

KATHERINE MANSFIELD: A THEMATIC STUDY

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Dedicated to my late
unfathomable pa-man

Preface

This study is both a descriptive and an analytic examination of dominant themes and patterns in Katherine Mansfield's stories. Arbitrarily referred to as the author of "The Fly" or "Prelude", Mansfield remains something of an enigma, shrouded in mystery. Much of the confusion may directly be attributed to her wild propensities. Tolerance and a comprehensive judgment are absolute essentials for studying the works of a writer who has performed with great élan.

The present work intends to discern the shifts and displacements of a sensibility, rather than to proffer a bland discussion of essential thematic structures in Mansfield's stories i.e. the question how Mansfield in "The Woman at the Store" differs from Mansfield of "Prelude" has been regarded as more important than the intrinsic qualities of each as a short story. Her almost belligerent insistence on the rational incoherence in the sequence of feeling in each character has been highlighted. Yet the incoherence is psychologically fully convincing. Mansfield's protagonists are incapable of leading a strict and methodical life. Their waverings may be partly ascribed to the lapse of time sense in the sleepy, temperate and equable climate of New Zealand. The luxuriant vegetation and sub-tropical forests with dense undergrowth have active participation in the human drama.

What may be called Mansfield's 'strife' is strangely woven into modern consciousness, possessing the power to startle and to charm. In striving to explore the ramifications of her obsessive themes (themes that are topical but nevertheless arresting and compelling), this study purports to do justice to a rather neglected writer of considerable talent.

It is impossible to name the variety of sources that have enhanced this project. Professor K.K. Roy is to be thanked for his wonted, meticulous supervision despite his many academic engagements. Dr. Probir Hui of W.B.S.E.S has provided generous assistance over the years. The National Library, Calcutta, the British Council Library, Calcutta and the USIS, Calcutta, have encouraged this project. Mr. S. Bagchi of Siliguri College Library and his colleagues are to be thanked for their encouragement and support. Dr. Chandanashish Laha is to be thanked for his valuable suggestions. Special thanks are due to Mr. Manoj Chakraborty who has undertaken the arduous task of typing out this thesis. Finally, I thank my family for keeping my spirits up.

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Chapter I

Introduction

This introductory chapter is divided into three sections. The first section takes a bird's eye view of the general features of the short story as a genre as well as some of its recurring motifs. The second deals briefly with Chekhov vis-a-vis Katherine Mansfield, who regarded herself as his follower. The third and final section highlights the factors that shape Mansfield's individual talent in the tradition of the short story. It would be a challenging task to locate Mansfield honourably somewhere between overpraise and underpraise by a thematic study of her stories.

(1)

The Short Story : Features and Themes

As a detailed study of the origin and growth of the short story would only be a very long story beyond the scope of the present study, it might be convenient to begin with what Edgar Allan Poe has to say about the quintessential features of this genre. Poe can very well be a starting point because it was he who first formulated a complete theory or gave a set of principles of the short story. In his well known critique of Hawthorne's Twice Told Tales, published in Graham's Magazine

in 1892, Poe laid down the following precise requisites: (a) a short story must achieve a predetermined effect; (b) it should mercilessly exclude everything that has nothing to do with the desired effect; and (c) it should be short but not so short that the preconceived design cannot be achieved. Considering the variety of forms and techniques which have characterized the vigorous growth of the short story through the ages, Poe's prescriptions should be enough for the purpose of the present study. However, Poe was stressing action more than character while Turgenev, Chekhov and Mansfield (to take the subject of the present study), put more emphasis on character rather than on action. Thus what we see in Poe is a purity of form, and in the others mentioned the form melting into the plot.

The short story is a product of conscious artistry. It is the unity of impression that sets the short story apart from other kinds of fiction. In this impressionistic prose tale, the author moves slowly towards a moment of crisis through cautious economy and scrupulous inspection of his material. Selection must be effectively done by choosing only the essential. The writer of a short story has to be profound, wise and laconic. In a long story, the reader may be overpowered by brilliant descriptions and witty persiflage, but in a short story he is in full view.

The primary function of a short story writer is to keep intact the unity of impression with his special brand of imaginative magic. Stories grow in his imagination from strong impressions.

They may jut out from anything : a decor, a picture or even a painting. Mansfield's early obsession with the Jugend is well known. She could frame a story around a Jugend picture. Chekhov often claimed that any subject would suffice for the formation of an impression. The success of the story lies in its ability to convince. So the author must, in a profound manner, believe in the direction of his imagination.

The moment of crisis is worked out by short story writers through effective evolution of the initial impression. The nature of the crisis is different in each story, depending largely upon the characteristic and temperamental infusions of the author. A single character in a single episode may be revealed at a particular moment without any discernible character delineation. Tagore's outstanding story "One Night" begins abruptly at a given point. Events of a tempestuous night are the determinant. A threatening firmament and gushing waters obliterate not only ^{the} village but also the social parameter. Amidst the dissonance of a hostile nature, love is explored in all its tenderness and purity. Not a word is exchanged between the lovers as they stand on the embankment in the darkness. The night becomes an eternal night in bringing them close and crystallizing emotions never expressed with a realization of the strength of the bond that unites the two of them.

Generally a character undergoes a decisive change in nature or understanding in the moment of crisis. James Joyce has invented a term for these moments of revelation. "Epiphany", according to Joyce is "the adaptation, near blasphemous, of a theological expression to secular ends" (Walter Allen, The Short Story, 7). The personal crisis point is striking in Anton Chekhov's "The Grasshopper", Mansfield's "Miss Brill", or Turgenev's "Yermolai and the Miller's Wife". Realization comes at a point of no return in "The Grasshopper" and "Miss Brill". Disillusion and futility of one's predicament become explicit in both the stories, but the severe Chekhovian treatment of the theme is strikingly different from Mansfield's stark Dostojvskian infusions. Impressions are instrumental in instilling tales of segregation and waste, bearing authentic, temperamental undertones.

Unity of impression does not necessarily mean brevity. If a prize is awarded for the shortest short story, it should not be taken seriously. The ghost story that Guy N. Pocock cites in his Modern Short Stories (6), is simply written for fun. Condensation is an asset to a short story writer for more serious and artistic considerations. Twenty five years have been unbelievably condensed in Guy de Maupassant's "The Olive Orchard". Chekhov telescopes time with strict economy in "The Bet". The

viciousness that can arise from a simple bet is the subject matter of the story.

The theme of a short story is its indispensable ingredient; characters or actions cannot be assessed without any reference to it. The theme is not merely the topic of a story. Cleanth Brooks and Robert Penn Warren have made an earnest attempt to define the theme in their remarkable study Understanding Fiction. The theme, they declare, is what is made of the topic. It is a larger concept than the topic. "The theme is", they continue, "what a piece of fiction stacks up to" (177). "It is the idea, the significance, the interpretations of persons and events, the pervasive and unifying view of life embodied in the total narrative" (177), they concede. The topic of two stories may be identical but the thematic treatment in each case depends on the author's orientation. In other words, the treatment of a particular theme is impregnated with the author's personality.

Short story writers have been inordinately fond of death as a theme. Sherwood Anderson's "Death in the Woods" is a remarkable story. It was written a long time after the actual event i.e. the uncanny death of a woman in a forest on an icy night. The initial impression lay latent in the author's mind. "The whole thing, the story of the old woman's death was to me as I grew older like music heard far off. The notes had to be

picked up, slowly one at a time. Something had to be understood" (Brooks & Penn Warren, 210). Thus the notes were picked up in the tale of the woman to whom happiness seemed an illusion all her life. She fed men and cattle in life, and in death dogs do not spare her. In a strange metamorphosis, dogs become savage wolves. The macabre running of the dogs is due to another impression which has been joined to the initial one. Death becomes intriguing as the split seconds before death are portrayed with accuracy and adroitness. "She wouldn't be very cold now, just drowsy. Life hangs on a long time. Perhaps the old woman was out of her head. She may have dreamed of her girlhood at the German's and before that, when she was a child and before her mother lit out and left her" (Brooks & Penn Warren, 207). In spite of Anderson's modest effort, death remains a mystery and the moment of death a puzzle.

Death, again the theme in D. H. Lawrence's "Odour of Chrysanthemums", brings out the buried life of turbulent feelings. The miner lies in the naive dignity of death whom his wife finds unapproachable. "She saw him, how utterly inviolable he lay in himself. She had nothing to do with him" (Arthur Mizener, Modern Short Stories, 448). The dead man's mother cannot remain quiet in her jealous mother love. She joins her daughter-in-law in washing and cleaning the body of her son. The wife is more perturbed than sad. The proximity of her relationship with her

husband perplexes her. Each time he had taken her, they had been two separate beings, far apart as now. He was no more responsible than she. Hurriedly finishing the frightful job of laying the body, she turns to life. She cannot face death in fear and shame. The treatment of the death theme is quinessentially Lawrentian. Lawrence's life-long obsession with the conflict of the sexes and his delving deep into unknown depths of feeling find expression in the story.

Exoticism marks out a subgenre of the short story. What is unfamiliar is often mysterious. Mansfield's Worishofen stories portray a society remote from the average English home, with ruddy housewives and arrogant men. Her Karori tales are remnants of a pristine past. The Karakas and the aloe and the human drama enacted around them are within the purview of Colonial New Zealand. Remoteness becomes the preponderant quality of Mansfield's topographical stories. Joseph Conrad's torrid ravings in the tropical jungles become striking in their foreignness. Heart of Darkness ensures a journey into the primeval ; "We could not understand because we were too far and could not remember, because we were travelling in the night of the first ages, of those ages that are gone, leaving hardly a sign and no memories" (Mizener, 43). The encounter between African darkness and European enlightenment is the encounter between the unconscious and conscious poles of the human psyche. The antinomy between them is the staple of modern literature as such.

A regional writer's vision remains anchored in local clay. Mansfield's bay is an allocated Murital. If it becomes apocalyptic at any moment, it must do so in response to some deep-seated urge. Eudora Welty in her informative piece "How I Write", emphasizes the role of place in the short story. Place is one of the simple, obvious and direct sources of the short story, she declares. An author is organically a part of his native soil. D.H. Lawrence's sooty Eastwood miners are the projections of his altruistic attachment to their lot. Katherine Anne Porter is preoccupied with the Southerners from Texas. Rudyard Kipling prefers adventures on Indian soil. The genius loci has spawned many good short stories.

A short story writer's power of association and imaginative cognition are important qualities. A short story affirms a vision, manifesting a logic and meaning of its own and creating a believable atmosphere. Each author has his individual convincibility. To convey a certain experience Maugham may go to Fiji but Chekhov will crystallize it in the life of a poor clerk. Maupassant's "Marocca" and Balzac's "A Passion in the Desert" both explore violence of love. Maupassant's suggestive symbol is a woman while Balzac prefers a tigress. One may choose a snake even. The importance of the symbol is paramount as it expresses an experience without action or explanation. Symbols become instinctive instillations of story writers. A simple locker might stand for a protective shelter in a John Updike

story, imprisoning a boy for life. Mansfield's temperamental leanings select an aloe with its protective thorns for the epiphanical moment. The emotional experience in each case remains an indispensable element. It may begin at any given point that will "start the imagination on its characteristic job of putting things concretely in a moment toward meaning ..." (Brooks & Penn Warren, 296).

(ii)

The Master as She knew Him

Guy de Maupassant and Anton Chekhov have been the greatest formative influences in the domain of the short story. Maupassant's caustic irony and unsparing pointing finger represent the apotheosis of the short story as much as Chekhov's grim mood stories do. Mansfield, on her part, was consciously following the Chekhovian path. Chekhov's obsession with the vision, regardless of circumstances and his dreary subjectivity were like a luminous indication to her. To S. S. Koteliansky Mansfield wrote in early August 1919: "Tchekhov has said the last word that has been said, so far, and more than that he has given us a sign of the way we should go" (Vincent O'Sullivan & Margaret Scott, The Collected Letters of Katherine Mansfield, II, 345). If the short story is exposure for Maupassant, it is revelation for Chekhov. Art is

completely subjective with the Russian master.

A Chekhov story may have any subject matter. Every negligible object or action is imbued with a meaning. Casting aside the great imponderables of love and power, Chekhov prefers to plot a story around a sneeze ("The Death of a Clerk") or the ownership of a dog ("The General's Brother's Dog"). Harsh truth is often extracted from ludicrous and silly matters. Intemperate criticism during the conversation of a couple may misfire, exposing their damnable secret life and nerve-shattering submission ("She Left Him"). What primarily interested Mansfield must have been Chekhov's subjectivity and preoccupation with so-called small things. "I like always to have a great grip of life", she had written to Garnet Trowell as early as 1908, "so that I can intensify the so-called small things — so that truly everything is significant" (O'Sullivan & Scott, I, 88).

A strong aversion to mediocrity lends a personal stamp to Mansfield's vision. Mediocrity possibly means to her the superficiality that often kills art. Her objective is a total involvement in which a silent garden would be sufficient for the formation of an impression. She luxuriates in suggestiveness, she savours loneliness. Outward action means very little to Mansfield and drab settings often excite a frisson of delight or fear. It is often said that a story of hers can be summed up only by the story itself. Like Chekhov Mansfield seldom

strays beyond her personal experience and competence. Authenticity is the hallmark of her art.

If a story has any merit, it should represent experience at several levels. The emotional experience underlying an anecdote is as important as its truth value. Chekhov's stories were important to Mansfield in both respects. After reading "The Steppe" she wrote to Koteliansky about her intense realization of Chekhov's enclosing "something which had been there forever" (O'Sullivan & Scott, II, 353). She thoroughly supported Chekhov's conviction that a writer's job was not to solve a question but only to put it, to make the reader aware of possibilities that already existed.

Illness and loneliness bred strange agonies in Mansfield, and Chekhov's cold, still despair seemed to strike a responsive chord in her. Quite revealing in this context is her letter to John Middleton Murry in June 1918: "Tchekhov would understand, Dostoiivsky wouldn't. Because he's never been in the same situation" (O'Sullivan & Scott, II, 230). As the physical crisis becomes threatening, Mansfield's indomitable desire for exposing vulgarity gains further momentum. Her quest for honesty demands a severity and daring well beyond Chekhov's sad autumnal mood. She does not hesitate to touch upon things nobody has touched before because nobody has lived her life. A story like "Je ne Parle pas Francais" becomes hallucinating in its inverted reality. Through the stroy Mansfield has spoken her doom. Chekhov's life-

long repugnance for corruption must have given her direction through the confusion of her life. The fact that she refers to Chekhov as her master in a letter to Koteliansky in early August 1919 is not due to any momentary feeling but a realization that comes through a dreadful ordeal in life. For a writer so subjective as Mansfield, a perspective on her experiences is an absolute necessity. What cannot be borrowed from Chekhov or Dostoiivsky is the writer's individual temperament. A thematic study of Mansfield's stories must encompass her quiddity and its influence on her creative vision. Where art and life interpenetrate, each enlightens the other.

(iii)

The Writer and her Work

Kass Beauchamp (born 14th Nov 1888) was the third child of Harold and Anne Beauchamp of Wellington, New Zealand. Hal Beauchamp — robust, self-reliant and energetic, was the magisterial pa-man with whom Mansfield had a love-hate relationship throughout her life. He steps into her New Zealand stories as Stanley Burnell, man of the house, whose presence exerts a pressure on the nerves of the women. Anne, delicate and weak, was much distanced from her children. Mansfield never spared her mother for her remoteness: "She was broken, made weak, her courage was gone, through child-bearing. And what made it doubly hard to bear was, she did not love her children" (Alpers, The Stories of Katherine Mansfield, 453). The hope for a male child

was fervent in the household and as a sensitive little girl, Kass must have had an inkling of it. In "A Birthday", Mansfield's latent feelings found expression: "A boy? Yes, it was bound to be a boy this time 'What's your family, Binzer?' 'Oh, I've two girls and a boy !' a very nice little number" (Alpers, Stories, 63).

The children were brought up under the care of Mrs. Dyer, Anne's mother, who moved in with the family with her two unmarried daughters. Owing to Anne's ill health, Mrs. Dyer became the mistress of the house. Hal Beauchamp decided for a country childhood for his children with the expansion of his business. The family moved into a large house in an upland valley, surrounded by totara forests. The pastoral, with its entire paraphernalia is condensed into the term Karori. Life in Karori was splendid with its garden and paddocks, fowls, ducks and plenty of fresh air. Baby Kass was particularly attached to grandmother Dyer and the matey sessions between Kezia and her granny in the New Zealand stories are not contrived : " 'Do you want a match, my granny?' 'Why yes child, a match is just what I'm looking for'. The grandmother slowly opened the box and came upon the picture inside" (Alpers, Stories, 239). Kass often invented such surprises and they were most successful. Hal Beauchamp rented a beach house for the summer months at Muritai and the extended family spent their holidays there. Muritai becomes Crescent Bay in Mansfieldian phraseology. When Mansfield felt the urge to create her personal

mythology later in life, she conjured up memories of Karori and Muritai. Crescent Bay conveys a cryptic message, which is an essential feature of Mansfield's fantasy: "The sun had not yet risen and the whole of Crescent Bay was hidden under a white sea-mist. The big bush-covered hills at the back were smothered. You could not see where they ended and the paddocks and the bungalows began" (Alpers, *Stories*, 441).

Baby Kass had an aggressive, agile wit. Her penetrating gaze often disconcerted adults. As she grew up, it remained a natural and permanent feature of her personality. Mansfield's dark, hostile look of discomfiture was noticed by many of her London friends and acquaintances. Leonard Woolf, Lytton Strachey, Clive Bell and Bertrand Russell were all repelled by the unfriendly gaze. As a child she did not have any close friends at school with the only exception of Marion Ruddick. She was a voracious reader and contributed frequently to the school magazines. Kass developed a passion for music and her father bought her a cello. Mansfield's musical acumen is explicit in stories like "The Singing Lesson" on "The Weak Heart". After watching Maud Allen's dancing, ^{she} had written to Garnet Trowell about her strange ambition. She wanted to study tone-effects in voice and not rely on gesture. "The Singing Lesson" is an exercise in this direction, containing a plethora of musical detail.

Music served as the pretext for two relationships in Mansfield's life. The Garnet Trowell episode is one of them, noted for its profligacy and waste. Nothing places Mansfield so vulnerably as this affair. It marked the end of her girlhood. The ignominy of defeat . . . she suffered due to the failure of this relationship was not negligible. If she purchased her brilliance from experience, the price was dear. Her parents had selected Queen's College, Harley Street, London, for their daughters' higher education. There Mansfield met Ida Constance Baker, who was to become her confidante and aide for life. Through a friend she got a copy of Oscar Wilde's The Picture of Dorian Gray, which swept her off her feet. Wilde became her mentor and she copied out shocking epigrams from his book. Her dangerous leanings were marshalled in Wilde's thoughts. The news of Mansfield's unleashed sensuality and her unsafe edge reached her parents. She was summoned to Wellington, to return later to London, determined on a musical career. The affair with Garnet Trowell was nearing its end, Trowell's parents disapproving the match. In a sudden gesture, Mansfield went to marry Mr. George Bowden, a vocalist, whom she had recently met. What the marriage meant nobody knew. It was wrought with deception and delinquency on Mansfield's part.

Mansfield left Bowden to rush off to Garnet Trowell in Glasgow almost immediately after the marriage. It was a farewell meeting this time. On her return from Glasgow, she discovered

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herself pregnant. Anne Beauchamp, horrified at the news of her daughter's sudden marriage arrived in London to find out the truth. Truth, in this case, was stranger than fiction. Mansfield was taken to Worishofen in Bavaria for recuperation. She suffered a miscarriage there, but came back to London with her "Pension Sketches". The next few weeks were spent with Bowden in London. Bowden, decent and sensitive about women's emancipation, recognised the assiduity in her sketches. At his suggestion, Mansfield went to meet Mr. A. R. Orage, editor of The New Age, with her stories. The meeting ameliorated circumstances. Mansfield moved into London literacy circles and established herself as Katherine Mansfield, the professional author. She soon became tired of Bowden and they were living apart.

The New Age had a reading public of its own though the Bloomsburies had nothing to do with it. Chekhov's stories were published and Post-Impressionism was discussed after Roger Fry's exhibition of 1910. Mansfield, after her colonial experience, was captivated by the novelty and charm of her new life. Her passionate conquests continued, followed by depression and occasionally ridiculous plights.

It was not until her meeting John Middleton Murry that Mansfield found the love of her life. Murry was introduced to her by a mutual friend. Erudite and handsome, he impressed her. At her request, he came to stay as her lodger. Within a few days they were living together, and were known in the London circles

as the two tigers. Mansfield now wrote for The Rhythm, which Murry edited, much to the chagrin of Orage and his friend Beatrice Hastings. At Mansfield's encouragement, Murry became a free lance writer. Their friends included Frederick Goodyear, D. H. Lawrence and his wife Frieda, S. S. Kofeliansky, the Campbells, Lady Ottoline Morrell and Dorothy Brett among others. The incessant intellectual prattle is presented with a grimace in some of Mansfield's stories: "Bertha noticed that his socks were white, too — most charming. 'But how dreadful !' she cried. 'Yes, it really was', said Eddie, following her into the drawing-room. 'I saw myself driving through Eternity in a timeless taxi' " (Alpers, Stories, 309). With each friend Mansfield assumed a different personality. Vincent O'Sullivan and Margaret Scott have made an interesting observation in this context. Mansfield, they noticed, was dearest woman friend for Lady Ottoline, fellow artist for Brett, intimate fellow outsider for Beatrice Campbell, Ida Baker was either taken into strict confidence or showered with sharp reproof. There is revelation yet control. *Her* ability lies in the fact that she never sounds false. Each role she takes up is performed with tact and warmth.

Murry is the only person to be allowed into Mansfield's fortified private world. Life was terrible to be endured alone in the war years. She was forced to a lone existence due to her health. In her letters to Murry from Cornwall in early June 1918, she is never free from anxiety. With him she can discuss

her work and the work of others, and in his arms she can feel the delicate safety of love. The frightened, frail face of the otherwise professional bold lady is revealed only to Murry. He would never be the strong, solid husband she could rely on, but that drawback is accepted. They kept separate bank accounts, and Mansfield had to earn for her medical expenses besides her father's monthly allowance. The World War was on. Money became a serious problem as literary criticism and journalism were not welcome at the press. Mansfield's deteriorating health made it imperative that she should travel amidst the chaos and uproar. These journeys are portrayed in her lone woman stories. The perpetual wanderings match with the temperamental unrest of the emigrant, in search of her self.

War became a personal crisis with the death of Mansfield's brother, Leslie Beauchamp, in an explosion near Armentiere. The dreadful incident marked a turning point in Mansfield's life and career. Horror of her past and her discreetly hidden nightly adventures, deliberate lies and deception were now confessed in her work. The tremendous self-abuse and waste of "Je ne Parle Pas Francais" are expressed with Dostoiivskian intensity. Mansfield was delving deep with a therapeutic purpose, in a defiant manner. Murry realised the strain of the process and overlooked the reproof against him. Mansfield, as he could apprehend, was satisfying another desire. He was fully convinced of her urgency.

Leslie's death necessitated Mansfield's recreation of her childhood. In memories of Karori and Muritai she found the magic island she was looking for. Her resort and refuge were her own private possession, far away from war-bitten inclemency. Reality is an essential element in Mansfield's fantasy, but it is remade and unmade to suit the artist's necessity. The past is reorganized with a purity and solidity against a ghastly present. The big house with the extended family, servants, poultry and activities, encapsulates a life that animated Mansfield years back in Karori.

Mansfield married Murry on 3rd May, 1918, fully aware of the nature of her consumption and the impossibility of a healthy conjugal life. At the dismal ceremony, she wore Frieda Lawrence's wedding ring of her broken marriage. The happiest time the couple spent together was at the Elephant, a comfortably furnished house at Hampstead. The Campbells, Koteliansky, the Lawrences, ^{and} Mark Gertler were welcome. Virginia Woolf was an occasional but prized visitor with whom Mansfield shared a secret friendship. Glimpses of this relationship are present in her story "Bliss", where Bertha and Miss Fulton move into another world, timeless and inscrutable. Life didnot permit such heavenly pleasures for long. In a coughing fit at the Elephant, Mansfield spat blood which came as a fatal warning. She was advised to rest at the Riviera while Murry worked at the War Office.

Restlessness and agitation soon dominated Mansfield's frequent moods. Only creative work could be her saviour. The attempt of her Catholic cousins to draw her into their faith proved futile. Mansfield's God had to be artistically creative. She struggled with herself to gain moral strength as she wrote "poison", "The Lady's Maid", "The Daughters of the Late Colonel" and "Miss Brill". The appearance of the world had changed. Her wrath was the uncontrolled rage of a consumptive. Lawrence in an identical state had called her a loathsome reptile. Murry accepted his share of inconveniences as he watched her in blank dismay. She threatened to dismiss him as her London agent which put him in an agony of nerves. Ida Baker (Leslie Moore) had to bear with Mansfield through these fits of temper. She received sharp reproof for her life-long subservience. She was the albatross round Mansfield's neck or the mountain obstructing her vision. Mansfield stood up in arms against the abuse of her privacy.

In autumn 1921, Katherine Mansfield was writing "The Fly", a symbolic attempt to discover the truth of her predicament. Dr. Manoukhin's treatment gave temporary relief. In June 1922, Ida Baker was desperately summoned. In spite of her best efforts, she could not keep going. Losing hope in medical science she sought a last chance in occultism. "The Dove's Nest" was typed out in palpitating nervousness as Mansfield realized things were coming to an end. Through Koteliansky and Orage, she had heard

of Gurdjeiff of Fontainebleau and his institute of harmonious development. As science failed her, she hoped for a psychic control of her disease through an oriental community life. She joined Gurdjeiff's institute to live an integrated family life — left long behind in Karori. The cycle was complete. A few days before her death in Fontainebleau, Mansfield was grappling with the eternal question, "Who am I?" (Alpers, *Life*, 380).

This quest — a quest for the self — is always there at the core of her stories.

Chapter II

The Mansfield Woman : A Soul Adrift

The damsels in distress in Mansfield's early stories are not exactly an imaginary lot. Personal experience is neither completely distorted nor fully censored to suggest a terrible frankness. The consciousness of Mansfield's lone maidens is closely related to her own. Contempt for society and rejection of tradition, discipline and morals are the marked features of the young Mansfield. Oscar Wilde had been her mentor. As a master of epigram and an erotic personality he fascinated her and Kass Beauchamp lost no time in copying out shocking expressions from his works. In a journal entry for 23rd October 1907 Mansfield wrote : "I thank heaven that at present, though I am damnable, I am in love with nobody but myself" (O'Sullivan & Scott, I, intro, X). Independent and ambitious, she sounds much like Wilde, the perfect egocentric who devised his own flamboyant method of becoming famous, and, his no less individualistic way of becoming infamous. Like Wilde she has no patience with society. Fugitiveness holds a strong appeal for Mansfield. She is the warring emigrant never at peace with herself. Since she believed in no ideal life-style, she invented one of her own and took full advantage of the liberation of women during the inter-war period. Being a fervent believer in the sovereign power of her art, she embraced a career full of uncertainties. On distant shores, away from home, Mansfield chose a life (both private

and professional), the means and end of which were unknown to herself.

The utter corruption and vulnerability involved in such a continual struggle for recognition has invited tremendous critical outrage. Frank O'Connor in his study of the short story, The Lonely Voice, contends : "Therefore if I emphasise what seems to me the shoddy element it is almost by way of experiment. Most of her work seems to me that of a clever, spoiled, malicious woman" (130). The orgies of passion which must have disenchanted A. O'Connor are Mansfield's life experience and her creative inspiration. A journal entry for 18th March 1910 reads : "I purchase my brilliance with life" and afterwards, "I am unlike others because I have experienced all there is to experience" (Alpers, *Life*, 60). Mansfield's letter to Vera Beauchamp written in late March 1908, projects her proud self-image as the sworn enemy of mediocrity. Vera's firm belief that a great trouble would put her right is only a "rather cheap and distinctly simple philosophy" (O'Sullivan & Scott, I, 42). Mansfield is interested in walking strange mystic paths where she can lean over a flower and suddenly have every veil torn inside. She insists on the conviction of experience.

Solitary women, socially maladjusted and temperamentally headstrong, preoccupy Mansfield in her early stories. They travel alone and are insecure, indecisive and uncertain. The young woman in "An Indiscreet Journey" is not sure of her destination.

Her inquiries with the collector are hampered by a communication gap.

'Does one go directly to X?' I asked the collector who dug at my tickets with a pair of forceps and handed it back again.

'No Mademoiselle you must change at X.Y.Z.'

'At - ?'

'X.Y.Z.'

Again I had not heard (Alpers, Stories, 180).

The out of touch colonial with alert suspicions is never sure. The moving train cuts off the conversation : "The train was on my side. It swung out of the station and soon we were passing the vegetable gardens, the tall blind houses to let, passing the servants beating carpets" (Alpers, Stories, 180). Successions of cities, towns and human activities give a transitory feeling, inseparable from a fleeting disordered life which is a collection of glimpses. The cold blue light on window panes, bright patches of fields or dump of houses like mushrooms are momentary impressions, distant and unknown to the foreigner. The little governess can only pause over the beautiful natural patchwork for a while. It remains out of her touch as ever. The moving compartment suggests everlasting motion, regardless of individual whims and feelings. A continual rejection of possibilities of association and self-identification is strongly felt.

A railway compartment is warm and comfortable. Harsh realities like war seem unbelievable inside it. A false sense of security confuses a lone woman traveller. She is alerted of war-time inconveniences. The lady sitting opposite to Mademoiselle in "An Indiscreet Journey", apprises her of expected difficulties in reaching her destination. She is a conniving woman intent on frightening mademoiselle out of her wits as the latter refuses to conform to the normal social conventions. The lady does not succeed however and the lone woman does not give up in spite of her harrowing experience. She is determined to reach her destination. In a letter to Murry dated 20th February 1915, Mansfield speaks of horror that is quite revealing in this context: "I seem to have just escaped the prison cells, Jaggle dearest, because I find this place is in the zone of armies and therefore forbidden to women" (O'Sullivan & Scott, I, 149).

A young woman journeying by herself often becomes an object of ridicule for others. Her innocence is maligned by curiosity and disapproval. Mademoiselle in "An Indiscreet Journey" smarts a strange insulting relish from the gloating remark of her co-passenger. The tone of a waiter wrecks the lady's security in "The Lost Battle". It makes her feel that something hostile is being plotted against her and that even inanimate objects like a chair or a table are in the know. At the waiter's exit, the woman feels relieved as if she has been rescued from a shipwreck

or a burning house. An impertinent waiter swoops past the little governess and nearly chuckles at her insecurity. Madame in "Being a Truthful Adventure", derives a sly, hypocritical pleasure from the narrator's evasive manner : "She was extremely friendly and seemed to find a fund of secret amusement in the fact; she looked at me as though expecting me to break into delighted laughter" (Alpers, Stories, 97). Madame is not obliged by a gesture of mute submission or a friendly smile. The young woman has no patience with her French cordiality. With her unladylike ravenous appetite she mindlessly eats in front of the waiter in a room hung with mirrors. A lone woman is expected to be accustomed to such improprieties.

Hotel rooms are vividly described in Mansfield's stories, as the reader is continuously reminded of their temporariness. The first person narrator climbs into a bed of slippery fine linen in her hotel room to be deflated by the sound of a banging door. To her disgust, she discovers next door bedrooms invaded by unfamiliar voices. The silly prattle of a couple is overheard. Masculine snorts and female groans accompanied by private talk call for an immediate action : "There was only one thing to be done. I coughed and cleared my throat in that unpleasant and obtrusive way of strange people in next door bedrooms. It acted like a charm ..." (Alpers, Stories, 99). There is an almost cynical satisfaction in that act. The solitary woman values her remoteness and makes a desperate attempt to maintain her privacy.

The concierge is an image of St. Anne in "An Indiscreet Journey". She reminds the narrator of her journey ahead : "You have only just got time. There is a bowl of milk on the writing table" (Alpers, Stories, 179). Robed in her old Burberry coat, the undisputed traveller runs down the steps, paying no attention to the concierge's warnings. Uninterrupted intervals are rare in hotel rooms. The little governess enters a dark, ugly bedroom to be watched curiously by an unknown waiter. The sense of unfamiliarity is heightened by such entrances and exits. In "The Lost Battle" the lone maid feigns happiness with the books and flowers. The momentary illusion is crushed by the untimely entry of a red-haired boy. There is an absolute breach of privacy in the story, containing subjective allusions. The homely ambience can never be created in hotels. Alleged interference does nothing to allay the discomfort of the estranged lady. To Dorothy Brett, Mansfield had written in May 1918 about having spent nine-tenths of her life arriving at strange hotels. A letter to Ottoline Morrell dated 24th May 1918 expresses similiar disgust. Disapproval of bought pleasures is pronounced. Professional hospitality often makes importunities explicit. There is no time to pause over an avenue of gold and red trees. Sensitivity will at once be tampered with an untimely intrusion. Mansfield's maidens are secretive and self-effacing. The boatman in "Being a Truthful Adventure" sincerely wishes to guide the young lady, but she will find things out for herself, unaided and alone. Mademoiselle in

"An Indiscreet Journey" frantically rushes out of her compartment before her fellow passengers have any idea of her identity. The narrator in "Being a Truthful Adventure" is not particularly elated at an unexpected meeting with her school friend. With a fake excuse, she makes her exit. The solitary women find a peculiar pleasure in wandering through strange cities with adolescent wonder, but the fear of recognition never leaves them. Afraid of intimacy, they have a precognition of the social rebuff. Nevertheless, for ^{the} sake of appearances, a lone maiden falsified her situation. "My husband is a professor at the Conservatoire ..." (Alpers, Stories, 149) or "My large box is at the station ..." (Alpers, Stories, 97)—statements of this kind exemplify these loners' penchant for fibbing. Depressed by hard use and misadventure, young women are in their element only in solitude. Even in the privacy of her room, Mansfield's solitary affronts her anti-self:

In the mirror she saw again that strange watchful creature who had been her companion on the journey, that woman with white cheeks and dark eyes and lips whose secret she shared, but whose air of stealthy desperation baffled and frightened her, and seemed somehow quite out of her control (Alpers, Stories, 201).

A sea-voyage has its own peculiar sensation. Doubts and uncertainties of Mansfield's consciousness merge with natural forces, and the disorder of life is absorbed in endless time. Nobody knows the young lady in the cabin. She sinks into

oblivion, knowing all the people to the point of indifference: "You do not believe in dry land any more — you are caught in the pendulum itself ..." (Alpers, *Stories*, 95). The Maidens are both inhibited and irritable. Garrulousness of co-passengers disconcerts them, the resentment being rooted in their colonial detachment. They are persona-non-grata because of their malicious wit, indulging more in sarcasm than in persiflage. The displaced woman invents a name for almost all the characters around her. The Mole, the Enthusiast and Negative provide her with amusement in "The Journey to Bruges".

Conversations are overheard and commented on. A person's distinctive features or other characteristics are exaggerated or distorted. Caricature becomes an obsession with Mansfield's lone women. Mackintosh Cap in "Epilogue III : Bains Turcs" confides to the narrator in a scandalous manner : "One might at least cut one's nails in private, don't you think?" (Alpers, *Stories*, 149). Richard Aldington in his D. H. Lawrence, Portrait of a Genius But... mentions Mansfield's scandalmongering habits, which, incidentally are in full view in the same stories. In "Epilogue III : Bains Turcs" Mackintosh Cap's outrage is noticeable. It is the most reasonable reaction she can have after a grim married life. Her sallow face and sunken eyes are juxtaposed against the two fresh beauties who are independent. Seagull in "An Indiscreet Journey" is named after her hat; a black velvet toque with a seagull camped on top of it. The

contempt and disdain in such portrayals may seem gratuitous, but they point to the malaise of a dislocated victim standing in doubtful dignity.

The hoydenish manner of a girl travelling alone mantles confusion and nervousness. In "The Journey to Bruges" the young lady is not deliberately obtuse. She runs to the bookstall and on her return loses the porter to find that she has been running for the wrong train. Her violent haste is piqued by the impudent porter. Her frantic hurry amuses his lot. In "Being A Truthful Adventure" the narrator is refused a room at the hotel for her meagre luggage which exposes her impecuniousness. She refuses to be treated as a commodity and finally dispels the doubts of her hostess with a synchronous rebuff.

Women are a feeble lot in Mansfield's *Dame Seules* stories. The strength and predominance of men reduce them, overshadow them and finally unnerve them. Security and comfort are ephemeral pleasures which vanish as fast as they appear. The little governess is abused and laughed at. Her only foible is that she is petite, frail, and not well-off. These factors make her an easy victim of heathenish male passengers. One of the young men "bursting with the joke, pointed to the notice *Dames Seules* and the four bent down the better to see the one little girl in the corner" (Alpers, *Stories*, 168). The porter enjoys his share of male predominance over the frightened girl. Physical inability brings the little governess to an impasse. The porter tries to

exploit her by demanding an additional sum which she refuses. Even then she wonders whether he wants an extra franc just because she is a girl and is travelling alone. His sharp eyes prick her all over before he goes away. A curious sense of exposure is explicit. Arriving again with somebody else's luggage the porter tears off the dame's seyle notice. The girl's self-confidence is wrecked by this unprecedented attack which hurts her like a physical violation. As the four young men in the next carriage mock her and sing at the top of their voices, she feels offended, shocked, and out of place in the compartment. Visibly nervous, the little governess is restored by the old man who makes his presence felt amidst the din. Pacified, she settles down peacefully, unconscious of his actual intention. He insidiously worms his way into her confidence. She is made dizzy by the beer which he offers. Charmed with fairy tale wanderings and expensive food, she goes to his flat where he tries to seduce her. Dumbfounded, she succeeds in running down the broad road as if she had escaped from an Ogre's den.

Young girls are sirens. Men are irresistibly attracted to them, but the peculiarity of the infatuation lies in its purely contractual nature. It is not love but lust of an abominable kind with a large dose of sexual harassment. The disgruntled frown of a lone Mansfieldean maiden has a strong subjective relevance. Mansfield's inherent tendency to fall for frauds of the opposite sex often aggrieved her. She must have

been pretty gullible to fall for Floryan Sobieniowsky and many of his like. Sobieniowsky blackmailed her and was ultimately pacified with financial assistance from Ida Baker. The old man in "The Little Governess" is a rather dangerous fraud. He kisses the little governess as if to make up for the money he has spent on her. In "The Swing of the Pendulum", a stranger offers pecuniary aid to Viola. He actually makes the most indecent proposal a young man can make to a girl living in penury. "I'll give you two hundred marks if you'll kiss me", he says (Alpers, Stories, 87). There is a Faustian profanity in that offer. Viola recoups herself for the loss. Robbed of her dignity, she strikes back and physically confronts him.

Viola wins her battle by her tact and strength. She feels exhilarated by her victory; by having conquered the beast all by herself. Like D. H. Lawrence's "Tickets, please", the story presents violent action. The specific confrontation involves physical contact in both the stories. Lawrence's story is more intense because of Anne's involvement with John Thomas. Her terrible lust slowly changes to strange bitterness, and she is in torture when Thomas ultimately chooses her as his girl. The unknown possibilities of love are explored with the typical Lawrentian vigour. Lawrence's preoccupation with 'blood' is also noticeable. The girls have their blood up in a frenzy while roughing up Thomas. Viola does not love the stranger in "The Swing of the pendulum", so she does not long for physical contact

like Anne. Her fight is against male strength and impudence. Mansfield does not make a ceremony of it as Lawrence does. In Viola's case her victory calms her, and she can once again face life.

Mansfield's ineffectual angels are often bypassed in their pursuit of love. The story "In a Cafe" highlights the plight of a young girl who tries to find infinite happiness in the possibility of love. She gives her lover a bunch of violets as a token of love and dreamily walks in the cold outside. The great fire hugging her heart suddenly dims as she finds the trampled violets. Crestfallen, she kicks them into the gutter. Harry, in "The Tiredness of Rosabel", has a tantalizing but short dialogue with Rosabel. She deprecates his advances publicly but continues to be obsessed with him, being aware of the futility of her situation. Loneliness and poverty place Mansfield's young girls on the periphery rather than the mainstream life. The situation is made doubly worse by the self-righteous male's demoralization. Men have physical strength and money. Possession of money gives them the right to misbehaviour. Mansfield's lone women display an idolatrous love for money. They are often less refined than Hardy's Eustacia Vye. A sumptuous meal is for them a much sought-after comfort than other refinements. Rosabel is ready to sacrifice her soul for a good dinner. At the thought of food Viola feels a sharp twinge in her stomach squeezing it dry. Hunger is more pronounced than other aspirations probably because it is more immediate. Eustacia Vye was not starved even in her

worst days with Clym.

Money boosts the morale of Mansfield's young victims and the lack of it compels them to an undesirable living. There is a constant grudge against the life and energy that money deprives them. The importance thus attached to money is hackneyed in English literature, Robinson Crusoe being the earliest product of money-centric thinking. Fielding's Charles Grandison is financially secure and Jane Austen's intelligent heroines seldom pursue a man without money. In Mansfield's stories references to money are direct and unmasked. Viola is mortally afraid of her landlady as she has not paid her rent. Poverty is like a dream-mountain on which her feet are fast rooted. The little governess has dared to travel alone in desperate need. Rosabel goes to bed with ^{out} a dinner cuddling down in the darkness.

Money and the problem of an unsteady income in Katherine Mansfield's stories are infused with subjective undertones. Financial difficulties were a hindrance to creative work. Mansfield's letters often speak of the unrelenting pressure of a doubtful venture. To Murry she wrote in early 1914 about the constant worrying that seemed devouring : "A constant strain like that wears you out quicker than anything" (O'Sullivan & Scott, I, 136). Letters of 1915 reveal a scrupulous exactness about money. To S.S. Koteliansky she could confide : "My God, what poverty ! ..." (O'Sullivan & Scott, I, 153). Occasionally she is up in arms : "Damn this bloody money ... (O'Sullivan & Scott, I, 162)! plunged as she is into dire financial straits,

she feels that money is the greatest grinder. Mansfield shares this feeling with others as well.

Virginia Woolf and Mansfield shared a discreet friendship. The passionate Mansfield found Woolf ethereal, hovering over her subject. Surprisingly — it is the much professed dispassionate Woolf, who has time and again emphasized leisure and a little money as the greatest incentives for women writers. "With money and leisure women will occupy themselves more than has hitherto been possible with the craft of letters. They will make a fuller and more subtle use of the art of writing", Woolf concedes in her Granite and Rainbow (84). In A Room of One's Own, Woolf is more severe. The news of a legacy reached her the same night women were given the right to vote. "Of the two—the vote and the money — the money, I own, seemed infinitely the more important", woolf openly admits (56). Secure in her home and her husband by her, Woolf stresses women's economic independence as she considers emancipation to be meaningless without it. Her vehemence is more pronounced in her essays and tracts than her journals. Mansfield's situation was the extreme opposite. Separated from her husband by disease and away from home, she was never ready to accept poverty. Colonial affluence had bred a certain self-consciousness that was never willing to accept penury.

For Katherine Mansfield's heroines, exposure means grappling with male curiosity and lust. They are not erudite. Inhibited and nervous, they learn slowly to be self-conscious. The role Mansfield allots to her young sirens is not that of the faceless domestic. Sooty kitchen roles are not for them. Grimace at household chores is not restrained. The unprotected, unguarded status of independent women is highlighted in Mansfield's stories. Strong emotions, a yearning for a great grip of life and instinctual behaviour characterize Mansfield's passionate quest. Women strive for significance despite disapproval. The feeling of misery and rage is gradually dissolved in reality. One has to find one's own way out and acceptance is not always easy. The indomitable optimism of youth sustains Viola, as well as Mansfield's other early heroines as they drift away in search of their true status in a male-dominated society.

Chapter III

The Feminine Experience

"One is not born, but becomes a woman" — Simone de Beauvoir

The stereotype of women in Katherine Mansfield's Bavarian sketches and some early stories have been created not to identify them culturally as negative objects but to launch a fierce polemic against a patriarchal order. They are modelled on characters Mansfield saw around her when she lay sick in a pension house at Worishofen. Their day to day living made a strong impression on her mind. She never failed to notice their frustrations though her own preoccupation was with larger problems, i.e. struggle for a kind of self-confidence that would end the terrible physical and mental confusion. The marginal and subordinate role of women in rural German society becomes the focal point in Mansfield's early German stories. As an ambitious, creative and adventurous woman she has no patience with the gender-biased social order, the anxiety and rage being rooted in her own sexual harassments and loss of girlhood.

Men's interests and needs have to be served, according to the prevailing concepts of the omnipresent patriarchal bias of our civilization. Frau Brechenmacher, for example, tired and exhausted after the day's work, dresses in the dark to attend a wedding feast with her husband. Herr Brechenmacher, naturally, has taken the lamp, leaving his wife in the dark to manage herself. The Frau has spruced up her husband's uniform, ironed

his shirt and polished his boots. She is conditioned to derogate her own sex and cooperate in her own subordination: "Dressing in the dark was nothing to Frau Brechenmacher" (Alpers, *Stories*, 43). Her nerve-shattering mindlessness becomes odious when she calls her daughter to watch her superbly dressed father. Frau Brechenmacher's mind is frozen like the ground outside. Her man does not wait for her and she runs after him like an obedient dog. At the party the disgraceful history of the bride is discussed to the Frau's discomfiture. She does not find a fund of amusement in the story and the sordid present dawns on her. She has five babies and twice as much money; but her dreams are lost. The coldness outside, the white and forsaken road instill a sense of despair that matches with the Frau's desolation.

The reproductive role of women and their sexual identification is a major thematic motif for Katherine Mansfield. Frau Binzer in "A Birthday", informs her son of his pregnant wife's condition in the morning. Old and exhausted with the night vigil, she lets out her exasperation when she grudges his night's sleep. His mother and wife are supposed to perform without demur the domestic and sexual duties which he expects from them. Anna, Andrea Binzer's wife has three children in four years. Her photograph, taken before her marriage, looks like an unknown stranger to Binzer. Her sole identity he recognizes is that of a mother and she does not look like a mother in that picture. No one could feel the humiliation of an ill-used female better than Mansfield, after her stormy affair with Garnet Trowell and

the miscarriage she suffered. Perpetual pregnancies have wrecked the constitution of the Frau in "The Child Who Was Tired". Her husband cannot stand the whimperings of his own children. Ironically when he says : "Swine of a day — swine's life ..." (Alpers, Stories, 23), he has spoken his doom.

The self-righteous male's usual ebullience and unashamed self-assertion are never eclipsed by female discomfort. Herr Rat in "Germans At Meet" appears unabashed by the crowd around him. " 'As for me, I have had all I wanted from women without marriage' ", he confesses (Alpers, Stories, 28). A woman on the other hand is identified by her knowledge of domestic detail. " 'How can a woman expect to keep her husband if she does not know his favourite food after three years?' ", the widow asks the narrator in the same story (Alpers, Stories, 31). Insensitivity becomes ridiculous at such moments. Women are caught up in a social context where they are never the subject. The Frau in "At Lehmann's" has grown so big in her pregnancy that her husband tells her to stay indoors as she looks 'unappetizing'. The term 'unappetizing' implies a degree of dehumanization, quite within the limits of male impertinence that is acceptable to society. The Frau does not dare to disturb her husband, but moans at his frightful indifference. She has been tutored to accept a life of depravity.

It is not often that the reader encounters a character like Frau Kellermann in "The Advanced Lady". She openly admits a woman's inability to exhibit love in family circles and blames family life for that drawback. The Advanced Lady goes a step forward to pinpoint the self-sacrifice of a woman as the greatest error in life. The distinctly feminine fervour ushers a certain uneasiness. The masculine element feels uneasy at these angry vibrations and ultimately succeeds in changing the topic.

Women are captured in brilliant erratic motion in some of Mansfield's later stories. Character delineation becomes intense and the theme of isolation accents the feminine identity. Linda Burnell in "Prelude" is exquisite and fragile. Forced into unwanted pregnancies, she cannot escape them even in her dreams. The fluffy ball she strokes becomes a baby. The strange metamorphosis horrifies her, though her father laughs at her. Linda is sick of her sole biological function. The prospect of sexual intimacy plagues her. She cannot inure herself to her husband's male aggressiveness. His firm, obedient body scares her and his amazing vigour seems to set him worlds apart. The dog image is deliberately introduced: "If only he wouldn't jump at her so and bark so loudly, and watch her with such eager, loving eyes" (Alpers, Stories, 254). It is a pathetic trial of love that Linda experiences. She loves Stanley for his honesty and decency but has a horror of offering herself to him. There are all her feelings for him, sharp and defined, where hatred

is as real as the tenderness. Somnolence is her only refuge, as she is deflected from her actual intentions. Linda attempts to identify herself with the aloe, with its large protective thorns but in the process faces up to the grinding truth. She will go on having babies and Stanley will go on making more money till both of them are exhausted. Her only yearning is to have a room of her own, impregnated with mystery. Linda finds herself in a Waiting-For-Godot — like situation, to be listening with her wide open eyes, waiting for someone to come who just did not come.

The idea of woman is mistranslated in the materiality of existence. The patriarchal order is not merely idealistic. It constitutes a specific material oppression. Mrs. Fairfield in "Prelude" keeps her daughter's house nice and prim in return for her living. Stanley, her son-in-law shows scant respect to her when he inquires about his slippers. The old lady has lived so long under male dominance that she has forgotten her identity. She is fond of a grape-vine but only for its utility. Beaming with satisfaction at her refurbished kitchen, she characterizes the unselfconscious woman, oblivious of her status or purpose in life. Unlike her daughters, she is not fussy. Her geniality is invincible. Beryl Fairfield does not feel invigorated by the fresh air or the large house like her mother. In a moment of disgust and rage, her exasperated honest self catches out and castigates her assumed self given to role-playing. Beryl and Linda have invested a lot of energy in their self-conflicts and

the strain makes them irritable. Beryl, on her part, can only pity her mother who finds her life's satisfaction in shelling peas in a basin. She refuses to comply with what is expected from her, by an unrelenting society.

The women in the big country house rejoice at Stanley's absence, relieved to have the omnipotent male out of the house. Their tones change when they converse. Presence of men exert a pressure on them and they are glad to have them out. Alice, the servant-girl joins in the jubilation in "At the Bay". " 'Oh these men !' said she, and she plunged the teapot into the bowl and held it under water even after it had stopped bubbling, as if it too was a man and drowning was too good for them" (Alpers, Stories, 447). Here is a telling evidence of feminine vindictiveness generated by masculine repressiveness. D.H. Lawrence has offered a powerful expression of female revenge in "Tickets, Please", that is enlightening in this context. Annie's tete-a-tete with Nora Purdy holds the key to future action. To her proposal of roughing up John Thomas, Nora reacts with cool diplomacy. " 'I don't mind', said Nora. But as a matter of fact she was more vindictive than Annie" (Brooks & Penn Warren, 157).

Bitterness in Mansfield's feminine victims is often absorbed by nature. The world and the self exist in a symbiotic relationship in Linda's case. The physical world is present alright but the mind floats by its own volition. Dropping manuka

flowers incite a frisson of horror in Linda Burnell, as if her own fate is bound up with them. Delicacy and frailty are to be crumpled and there is no justification in her birth or that of a manuka flower. The elusive, fine female temperament is not easily approachable. Jonathan, the incurable romantic, feels the sense of rebellion smouldered in Linda; a rebellion that is strangled by worldly elements. He understands Linda because he, like her, senses life as an imprisonment. Jonathan is one of those extremely rare men who are able to feel the plight of women as despondent losers. Stanley hates Jonathan's idiocy as he is an earthly kind of a man and cannot come to terms with the latter's casualness. Linda likes Jonathan's nonchalance because like her, he is incompetent. In an exultant mood Linda asks Jonathan a maddening question : why doesn't he fly out? The answer is short : " 'Weak ... Weak. No stamina. No anchor. No guiding principle, let us call it' " (Alpers, Stories, 465). Jonathan's faded voice is soon quashed by the sound of Kelly's whips. The sound reverberates on Linda's sensitivity as she draws herself together to face her successful, robust husband.

Beside the angelic Linda Burnell is the arrogant woman. She has something to convey and will not be dissuaded by male or female intervention. Mrs Harry Kember shocks the reader in "At the Bay". There is nothing domestic or tame about her. She challenges the conventional feminine model by her lack of vanity and her slang. Herself the very reverse of a homemaker, she instigates others to follow her. No wonder, one of her friends,

Beryl Fairfield feels she is being poisoned by this woman. Mrs. Kember looks like a horrible caricature of her husband. It is artistic wrath that deforms her. Anger is the only positive signal of the feminine consciousness, as confirmed by Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, in their study entitled The Madwoman in the Attic.

Artistic anger and disease is projected into detestable figures as women writers of fiction enact their deconstruction of patriarchal logic. They create dark doubles of themselves and their heroines. Gilbert and Gubar's logic is affirmed in Mansfield's remarkable story, "The Woman at the Store". The woman is dehumanized to a degree till she becomes devilish. Thin and ugly, she lives in a desolate warehouse with a rat of a child and a mangy dog. Drunk with the travellers, she vows to have her husband lynched for child-murder. A typical New Zealand setting intensifies the horrifying atmosphere as the story slowly unfolds: "There is no twilight to our New Zealand days, but a curious half-hour when everything appears grotesque - it frightens..." (Alpers, Stories, 112). In this story Mansfield comes to terms with her own feelings of fragmentation. It would be axiomatic to say that the woman is an image of exasperation. The ideas of confinement, disease, health and escape are important in this context. Subjection of women is caused not by natural drawbacks but by socialization. While growing up a girl internalizes certain conventions which become second nature to her. The exquisite and

fragile Linda Burnell and the woman at the store are two faces of the same personality. Both of them long for an escape from unwanted pregnancies. Linda is privileged socially and economically while the woman stagnates in her penury. Linda is cared for by her mother and restored by her family. Her dreams include her father as the guardian angel. The woman aggravates her situation by rotting in that ^hwarehouse. She has no other alternative. Her past is tainted like her present. She is not spoiled by any unfathomable pa-man like Linda. The venom and hatred of her married life find expression in her little girl's repulsively vulgar drawings. With a lunatic's shrewdness, she has drawn the picture of her mother shooting her father with a rook rifle.

Katherine Mansfield's study of the woman-woman relationship is remarkable. Miss Pearl Fulton in 'Bliss' is an interesting find in this context. Bertha Young adores Miss Fulton's moon-beam fingers and guesses her moods exactly and instantly. The moon is silver and 'Pearl' has a suggestion of silvery white. Like the moon, Pearl Fulton is shrouded in mystery. Bertha does not know how she apprehends Miss Fulton; she cannot give a logical explanation of her actions. " 'I believe this does happen very, very rarely among women. Never between men ' ", is her summing up of the extraordinary friendship (Alpers, Stories, 312). Luce Irigaray's study of the feminine communication would further ascertain the accuracy of Bertha's assumption. According to Irigaray, femininity is bound up with a specific woman's language, which she calls 'le parler femme'. It ⁿemerges spontaneously when

women speak together, but disappears again as soon as men are present" (Toril Moi, Sexual Textual Politics, 144). Irigaray, Moi observes, was determined to say nothing about 'le parler femme', simply because it could not be meta spoken. Verbal discourse is abandoned completely for more touching rituals in "Bliss". Miss Fulton's 'sign' is noticed only by Bertha and her cool, sleepy voice has a strange potency which cannot be communicated to the men:

And the two women stood side by side looking at the slender, flowering tree. Although it was so still it seemed, like the flame of a candle, to stretch up, to point, to quiver in the bright air, to grow taller and taller as they gazed - almost to touch the rim of the round, silver moon. How long did they stand there? Both, as it were, caught in that circle of unearthly light, understanding each other perfectly, creatures of another world ... (Alpers, *Stories*, 312).

At the seeming limits of the intra-feminine communication is the zone of silent communion, the vibrations of which, Irigaray confirms, are too high for the patriarchal hearing mechanism. Mansfield's strictly private friendship with Virginia Woolf answers to Irigaray's silent communion. Equally important is the fact that Mansfield rarely refers to Woolf in her diaries or journal. Alpers' reference to a 1918 entry in Mansfield's journal, portraying a parting between the two friends on the steps of 2, Portland Villas is an indispensable evidence of Mansfield's

preoccupation with what Irigaray calls the intra-feminine communication (Alpers, *Life*, 288).

Linda Burnell speaks to her mother in a special voice that women use at night; as if they spoke from some hollow cave in their sleep. Miss Fulton's voice is cool and sleepy when she inquires about Bertha's garden. The urgency for silence is remarkable. Somnolence hastens the secret communion. It is a prerequisite for such nocturnal ventures. Hollow caves suggest the secrets of Women's sexuality. Night is the appropriate time for women to reach out to each other. The night of the soul comprises the obscurity and confusion of the self. The soul gradually transforms to a fluid self for some fleeting moments. The self remains oblivious of time. Its fluidity matches with the flowing moonbeams till its natural resilience helps to overcome the crisis.

What concerns, Mansfield is not a woman's being a woman but her becoming so. This shift from being to becoming vis-a-vis the portrayal of the aspects of feminine experience in her stories has its *raison d'etre* in her interest in the frustrations of an average woman's existence in a male-dominated society. Mansfield thus explores woman not per se but what man has made of her. *The* diabolic and the angelic are the obverse and reverse of the same coin minted in an androcentric society. The mad woman is a voice of protest which the meek woman lacks. The voice is an echo of the feminine void. True female voices are rare, as they are quashed by society and too fine for its understanding.

Chapter IV

Dangerous Existences

"I alone have evoked the lucid insight these wretched beings possess into the fatality of their condition, a fatality such that it would be useless to react against it".

Dostoiivsky

Katherine Mansfield seldom denies the authentic feminine states of mind; namely the angry and the alienated ones as specified by Elaine Showalter, in her study of women novelists entitled A Literature of Their Own, albeit to be pinned down to the gender-biased angle of vision does not seem several notches up to her, on the ladder of artistic excellence. Subterfuge becomes a deceptive luxury she can no longer afford. A time comes when she bids farewell to the misleading world of appearances. Striving for self-discovery is basically related to artistic adventure. In Mansfield's case, the pain and anxiety of her struggle is infused with a deep sense of sin. She does not recoil from confessing that she had actually acted her sins and then put them away. It had not always been a conscious exercise but often her consciousness had felt the essence of essential evil. Destruction and a deep sense of waste were the resultant emotions.

Mansfield's rendezvous with Francis Carco, conjugal lies and deliberate deceptions with her brother had never been acquiesced in the depths of her consciousness. Ralph Waldo Emerson in his essay entitled "Experience", aims to shed some light on the dark continent of human experience that would substantiate our point : "The individual is always mistaken", Emerson asserts. He further clarifies - "He designed many things, and drew in other persons as co-adjutors, quarrelled with some or all, blundered much, and something is done; all are a little advanced, but the individual is always mistaken" (Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Essays & Journals*, 280). Mansfield's realization of her terrible mistakes looms over a spate of dark stories. With her brother Chummie's death in an explosion in 1915, the necessity of exposure of her hidden life became pronounced. Submerged life becomes the author's prerequisite in a series of stories of frightening depths, where the perceptible is penetrated with Dostoiivskian self-search.

Francophobia is closely linked with Mansfield's agonies. "I simply loathe and abominate the French bourgeoisie", she declares (O'Sullivan & Scott, II, 52).

While working on "Je ne Parle Pas Francais" Mansfield never leaves out the war and her illness. These are the two afflictions agglomerated into her complicated torment. The devouring nature of the war synchronizes with her consumption:

"Its here in me the whole time, eating me away — and I am simply terrified by it ..."⁷ (O'Sullivan & Scott, II, 54). Writing amidst the pandemonium must have been a bizzare occupation. Mansfield confides to Murry the two kick-offs of the writing game and a deep sense of hopelessness. "Je ne Parle Pas Francais" was completed in frantic urgency as she reveals in a letter to Murry : "My work excites me so tremendously that I almost feel insane at night and I have been at it with hardly a break all day" (O'Sullivan & Scott, II, 55). The story is her cry against corruption in exposing betrayal and duplicity to the extent of apparent vulgarity. A precarious living and corruption are important thematic motives in the story. Love is robbed of its dignity in a continuous war of attrition.

Ill with consumption and what was later diagnosed as gonorrhoea, Mansfield's rage is directed towards herself. Murry felt her urgencies and said that she was dragging deep into her consciousness, "Je ne Parle Pas Francais" and a few other dangerous stories strive to enact a mirror-like thematic structure where reality is inverted. Mansfield peeps at her own inverted image through "Je ne Parle pas Francais ". Like Dostoivsky's Memoirs from the Underground, the story is a record of the artist's soul-shattering experience. In Dostoivsky's case, the winter of 1863-64 had been decisive. His letters of this period speak of mental agony. To his brother M.M. Dostoivsky, he confided on 5th March 1864 ; "Now I must tell you that I have been worse than I ever expected" (Jessie Coulson, Dostoievsky ; A Self Portrait,

123). Full of anxiety for his sick wife and his own illness, Dostoiivsky struggled to complete Memoirs from the Underground. Marya Dmitrievna, his first wife died on 15th April 1864, before the second part of the Memoirs could be published. No less harrowing was his brother Misha's death in July, the same year. Dostoiivsky was trying to make concrete the realities of human condition in a series of extreme and defining crises, a striving that is equally intense in Mansfield's case. It became one of Dostoiivsky's strongest convictions that human nature is not essentially good. Man may choose evil knowing it to be evil. According to him human evolution is a confirmed record of man's irrationality. Nobody could feel this better than Dostoiivsky, whose happiness was not only marred by his love for Suslova (his mistress) but also by a passion for the gaming table. The obstacle in the way of Mansfield's bliss is her murky past, revealed in the perversity and malevolence of "Je ne Parle Pas Francais". The chief impulse that drove Dostoiivsky to the gaming table was a yearning for unnatural emotions. His nerves became agitated in the process and he placed himself in an excited state of self-imposed doom. Mansfield's receptive attitude accounted for much of her nightmarish experience. Mouse's fate in "Je ne Parle Pas Francais" is undeniably Mansfield's own fate caught between the claws of worldly evil. Her choosing Dick Harmon or trusting Raoul Duquette are arbitrary choices for which she is doomed.

Christian eschatology is severely repudiated in "Je ne Parle Pas Francais". Diseased pride asserts itself easily. Raoul Duquette does not believe in the human soul. He believes that "... people are like portmanteaux" (Alpers, Stories, 277). The loss of faith is imbued with a bitterness against life. Life is a trespasser to Raoul, the diseased underground man. He has an instinctual eagerness to strike back. He shapes his life by his rebellious intellect as George Steiner observes in his study Tolstoy or Dostoevsky : "The man from the lower depths possesses intelligence without power, desire without means" (215). Raoul Duquette puts out his tongue not merely at the reader but also himself. "I have made it a rule of my life never to regret and never to look back. Regret is an appalling waste of energy" (Alpers, Stories, 280), he asserts. Applying his personal logic to art Duquette concedes : "Art can't and won't stand poverty" (Alpers, Stories, 280). Raoul's galling life vision springs from his past. A dark uncanny childhood of unknown fears has bred a creeping sickness in Mansfield's archetype. If he refuses remedies, it is out of malice. He prefers to conceal his past of baser instincts. With his bygone days safely hidden, Raoul can proudly speak of his artistic mission.

I am going to write about things that have never been touched before. I am going to make a name for myself as a writer of the submerged world. But not as others have done before me. Oh, no ! very naively, with a sort of tender humour and from the inside, as though it were all quite simple, quite natural. I see my way perfectly.

Nobody has ever done it as I shall do it because none of the others have lived my experiences. (Alpers, *Stories*, 282).

The dirty and sad little cafe in "Je ne Parle Pas Francais", with its mean, shabby atmosphere represents an arch-Dostoivskian background to which the weather is the appropriate key. Raoul repeatedly visits this place of his morbid triumph; "where I had the old bitch by the throat for once and did what I pleased with her" (Alpers, *Stories*, 278). The dusk and the snow outside prefigure a painful malady that has poisoned Raoul. His dissipated life, twisted personality lend a tang to his art by sharpening his dramatic point of view. Here is a tantalizing instance of his capacity to look at himself from the outside : "I am like a little woman in a cafe who has to introduce herself with a handful of photographs. 'Me in my chemise, coming out of an eggshell' ..."

(Alpers, *Stories*, 283). Such shocking revelations were perhaps too revolting for an unprepared reading public of the time, when Lawrence's novel The Rainbow was being suppressed. Raoul's cynical outbursts against love and sex were partially toned down at the insistence of Michael Sadlier. Mansfield, primarily agreeing to the omissions at Murry's insistence, regretted afterwards. It was like having the eyes off a story. The vulgarity is an indispensable part of it though it can be shocking beyond belief. Raoul makes full use of his arsenal of invective, being aware of his crippling inhumanity. The mien, the jeering tone, the mingling of the arrogant and abject may be observed in him. Like the underground man, he talks endlessly

to himself, advancing to the vocabulary of the unconscious.

The underground man is a product of the subconscious hell that seethes in the depths of man's soul. Duality of emotions, E.H. Carr observes in his study of Dostoiivsky, is a prominent feature not only in the Memoirs but also his novels. The double in Mansfield's story is introduced to diagnose a disease. Raoul has a penchant for filthiness and is proud of it, yet he is a confirmed egoist. The sadistic and masochistic are alternate manifestations of his double self. Self-scrutiny is his asset that assists in the process of self-definition. "Je ne Parle Pas Francais" marks a stage in the evolution of the artist's thought. The irrational chaos of human nature opens a chasm where things are revealed in a new light. Raoul Duquette dramatises through his voice, the many tongued confusion of Mansfield's consciousness.

Dick Harmon and Raoul Duquette both ill use Mouse, the central female character in "Je ne Parle Pas Francais". Dick has succeeded in bringing her to Paris, a city of unknown horrors. The city lies with its social injustices, its fake sexual conventions and its cruel display of wealth. Mansfield's Paris is much like the Dostoiivskian metropolis or an inferno to be more precise, where reconciliation or grace cannot exist. Dick abandons Mouse in the strange city and goes back to England at the beckoning of his mother. His Oedipus-complex is explicit in his letter

to her. Dick's mother fixation prevents fulfilment in love. He suffers from a congenital mental disease and is condemned. Like Raoul, Dick perpetrates actions which nothing can extenuate. He can never be the strong, solid man on whom Mouse can rely. There is a detestable feminine dependency in Dick's character, wrought with considerable artistic disgust. At the idea of Raoul's departure, he seems to faint. His wretchedness at these points becomes unseemly.

Mouse, as her name suggests, is meek and frightened, longing for a hole to shelter herself. She seems to be a little creature who cannot apprehend what is done to her and is destined to beat her little heart with her tiny fist in the dark, cold corner. The city strives against her, intent upon her life. Her muff is her only protection against unknown horrors. Mouse is enraged at Dick's nerve-shattering inability but controls herself. It is not understandable why she has made the blunder of coming to Paris with him as he is unsteady and never master of himself. Dick leaves Mouse alone on the pretext of posting a letter to his mother and does not return. She makes the second fatal mistake in breaking down in front of Raoul. Raoul, as is expected of an urban rake, takes full advantage of her insecurity. " 'Do feel that I am your friend' " (Alpers, *Stories*, 298), Raoul tells Mouse. He wants her to use him. Ironically it is he who uses her, deliberately with a diabolic cunning. His hypocrisies are a cover for his sole aim of seduction. Raoul succeeds in his mission abominably : "I succeeded. She came out of her hole ...

timid ... but she came out" (Alpers, *Stories*, 298). He is represented as a satyr, boisterous and lustful. His language and gestures, like the satyr are often obscene. His blatant effronteries have something overmastering that works the reader up to a state of moral indignation. "Je ne Parle Pas Francais" is not merely amatory literature. Sexuality in the story is not procreative but poised against a hard mechanical world represented by Paris. Mouse's affirmative physical reality is corrupted both by Raoul and Dick. Dick's clumsiness is juxtaposed against Raoul's corruptive pride. Raoul obeys his passions clinging to the notions of selfhood. Both of them lack the essential solidity of character and a constructive enlightening consciousness. Mouse's condemnation is an obvious hazard as she has come into contact with them. A deep sense of waste permeates the story.

Disillusionment and lost hopes are the dominating motives in "A Dill pickle". Mansfield's past relationship with Francis Heinemann during the New Age period comes up in the story. The story takes up for review neither the beginning nor the continuation of a relationship. Vera sees her friend after six years. Six years have acquired spatial qualities with the time-lapse. Vera has matured and now when she looks back in retrospect, she cannot fail to notice her indifference. Her efforts at finer intimacy have been killed. The rapture and mood of their previous meetings are wholly extinguished by the passage of time. The chill outside synchronizes with the cold inside. It galls Vera bitterly to

think of past pleasures. She hears stories of the Black Sea with the anguish of a famished child. Her friend's realistic description of the sea is pregnant with psychological import. In a swoon, Vera loses herself to the outstanding ambience for a while. In the mysterious out of doors, she is awoken from her slumber by the coachman's voice, urging her to taste a dill pickle. She has never eaten a dill pickle but can imagine it "...the greenish glass jar with a red chili like a parrot's beak glimmering through" (Alpers, Stories, 274). Its piquant taste is not new to her; life has the same flavour, if not more sour. In fear of being caught, Vera prepares to leave. Her friend's mockery of the past confirms the point of her exit.

The dying of a relationship is the theme of "A Dill Pickle". Vera's friend is incomprehensive of her disorderly enthusiasms. The inherent smallness of a love affair and its tyrannical money-centric dimensions are apt at killing it. Vera waits till her friend hands her back the glove, full of detachment. She hurries without bidding him goodbye almost stealthily, to avoid the futile theorizing and bothering about money. The characters of Vera and her friend are darkened with excessive honesty. They affirm Mansfield's conviction that life is fragmented and is continually renewed.

Aged spinsters in abject misery possibly represent a defoliated life of wasted passions in Katherine Mansfield's stories. Remote from matrimonial prospects, they lead a dreary life on which restrained sexuality leaves a lasting effect. They

lack conviviality. No warmth of feeling unites these maids organically to life. It is life in the void they portray, a life not really existing, disconnected from the vital and substantial world. Miss Brill always has a foreboding of hopelessness. The Jardine Publiques with its bands playing and the hackneyed human drama suddenly strikes the chords in Miss Brill. She becomes aware of her meaningless performance everyday. Miss Brill has become a stupid old thing, a hindrance to others' intimacy.

Sunday after Sunday she notices odd silent faces on the benches, "as though they'd just come out from dark little rooms or even cupboards" (Alpers, *Stories*, 375). Cupboards suggest double confinement, a room within a room. Dark little rooms have suggestions of cellars. Cellars in the Dostoiivskian architecture of symbolism give a strong image of space beneath floorboards. The mind's descent to its depths makes external reality sound unsubstantial. Miss Brill never hears these people speak. They are, like her, inhabitants of the underworld. Her little dark room is a veritable cage from which she cannot escape. The voice crying inside the box is her own maimed identity.

Ellen in "The Lady's Maid" is a confirmed spinster like Miss Brill. She cuts off her hair, her most prized possession. With the loss of her hair, Ellen loses her identity. One further point needs to be made. Ellen loses physical contact with the world outside. She lives a life that is not really her own. Her world comprises the one and inevitable 'My lady'. She has virtually made a donkey-ride of her life. The fact that her

dreams are laden with donkeys has suggestions of her denial of every rational human satisfaction. Performing menial duties to her mistress, she slides into absolute servitude like a washerman's donkey, stupid but obedient. What alarms the reader is the recurrent use of animal imagery designed to dehumanize Ellen. The sense of animality affects Ellen's consciousness.

The daughters of the late Colonel are hypnotized as they move about in a drugged atmosphere. Josephine and Constantiana continue to live in a hollow after their father's death. Peering through the murk, they are in a trance, uncertain of everything. With bleak marital prospects, they are in a consequence so edgy that at the slightest stir they go overboard. Obsessive reference to 'Mouse' is not without significance in "The Daughters of the Late Colonel". Josephine and Constantiana are two little mice, timid and cowardly. They grope for their holes in dark depths. Afraid of exposure they are pacified in darkness. Nurse Andrews shocks them by her gluttony but she stands as a superb contrast to their lack of appetite and sickness. Having been devitalized by their living father, they live with his shadow after his death. The two sisters always anticipate intrusion. When Mr. Farolles, a clergy, suggests a communion, they become terrified but as usual their response is dilatory and not clear at all. Whether at the cemetery or in the house they are torn to pieces by assuming untimely invasions of the dead man. Their points of contact with the vital world are few. Josephine and Constantiana are in a constant phobia of confronting the dead, a condition

not conducive to healthy living. Their father's amazing power to destroy the remnants of their self-awareness is an illusion which inhabits them. Constantania's efforts to dissimulate her thoughts end in dismal retreat. The strain surfaces on the countenances of the two sisters. They lose the sense of time and live dubiously, dwarfed by the past.

Miss Emily Grierson in William Faulkner's story "A Rose for Emily" resembles the daughters of the late Colonel in her isolation. When the city tax collectors come to see her, she advises them to talk to Colonel Sartoris, a man long dead and buried. The lapse of distinction between life and death is an important symptom of Miss Emily's sickness as well as the two sisters in Mansfield's story. The realms of appearance and reality merge in their vision. Josephine and Constantania in "The daughters of the Late Colonel" are so absorbed in their hovering flights that the maid's inquiry brings them back to the trammels of routine with a bump. They can hardly take it in, but as usual they cannot dismiss her in spite of her impertinence. "That just on this one subject I've never been able to quite make up my mind", (Alpers, *Stories*, 399) Constantania meekly confesses. She has, in fact, not made up her mind on any subject. Distanced from her, Faulkner's Miss Emily is proud and decisive in spite of her schizophrenia. She inspires awe in other people and is never ready to accept the world on others' terms. Confidence and pride are totally absent in Mansfield's daughters of the late Colonel, though they have striking similarities with Faulkner's Miss Emily.

Mansfield's story does not end in horror like Faulkner's. There is a possibility of redemption that is suggested in the denouement. With sunlight flashing over the photographs of the dead and chirping sparrows, there is a resurgence of hope. For the first time in their lives, Josephine and Constantania forget to be dictated. The Buddha with its mysterious smile assists in their rehabilitation. Their lives so far had been spectral; they had been beautifully out of touch and at the same time conscious of their disconnection. In cosmic manifestations they grope for self-assurance. Sunrays and moonbeams affect them physically. The soft intimacy of the night and the iridescent moonlight have a physical effect on Constantania. The pale big moon urged her to reach out. She is charged with a strange potency only in close proximity with nature : "It was only when she came out of the tunnel into the moonlight or by the sea or into a thunderstorm that she really felt herself" (Alpers, Stories, 402). Exposure, as indicated by 'coming out', becomes a precondition for self-discovery. Contact with the inwardness and reticence of cosmic rhythms, against the hard insentience of the outer world is essential for self-scrutiny. Unravelling the tangle of consciousness, Constantania finds herself sinking into a strange oblivion. She is uncertain of the future but waits in confused apprehension. The force of universal symbolism evolved in the story was an unconscious exercise. It was two years after the publication of "The Daughters of the Late Colonel" that Mansfield read Cosmic Anatomy and expatiated her views:

To get even a glimpse of the relations of things — to follow that relation and find it remains true through the ages enlarges my mind as nothing else does. It's only a greater view of psychology. It helps me with my writing, for instance, to know that hot + bun may mean Taurus, Pradhana and substance. No, that's not really what absorbs me; it's that reactions to certain causes and effects have always been the same. It wasn't for nothing that Constantiana chose the moon

(Alpers, Life, 354)

Mansfield seemed satisfied with her story, as her letter to William Gerhardie, written after the story's publication, confirms. She recognized the beauty hidden in the lives of the two sisters' and had no reservations about admitting it. To Hardy's request to write more about the sisters she modestly acknowledged her inability. There was nothing more to write about them. The story, according to her own artistic standards, was complete in itself.

"Poison", completed in November 1920, is a story about promiscuous love. Princess Bibesco's love letters to Murry occasioned Mansfield's strange melancholia. Murry's evasiveness on the subject angered her and she called him a liar privately. Not content with having posted a letter to the love-smitten princess, she wrote "Poison", a story of love jinxed by letters. In an undated letter of November 1920, Mansfield tried to make her intentions clear which Mr. Alpers cites in his collection of her stories (Commentary, 565). "Poison" is told in retrospect. Twenty four is an impressionable age for a man. His passionate

love for the pearl-studded Beatrice is more ideal than real. She is an epitome of elegance and beauty. Married twice, it is striking that she does not wear a wedding ring. She has an air of ghastly freedom about her albeit she is the enchantress, smiling in a provocative manner. Beatrice seems intent on an ethereal flight and is apt at puzzling her lover by her numerous guises. He gropes for self-assurance in her love. She soothes him with her deceptive magic. The bliss is shattered by the postman's footsteps on the gravel. Her heavenly grace disappears in a moment. The chronic schizophreniac comes out and talks of her hurried life of conspiracies. When her lover asks her whether she has poisoned anybody, his gesture becomes striking and explosive, unleashed by the hallucinatory, equivocal air. The hysterical atmosphere thickens in the denouement : "The drink tasted chill, bitter, queer" (Alpers, Stories, 382). The indomitable lover has ultimately been poisoned by the dangerous woman. There is an air of unpredictability in the creation of Beatrice. She moves between two worlds, the real world and the world of penumbral shadows. Having little to lose, she is feral, with a streak of vicious cunning. Mansfield has conjured up powers of darkness in the story and it becomes harrowing. Cruel artistic malice reaches a paroxysm in the creation of Beatrice. She is a study in sin.

"The Young Girl" is a product of Mansfield's hallucinations. Mrs. Raddick's young daughter is not permitted into the casino as she is merely seventeen. She does not mind that rebuff. Her indifference and weariness is striking, unusual for her age.

The fact that she does not care to take off her gloves at the tea-table or that she is not intent on observing things and bites her lips, point towards a malaise. The tiresome performance around her only confirms her alienation. Her glassy look suggests an opaqueness. She inhabits the void like Miss Brill or Raoul Duquette. She is not potentially venomous like Raoul or Beatrice but with her derisive rejection stands apart. Her sight is obstructed by her unsafe edge. She sees a hole in the air and looks through and through. It is useless for the young girl to react against such fatality.

"The Stranger", as its name suggests is the story of an outsider. The autobiographical element in the story has been much publicized, but the apocryphal part of it certainly juts out from Mansfield's personal experience. Harold and Anne Beauchamp's voyage and a passenger's death at sea was a distant event in October/November 1920, when Mansfield conceived the story. More recent was Anne's death and Harold's second marriage. Anne's intimacy with death is suggestive in a queer manner. She did not know the dying man but had shared a strange relationship with him, nurtured by physical contact : " 'It was heart'. A pause. 'Poor fellow !' she said. 'Quite young'. And she watched the fire flicker and fall. 'He died in my arms', said Janey" (Alpers, *Stories*, 372). To have held a complete stranger at the mysterious moment of death is an experience that Janey cannot overcome. She seems drugged by it. Her story deflates Hammond. By the time the story ends, his

breast is hollow. The stranger has completely shattered his eagerness towards physical intimacy:

The fire had gone red. Now it fell in with a sharp sound and the room was colder. Cold crept up his arms. The room was huge, immense, glittering. It filled his whole world. There was the great blind bed, with his coat flung across it like some headless man saying his prayers

(Alpers, Stories, 373).

Hammond affects a sense of degradation. His prurience has affected his vision. The new and ambiguous beauty in Janey's countenance is beyond his perception. As often in Dostoiivsky, one particular feeling is highlighted by Mansfield, namely longing for conjugal intimacy in Hammond's case, and then replaced by its direct opposite i.e. intrusion of a third unknown character to cause great resentment and vexation. The mute dead passenger exacerbates Hammond's edginess. His vision of himself is inverted and headless, inflamed with passion. Dead and gone, the stranger has succeeded in intriguing him against Janey. They would never be alone again. There is a cruel rejection of passionate advances in the story; a strong disapproval of conjugal bliss is furnished amidst the hallucinatory air. Hammond's sensible and rational self is compelled to do something utterly senseless. His is the hideous torment of a jealous husband though his opponent is a dead man. The irrationality and chaos of his consciousness has segregated him from mainstream life.

The dangerous existences that Mansfield's characters court are their only option as they are maladjusted in their society as

well as in their family. As they shrink from two concentric circles of existence, they look upon guilt and sin as a kind of free act which would enable them to step beyond the oppressive boundaries laid down by society and family. Engaged in a dangerous existence, the ultimate goal of such a character is the self, the dead honest self. None of Mansfield's protagonists are great men or women but the most dangerous ones are often exceptionally intelligent and intellectually strong, like Raoul Duquette or Beatrice. Hubris is their greatest impediment to their struggle for self discovery, though it is their most striking asset. Having forfeited the normal joys of life, they hasten to their doom, driven by infernal malice and arrogant pride. They claim to be deemed convinced and consistent egoists. They are projections of Mansfield's antinomian potential selves. Her dangerous characters yield to every contradiction with gay abandon. They deal with God and Devil at the same time and with equal ease.

Chapter V

The Magic Island

Who is he that hideth counsel without knowledge?
therefore have I uttered things that I understood not;
things too wonderful for me, which I knew not?

(The Book of Job)

In early 1916 Katherine Mansfield was busy making notes for a fresh beginning of "The Aloe", sometime after her brother's death in an explosion. An escape into a desired land seemed the only alternative to sticking to one's fidelities in those war years. D.H. Lawrence had confided to Murry that there was no point in writing anything. The conditions of life should be changed first. Mansfield — self-opinionated, erratic and individualistic, had the same reaction to strange inconveniences caused by the war, but unlike Lawrence, she kept her utopian territory to herself. Lawrence had been dreaming of Rananim where he would form a colony of congenial people, " 'a life in which the only riches is integrity of character' " (Harry T. Moore, The Intelligent Heart ; The Story of D.H. Lawrence, 234). Tired of the personal element, he urged his friends to join him. Mansfield could never agree to the proposal. Rananim (named after one of Koteliansky's Hebrew songs), was an impediment to her creative pursuit. Besides, there would be no cultural identification. Mansfield was intent on writing about her own undiscovered country. Her arcadia was surely to be topographically, artistically and

culturally her very own, the reconstruction of which must have been triggered off by Leslie Beauchamp's death and a letter from Lawrence in sincere grief:

Do not be sad. It is one life which is passing away from us, one "I" is dying; but there is another coming into being, which is happy, creative, you. I knew you had to die with your brother; you also go down into death and be extinguished. But for us there is a rising from the grave, there is a resurrection, and a clean life to begin from the start ...

(Sylvia Berkman, Katherine Mansfield, 70).

Soon after arriving in Bandol after the bereavement Mansfield wrote in her journal : "I do not wish to go anywhere ..." (Murry, Journal of Katherine Mansfield, 89). She had ultimately learnt to make reparations for her duplicacies and sin. Like a phoenix she rose from her own ashes. Her resurrection precisely implies a renewal of her roving to all remembered places till she exhausted her store. In a letter to Brett, Mansfield reminisced her invulnerable memories and apprised her of her novel experiment : "I tried to catch that moment - with something of its sparkle and flavour, then smother it again and then again disclose it" (O'Sullivan & Scott, I, 331). The exhibition of Post-Impressionist paintings in the year 1910 by Roger Fry must also be regarded as a cumulative influence. Mansfield wrote to Dorothy Brett how Van Gogh's "Sunflowers" seemed to reveal something she had not realized before. It lived with her afterwards.

Karori and Muritai, with memories of days spent there, could be only relived in myth. Freud believed that myths were projections. He assumed the unconscious to be the storehouse. In a myth the forces of the unconscious find harmony in a rational light of the consciousness. Freud went further to imagine the unconscious as a cellar which stored sexual fantasies which the conscious would never know about. His ardent admirer C.G. Jung is of the opinion that what we encounter in myths and literature are "merely archetypal images" (K.K. Ruthven, Myth : The Critical Idiom, 20). There is a basic affinity between myth and literature. If available mythologies prove unsatisfactory, an author can always invent his own system. An invented mythology does not have the resonances of an inherited one and is acceptable to only a select coterie. Mansfield had initially started as act of escape into the simplicities of childhood with a desire to bring something unspoilt and pure into the meaningless present. Her myth provides her with a necessary connection with a past that emerges from the dark depths of the unconscious.

Kezia, the girl child's name in Mansfield's Karori tales, is derived from The Book of Job : "He also had seven sons and three daughters. And he called the name of the first Jemima; and the name of the second Kezia" (The Book of Job, Chapter 42, lines 13 & 14). It is not for nothing that Mansfield chooses the name in her first decisive step towards evolving a personal mythology. For an egoist like Mansfield, The Book of Job naturally served

as an excellent source. Lawrence had openly admitted the greatness of The Book of Job. "If you want a story of your own soul, it is perfectly done in The Book of Job — much better than in Letters from the Underworld", Lawrence wrote to Gordon Campbell in a letter in December, 1914, that Harry. T. Moore cites in his study entitled The Intelligent Heart ; The Story of D. H. Lawrence (226). The Lord had directed Job to cast abroad the rage of his wrath : "and behold every one that is proud, and abase him" (The Book of Job, Chapter 40, line 11). Job has been blessed more in the end than at the beginning, after his repentance in dust and ashes. His being blessed for the second time implies a resurrection; a rising from chaos. Katherine Mansfield must have been impressed with this theme and discerned the ideal father in Job whose daughters were fair and their father "gave them inheritance among their brethren" (The Book of Job, Chapter 42, line 15).

Kezia, thoroughly unwanted by her mother, is left behind with her sister Lottie in the house as the family leaves for a new home. Linda Burnell, her mother, is visibly relieved to leave them behind. Kezia's response to Linda's vehemence is noticeable. She does not weep like Lottie at the disappearance of the buggy. Making a face at Mrs. Samuel Joseph's undone placket, the secretive Kezia does her best to conceal her confusion. The old big house is changed and strangely charged with the occupants gone. Upstairs in her parents' living room, Kezia finds a pill box : " 'I could keep a bird's egg in that' " - she decides (Alpers, Stories, 226). It is precisely the female child's cognitive development

that is enunciated in the term 'egg'. The egg is essentially female and it is only the female egg that hatches into new life. Both in society and family, women are psychologically important to men in terms of their fertility, the single biological quality that is etymologized in the term 'egg'. Kezia is disturbed at her untimely entry into the dark, demure exclusively adult world. A female child's plight at her first glimpse of feminine protuberance had been categorically explored in Mansfield's early story, "At Lehmann's". Sabina, the child maid had reacted in her own way, to her landlady's pregnancy which the women called 'journey to Rome'. It was a puzzle and Sabina never got to know what men had to do with it.

Sabina, a poor servant girl, could not escape her fate. The young man who tried to molest her was held back by a shriek and she escaped from the outrage. Mansfield has matured remarkably in 'prelude' as an artist since her Bavarian Sketches. Her preciosity and mute suggestiveness have outdistanced the prosaic portrayals of "At Lehmann's". That Linda Burnell could not possibly have held a child is an obvious suggestion of her pregnancy which must have been noticed by the discreet and shrewd Kezia.

A male child's entry into the adult male world is marked by confidence, fear and anticipation. Nick Adams' boldness in Hemingway's remarkable story "The Killers", is a brilliant contrast to Kezia's pusillanimous advances. The two gangsters who

come to kill Ole Andreson, a Swede, at Henry's lunchroom have an air of vicious finality — that is foreign to Nick. Tired of waiting, the killers leave the place. Nick, in a sudden gesture, decides to go up to Andreson's place to warn him of the danger. In his tete-a-tete with the Swede, Nick sounds decisive and stern.

'Don't you want me to go and see the police?'

'No', Ole Andreson said. 'That wouldn't do any good.'

'Isn't there something I could do?'

'No. There ain't anything to do.'

'Maybe it was just a bluff.'

'No. It ain't just a bluff.'

(Books & Penn Warren, 193).

Andreson's involvement in some terrible operation is confirmed by his inactivity. Nick cannot come to terms with the gruesome experience. Unlike the Negro cook who prefers to be deaf in order to survive, and George who has an air of casual indifference, Nick cannot afford to be a silent observer. In trepidation, he decides to leave the place. Nick has had his first glimpse of adult experience in the professional casualness of the gangsters, Ole Andreson's acceptance of his fate, and George's dismissal of the whole episode. "The Killers" is basically, Nick's story.

Kezia's discovery of adult hypocrisy and cruelty is presented in an atrocious episode in "Prelude". Pat, the buggy

driver, looks like a savage sorcerer. He beckons the children to show them how the kings of Ireland chop the head off a duck. The children follow him like the rats of Hamelin, charmed by his magic. Coaxing the ducks, Pat pretends to show them the grain. The greedy ducks gobble at the food and at that strategic point Pat seizes two ducks. Their darting heads and round eyes frighten the girls but not Pip, as he is a boy. At the sight of waddling headless duck, Pip dances and yells. Kezia is in a frenzy when she sees the beheaded duck. She implores Pat to put the head back. Her horror and violent cries to restore the duck back to life are touching. It is the malevolent adult duplicacy to which Kezia finds herself maladjusted. Tragically, the king of Ireland's charm works no more.

Myth and ritual replicate each other in the duck-hunt. The magical doing away with the duck's head works on the level of action while the mythical element exists on the conceptual level. Things which have once been into contact with each other continue to act on each other at a distance after the contact has been severed, which, according to James Frazer is one of the principles on which magic is based. The duck's head does not seem to be lifeless, as if it could spring to life at the magician's will. Pat's power is by no means arbitrary and unlimited. He cannot wield it any longer as he has been deceitful.

In the magic world of Karori, Kezia's confrontations with the grown-up world are vividly explored. In "At the Bay" she is seen in repose with her grandmother, bewildered by the story of her uncle William's death. Kezia forms her own version of the death scene : "... A little man falling over like a tin soldier by the side of a big black hole" (Alpers, Stories, 456). Her grandmother's calm adult acceptance of her son's death puzzles Kezia, but slowly she becomes resilient. As she tickles her grandmother, the death spell evaporates. A discreet Kezia charms the reader in "The Doll's House". Being fully aware of the fact that the Kelvey girls have been socially boycotted, she invites them to see the doll's house. Lil Kelvey's warning : " 'Your ma told our ma you wasn't to speak to us' " (Alpers, Stories, 504), is reciprocated by Kezia's stubborn determination. She boldly ushers them into the big house to see the lamp. Conscious of the class difference between her and the Kelveys, she makes a desperate attempt to break down the social bulwark. The spell is broken by Beryl Fairfield's unceremonious entry. Her histrionics shakes the Kelvey girls out of their wits and forces Kezia to withdraw. Kezia's adolescent mission is successful to some extent as the Kelveys manage to have a glimpse of the little lamp before fleeing.

The 'little lamp' is paramount in its symbolic content. In late October 1921, Mansfield noted the central idea of "The Doll's House" in her journal. "At Karori : 'The little lamp. I seen it' " (Alpers, Stories, Commentary, 573). The need for spiritual illumination at the time of severe

physical crisis could no longer be concealed. This was precisely the time when Mansfield was imploring Koteliansky for information about Manoukhin. She had a feeling that her illness was not entirely physical. A prayer in her notebook that Alpers cites in his biography of hers, is particularly revealing in this context : "Lord make me crystal clear for thy light to shine through" (347). Life alone can impart life. The flickering incandescence may lack in glitter but its faint glimmer has a sincere appeal. When a person speaks the truth in the spirit of truth, he is clear as heavens. Mansfield must have undergone a kind of spiritual transfiguration, overcoming all barriers to truth. She was possibly conscious of the Nemesis presiding over all intellectual work. Emerson has clarified this point with his usual ardour : "We have yet to learn that the thing uttered in words is not therefore affirmed. A work of art should affirm itself ..." (Essays & Journals, 141). A clear, solid consciousness is the optimum requirement for such affirmation.

Mansfield's first decisive step toward achieving that new clarity and freshness lay in retracing her steps into an undisturbed, natural concave of family love with a stubborn, instinctual insistence. She was prepared to use up all her energy in the recreation of the family saga. D.H. Lawrence contributed to the sudden resurgence of feeling in a peculiar way. His latest novel Women in Love had arrived for review at the Murrays' and Mansfield, shocked at the rancorous portraits that Lawrence made of his friends, tried to restrain herself. Richard Aldington,

a biographer of Lawrence and a friend of his remarked once that the book (Women in Love) was about everybody in hate with the possible exception of Birkin and Ursula. Mansfield figures out Lawrence's onslaughts as the work of a disturbed mind. She was convinced of his illness and felt that only family love could alleviate the tension. Dorothy Brett received a letter in August 1921 from Mansfield, expressing the urgency of love in family circles. Till 1915 Mansfield was satisfied with occasional reminiscences i.e. "The Wind Blows", "The Apple Tree" or "The Aloe". In 1921 the momentum was noticeable. Three Karori stories were completed within the span of four months (Alpers has confirmed that "The Garden Party" was founded on a Karori incident). "At the Bay" and "The Doll's House" are the two other pieces completed after Lawrence's malicious attack.

The topography of Karori forms the plexus of the island stories. The outstretching pastures, the Karakas, large totara forests at the hillside, the littoral 'Muritai' and the sleepy sea are the phantasmagoria of the Karori tales. Impressions fill the space in the strange land of Karori. Smell of leaves and wet, black earth mingles with the sharp smell of the sea. The shepherd with his meek sheep keeps up a soft, light whistling that sounds mournful and tender. The quietness and the mist instill a sense of reposeful charm. No harsh sounds are heard. The bleat of sheep "...sounded in the dream of little children", (Alpers, Stories, 442), the shepherd's whistle is soft and airy and the waves come rippling. It is an eternal self-search in the realm of a never ending

metamorphosis: "A thread like creature wavered by and was lost. Something was happening to the pink, waving trees; they were changing into a cold moonlight blue" (Alpers, *Stories*, 455). The inner plungings and deep disclosures of the deracinated consciousness are echoed in natural motions. The world shaped by ancient rhythms has a positive role to play in Mansfield's creative pursuit. The sheep, the sleepy sea and the entire paraphernalia intercommunicate with the human drama.

Amidst the drugged setting, dream figures move about and react. Nature offers the Kelvey children a primeval shelter against class hatred in "The Doll's House". The sisters look 'dreamily' over the hay paddocks past the creek. As they look at the pasture from their palliative resort, their shame and suffering is absorbed in nature. In Karori's natural ambience, Kezia magically dissolves in the denouement of "Prelude" : "Then she tiptoed far too quickly and airily" (Alpers, *Stories*, 259). Disgusted with adult duplicacies, Kezia merges with the elements. Putting the cream jar on the Calico cat's ear, she had made it look at itself in the mirror. "Now look at yourself", she had told the cat (Alpers, *Stories*, 258). Her sternness is due to her wrath, as she cannot make the grown ups look at themselves. The inverted animal image fills her with anger as suggested by "hot all over" (*Stories*, 258), and she disappears.

Dreams are the aorta of Katherine Mansfield's fantasy. The relative autonomy of dream life involves unconscious processes at work. The dream becomes a guiding image for Mansfield. It is a

part of nature which does not deceive but expresses something. Dreams, according to C.G. Jung, are processes to which no arbitrariness can be attributed. They help Mansfield to get over her feeling of disorientation and confer meaning upon the banality of life. There are traces of a collective beneath Mansfield's personal psyche. The individual in her dreamland is part of a collective exercise. The sea, the paddocks, the Karakas and every minuscule expression of life infuse a sense of cohesion. A cohesive family unit is Mansfield's choice in her fantastic roving. The psyche of her subject oscillates like a pendulum between tangible and intangible experience. A secure family recline favours dreams. Linda Burnell is favourably disposed towards dreaming. She finds a congenial companion in the aloe. The aloe exists beyond the possibility of dissociation in a condition of integrity, consonance and clarity.

Alice, the servant girl, is seen busily absorbed in a book interpreting dreams in the magic world of Karori. Alice's book is full of warnings : "To dream of black-beetles drawing a hearse is bad. Signifies death of one you hold near or dear" (Alpers, Stories, 250). Next comes the spider dream. Insect images are frequent in Karori. The two moths which fly in through the window and round and round the moonlight in "prelude" are not brought into the story casually. Lamplight suggests exposure and threat to the sparky, fearless moths. Linda Burnell fears the provocative but fatal incandescence. The moths have a retrogressive effect

on her mind. Linda's awareness of her own forlorn predicament becomes explicit. In Alice's world insects are given human attributes. The movement of insects in her book has a worldly appeal. Necessity is the ultimate word in Alice's dream world. Her soggy practical existence forms the ground work of her dreams ; "Spiders. To dream of spiders creeping over you is good. Signifies large sum of money in near future" (Alpers, Stories, 250). For Alice insect images are either good or bad and are relevant for future prospects against a depressing and derelict present.

Kezia wants to be a bee because it is an insect. She feels the yellow, furry, striped legs about her. Kezia wishes to be tiny but powerful. Pip's model is the bull that would frighten the bee. Jonathan Trout discovers the likeness of his predicament to an insect's. Dashing against the wall, the windows and ceilings, he does everything on God's earth to hurt himself like the fly. What he does not dare is a flight outside. The vast dangerous garden full of possibilities awaits him, but he gives up. A straight, undaunted passage is an impossibility in his case. Much earlier in her story "Something Childish but very Natural", Mansfield had presented a moth in Henry's dream. In a strange metamorphosis the moth had become a girl handing him a telegram. The telegram is a token of urgency, which tolls the knell of Henry's dream. The beautiful garden recoils into his psyche. Vestiges of old experience exist in the unconscious. They are not dead but belong to our being. Mansfield's stream of fantasies often

smother them like Henry's garden. Insects become psychological realities in Mansfield's fantasy. Her flies and moths are not the Dostoivskian worms upon earth, foul and ill-gained. They are tiny, fearless creatures. There is a beauty in them that strikes the reader in spite of the fatality of their condition.

Gardens at night impinge on human consciousness. The moon and the astral rays inspire strange speculations. The melancholy of the trees has a soothing effect on the bruised psyche, away from the harsh insentience of the outer world or industrial noises. Seclusion in a garden is illusory as the practical world seldom allows a person to be private and withdrawn. The invaluable aloneness has an irresistible attraction. A solitary soul recoils from all human contact in Mansfield's Karori stories. Linda Burnell stands on the grassy bank to have a look at the aloe. The scent of midnight flowers impact on her delicate constitution. She dreams, unaware of time or circumstances, of being rowed away in a boat. Her luminous exploration is more metaphorical than real. What is explicit is the desire to escape. Beryl Fairfield, mesmerised by the nocturnal mysteriousness of the garden watches the apparently motionless trees, wanting to reach out. Trees stand for the power of silence, that is so essential for thinking about life. The unspeaking reticence of the Manuka affects Beryl immediately. Night is the proper time for such ventures, when the individual can feel the potency of silence in a garden. Beryl comes to know parts of herself previously unrealized.

The garden in "The Garden Party" is spoilt by human interference. While the gardener mows the lawn, the stupid professional activity devours the strong and aristocratic silence of the garden. A motley crowd have to be amused with a manufactured colourful patchwork : "As for the roses, you could not help feeling they understood that roses are the only flowers that impress people at garden parties ..."³ (Alpers, Stories, 487). Affectation becomes an important thematic motif in "The Garden Party". The Karakas reinforce the idea of integrity-root, shoot and blossom. The tree-image has a long history of which Mansfield must have been aware, since she was a voracious reader. Blake in his Songs of Innocence, has spoken of a tree in whose branches love and harmony combine. Blake's tree of Experience is a poisoned tree, condemned because it negates the tree of love. Blake's tree of love is not a vegetable tree : "It is an organicist image ..."⁴ Frank Kermode confirms in his Romantic Image (100). The imagination enables it to live as a symbol. It is the quasi-instinctive happy and self-begotten expression of imaginative art. There is a pronounced insistence on the oneness of soul and body in Blake, a thought that had been haunting Mansfield since her reading of Cosmic Anatomy. Yeats, in his poem "The Two Trees" published in The Rose has introduced the holy tree of joy and the "surety of its hidden root" (W.B. Yeats, the Collected Poems, 54-55). The shaking leafy head of Yeats' tree symbolizes the creative integrated imagination. His other image of the broken tree with blackened boughs obviously suggests fragmentation. In "A Prayer for My Daughter" Yeats talks of a flourishing hidden tree and

green laurel that are rooted in a perpetual place. Rootedness of a tree is suggestive of firmness and direction. These were possibly Mansfield's most prized prerequisites at the time she wrote "The Garden Party".

Mansfield's Karakas are proud and solitary. They lift their leaves and fruit to the sun in silent but dignified submission. The Karakas must be hidden by the marquee. Nature must be meddled with to promote a pageant of masked people. There is a sense of sacrilege in this methodizing. Sharp lights and tutored conversations of people wanting to be entertained, destroy the private seclusion of the garden. In the world of colonial garden parties and barbeques, the affluent are oblivious of the working classes. Laura, like Kezia in "The Doll's House", makes a desperate attempt to undermine her family's class-hatred but does not succeed. Instinctual and arrogant, she is more fascinated by the poor muscular workmen than the spoilt, silly boys of her neighbourhood. The news of the accidental death of a poor neighbour puts Laura in a quandary. Outraged at the prospect of revelling in such an uncanny atmosphere, she persuades her mother to call the party off. Her mother's reaction^{is} that of a cool, unfeeling grown up, corrupted by experience: "It's only by accident we heard of it" (Alpers, Stories, 494). The life or death of a workman can not hamper adult, affluent living. The very smoke coming out of their chimneys are silvery plumes, superimposed on poverty-stricken smoke of their poor neighbours.

Laura's hat is not a remedy but only a temporary relief. It alters her appearance and makes her look like a picture, unrealistic and foreign. The magical transformation is necessary for the oncoming masquerade. Laura, safe in the obscurity of her hat, is suddenly distanced from her original self. The poor, dead man and his family are like distant figures moving in a remote horizon : "But it all seemed blurred, unreal, like a picture in the newspaper" (Alpers, *Stories*, 495). Trying to put aside the denuded, morbid reality, Laura safeguards the interests and dignity of her rich parents. She cannot combine the two, complete disparate forms of experience, and chooses one to restore peace.

At the dead man's house, Laura finds herself face to face with the widow ; a stark inescapable reality ready to grind her. To the woman she is a stranger with a basket, not really having any point of contact with their lot. The dead man looks peaceful and absorbed in death. Both he and his wife belong to a fore-doomed stratum of society. The chance of a meaningful conversation between Laura and the widow is nil. The dead man's strange composure rekindles Laura's lost feelings that had suddenly relapsed into an adult evasiveness. Conscious of her incrimination, Laura gropes for self-confidence. She feels she has committed an unwholesome crime in denying life in them and death as well. The naive dignity of death in the uncanny surroundings chokes Laura. "Forgive my hat" (Alpers, *Stories*, 499) is the

only sentence she can utter between her sobs, before rushing out of the bereaved house. Laura's walk is a purgatorial journey, hurtling forward through dead souls. Her realization of the magnitude of her offence would not have been possible without it. She survives the shock and departs, cured of her illusions. Home seems Laura's only reparation and the warmth of love the only restoring force. Family offers a protective shelter to the anguished psyche. Laura's despondent self is perhaps a camouflage for Mansfield herself. Two life-long conflicts tore her apart which Alpers sums up as the love-hate feeling with her father and the love hate feeling for her country. With the face of the world corrupted by war and death, she wanted to evoke new mythologies which would perform a prismatic function, refracting experience into its old hues and yet preserving its organic unity. She had to undergo a formal trial like Laura before she could create the family saga. The procedure was intense and strenuous in which old experience was cleansed and the mind revitalized.

Mansfield's myth-making faculty is in close propinquity with Lawrence's consummation. To Dorothy Brett she had confided the tremendous strain of the process:

When I write about ducks I swear I am a white duck with a round eye, floating in a pond fringed with yellow blobs and taking an occasional dart of the other duck with the round eye, which floats upside down beneath me. In fact this whole process of becoming the duck (what Lawrence would, perhaps, call this

consummation with the duck or the apple) is so thrilling that I can hardly breathe

(O'Sullivan & Scott, I, 330).

To be alive, to be urgent and insistent is a not-to-be life for Lawrence. The highest of all is to melt out. Lawrence attempts to combine the dark, animal and instinctual with the enlightening conscious self. Mansfield temperamentally Lawrentian, was an ardent admirer of his passionate eagerness. Symbols were important to Lawrence in an elementary sense, and he wanted to make a ritual of the slightest activity. Mansfield's intentions are similar though she had no patience with some of Lawrence's ceremonies. What is evident is a struggle for honesty in Mansfield's case. Excruciating pains, a personal brand of antagonism to the war and a dismal darkness are contraries, without which there is no progression. Karori is the unbruised promised land, lying deep in the chequered shades of her dreams.

It is interesting to see how Mansfield always travels back to her central quest for self-awareness through waltzing out and in with multiple, apparently disparate themes in her stories. The theme of resurrection may easily give way to that of appearance and reality which again may bring in its trail the search for the centre of the feminine world vis-a-vis the adult-adolescent conflict. Class conflict (as betrayed in 'The Doll's House' or 'The Garden Party') cannot be studied in isolation because it seems to end up with a basic quest : in a

'house' of conflict among 'dolls', the lamp stands out as a beacon for the scared souls. The workman's death is illuminating as well as harrowing for Laura. Dreams and myths are brought in, but only to wield the relevant imagery that finally and as a whole points to Mansfield's struggle for the truth.

Chapter VI

Along the Winding Path -- to the Twilight

When the swan must fix his eye
Upon a fading gleam,
Float out upon a long
Last reach of glittering stream
And there sing his last song.

Yeats

Mansfield's last stories speak of waste, decay, disenchantment, mindless adaptation, transitory love, illness and above all, abuse of privacy. The chances of her regaining health seemed remote after 1919. In a letter to Murry, she settled the distribution of her possessions with an air of contrived light-heartedness : "I am leaving this letter with Mr. Kay in case I should pop off and not have the opportunity of talking over these things" (Alpers, Life, 297). Aware of her false tone she felt a liquid ache spread over her. Sickness was gradually becoming the greatest threat to her creative vision. For a woman to whom work was the greatest priority, acceptance of her predicament seemed difficult. Being a consumptive at the time when consumption was taking a thousand lives a week in England, was a harrowing situation. Added to that fear was the agony of living all by herself in the strange world of disease which healthy creatures have no inkling of. Event of a lifetime like marriage forfeits all its significance; life itself reduces to a nightmare.

The sick, invalid wife and the complacent husband in "The Man without a Temperament" are not far fetched characters.

Salesby is seen at the hall door turning the heavy signet ring on his little finger. He might have been going to whistle but does not whistle. Salesby's freshly washed hands suggest a natural glow. His indifference is rooted in his mind. His turning the signet ring on his finger is an indication of his self-denial. It may also be a gesture of suppressed anger or impatience but ultimately the signet ring, in its constant motion points to a loss of identity. Salesby negates life, in all its demands and possibilities. He seldom speaks. At his wife's request to bring his chair near hers, he is mute. The servant girl's apparent "sign" goes unnoticed. There is a sense of injustice in Salesby's portrayal, rooted in Mansfield's inability to provide Murry with a happy conjugal life. Salesby's wife wants him to be there to assure herself that she exists. As a consequence, he inhabits the strange world of disease with her.

Swoopings, tumblings and dashings of the honeymoon couple in "The Man Without a Temperament", serve as a brilliant contrast to the groans, faintness and cough of the sick woman. The newly wed girl looks as though her young husband had been dipping her in the sea, and fishing her out to dry in the sun. Animal passion and its brilliance in the flux of a new awakening derides Salesby's life in the void. He and his wife are the last to enter the dining room and the first to leave it. The General, the two top knots and the American woman enjoy their meals while Salesby shies from them. He tries to shake off his wife's despondency by saying he has lost his appetite. Obviously his aversion is rooted in his psychosis.

Salesby goes for a constitutional only to prove his abject allegiance. His meek acceptance is mocked by the lodgers at the hotel. Away from the crowd, he sees a deep valley with a dried-up river bed. Luscious bunch of grapes are cut and boxed, the mundane activity being in close proximity with his claustrophobia. The natural growth of wild berries is obstructed by stones. Drained of his real manhood, Salesby has become sapless like the river bed. The season of mellowing is no more and images of drying and preserving dominate the scene. Salesby is engulfed in an eternal winter. The idea of engagement defoliates all hues from his life in a miasma of despair. The following conversation brings out that the ailing wife has more animation than the healthy but oversolicitous husband:

'You're late', she cried gaily. 'You're three minutes late. Here's your watch, it's been very good while you were away. Did you have a nice time? Was it lovely? Tell me. Where did you go?'

'I say — put this on', he said taking the cape
from her

'Yes, I will. Yes, it's getting chilly. Shall we
go up to our room?'

When they reached the lift she was coughing. He
frowned

(Alpers, Stories, 338).

Salesby mollycoddles his invalid wife to the point of stifling her. As they enter the lift, he stands in the 'cage'.

Salesby has been segregated from the sane healthy world. He is not in touch with anybody. There is no conjugal bed in Salesby's bedroom. The precise nature of the sexual failure is not indicated but an impression of utter sterility looms over the story. Every act of Salesby's is either gratuitous or utilitarian. He goes to his wife's bed to kill a juicy mosquito. His kissing her is an act of comfort rather than love. He tucks her in and smooths her pillow. His overt subservience makes him impersonal, almost idiotic. Salesby seldom speaks because he has nothing to convey. When he speaks, his words are empty sounds without any emotional charge.

Salesby may have been modelled on Murry. Critics have severely dealt with his complacency and inordinate capacity for punishment. Frank O'Connor in his famous study of the short story The Lonely Voice remarks that Murry, in editing Mansfield's journal and her letters, was unfair to himself and "far too fair to his wife" (128). Mansfield's caricatures of Murry are seemingly unkind in "Je ne Parle Pas Francais" and "The Man Without a Temperament". O'Connor further insists that most of Mansfield's work is that of a "clever, spoiled, malicious woman" (130). Mansfield's venom was in real life, not designed for Murry in particular, albeit it looks like it. It was a phenomenon generally noticed and discussed between her contemporaries. Wyndham Lewis had confided to Violet Schiff that he was pleased not to be troubled with the venomous colonial story writer. Lytton Strachey shrewdly betrayed his feelings in a letter to Virginia Woolf, in

which he spoke of Mansfield's ugly impassive mask of a face and a vulgarly fanciful intellect sitting behind it.

Conscious of Murry's self-chosen doom and her anti-conjugal lies, Mansfield had admitted her failure and inability in running a household and a true conjugal life to Ida Baker, in a letter of 8th June, 1922. She felt that Murry was being defrauded by her. Alpers further observes in his biography that "Murry's difficulty was that she demanded that belief from him" (Alpers, *Life*, 360). In the light of this observation, the origins of Mansfield's venom may be traced. Aware of the fact that she was a drag on Murry's consciousness, she could not shirk her responsibility for it. Dick Harmon or Salesby ultimately point to the artist's own reproof of herself, though they are portrayed with considerable ridicule. If Mansfield nurtured such an unjust demand that Alpers mentions, it might be her last requisite for a kind of self-rehabilitation.

Mansfield could never accept suffering in the Dostoivskian sense. The cult of suffering and physical infirmity had a special significance in Russia. Gogol seemed thankful to fate for having deprived him of good health, a breeder of all vices. For Dostoivsky, the healthy man is an earthly kind of a man "...but let him fall ill, let the natural earthly order of the organism be upset, the possibility of another world begins at once to declare itself; and the more ill he is, the more points of contact he has with the other world" (E. H. Carr, Dostoevsky, 290).

The destitute, the infirm and the epileptic have advantageous positions in Dostoiivsky's novels. The elements in the cult of suffering — romantic, spiritual and masochistic were dear to Dostoiivsky. Mansfield for her part, believed in no such resplendant role of suffering. As she grappled with disease, the hope for a recovery faintly glimmered. The path from Dr. Ainger to Manoukhin, and Manoukhin to Gurdjeiff is undeniably, a journey towards hope, a hope for life.

Death and bereavement in "The Dove's Nest" slowly thin away into insignificance as sunshine and life creep in. In the quiet serenity of the Cassetta, Milly and her widowed mother try to recover from their shock. Marie, the housemaid, decorates a dish of flowers regularly with a cynical presentiment : "She had the happy thought of so arranging the flowers that they would be appropriate to one of the ladies on a future tragic occasion" (Alpers, Stories, 518). Marie's sinister creations include a tomb of Miss Anderson's in black pansies and the tombs of Madame's and Milly's. Her decorations are self-effacing and terrible. Marie's smile in response to Mrs. Fawcett's praise is diabolic which disconcerts Milly. The stale life of timid English ladies in mourning does not suit Marie. When the outsider Mr. Prodger enters the dull premises, she is animated.

Miss Anderson shows little sign of life in "The Dove's Nest". A devout Roman Catholic, half her time is spent in wearing out the knees of her skirts in old churches. Her fingers

are cold like church candles. The churches with their architecture of a particular time, are in opposite extreme to the present. They are great builded voids in which Miss Anderson sinks back to vague anguish. She fails to respond to the outer world. Milly can never get over her suspicions about Miss Anderson : "Sometimes, at night, when Milly was feverish, she ~~wake~~ up and heard that rustle outside her door. Was Miss Anderson looking through the key-hole." (Alpers, Stories, 520)? Milly's uneasiness is rooted in Mansfield's own exasperated consciousness. Her Catholic cousins were, to some extent, responsible for it. They aided her at a time of desperate need but all the while were keen on the question of conversion. Miss Fullerton had presented her with a copy of The Imitation of Christ, much of which was debatable to the latter. In a journal entry for February 1920, Mansfield confirmed that she wanted a God not to praise or to entreat but to share her vision with. She accepted her cousins' hospitality with gratitude. As to their faith, she could, after a serious consideration, find nothing interesting in the personal deity. Alpers has acutely observed how she made angry retorts in the margin of The Imitation of Christ.

Mr. Prodger is initiated into the cold, sterile setting of "The Dove's Nest" to create a stir, to make ripples on a stagnant surface. Miss Anderson shakes off her rigidity and busies herself with her dress. The gilt chair is brought into the balcony. The ladies want a rehearsal of the oncoming meeting but they are uncertain of the topic of discussion. The inmates

of Villa Martin hasten to prepare themselves for a significant arrival. The decorative pieces and the artefacts seem confused in the prevailing uncertainty.

'One never knows', said the pink-spotted dragons on the mantelpiece and the Turks' heads pondered. Nothing is known-nothing. Everybody just waits for things to happen as they were waiting there for the stranger who came walking towards them through the sun and shadow under the budding plane trees...

(Alpers, *Stories*, 522).

The entire paraphernalia suggests a redemption. Spotted dragons or the Turks' heads are oriental motifs having subjective-relevance. Through her trusted friends Orage and Koteliansky, Mansfield had come to know of Mr. Gurdjeiff and his institute of harmonious development. Manoukhin's treatment had brought further deterioration and now, there was only one option left; a psychic control of her disease through eastern asceticism. Mansfield's journal and notebooks of this period speak of oriental references. The industrialized, mechanized west held no charm for her as well as for some of her contemporaries. Aldous Huxley confirms this in his Ends and Means: "At the present time and in the industrialized west, there is not much to be said in favour of rites, customs and ceremonies of traditional Christianity. There is not much to be said for them for the simple reason that demonstrably they are ineffective" (229). Mansfield was convinced of the self-destructive west. In her

journal she groped for self-assurance : "Do I believe in medicine alone? No, never. In science alone? No, never" (Alpers, Life, 373). The craving for eastern methods of systematic control of the body through a heightened consciousness seemed as possible alternative. The Turks, dragons or the Buddha are images of Msnnsfield's new-found hope.

Mr. Prodger or the stranger in "The Dove's Nest" is a man of his own substance and stature. His perfection and cleanliness, his manners and his dress present him with a strange intensity. He awakens the ladies from their slumber and at the same time intrudes into their privacy. Mr. Prodger's appearance overpowers them, and his male gesticulations have a mesmerizing spell. The three women["]...bobbed uncertainly at the pale table with a curious feeling of exposure["] (Alpers, Stories, 523). They are made insubstantial by his healthy interference : "They were like those meek guests who arrive unexpectedly at the fashionable hotel and are served with, whatever may be ready" (Stories, 523).

With Mr. Prodger come sunlight, heat and brightness as the harbingers of a throbbing life, in contrast to the chill. The balcony rail is hot and the sun is 'simply baking'. Milly raises her hand to the sun, and Mr. Prodger finally asks : "Then you're not afraid of the sunshine" (Alpers, Stories, 525)? In a sudden resurgence of feeling Milly replies, "No, I adore it". The sun is the source of 'quivering brightness' of the sea and the oranges in a little world 'burning bright'. The mist has been uplifted before Mr. Prodger's exit.

'The Fly' was written amidst Dr. Manoukin's treatment of Mansfield's tuberculosis, and is perhaps the most widely read and critically analysed story of hers. Completed in February 1922 in a building in Paris where she had spent three horrowing weeks in 1918 at the time of the German air raids, it interweaves several themes. Manoukhin's treatment is responsible for one of them. Alpers apprises us: "Dr. Manoukhin, formerly Gorki's doctor and now a member of the Russian colony in Paris, who claimed to be able to cure pulmonary tuberculosis by a highly priced and nonsensical process of irradiating the spleen with X rays" (Alpers, *Life*, 350). The sittings with Dr. Manoukhin proved too expensive and ultimately useless for Mansfield. Earlier she had dropped communication with her father, having heard from relatives about his grudging her monthly allowance. It was a terrible blow not pacified until March 1922. There was no possibility of further assistance from the homefront. On the other hand, Murry was not to be touched for these exclusively private expenses as he could ill afford them. The desperate situation brought forth many stories most of which are popular and insignificant, plainly written for money. It was something not in accord with Mansfield's nature, to whom nothing mattered more than her work. "A Cup of Tea" or "Taking the Veil" was written within a few hours. Mansfield's innermost self shrank from such despicable urgencies. She felt Manoukin to be an impostor. "The Fly" surprisingly is not a hurried work. She took three weeks to complete it. The fierce undercurrent of resentment in 'The Fly' has pathetic subjective allusions.

The boss sits snug and resolute in his office in 'The Fly' when Woodifield enters. Woodifield, a heart patient, leads a conditioned life. His wife and daughters leave him boxed up in the house everyday of the week except Tuesday. He envies the boss's vigour as he is deprived of it. The peculiar satisfaction that the boss derives from sitting in front of the frail old figure is visibly a corporeal victory. Woodifield strikes just at the moment the boss warms himself up with the whisky. Woodifield's information seems to be a craftily manoeuvred bit, sure of its target: "I thought you'd like to know. The girls were in Belgium last week having a look at poor Reggie's grave, and they happened to come across your boy's" (Alpers, Stories, 531).

The boss's existence is torn apart though he tries to keep up the show till Woodifield's exit. His composure and self-assurance are flashy gimmicks which vanish with Woodifield's news.

The blow is so severe that the boss cannot speak for a while : "Although six years had passed away, the boss never thought of the boy except as lying unchanged, unblemished in his uniform, asleep for ever ..." (Alpers, Stories, 532). Tears do not come as they came in profusion six years ago. The moment he got news of his boy's death, recovery was an illusion. Surprisingly the six long years have smothered the grieving father in him. Time has depraved him in a manner that is unbelievable and sickening : "The boss took the hands from his face; he was puzzled. Something seemed to be wrong with him. He wasn't feeling

as he wanted to feel" (Alpers, *Stories*, 532). When he looks at his son's photograph, he finds it cold and stern-looking. A contempt for his resettled self possibly disconcerts him, of which the photograph is a mere reflection. Mansfield's letter to Murry after her reading Virginia Woolf's Night and Day is significant in this context:

I don't want mobilization and the violation of Belgium, but the novel (Night and Day) can't just leave the war out. It is really fearful to see the settling down of human beings. I feel in the profoundest sense that nothing can ever be the same -- that as artists we are traitors if we feel otherwise ... (Alpers, *Life*, 258).

The boss's discomfiture becomes pronounced at the sight of the fly struggling to climb out from his ink-pot. He takes it out with a pen and keeps it on a blotting paper. The fly, once recovered from the fatal blow, tries to rearrange itself: "the little front legs rubbed against each other lightly, joyfully" (Alpers, *Stories*, 533). Once the confrontation with death is over, it settles for life. This act of resettling infuriates the boss possibly because of the parallelism between his own predicament and the fly's. He ensures the fly's death by pressing blots of ink on its tiny insect body. The boss derives an almost sadistic pleasure from the pangs of suffering into which he has thrust the fly. The weak but brave fly ultimately succumbs to the fatal final blot. By the time the boss orders his stooge

Macey to bring in some fresh blotting paper, he has completely forgotten his son. Recurrent use of 'blotting paper' suggests the drying up of natural emotions.

The fly as a symbol is effective. Its inherent weakness and vulnerability, continuous hankerings and encumbrances it faces are akin to Mansfield's presentiment of trouble ahead. Restlessness is one of the striking features of her life. Exposed to disease and death as the fly is to incandescence or human whims, she moved from place to place with an unusual proclivity like the fly. . . Harry T. Moore quotes . . . Edmund R. Clarke in his biography of D.H. Lawrence (The Intelligent Heart) to clarify a trait in Lawrence's personality, that is equally important in Mansfield's case. . . Clarke observed : "The individual develops an intense need for the satisfaction that comes out of accomplishment, recognition and achievement" (471). In his data-based study of tuberculosis patients, he emphasized : "It is then the background of personality development which accounts for the way of life that people with tuberculosis must follow. All of the patients we have studied to date demonstrate a life performance which might be described as one of intense striving towards their goal in life" (471).

According to . . . Clarke, an individual reaches a saturation point when it (the pursuit) is not longer tolerable and falls into exhaustion and despair. Restlessness becomes one of the chief symptoms of tuberculosis patients, a fate that had befallen Mansfield. A peculiarity of such restlessness is social

isolation when the individual does not feel at home anywhere and resorts to wandering from place to place. Mansfield's life is a never-ending record of journeys and voyages. 69 Clovely Mansions, Gray's Inn Road (January 1911 to Sept 1912) and the Elephant, 2 Portland Villas, East Heath Road, Hampstead, are the two addresses that record her longest sojourn.

Vulnerability of the fly is strewn with hints of Mansfield's gonorrhoea which was confirmed during her stay at the Elephant. Virginia Woolf guessed something uncanny but had no concrete idea of what it was. Mansfield, in a stigmatised revelation, spoke of something dark and catastrophic. The fly was her subterfuge in a sense, as a journal entry for 1919 confirms : "And God looked upon the fly fallen into the jug of milk and saw that it was good. And the smallest Cherubium and Seraphim of all, who delight in the misfortunate, struck their silver harps and shrilled : "how is the fly fallen, fallen" (Alpers, Life, 289). The word 'good' is confusing. There is nothing presumably good in a fly's falling into a jug of milk in a suicidal manner. It probably points toward Mansfield's self-destructive ordeals. The jubilations of providence or Fate and the lesser spirits depict a hostile cosmic order with which she is ill at ease. The horror of an external threat never left her. The prospect of the fall possibly alludes to the terror of the unknown, which gradually strengthened its grips on Mansfield. Her terminology is gnomic and cryptic, giving credence to a devilatilizing order, and at the same time making no secret of her resentment of it.

'A Married Man's Story's is thematically remarkable. It is the tale of an outcast, as telling tales seem to be Mansfield's forte. The married man's mind roams about in far away places while his wife sits with her baby near the kitchen fire. He finds himself in a strange city or walking along a strange road or near the dark quayside smelling the sea. Home is not home to him in spite of all it offers. Strangeness and darkness point toward a void in his soul. The bizarre convolutions of the plot are highly connotative.

The theme of desecration is important in 'A Married Man's Story'. The family hearth stands for sanctity and peace. The stability and protection of a home is maintained by a firm and substantial hearth. D.H. Lawrence, in his novels and stories, has often been meticulous in his presentation of the hearth : "The kitchen was small and full of firelight; red coals piled glowing up the chimney mouth. All the life of the room seemed in the white warm hearth and the steel fender reflecting the red fire" (Mizener, Modern Short Stories, 435). Raking the fire seems to be a natural impulse in Sons and Lovers. Lawrence seems convinced of the innate vitality of the hearth. Mansfield's married man is a denizen of a dismal world. He sees deformed images in the firelight, and is unable to ruminate over the salubrious fire. His mind is poisoned, and unlike Lawrence's throbbing earthly characters, he is bent on noticing shadows of his wife and child melt into nothingness : "And as the fire

quickness, falls, flares again, her shadow - an immense Mother and Child is here and gone, again upon the wall" (Alpers, Stories, 477). The distorted madonna with child has suggestions of impurity, of moral depravity, resulting in sacrilege.

The married man deceives his wife. Her fervent love is reciprocated by his innumerable lies. He expects her to grow accustomed to his duplicity. He is torn apart from the familial unit. He cannot connect himself organically with his baby. His life is shelled like a cocoon. All connections with family and society are severed. His disease has consumed him: "You know those stories of children who are suckled by wolves and accepted by the tribe, and how for ever after they move freely among their fleet grey brothers? Something like that has happened to me" (Alpers, Stories, 480). The curtain slowly rises to an uncanny, unwholesome performance.

The married man flashes back to his childhood which has shaped his sordid adult life. Schizophrenia in his case has a long history. Someone had put a dead bird in his pocket one day, and as a boy he was not shocked: "Oh! what a strange flutter was there in my heart when I drew out that terribly soft cold little body" (Alpers, Stories, 484). The dead bird had made him sing for the first time in his life, a song of the diseased. He is engulfed in that nightmarish past. Never knowing mother-love as a child, he had been equally distanced from his father. The invalid mother had come to him like an apparition one night to

tell him about his father's poisonings. The next morning she was discovered dead, That was the end of love for the boy. When he grows up family means nothing to him. He is plunged into the well of loneliness. There is a strange fascination of the abomination in the married man's rumination about his past. The powerless hate and surrender become more detestable as he derives a gloating relish from a diseased past.

The molten mass of a wasted candle initiates the epiphanical moment in 'A Married Man's Story' : "Something bound me there by the table — I couldn't even let the pin drop that I held between my fingers and thumb. For a moment I came to a stop, as it were" (Alpers, Stories, 486). His installation in an unearthly world is complete. There is a total lapse of communication with the sane, healthy world : "Everything lived, but everything. But that was not all. I was equally alive - it's the only way. I can express it — the barriers were drawn between us — I had come into my own world" (Alpers, Stories, 486). His is not a sentimental pretence but a delving into the gloomy circle of some inferno. He has transgressed the bounds of normal family life. As a consequence he is compelled to inhabit a world of ominous silence and penumbral shadows.

The married man does not accept his envenomed detachment readily but tries to demystify its origins. Intermittent flashes of revelation enunciate a startling recognition. The past is the miscreant : "Who am I as I sit here at this table, but my own past" (Alpers, Stories, 484)? Conditioned by the past, the

present has been robbed of meaning. Childhood fears and an unprepared entry into adult evil have jinxed him for life.

Darkness and a windy night constitute the backdrop to 'The Voyage'. The dark, old wharf, the little squat railway engine and the wool sheds all "seemed carved out of solid darkness" (Alpers, Stories, 470). The old lady and her son part with each other with a recent death hovering over them. Death creeps into Grandma's black gloves and Fenella's black coat, skirt and black blouse. Separation and mourning are replaced by the idea of entrapment when Fenella and her grandmother board the steamer : "What a very small cabin it was ! it was like being shut up in a box with grandma" (Alpers, Stories, 473). With her grandmother, Fenella enters a little cart after the voyage. The journey significantly ends in front of a shell-like house.

Images of gloom and barrenness loom over 'The Voyage' : "The sun was not up yet, but the stars were dim, and the cold pale sky was the same colour as the cold pale sea" (Alpers, Stories, 473). Natural pallor matches with withering and age and is permeated with a sense of waste. In Grandma's house the blinds are drawn to avert sunlight. A deep half-stifled voice calls back, and the door creaks. Grandpa is like a very old and awake bird, tired and wasted with time amidst the Gothic setting. Corporeal world has little interest for him. He is ready for the voyage out.

Frequent references to the swan are noticeable in 'The Voyage'. Grandmother's name is Mrs. Crane. Her umbrella is swan-necked. Fenella "crooked the swan-neck over the bed-rail." The sick bed of Grandpa seems to be the body of the imaginary bird, prepared for a flight. Above the bed Grandma's swan-song hangs in a deep black frame. The soul is often conceived as a bird, particularly the swan. Frazer has discussed the subject in his best known work The Golden Bough (181). Poets have been fascinated by the elusive nature of the 'swan' image. W.B. Yeats has a passion for it. He was greatly indebted to Sturge Moore (The Dying Swan) and openly acknowledged his weakness for Moore's swan. Moore's silver-throated swan represents the soul which conducts all rhythmic motions and is of eternal being. Yeats's nine and fifty wild swans ("The Wild Swans at Coole") are mysterious and can magically disappear. In 'The Tower' Part III Yeats introduces the swan imagery with a specific intention. He is obviously thinking about the soul :

When the swan must fix his eye
 Upon a fading gleam,
 Float out upon a long
 Last reach of glittering stream
 And there sing his last song

(Yeats, The Collected Poems, 223).

The swan has a subjective connotation in 'The Voyage'.

'The Voyage' was completed in the mountains of Montana on 14th August, 1921. Mansfield had a violent attack of fever the same

month. With an absolute defeat of the physical, she sought higher truths, something that would be transcendental. Yeats's quotation from Plotinus demystifies Mansfield's preoccupation with the swan:

Let every soul recall, then, at the outset the truth that the soul is the author of all living things, that it has breathed life into them all, whatever is nourished by the earth and the sea, all the creatures of the air, the divine stars in the sky; it is the maker of the sun; itself formed an ordered this vast heaven and conducts all that rhythmic motion, and it is a principle distinct from all these to which it gives law and movement and life, and it must of necessity be more honourable than they, for they gather or dissolve as soul brings them life or abandons them, but soul, since it can never abandon itself is of eternal being" (Yeats, *The Collected Poems*, 533).

With excruciating misery of disease, intrusion on and abuse of privacy threaten individual aspirations in Mansfield's last stories. Reggie or Reginald in "Mr. and Mrs. Dove" cannot enjoy a moment's peace on a dark verandah flooded with astral rays. He is haunted by his living mother who has become a terror for him. She is grim, and the reader's first glimpse of her is: "with her scissors outspread to snap the head of a dead something or other" (Alpers, *Stories*, 416). Sizing trees to suit her fancy suggests her interfering attitude. Having methodized nature, now she is intent on shaping Reggie's life for him. As she casually snaps the head of a plant, the sound of decapitation disconcerts Reggie. He would not like to be headless like her dogs, obedient

and vague. Reginald wants to get over the unpleasant ordeal of facing her as quickly as possible.

Unfortunately there is no escape for Reginald. His betrothed Anne confesses that she loves him alright but love would be hopeless, like her two pet doves. The victorious and evasive Mrs. Dove followed by a complacent, ever-submissive Mr. Dove would be a summary of their conjugal life. Reginald is taken aback by this terrible revelation, and begs to take leave as *that* seems his only option. Surprisingly Anne calls him back in Mrs. Dove's persuasive bird tone, and he, now Mr. Dove, comes back slowly across the lawn.

'Mr. and Mrs. Dove' is a "little bit made up", Mansfield wrote in her journal (256). She criticised herself harshly for the final compromise : " 'I have a sneaking notion that I have, at the end used ~~the~~ Doves unwarrantably. I used them to round off something, didn't I? Is that quite my game? No it's not. It's not the kind of truth I'm after' " (Alpers, Stories, 569). The malevolence in the creation of Mr. Dove is the artistic reproof of bill-paying engagements to which she was forced. Alpers apprises, "Katherine's financial saviour at this moment was Clement Shorter of 'The Sphere' (where "Mr. and Mrs. Dove" was published), a paper he conducted with more appetite than taste. He had commissioned six short stories at ten guineas each" (Alpers, Life, 338). It was the highest payment she received at that time, but she despised herself for her wretched, almost wanton urgencies that crushed her spirit, a phenomenon displayed in Mr. Dove as well.

Drowsiness and a deep repugnance to social compulsions are the symptoms of Mr. Neave's weariness in 'An Ideal Family'. Old and withered, Mr. Neave cannot participate in the plethora of life in his plush, beautiful home. Neither can he walk out of it. Affectation is an indispensable element for pliancy in society; Mr. Neave obliges not himself but others. Life in his house implies more histrionics than anything else. They have become used to masked performances. Mr. Neave's daughter Marion has a soft hesitating voice as a child, but "now even if it was 'jam please father' it rang out as if she were on stage" (Alpers, Stories, 424). His wife Charlotte croons vaguely. Despite his efforts to comply with, Mr. Neave cannot get over his vision of himself, of an old withered man climbing an endless flight of stairs.

Opposed to old age and decrepitude but not remote from it in tone, is teenage bereavement in 'The Weak Heart'. In a journal entry for 21st November 1921, Mansfield noted:

Today I began to write seriously, 'The Weak Heart' a story which fascinates me deeply. What I feel it needs so peculiarly is a very subtle variation of 'tense' — from the present to the past and back again, and softness, lightness, and the feeling that is all in the bud.

(Alpers, Stories, 575)

'The Weak Heart' is one of Mansfield's last efforts to keep in touch with life. Edie Bengel's piano is an intermixture of fact and fiction. Fleeting moments are ruminated over with the

sluggishness of disease: "Ah ! if life must pass so quickly, why is the breath of these flowers so sweet? What is the meaning of this feeling of longing, of sweet trouble, of flying joy" (Alpers, Stories, 510)?

A yearning for a healthy idyllic life becomes pronounced ironically at a time when it is a downright impossibility. Edie's craving for love was never recognized. Nobody bothered to know about it : "But in the dusk, lovers parading came into its shade as into a tent. There they greeted each other with long kisses, with embraces that were sweet torture, agony to bear, agony to end" (Alpers, Stories, 512). The tree at the corner of Tarana and May street with its foliage had been witnessing passionate rehearsals since one did not know when. There is an air of finality in those sweet agonies, almost Keatsian in tone. Living forever or else swooning to death are the possible options, and Edie has opted for the latter. Roddie never knew Edie nurtured such thoughts. The tall dark tree mocks him for his ignorance. Now, as he cannot make it up to Edie, he decides to do marvels, to astonish and shock the tree with his male arrogance.

Roddie finds Edie's room vacant when he dashes into it. The cold solemn piano has frozen with Edie's death. Edie Bengel's piano that once questioned the transience of all living things and pleaded with time : "let us stay, let us stay" (Alpers, Stories, 510), ultimately surrenders to the claws of an unseen impostor.

Mansfield flies off at a tangent often in her last spate of stories from an overburdened plane of thought. Juxtaposed to the weariness of old sick men or meaningless hankerings are the impressionable, young people. Animated and vibrant, they offer an aerial view of life, where prospects are not marred by a constant phobia. Edna in 'Taking the Veil' casts off her 'black book', which presumably has suggestions of the macabre. She had once clasped it as if it were her missal. The missal is forsaken before it is too late. Edna, aged eighteen, runs for a remedy: "Everything is still possible for her and Jimmy and the house they have planned may still be built" (Alpers, Stories, 529).

Hope for a deliverance becomes remote in 'Six Years After'. Away from life, amidst unknown waters, the little steamer passes through enchanted places. Life seems forlorn and cold in the story. The stark natural detail obliterates the destination: "Far out, as though idly, listlessly, gulls were flying. Now they settled on the waves, now they beat up into the rainy air, and shone against the pale sky like the lights within a pearl" (Alpers, Stories, 508). The gulls are in constant motion but unsure of their attainment. Allusions to death are commensurate. It is evident that the end suggests death, whether it is physical or artistic death remains a question. Whatever may be the case, acceptance of the end is not easy: "Softly without a sound the curtain has rolled down. There is no more to come. That is the end of the play. But it can't end like that -- there must be more" (Alpers, Stories, 509). The never ending dark stairs

denote an ascendance to a fruitless realm. Whether in life or in death, one is always uncomfortable. The changing immensity of life glides past, veiled by a sense of mystery. The sea is inscrutable like Fate. Dusk falling like ash upon the pallid water and the cold spell the end of a life performance. The steamer goes on, aware of its futile pursuit.

"The Canary" was written in trepidation and fear. Mansfield could feel her muse deserting her as she typed out "The Canary". Something was pouring out of her heart in the sea of inexorable time. The Canary's prattle was the expression of some sort of belief, it had candour and conviction and was conducive to the old lady's composure. It was an affirmation for the lady. The bird's death leaves a part of her soul dead ; "My breast felt hollow, as if it was his cage" (Alpers, Stories, 540). Frightful realities impinge on the lady's consciousness and a shadow darker than the shadow of the night looms over her. She crawls into vacant, dark space. The reader can distinctly feel the artist's vision turning to darkness and her feet giving way.

The whole gamut of emotions in Mansfield's brief life was centred round her work. Letters written to Murry, Ottoline Morrell, Dorothy Brett and S. S. Koteliansky reveal an honest pursuit from which she could never detach herself. The pangs of disease were momentarily forgotten while at work. Creative writing was ^{not} only a consolation or a refuge for Mansfield but it also was an intense intellectual exercise. When such whole-hearted submission is hampered by disease, consternation sets in:

"Why should one's delights be so snatched away? — but my cough is the devil again and I have to keep as still as a mouse" (O'Sullivan & Scott, II, 322). No catastrophe could be more cruel than the extinction of Mansfield's ability to write. She had to submit to the unseen impostor, absent, torn, without any being of her own. The death of the Canary ends the magic spell both for the lady and for Mansfield. Katherine Mansfield's meteoric venture is over.

"The Canary" was completed as a gift for Dorothy Brett, in July 1922. Though the story may have been prompted by an old woman crossing the streets of Paris with cages, the New Zealand setting is affirmed by its characteristic detail. The evening star, the dark gum tree, the backyard and the verandah capture the Wellington ambience. The sod under Mansfield's feet does not become hers till the end in the profoundest sense. A fear of receding faculties enhances the doom. An essential, inevitable pathos at the back of everything reverberates on the surface of "The Canary". It is not common sorrow. It waits patiently till one has the time to pause and to reflect. The old lady feels it only at intermittent intervals between her work; something great and invincible like truth. It is impossible to convey its meaning, its subtle and penetrating essence. Alpers is justified in believing that the closing lines of the story supply a fitting epitaph to Mansfield's work. Her untimely death on 9th January

1923 is only information. She actually died with her Canary :
"But isn't it extraordinary that under his sweet joyful little
singing it was just this — sadness? — Ah, what is it? — that
I heard?" (Alpers, *Stories*, 541).

Chapter VII

Conclusion

Katherine Mansfield was all for experiment both in life and art. Erratic and maverick, she is often deemed fallen by conservatives. Readers have been mostly given a highly slanted portrait of the congenital nonconformist. Highlighted as the enfant terrible, Mansfield has remained a debatable personality over the years. Her legacy constitutes the entire gamut of experience from the vulnerable youth of the Bavarian Sketches to the transcendental artist of her last stories. The essentially sensuous experience of the beginner slowly matures to a remarkable clarity of vision.

An avid admirer of Chekov, Mansfield does not see life in a monotone like him. Her characters are sharply individuated. Though personally acquainted with the Bloomsbury group, she does not echo them. Aware of her temperamental inclinations, she is a lone wolf and strikes out on her own. With a distinctive Colonial flavour, Mansfield creates an ambience fraught with her personal brand of magic. She never reduces to flashy gimmicks inasmuch as personal preoccupations inspire her creation. A writer first and a woman next, she portrays life as a tortuous path of which she has recondite knowledge. The irony is that the unconventional, irreverent woman in her threatens to obscure the original, sensitive artist. Hence it is all the more imperative that she is studied in the right perspective.

Mansfield's concern is with the subjective, the fugitive, the elusive and the enigmatic. She wants to capture the vision and not the circumstance. The theme or thought is of prime importance in a Mansfield story and it shapes the technique. A self-exile's deracination has its safety-valve in counterbalancing nostalgia. Hence the recurrence of nostalgia as a motif in the Karori tales. And if that expatriate is emotionally as high-strung, if not somewhat unbalanced, the chances are there that she should plunge into bouts of recklessness, inevitably followed by soul-searching. Mansfield's intense soul-search as she penetrates through her inverted image often misleads critics.

Katherine Mansfield's coming of age as a writer coincides with the . . . world war]and the outset of her tuberculosis. These traumatic changes in the public, and private worlds are well reflected in her new images of devouring animals and disturbing insects. Dr. Sohrapure's confirmation of her gonorrhoea adds remorse and shame to the unbearable suffering. The outrage she feels at the loss of her much prized privacy is compounded by the conditioned life of a patient. The wheel comes full circle as the initial rebellion is replaced by a final resignation to the inevitable : "Who am I as I sit here at this table, but my own past? . . . One thing I have learnt, one thing, I do believe is, Nothing Happens Suddenly. Yes, that is my religion, I suppose . . ."

(A Married Man's Story)

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