

## Katherine Mansfield: The Horror of Femininity

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### Abstract

This paper focuses on the theme of femininity, in the short stories of Katherine Mansfield (1888 – 1923), as causative for horror in a Modernist mood. As Mansfield disseminates gender-performance from its periphery towards a thematic whole within the reality of domesticity during the fragmented modern period, she focuses on how feminine consciousness works in an individual, and how that consciousness germinates a self that voices itself in adverse circumstances. By propagating the self, she unveils a darker realization of it: horror. This horror works as a dismantling force in the female characters of her stories that tell of their suffering, experience, and helplessness, which eventually reveal the horror they encounter throughout their existence. Mansfield's can be treated as an exposure of her own experience in the modernist environment. The shock she went through as an author is also exemplified in her writings. The characters unearth their observance, which is the attenuation of self through horror. In this way, Mansfield gleans the topic of femininity as an individual experience of horror. This paper aims to find how Mansfield presents the horror of femininity as a comprehensive mood of modernism in her short stories.]

### Keywords

*Modernism, katherine mansfield, horror, mood, short stories.*

Katherine Mansfield's short stories can be divided primarily into two groups: stories with New Zealand background, and stories with European setting – in England, France, and Germany. Her narrative focuses not on the plot, but on the characters. Mansfield constructs a story by emphasizing the inner, psychological world of the participants, although they remain passive in the development of the story. Thus, she distinguishes between the outside world and the interior of a character, and explores that character's self as it faces numerous uncertainties in that external world. The exterior world in her story becomes less significant than the inner world. She creates space within the individual, and expands this inner spatial world focusing on memory and consciousness, a process which is not limited within one time-frame. By creating two worlds, she brings the inside out, and nurtures it within the liminal space of short story.

Horror can be defined as a feeling of extreme fear or shock or disgust. Philip Nickel emphasizes on two components of horror: a mien of the monstrous, and an intentional evocation of fear (as cited in Fahy, 2010, p. 15). Virginia Woolf, in her novel *Mrs Dalloway* (1925), uses horror four times as a mood to express Clarissa's shock of pragmatics. Mansfield, with her colonial background, was not received well within English writing circles. London turned out to be a challenging place for her literary exposure. Her life-style, clothes, thoughts, and creativity were thought unworthy of Englishness (Smith, 2000, pp.

1-3). She underwent horror and injustice in this treatment, which belittled her both as a woman and as a writer. Her instincts encountered the problem of her feminine way of life. As a result, she developed a sense of alienation, uncertainty, and a forceful penetration inside a new culture, which gave her the strength of emerging as a modernist writer. Thus, her colonial background and the resistance she encountered in London encouraged her in rebellion, and the form that rebellion took was a concern with feminine and feminist ideals.

I aim to explore how feminine consciousness works in an individual in three of Mansfield's stories: "The Little Governess" (1915), "Miss Brill" (1920), and "Life of Ma Parker" (1921). Each story has one central female character. They are alone, and forced to be so in a world, which is not unknown to them, but which threatens them with the sense of loss of their individual identity. Mansfield looks deeply into the sufferings of these women, and subtly uses the stories to show how they are able, to some extent, through momentous anguish, to be conscious of themselves. The author uses the capacity of the genre in order to explicate an inevitable awareness in life, that is, being conscious of one's individuality.

Mansfield's coming to London to explore her creativity as a writer (Smith, 2000, pp. 9-10) had two edges: she was a woman, and she was a colonial personality. At a time when male modernists were dominating in the literary world, it was difficult for her to establish herself as a promising writer. Her gender identity was an important matter. Moreover, in that literary domain, the colonial background of a writer was not a welcome issue. Mansfield needed two types of shelter under one parasol. She had to feel safe, and she needed someone who could sustain her authorship. Scott says that Mansfield is a marginal writer, doubly disadvantaged, and from the beginning of her career she searched for male confidants who could be her safeguard against sexual exploitation and promote her work (Scott, 1990, p. 299). Finding herself thus cornered, Mansfield paradoxically benefited from her situation. With the ingenuity of writing stories, she could easily realize the extent of her transplantation in the new place with all its adversities. Europe introduced alienation to her from a broader perspective. She accepted that challenge of becoming a role-player. Difficult though it was to the extreme, she prepared herself for getting a clear image of the surroundings – people, culture, place, and psychology. She was thus able to uncoil that realization – the new consciousness within – in a new light, and that in her timeless short stories.

"If we turn to modernist representations of domestic space," states Katherine Mullin, "we can perceive a self-conscious awareness in writers of both genders that the world of family, home, love, marriage, and romance has traditionally been labeled a female world" (as cited in Rooney, 2006, p. 144). Her interest lies in the women because of her own experience as a female author, and because of the modernist trend. The three stories are about three lonely women, 'femmes seules,' who find everything around them – space, culture, people – as threatening towards their individual socio-cultural existence. These characters become the ground of interior and exterior explorations for Mansfield. She refashions this world with a view to studying female psychology. For her, this psychology is to understand how the characters evaluate their surroundings and themselves. In other words, the female characters in her stories become sentient at a transfixed point of life.

The term "feminine" incorporates women's exploration of their own voice and identity into a set cultural background. It refers to an awareness at multifarious levels of individual attainment. Moi argues that femininity is a cultural construct, and feminine represents both nurture and female nature (Moi, 2002, p. 64). Femininity, being a cultural construct, is not immanent, but rather, it is an exteriority or external action. It can be explained as what Robert Connell calls "emphasized femininity," which is "soft, submissive, sexually coy, alluring or

flirtatious, concerned with domesticity and preoccupied with bodily appearance" (Bradley, 2007, pp. 47-48). Women are expected – in the patriarchal community – to have all these attributes, which may formulate their action, and which creates the idea of the 'feminine.' This external action is what Judith Butler defines as 'performativity' in *Gender Trouble*. According to Butler, gender is a cultural construct, and so, biology or biological difference does not have much to do with it. Gender is a free-floating artifice, and must depute the paraphernalia of creation whereby the very sexes are founded (Butler, 2006, pp. 8-10). Elsewhere, she suggests that gender is performative, that gender performance produces an illusion of an inward gender. In other words, gender performance instigates the effect of true or perennial feminine temperament (as cited in Salih & Butler, 2004, p. 253). So, it can be said that femininity is primarily an outcome of the performance of gender, which depends on social construction and action or performance.

According to Barbara Marshall, consciousness is an ongoing process, a continual renegotiation of the relationship between self and others (Marshall, 1994, p. 113). In other words, consciousness is a concept which is conscious of itself and delineates how it acts, reacts, and interacts within its enclosures while remaining central all the time. "Gender does not 'express' a self, a way of being, or a bodily difference, but rather is a performance or enactment of power," which, states Chris Beasley, "is productive and multiple. It provides the dynamic shaping of the self" (Beasley, 2005, p. 101). Therefore, it is the enactment, the performance, the power within gender, and the multiplicity that can create the proper shape of feminine consciousness.

Mansfield writes in her journal, "True to oneself! which self? Which of my many . . . hundreds of selves?" (Mansfield, 1962, p. 205). Once she is aware of the self's multiplicity, she is also aware that it is fragmented. As a modernist author, she deals with this fragmentation. Scott says that Mansfield's writing method is always one of extreme indirection and obliquity, which is feminine in nature, in comparison to the writings of male modernists like Eliot or Joyce. This fragmentary self seems to be feminine because the real self continues to outdo and evade any masculine attempt to label it, to give it the proper means regarding any emblematic order (Scott, 1990, pp. 301-302). Mansfield's symbolic authorship is not in harmony with the male modernists, but is filled with commonalities. One ordinary description of everyday life, any unenhanced action leads to the tension that lies within, hidden, and surfaces abruptly. When characters come close to accept that stress, they become conscious of their action, performance or power. Mansfield's 'femme seule' stories reveal this methodically. She injects her own experience into her stories, and manifests the horror of that experience.

"The Little Governess" (1915) presents an unnamed young girl travelling from France to Germany as a prospective employee. The story narrates her loneliness and anxiety regarding her feminine identity, and the threat through which she finally comes to discover the external world as well as her internal susceptibility. It is about the development of a young girl dwelling in a fantasized world from where she needs much strength to come to the real world, which is much deceptive. She loiters between fantasy and reality, and falsity and authenticity. Her sense of the horror of the time is coated with the pseudo-courage or self-deception in the masculine world. Unacquainted with the external world, the little governess must encounter a situation that will enthrall and refurbish her true extent about living in that unknown and threatening world.

The story begins with two different approaches towards life: one of the ladies at the Governess Bureau, and the other of the girl. The contrast is obvious between innocence and experience regarding travel-time and safety. The governess has to travel, against her will, at night-time, which she comprehends as hazardous, which gives rise to the mood of horror in her. But the lady advises her with all the probable shields for her to use, and concludes her suggestion with a bold affirmation, "It sounds rather hard but we've got to be women of the world, haven't we?" (Mansfield, 2002, p.47). This challenge demands more attention to one's interiority than to the outside world. A hotel room is not as safe as the labelled compartment of the train, and it is the label which makes it safe. Inside it can only those people sit who are helpless outside that label. So, there is the vulnerability of women. The only way to remain safe is to be alert all the time. The lady means to say that she should be conscious of her surroundings and her self. Both the exteriority and the interiority of a person are the points of concern while she undertakes travelling, and that lady's assertion is an encouragement towards her self-estimation and self-guarding confronting her horror-mood of being in an unpredictable stage.

Mansfield harshly treats the governess through masculine agency for showing the contrast between reality and expectancy. A porter gives the girl the first blow by taking advantage of her stature and her belongings. The author uses the narrative as a determining deviance within the governess, "She had to run to keep up with him, and her anger, far stronger than she, ran before her and snatched the bag out of the wretch's hand" (Mansfield, 2002, p.48). What she feels inside cannot be executed properly because the cultural construct does not permit her to do so. The brawl about the payment shows the girl's apparent victory over an intruder in her condition. But here is how she misguides herself as she remains horrified, stiff, yet convinced that she can manage her situation, and then in the narrative, she "looked – like a woman wheeling a perambulator – up and down, up and down – with a sleeping baby inside it" (Mansfield, 2002, p.49). C. A. Hankin says that the governess is an immature character not to be able to differentiate between truth and wish-fulfilment. Childhood, showered with with emotion in a grown-up lady, is the theme here (Hankin, 1983, pp. 98-99). A sense of unsheltered emptiness works in her gradually, and what comes out is the deep corner, where she is merely an immature girl in the shell of a woman. Mansfield makes things worse for her as she faces other anxieties in the train, when she muses, "I wish it wasn't night-time. I wish there was another woman in the carriage. I'm frightened of the men next door." Her mood of horror eases when the imagined "grandpapa" (Mansfield, 2002, pp.50-51) arrives and settles.

The little governess beguiles herself once again when she looks forward to being sheltered by the old man. Her fantasy prevents her from being cautious about people and place. As a young starter in life, her dress, thoughts, class, and belongings ascertain her feminine normativity. Pamela Dunbar explicates that it is a story about a governess's personality, attitude, and plight. The image which most aptly marks her vulnerability, also painfully conveys her naïveté and as-yet unstructured identity. Because of her situation, she remains alone, and is forced to be so (Dunbar, 1997, pp. 63-64). The governess's idea about the old man and her indulgence in him ironically show that she is left within the threat of immaturity and loneliness. Her one-day stay in Munich for sight-seeing with him works as the most crucial event yet in her tender life. It is this person who manipulates her into fulfilling his sexual appetite, and thus diabolically offers her a lesson in the world-view. On her part, she acts the way she is expected to do. The world is not full of good people only; there are other people who roam round, wearing the mask of goodness, and prey upon their victims when opportunity offers itself. But this opportunity works only when one is not aware of one's internal and external conditions.

The governess is blinded not by the behaviour of the old man, but by her own estimation. Being unable to judge incidents precisely, she is forced to have a kiss from the pseudo-benefactor, and that, "On the mouth! Where not a soul who wasn't a near relation had ever kissed her before. . . ." (Mansfield, 2002, p.58). This is the moment when she looks at herself, portends and becomes herself. As he is not a relation, he cannot kiss her on the mouth. This is how the epiphany works in the story that the little governess becomes what she has been missing all this time: conscious of her instincts. The self is retroactive here. Horrified, she runs as she cries, violating the societal custom of not displaying emotion in the public, because of the ache of the revelation of her extent. Her fantasy is metamorphosed to reality, and likewise, her immaturity is converted into the consciousness of her position. The grandfather is not the concern anymore. The grandchild is now dead. She is forced to be free from her self-deception. "The abjection of self," says Julia Kristeva, "would be the culminating form of that experience of the subject to which it is revealed that all its objects are based merely on the inaugural loss that laid the foundations of its own being" (Kristeva, 1982, p. 5). What comes out of the cocoon is a woman who has now learned how to be sheltered. Somewhat autobiographical regarding a lonely woman's travelling aboard, argues Sydney Kaplan, the story echoes Mansfield's concern as an author, and her vulnerability within the domain of men. She does it with the girl's self-division and her self-deception, and both her impulses toward freedom and her conditioned responses to self-denial (Kaplan, 1991, pp. 118-22). The governess's authentic journey is not from France to Germany, but from childhood to womanhood, from immaturity to maturity, from fantasy to reality, and most importantly, from gullibility to consciousness. Her experience begins with the porter, and ends with the waiter at the hotel, the old man being the principal artefact in making her aware of what she really is.

"Katherine Mansfield's fiction is important," says Marvin Magalaner, "for its ability to verbalize dramatically levels of consciousness seldom depicted effectively in English short fiction up to her time" (Magalaner, 1971, p. 130). Like "The Little Governess," "Miss Brill" (1920) is another story of a lonely woman at a foreign place. She is not young, and cannot be deceived by any imaginary might-be protector. But, like the little governess, she is also vulnerable, and beguiles herself until the penultimate moment. Dialogue is scanty; the narrative maintains a speechless psychological fluidity. An observer of her surroundings, the elderly spinster entertains herself as she watches people in the park where she comes every Sunday afternoon. She can find the limitations around, but misses those in her. Being self-confident, she, like the little governess, fantasizes her situation and herself. In 1921, Mansfield wrote to Richard Murry, "In Miss Brill I chose not only the length of every sentence, but even the sound of every sentence . . . to fit her on that day at that very moment" (Mansfield, 1984-2008, 4, p. 165). Mansfield quite unexpectedly – as a psychological study – reveals the harsh truth of internal ignorance, and hence the vulnerability, of this lady through mortification and pathos. In "Miss Brill", she fantasizes the horror she went through in England as a colonial author.

Miss Brill represents the typical life of a lonely woman. She uses "her 'special' seat" (Mansfield, 2002, p. 225) in the park as the centre of her world, which imbues her with amusement from her surroundings. This set time creates in her a sense of timelessness as she becomes the silent commentator of the ongoing events. This ephemeral time is static as she ponders, "Other people sat on the benches and green chairs, but they were nearly always the same, Sunday after Sunday, and . . . there was something funny about nearly all of them. They were 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 – even cupboards!" (Mansfield, 2002, p.226).

She observes them through time's fixity within a non-spatial life. This is the birth of her consciousness, which remains unnoticed by her. She brings with her the past, and compares it to the present. An English teacher in France and a reading assistant by profession, Miss Brill's only companion is her mind, which she uses for evaluating others. And in her mind, she maintains an affinity with the fur as she treats it as animated, "Little rouge," which is "biting its tail just by her left ear" (Mansfield, 2002, p. 225). This is how, being lonely, she relies on her innerness for overcoming the void in life. Her life passes without any practical movement. Her apparently charmless life is the charm in the story. Mere observation is not enough; it is the revelation of the effect of that task that counts. Miss Brill comes here consistently, but misses that she herself is silent, nearly old, and comes here from her own little room.

Like "The Little Governess," "Miss Brill" also deals with inner ambivalence. Miss Brill is revealed, narrates Sylvia Berkman, through the interior monologue in association with external scene. Hyperconscious and semi-hysterical, this solitary figure is intensely absorbed in the limited happenings, which she explains through feverish examination in the running stream of feeling (Berkman, 1951, pp. 162-63). She interprets musical notes; she feels what and how other people may feel. She even finds how people are pretentious by following the incident of the girl with an ermine toque. When the girl is discarded, she "smiled more brightly than ever" (Mansfield, 2002, p. 227). Miss Brill is much compassionate about the whole incident, and follows the drum beat, "The Brute! The Brute!" But the derelict girl can pretend that "she'd seen some one else, much nicer, just over there, and pattered away" (Mansfield, 2002, p. 227). This girl feigns. She has to, because life's mutability is expected by the society. Here is a difference between the two ladies. The ermine toque knows what to do. Miss Brill can interpret the tune, but cannot understand her own position of being a passive onlooker, who fails to look at herself.

Miss Brill's voice is her psychic analysis, which makes her more active than others. She participates passively, unattended and unnoticed, "The air was motionless, but when you opened your mouth there was just a faint chill, like a chill from a glass of iced water before you sip, and now and again a leaf came drifting – from nowhere, from the sky." Like the chill inside, she is ignited through her participation: everything is as pre-arranged as the scenes in a play, and like a performer, she has her role of a spectator, "Yes, I have been an actress for a long time" (Mansfield, 2002, pp. 225, 228). She lives within a false sense of personality that she is a controlled actress. Her feminine instincts are wrapped in this hyperreality, which she is unable to categorize until people from younger generation ravage her world. When a boy and a girl share her seat, they express that Miss Brill is the intruder in their way of life. This is the determinative moment in her entire life. Their behaviour unveils a truth, which she is not strong enough to uphold. Being horrified at the realization, her pseudo-consciousness shatters. Unlike the ermine toque, she cannot pretend, and being unable to tolerate it, "to-day she passed the baker's by," from where she regularly buys her Sunday treatment, "climbed the stairs, went into the little dark room – her room like a cupboard – and sat down on the red eiderdown" (Mansfield, 2002, p. 229). Her feminine disposition has been given an unexpected shake. As it is not customary to demonstrate feeling in the public, she quietly returns home without carrying any sign that she has been demolished.

Thus, Miss Brill comes to her new consciousness at the expense of her consciousness. She has never found any similarity between other people's dwellings and her own. Now she comes to the point, and she finds her delimited space. She desperately needs the caring emotion she has nurtured for the ermine toque. But knowing that she cannot have it, she retreats to her own shelter. Fullbrook says that Miss Brill rigorously metamorphoses

into an exile from a participant. The story articulates a conscious yet discrete self, the realization of which is achieved through much agony but honour. This is a portrait of a woman caught by the contradictions of social preconceptions that she herself has internalised (Fullbrook, 1986, pp. 104-6). As she returns, she concludes how she has been treated and viewed by others. She puts back the fur inside the box, and hears the cry not of the fur, but of that which erupts from within. It is the cry of her inner self, her feminine impulse, not because she is looked down upon, but because her confidence of the performer has been thrashed by the fact that she must play a different role from now on, instinctively, one that she has not been prepared for at all. The momentary realization offers her a new world, where, inflicted with horror, she must accommodate herself from a new perspective. The fur's return into the box is, as Clare Hanson says, "a release for more obscure and painful feelings, for an impulse towards self-destruction . . . is displaced onto an external object in the fantasy of killing the 'dear little thing'" (as cited in Kimber & Wilson, 2011, p. 121). Her failure in standing the young generation, the challenging and arrogant voice against tradition, unveils her vulnerability. In this story as well, the protagonist undergoes a transformation that is conclusive and pathetically comprehensive. Mansfield wrote in her journal in 1920, "At the back of my mind I am so wretched. But all the while I am thinking over my philosophy – the defeat of the personal" (Mansfield, 1962, p. 195). Miss Brill acknowledges defeat and returns to her chamber, where she is confined with the horror of femininity.

"Life of Ma Parker" (1921) is a story of an elderly lady whose fate is wretched, and who faces defeat like the protagonists of the two previous stories. Ma Parker is an old charwoman working for a literary gentleman in London. Without much action, and hence without any fixed plot, the story depicts her struggling life through many constraining events. The narrative vacillates between past and present frequently in the manner of stream of consciousness. As the story begins, she joins her work after the latest blow in her life – death of her grandson. She does not expect much from life, and like her answer to the gentleman's question, she retreats to work silently. But with this visible silence, Mansfield introduces the contrasting psychology of the protagonist: her psychological consciousness in the concrete representation of stream of consciousness, bringing time into motionless spatiality.

A working woman her whole life, Ma Parker is evidently ignorant of Shakespeare. The narrative presents her as a person who repeatedly looks back while conversing with her employer and with herself. The fragmented representation of her past makes her life-story the broken perception of a pathetic character. She remembers, "there was something – a bush, there was – at the front door, that smelt ever so nice. But the bush was very vague. She'd only remembered it once or twice in the hospital, when she'd been taken bad" (Mansfield, 2002, p. 252). The shape becomes rather a silhouette, and she confides to its essence. She juxtaposes her illness with a retreat to the past. She talks about it, the only pleasure in her early life. Coming out of the shelter of her mother, paralleled by the bush, and coming from traditional Victorian life-style, she finds life horrible. In fact, her life is blessed with renewed horror. As a working woman, her life has never been a pleasure until becoming a grandmother. Even in her married life, she bears the constant symbol of motherhood and nurture. This deplorable life lacks a proper place where she can have a room of her own. As Judy Giles says, "Women of all ages and classes continued to seek spaces in which they might negotiate the tensions between the necessary safety of mundanity and the need for individual fulfilment" (Giles, 2004, pp. 158-59). Ma Parker's feminine urge has always been hampered, as her psychic embodiment of the past reveals. She has never been able to feel the essence of the lost smell of the vague bush of her secured childhood.

As a caring woman, and as a caring mother in her sub-conscious mind, Ma Parker feels pity for the gentleman. Her approach towards all – children, sister-in-law, grandson, her employer – is that of an all-encompassing benefactor, who swallows every bit of her sorrow. In doing so, that persistent yet suppressed mourning becomes visible to all. She is like the sky, "Out of the smudgy little window you could see an immense expanse of sad-looking sky, and whenever there were clouds they looked very worn, old clouds, frayed at the edges, with holes in them, or dark stains like tea" (Mansfield, 2002, p.251). Ma Parker and her sufferings are brought together in the same spatiality. Like clouds, her distress piles up without melting away. She knows this. Still, her awareness brings further devastation for her. In all these adversities, it is Lennie, the grandson, who has been her only consolation. Now that he is also gone – the story tells it at the beginning, and gradually yet randomly unfolds more information of her agony – she has lost the last refuse of life. Like the lonely sky that can bear stained clouds, Ma Parker has nothing left but the past to continue in the present. For her, time is static at a time of complete loss of her feeling, her happiness, her inspiration in life. Rhoda Nathan says that the memorabilia in this plotless story helps to understand an ordinary woman's piteous grief without much tragedy in it. The dual poignancy of the story reclines in Ma Parker's overall loss and seclusion. The centre of her life becomes empty, though her situation has not changed (Nathan, 1988, p. 95). As a caregiver, and not as a receiver, Ma Parker remembers her whole life up to the funeral of the grandson. The aftermath of it is what comes out as a fragmented form of her life-story, which is not tear-shedding, but heart-squeezing. It is so because the lack of expression of feelings, enforced by the socio-cultural construction, represses her all the more.

Little Lennie has been ill for quite a long time, and being his grandmother's only hope in a cruel world where there is nothing but pain, grief, humiliation, and his death works as Ma Parker's induction to a dark truth. Now that Lennie is gone, "what had she? She had nothing. He was all she'd got from life, and now he was took too. Why must it all have happened to me? she wondered. 'What have I done?' said old Ma Parker. 'What have I done?'" (Mansfield, 2002, p.255). Mansfield uses death as a decoy for all the despair of Ma Parker to come out. Death in the family has not been able to defeat her. Like an expected, caring woman, she has eluded other sorrows as well. But now, since this little hope for all her concentration, for a future world has passed away, her stoical strength has vanished at the same time. "Nothingness and meaninglessness," says Françoise Defromont, "these are the dead-ends to which Katherine Mansfield's approach to death leads. Actual death and death of the soul both point to an unbearable suffering and the implicit revolt it prompts in the sufferer's heart" (as cited in Michel & Dupuis, 1989, p. 160). The life-story of Ma Parker is not extraordinary. Yet, the hopelessness germinating from her whole life's experience not only breaks her inner strength but also brings the readers to a point from where they can visualize her.

Ma Parker's helplessness is completed as she finds no proper space for mourning this loss. She finds no place "where she could hide and keep herself to herself and stay as long as she liked.

There was nowhere" (Mansfield, 2002, pp.255-56). The last three words conclude the story, but carry on her agony in a space where there is no relief for her. She has to go on like this, being deprived of spatial respite. Herself a realm of enormous nurture inside and outside house, from past to present, this old lady with all her consciousness cannot bring an end to her undisclosed misery. Since everyone has seen her tolerate grief, she has to carry on like this without ever getting relief of her true emotion. This is how she experiences the horror in her life. This harsh truth works against herself. She has to nurture her inner distress



the way she nurtures others. Her endless sorrow mounts; there is no place where she can shed tears over her sorrow. This spatial paradox is the conscious realization in her. It is the paradoxical space that she is limited to. That is how Ma Parker's ordinary life becomes a visionary symbol of her defeat in life, consciousness against consciousness, time against time.

All these three stories focus on three different-aged working-class women who, in the last phase of the narrative, come across an unexpected and destitute reality that they cannot bypass. Yet, this moment offers an enlightenment that tells them how to be unpretentious, showing respect to their inner selves at the same time. They have lived with affliction, which has been shaped by society and culture that expect and drive them to act in a certain way. Mansfield portrays them as primarily filled with the strength of life. Later, they face unprecedented changes, which reconstruct them with an inner awareness that empowers them, through suffering, in their ways to life. This new power prepares them for a new start. Their remodelled feminine instinct is the authority they now own. The stories end, but leave a mark on the reader's mind about how these women determine, and how they are determined. The little governess, Miss Brill, and Ma Parker, more or less, maintain the legacy of the Victorian period. But in the modernist time, their lives have become challenging in the changing setting. Mansfield unveils their vulnerability of challenging that challenge of being on their own, uninfluenced by the periphery. Their experience of horror and performance in the relevant space and society give rise to their feminine attributes, which help them formulate an individual inner consciousness. The femininity that these individuals have passes through repression and agony, and leads to a self, which cries with an inner, suppressed voice against social repression for the sake of its identity. It is an identity which is forced to lose itself. The women perform, and are performed later on. Either way, that performance brings an end to their conscious existence, and tends to begin a new start through the passage of horror in life.. In this way, Mansfield offers these deprived women the voice that they do not find anymore. These women do not fight, but rather admit defeat as they pass through excruciating horror in life. Through their helpless surrender to that oppression, they are in the path of creating an awareness that may speak for themselves. Mansfield does not directly speak for it, but presents the situation as it is so that the realization can surface in the minds of the readers.

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