield was greatly influenced by Anton Chekov, sharing his warm humanity and attention to small details of human behaviour. Her influence on the development of the modern short story was also notable. Among her literary friends were Aldous Huxley, Virginia Woolf, who considered her overpraised, and D.H. Lawrence, who later turned against Murry and her. Mansfield's journal, letters, and scrapbook were edited by her husband, who ignored her wish that he should "tear up and burn as much as possible" of the papers she left behind her.

Analysis of Katherine Mansfield's Stories

Katherine Mansfield's (14 October 1888 – 9 January 1923) themes are not hard to discover. In 1918, she set herself the tasks of communicating the exhilarating delicacy and peacefulness of the world's beauty and also of crying out against "corruption." A reader will soon make his or her own list of themes: the yearnings, complexities, and misunderstandings of love; loneliness, particularly of independent women; the superficiality of much of modern life; the erosions of

time and forgetfulness; the beauty and indifferent power of the natural world, especially plant life and the sea. Her exact meanings are not so easily pinned down, for her tone is complex: She mixes witty satire and shattering emotional reversals. Moreover, she uses dialogue and indirect speech extensively, and she does not often seem to speak directly in her own voice; the reader is not sure exactly who is speaking. It is vital for readers to understand that Mansfield (like Chekhov, to whom she is often compared) does not conceal a hidden “message” in her stories. If a story appears to point in many directions, not all of which are logically consistent, that is the way Mansfield feels the whole truth is most honestly communicated. This essay suggests some of the ways these stories may be read.

The action of Mansfield’s stories (again, like Chekhov’s) does not surge powerfully forward. Often her stories are designed, by means of quick changes in time and by surprise turns, to lead the reader to unexpected moments of illumination or epiphanies. Her stories are economical, edited so that there is usually not one unnecessary or insignificant word. She can be witty if she chooses, but more often her stories provide arresting descriptions and startling metaphors, which evoke shifting states of happiness, yearning, or despair.

In a Café

Mansfield’s stories often evoke the complexities of the conversational give-and-take between women and men and the unexpected courses that passion can take. An early story, “In a Café,” portrays a youthful “new woman” and her male acquaintance, a musician. They flirt as they discuss life, art, and the future. Before he leaves, he asks the girl for her violets, but once outside he drops them because he must keep his hands warm for performing. The young woman is totally happy until she sees the violets on the sidewalk. The reader knows that her love has been crushed, but, new woman that she is, she kicks the flowers and goes her way laughing.

Epilogue II

“Epilogue II” (also known as “Violet”) is more complex. At a pension in France, where the acidly worldly narrator is recovering from an attack of nerves, she reports a long conversation with an exasperating woman named Violet, who in turns tells of a conversation she has had with a man named Arthur. Violet says

that, after a few dances, Arthur asked her if she believed in Pan and kissed her. It was her first adult kiss, and they immediately became engaged. The narrator can hardly believe what Violet tells her and is repelled by how easily the naïve Violet and Arthur have found each other. The story (a conversation within a conversation) ends with the narrator thinking that she herself might be too sophisticated. (In this story, Mansfield has imported a piece of conversation from real life. Sometime before she wrote “Epilogue II,” she startled a man by asking him if he believed in Pan.)

Psychology

In “Psychology,” Mansfield dissects the ebb and flow of attraction between two older artists, culminating in a moment of potential, a moment which, because of their agonizing self-consciousness, they miss. This story shows both minds, but readers are left with the woman and with another characteristically unexpected psychological twist. An older female acquaintance brings her flowers—violets again. This spontaneous gift revitalizes the woman, and with renewed hope she begins an intense letter to the man who has left her. Readers may guess that their next meeting will be no more satisfying than their last.

The Lost Battle

Mansfield also explores the problems of lonely women, often by showing the reader their inmost trains of thought. In “The Lost Battle,” a woman traveling alone is escorted to her room in a French hotel by an overbearing man who makes demeaning and insinuating remarks: A bed in a small room will be enough for her, he implies. She asserts herself and demands a better room, one with a table on which to write. She wins her struggle and is happy with her new room—its size, the view from its windows, and its sturdy table. When she overtips the boy who delivers her bags, however, her joy somehow leaves her. In a convincing but mysterious moment typical of Mansfield’s stories, the woman’s bravery collapses in self-consciousness, memory, tears, and desire.

The Doll’s House

Two shorter New Zealand stories probably show Mansfield at her finest, and they show most clearly how her narrative surprises and moments of brilliant revelation of character and motive can be concentrated in a single phrase, in what might be

called a domestic epiphany: a small moment of great importance not easily summarized. In “The Doll’s House,” Kezia and her sisters are given a vulgar plaything. The house is despised by Aunt Beryl but loved by the girls (Kezia is particularly enthralled by a tiny lamp in the diminutive dining room) and much admired by their schoolmates. The story seems to be about adult cruelty and juvenile snobbery. All along, however, there appear to be two social outcasts, Lil Kelvey and her silent little sister, Else, both daughters of a washerwoman and (perhaps) a criminal. When Kezia impulsively invites them to look at the house, Aunt Beryl orders them away. Lil says nothing, but her silent, wretched little sister had got one glimpse of the beautiful doll’s house and remembers, not her humiliation, but that she saw the house’s tiny lamp. A small human spirit asserts itself.

The Garden-Party

“The Garden-Party” is based on what happened at a real party that the Beauchamps gave in Wellington in 1907. Part of its meaning concerns the relations between two social classes. The central character is Laura, clearly a Mansfield-like character, an adolescent Kezia. Laura is thrilled by the promise of festivity, but in the middle of the expensive preparations—canna lilies, dainty sandwiches, a small band to play under the marquee—she learns of the death of a poor man who lived close by in a wretched house. Readers see the clash of generations when Laura demands that the party be canceled, but her worldly mother says no. The party is a grand success. As usual in Mansfield, important matters slip the mind; Laura enjoys herself immensely, especially because her large new hat is widely admired. After the guests have left, her mother sends Laura with a basket of party food to the house of the dead man. Her journey at dusk is phantasmagoric. Her sympathies, forgotten at the party, return. She is shocked by the somber house of death and by the grieving wife, and overwhelmed by the stillness, even the beauty, of the corpse. Laura feels that she must say something: “Forgive my hat.” What she says is certainly inadequate, but it seems to signal a moment of understanding and growth—or does it? Laura has found a moment of beauty in death. Is that evasive or profound? She accepts the sympathy of her brother at the very end. He understands—or does he?

Text of Short Story “Canary”

The Canary

. . . YOU see that big nail to the right of the front door ? I can scarcely look at it even now and yet I could not bear to take it out. I should like to think it was there always even after my time. I sometimes hear the next people saying, " There must have been a cage hanging from there." And it comforts me ; I feel he is not quite forgotten.

. . . You cannot imagine how wonderfully he sang. It was not like the singing of other canaries. And that isn't just my fancy. Often, from the window, I used to see people stop at the gate to listen, or they would lean over the fence by the mock-orange for quite a long time —carried away. I suppose it sounds absurd to you—it wouldn't if you had heard him—but it really seemed to me that he sang whole songs with a beginning and an end to them.

For instance, when I'd finished the house in the afternoon, and changed my blouse and brought my sewing on to the verandah here, he used to hop, hop, hop from one perch to [PAGE 56](#)another, tap against the bars as if to attract my attention, sip a little water just as a professional singer might, and then break into a song so exquisite that I had to put my needle down to listen to him. I can't describe it; I wish I could. But it was always the same, every afternoon, and I felt that I understood every note of it.

... I loved him. How I loved him ! Perhaps it does not matter so very much what it is one loves in this world. But love something one must. Of course there was always my little house and the garden, but for some reason they were never enough. Flowers respond wonderfully, but they don't sympathise. Then I loved the evening star. Does that sound foolish ? I used to go into the backyard, after sunset, and wait for it until it shone above the dark gum tree. I used to whisper " There you are, my darling." And just in that first moment it seemed to be shining for me alone. It seemed to understand this . . . something which is like longing,

and yet it is not longing. Or regret— it is more like regret. And yet regret for what ? I have much to be thankful for.

. . . But after he came into my life I forgot the evening star ; I did not need it any more. But it was strange. When the Chinaman who came to the door with birds to sell held him up in his tiny cage, and instead of fluttering, fluttering, like the poor little goldfinches, he [PAGE 57](#)gave a faint, small chirp, I found myself saying, just as I had said to the star over the gum tree, " There you are, my darling." From that moment he was mine.

... It surprises me even now to remember how he and I shared each other's lives. The moment I came down in the morning and took -the cloth off his cage he greeted me with a drowsy little note. I knew it meant " Missus! Missus! " Then I hung him on the nail outside while I got my three young men their breakfasts, and I never brought him in until we had the house to ourselves again. Then, when the washing-up was done, it was quite a little entertainment. I spread a newspaper over a corner of the table and when I put the cage on it he used to beat with his wings despairingly, as if he didn't know what was coming. " You're a regular little actor," I used to scold him. I scraped the tray, dusted it with fresh sand, filled his seed and water tins, tucked a piece of chickweed and half a chili between the bars. And I am perfectly certain he understood and appreciated every item of this little performance. You see by nature he was exquisitely neat. There was never a speck on his perch. And you'd only to see him enjoy his bath to realise he had a real small passion for cleanliness. His bath was put in last. And the moment it was in he positively leapt into it. First he fluttered one wing, then the other, then he ducked his head and dabbled his breast feathers. Drops of water were scattered all over the kitchen, but still he would not get out. I used to say to him, " Now that's quite enough. You're only showing off." And at last out he hopped and, standing on one leg, he began to peck himself dry. Finally he gave a shake, a flick, a twitter and he lifted his throat—Oh, I can hardly bear to recall it. I was always cleaning the knives at the time. And it almost seemed to me the knives sang too, as I rubbed them bright on the board.

. . . Company, you see—that was what he was. Perfect company. If you have lived alone you will realise how precious that is. Of course there were my three young men who came in to supper every evening, and sometimes they stayed in the dining-room afterwards reading the paper. But I could not expect them to be interested in the little things that made my day. Why should they be ? I was nothing to them. In fact, I overheard them one evening talking about me on the stairs as " the Scarecrow." No matter. It doesn't matter. Not in the least. I quite understand. They are young. Why should I mind ? But I remember feeling so especially thankful that I was not quite alone that evening. I told him, after they had gone out. I said " Do you know what they call Missus ? " And he put his head on one side and looked at me with his little [PAGE 59](#)bright eye until I could not help laughing. It seemed to amuse him. .

. . . Have you kept birds ? If you haven't all this must sound, perhaps, exaggerated. People have the idea that birds are heartless, cold little creatures, not like dogs or cats. My washerwoman used to say on Mondays when she wondered why I didn't keep " a nice fox terrier," " There's no comfort, Miss, in a canary." Untrue. Dreadfully untrue. I remember one night. I had had a very awful dream—dreams can be dreadfully cruel—even after I had woken up I could not get over it. So I put on my dressing-gown and went down to the kitchen for a glass of water. It was a winter night and raining hard. I suppose I \ was still half asleep, but through the kitchen window, that hadn't a blind, it seemed to me the dark was staring in, spying. And suddenly I felt it was unbearable that I had no one to whom I could say " I've had such a dreadful dream," or—or " Hide me from the dark." I even covered my face for a minute. And then there came a little " Sweet! Sweet! " His cage was on the table, and the cloth had slipped so that a chink of light shone through. " Sweet! Sweet! " said the darling little fellow again, softly, as much as to say, " I'm here, Missus! I'm here ! " That was so beautifully comforting that I nearly cried.

. . . And now he's gone. I shall never have _ another bird, another pet of any kind. How could I ? When I found him, lying on his back, with his eye dim and his claws wrung, when I realised that never again should I hear my darling sing, something seemed to die in me. My heart felt hollow, as if it was his cage. I shall get over it. Of course. I must. One can get over anything in time. And people always say I have a cheerful disposition. They are quite right. I thank my God I have. . . . All the same, without being morbid, and giving way to—to memories and so on, I must confess that there does seem to me something sad in life. It is hard to say what it is. I don't mean the sorrow that we all know, like illness and poverty and death. No, it is something different. It is there, deep down, deep down, part of one, like one's breathing. However hard I work and tire myself I have only to stop to know it is there, waiting. I often wonder if everybody feels the same. One can never know. But isn't it extraordinary that under his sweet, joyful little singing it was just this—sadness ?—Ah, what is it ?—that I heard.