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Women's Identity and Patriarchal Boundaries in Katherine Mansfield's Short Stories

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Abstract

Katherine Mansfield is an important figure in contemporary short fiction, for her originality and her handling of complex themes. Her stories often explore the inner lives of women, and reveal the limits imposed by social norms and the patriarchal structures which shape their identities. Mansfield's less easily classifiable characters question these boundaries and challenge readers to rethink women's places in public and private domains. Mansfield's writing uses new ways of telling a story and shows us gently what it is like to be human. Her short stories often examine the link between personal identity and the social systems that influence how individuals think, act, and understand themselves. Women in Mansfield's fiction are confined to the domestic sphere, to a marital relationship, to a family hierarchy, or to social institutions that regulate their desires and restrict their liberty. But Mansfield does not depict female experience solely in terms of overt conflict or direct political protest. Instead, she demonstrates the functioning of patriarchal power through silences, gestures, memories, symbolic objects, fragmented conversations, and moments of psychological revelation. This paper will be looking at the representation of female identity and patriarchal constraints in Bliss, The Garden Party, The Daughters of the Late Colonel, Miss Brill, and The Singing Lesson. The study explores the effect of marriage, domestic authority, social class, economic insecurity, and cultural expectations on women's identity. The study draws on the feminist literary criticism, the concept of gender as a social system and not as a social construct, and the theories of modernist consciousness. In Bliss, the illusion of married happiness of Bertha Young is shattered when she discovers the emotional and sexual infidelity that underlies her marriage. In The Garden Party, Laura Sheridan's growing consciousness of society threatens the standards of her privileged family, but her awakening is undecided. The maiden sisters in The Daughters of the Late Colonel, Josephine and Constantia, suffer long-term psychological

effects of their father's paternal domination. This shows how authority can linger through internalized fear, even after the authority figure has died. Miss Brill exposes the vulnerability of a socially isolated woman whose imaginative selfhood is destroyed by public humiliation, while The Singing Lesson depicts the relationship between female emotional life and dependence upon male approval. In these stories, then, Mansfield questions the idea that traditional feminine roles provide women with fixed identities or real contentment. The paper will argue that her modernist form and feminist insight are inseparable: by rendering women's inner lives complex, contradictory, and worthy of sustained attention, Mansfield reveals the limitations of patriarchal society and makes visible the struggle for an authentic female self.

I. INTRODUCTION

The relationship between female identity and patriarchal authority is a major concern of literary studies, especially in the study of women's writing in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The period brought significant changes in women's education, employment, social participation and political rights. But prevailing ideas of femininity still defined women as marriage partners, mothers, domestic workers, emotional servers, and subordinate to male authority. Such expectations put pressure on individual desires of women and the personas society allowed them. Katherine Mansfield (1888-1923) is a leading voice of literary modernism, and her short stories address these tensions, with a focus on women's experiences of the everyday.

Rather than build traditional plots with definitive victories or defeats for her characters, Mansfield often provides us with moments of uncertainty, emotional upset and incomplete understanding. Her characters discover that the social roles they occupy do not necessarily coincide with their personal feelings. The outcome is a fiction in which identity is unstable, socially conditioned, and psychologically complex.

The significance of Mansfield's treatment of women is that she presents oppression not merely as an external system of prohibitions but also as a force that shapes consciousness. A woman may be free in the eyes of the law or society to make a choice but be psychologically incapable of acting independently because she has internalised years of submission. Another woman may have material comfort and social privilege but feel emotionally unfulfilled in marriage. A third might create a persona to fill the void left by loneliness, only to discover that civic society does not recognise the person she believes herself to be. The stories *Bliss*, *The Garden Party, The Daughters of the Late Colonel, Miss Brill,* and *The Singing Lesson e*xplore these different experiences. Though they differ in setting, characters, and narrative structure, they share an interest in the conflict between inward experience and outward expectation. Their female protagonists struggle with the meanings attributed to marriage, family, class, respectable behaviour, and emotional dependence.

In *Bliss* Bertha Young seems to have everything that makes for a comfortable life: financial security, a husband, a child, and a charming house. But her excitement and apparent happiness cover a want for real knowledge of her marriage. Her experience is an example of the inadequacy of traditional domestic achievement as a standard of female fulfillment.



Fig.1

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Fig.2

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In *The Garden Party*, Laura Sheridan's experience of a working-class neighbour's death disrupts the assumptions of her wealthy family. Her sensitivity makes her torn between personal conscience and class privilege, but the story doesn't resolve that through a simple moral conversion.

The Daughters of the Late Colonel more directly addresses the issue of patriarchal domination. Josephine and Constantia, two maiden sisters, have passed their lives under the authority of their father. His death should free them, but they can't decide for themselves. Mansfield also shows that patriarchal power can work through mechanisms like memory, fear, and self-censorship even without the controlling individual.

Miss Brill shifts the focus from family and marriage to the position of an isolated woman in public life. The protagonist's imaginative participation in the social world around her is a means of creating a sense of belonging. Her fragile identity breaks down when a young couple mocks her. The story shows how a woman's self-esteem can be affected by age, economic vulnerability and social judgment.

Bertha appears to be happy in the home setting of The Singing Lesson, but in reality, Miss Meadows's emotions are controlled by a letter from her fiancé, and her moods change during the lesson. How much a woman's emotional safety net is a man's acceptance or rejection is demonstrated in the story.

This study paper contends that Mansfield's stories depict female identity as multi-faceted, influenced by societal happiness, personal ties, material conditions, and interior consciousness, therefore challenging patriarchal beliefs. Her women aren't helpless victims or unstoppable rebels. The systems within which neighbours functioned imposed limitations on their abilities and freedom of choice. Tension between women's inner thoughts and the part they are compelled to play is Mansfield's greatest strength.

Furthermore, this article argues that this criticism is directly attributable to Mansfield's use of modernist storytelling techniques. Instead of using a traditional narrator to provide an objective account of women's experiences, Mansfield often immerses the reader in the shifting and limited viewpoints of her characters. In order to better comprehend

the social reality, this narrative method gives more weight to women's experiences.

Consequently, the study delves into Mansfield's principles and the ways in which she embodies them. The central focus is not on whether or if her female characters experience oppression, but rather on how this oppression impacts their wants, perceptions, speech, relationships, and ability to define themselves. The relationship between women's efforts to establish their own identities and the socially mandated roles for them is the core research problem.

Feminist questions and modernist form are the focus of this important study. A social reform agenda is uncommon in "Colonel's Lady" by Mansfield. Instead of offering a resolution, it evokes in the reader the unease and fear that come with unequal social interactions. She makes readers doubt their own life-organizing assumptions through her characters' reticence, biased revelations, and absence of normative conclusions. The fact that these stories feature a wide range of women's experiences is also noteworthy.

Miss Meadows is romantically dependant, Bertha Young is financially secure, Josephine and Constantia are emotionally repressed due to their family history, Laura Sheridan is from an affluent household, and Miss Brill is socially secluded. They're not facing the same challenges. In doing so, the study avoids generalising about women and instead takes into account the complex interplay between gender and factors such as age, socioeconomic status, family status, and age. This story begins romantically as:

> Miss Brill was glad that she had decided on her fur. The air was motionless, but when you opened your mouth there was just a faint chill, like a chill from a glass of iced water before you sip, and now and again a leaf came drifting—from nowhere, from the sky.

Beginning an affair with the fascinating Pearl Fulton complicates Bertha's views on marriage. Pearl and Bertha, in Bertha's mind, had reached an understanding. Bertha feels validated in her belief that her life is currently experiencing remarkable harmony as a result of their partnership. It seems like the flowering branches symbolise the depth and breadth of her emotional state.

Depending on your perspective, the tree could represent energy, longing, and a sense of self that goes beyond the confines of traditional family life. It would appear that Bertha's inner existence and her outside world will find perfect harmony thanks to her attractiveness. But the image isn't solid since Bertha's emotional expectations inform her reading of the tree.

The sign stands for the idea that one's sense of self is shaped in part by how they choose to interpret the world. Until something happens to reveal where one's beliefs are limited, it could seem like everything is pointing in the same direction. Using the pear tree as an example, feminist theory further muddies the waters of the connection between societal norms and women's desires. Bertha is full of strong feelings but has little understanding of them. She says that the fact that a real bond is possible is proof that her current bonds are secure. Another problem that Bertha's association with Pearl Fulton poses is the possibility of female solidarity outside patriarchal standards. In Bertha's dream Pearl has a unique understanding of her. It would mean that their relationship has a space outside the usual roles of spouse, friend, and acquaintance.

Bertha seems to be looking for validation from another woman who could share her passion for Pearl, as her obsession with her grows. But the conclusion excludes anything like that. Bertha learns of Pearl's relationship with Harry and realizes that the assumed connection between the two women is radically out of whack or misapprehended. The house is so open she doesn't know of a secret arrangement. This inequality demonstrates that patriarchal relations are two-fold, based on secrecy and authority.

Harry's behavior undermines Bertha's sense of self as a wife because it destroys the shared definition of marriage. And now she has to find a way to bridge the gap between her real life connection and the role she's playing. The unconventional resolution is the strength of Bliss's ending.

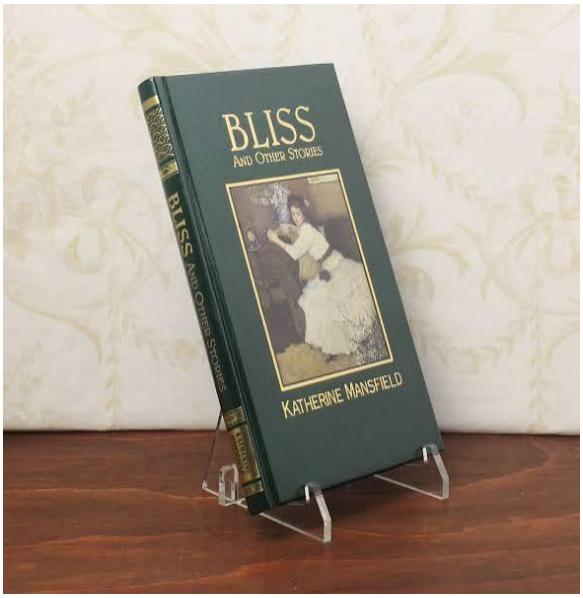


Fig.3

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Bertha's discovery does not lead immediately to a decision about separation, confrontation, or independence. But instead the story ends with her shocked recognition of a reality she had not understood. This open ending reflects the instability of female identity in patriarchal conditions. Bertha's sense of herself has been built upon the belief that emotional security is to be found in marriage and a secure social position. Once that belief collapses, she has no pre-packaged alternative identity. The story does not imply that Bertha's happiness was altogether false. She really did care, but they misunderstood her feelings.

This is a distinction that counts. Patriarchal constraint does not always take women's emotions away; it can change the conditions under which those emotions are understood and expressed. Bertha's experience thus demonstrates that domestic comfort and emotional autonomy are not the same thing. Her marriage, by all normal standards, seems successful, but it lacks the openness, the equality, and the mutual understanding she supposes it has. *Bliss* ultimately interrogates the idea that a woman's happiness can be measured by whether or not she has a husband, child, home, and a respectable social circle.

Bertha's awakening is painful because it reveals that identity cannot be secured by appearances alone. This argument is strengthened by the modernist form of the story which allows the reader to experience the collapse of Bertha's assumptions from within her consciousness.

The Garden Party is a study of female identity, focusing on Laura Sheridan, a young woman whose life is influenced by the expectations of her gender and her class privilege.

Laura, unlike Bertha Young, puts her own interests before the satisfaction of marriage. The central conflict stems from the relationship between her personal sensitivity and the social values of her family. The Sheridan household is preparing for a garden party. Preparations are the flowers, the food and the decorations, and the coordination of domestic servants and other workers. This is not just a social occasion, but a performance of class identity. The family's ability to afford such an elaborate celebration is an indication of its material security and social standing.

Laura takes part in the preparations but does not always share the assumptions of her family. Her dealings with the workmen show that she can see people as people, not merely as social categories. She encounters the workers setting up the marquee and is struck by their naturalness and ease. Her reply is at odds with the more formal attitudes that prevail in her family's social setting.

The significance of this episode is that it challenges the idea that class identity is simply a matter of inherited status. Laura discovers that the workmen have qualities she admires, and she begins to be conscious of the artificiality of some of the conventions of her life. Her increasing awareness suggests that identity can be challenged when people encounter experiences that contradict their assumptions.

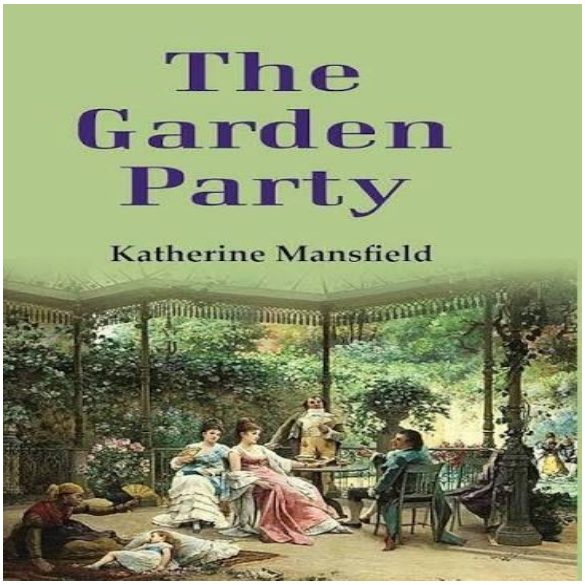


Fig.4

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The disagreement exposes the gulf between Laura's emerging sense of ethics and the assumptions of her household. Her relatives are preoccupied with maintaining the social occasion and preserving the family's established way of life. Conversely, Laura begins to doubt the appropriateness of celebrating when another household is mourning. It is not just a matter of a caring person versus evil relatives. It also refers to the social structures that make suffering visible or invisible and it is rightly quoted here:

> My dear child, it's no use asking me. I'm determined to leave everything to you children this year. Forget I am your mother. Treat me as an honoured guest. (*The Garden Party*)

The family of the dead man is in a different class position, and the party is organized within a social world that can continue to a large extent unaffected by the hardships of its neighbors. Laura's reaction is significant because she feels the death as a threat to the limits of her identity. She can no longer see the party as just a private family affair. The event bridges her privileged world with a social reality that it typically keeps at a distance.

Laura's effort to have her family cancel the party is interpreted as a moral rebellion. She contests the choices made by her seniors and attempts to impose her judgement over what her social environment expects of her. But her resistance is not total. The family continues with the preparations, and Laura is gradually drawn back into the event. Her brother Laurie and the other family members help restore the normal tone of the house. This is the intersection of class and gender.

Laura's role is informed by the expectations of a young woman in a wealthy family, but her class privilege also grants her opportunities that are not available to the working-class women who live nearby. Being part of the household organizing it, she is free to query the morality of the party. The poor family affected by death has no similar control over the event.

Laura's moral sensitivity, then, does not automatically translate into social transformation. Mansfield contends that individual awareness can expose injustice even if it does not immediately succeed at overcoming the institutions and habits that support it. One of the most revealing moments is when Laura's mother gives her a hat.

The object is connected to appearance, femininity, and the power of social approval. For a moment Laura forgets her worries about the dead man and enjoys seeing herself in the hat. She moves her attention from the moral dispute to how sexy she looks. The episode doesn't necessarily mean her previous concern was disingenuous. Rather, it demonstrates how quickly the comforts and rewards of familiar social locations can divert an individual's moral attention.



Fig.5

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The hat is important because it connects Laura's identity with the visual codes of her class. She is asked to see herself as an attractive young woman participating in a respectable family event. This picture illustrates her struggle to act in accordance with her conscience. Mrs. Sheridan's voice floated down the stairs. "Tell her to wear that sweet hat she had on last Sunday." "Mother says you're to wear that _sweet_ hat you had on last Sunday. Good. One o'clock. Bye-bye." The episode also shows that patriarchal and class conventions need not operate through explicit commands. They can be reinforced by affection, admiration, fashion, and the desire to belong. Laura is obeying an order and feels the attraction of the identity that her family offers her.

Thus, the hat symbolizes the seductive power of social conformity. It allows Laura to return, temporarily, to an emotionally satisfying role if not resolving her moral conflict. After the party Laura is sent to the dead man's house with a basket of food. In this visit she is introduced to a different social milieu than her own. The dead man is no longer an abstract subject of conversation; his death has entered into the experience of a real family.

Laura meets the widow and others affected by the loss. She becomes increasingly aware of the inadequacy of the social categories with which she has previously understood the world. This meeting challenges the dichotomy between the privileged household and the working-class community.

It is important to note her response to the body of the dead man. She is in a moment of intense ambiguity, when the normal distinctions of social status, body and human value are suspended. The encounter produces a kind of recognition that cannot be reduced to a simple moral lesson.

The visit is not a simple act of female independence. Laura is sent by her family and is not sure of how she should behave. But the experience broadens her understanding beyond the assumptions of her privileged environment. Her developing sense of self is therefore shaped by a conflict between social conditioning and self-recognition. She has not risen above her class position, but she has faced a reality that makes her expectations less easy to take on faith. Laura's last meeting with Laurie doesn't explain very clearly what she has learned. Her attempt to express her emotions gets interrupted by uncertainty, but her brother's reply offers companionship instead of interpretation.

This is a typical Mansfield modernist ending. The story does not make Laura an independent moral authority. Rather, it provides an instance of distorted perception, the meaning of which is unfinished. The inconclusive ending is significant for the study of female identity.

Laura has become aware of contradictions in her social world but cannot yet articulate a stable position outside it. Her identity continues to be caught between the values she has inherited and the insights she has gained.

> Darling!" Mrs. Sheridan got up and came over to her, carrying the hat. Before Laura could stop her she had popped it on. "My child!" said her mother, "the hat is yours. It's made for you. It's much too young for me. I have never seen you look such a picture. Look at yourself!" And

she held up her hand-mirror. “But, mother,” Laura began again. She couldn’t look at herself; she turned aside. This time Mrs. Sheridan lost patience just as Jose had done. (*The Garden Party*)

The Garden Party thus demonstrates that female agency is a question of both gender and class. Laura’s experience undermines the moral authority of her family and exposes the inequalities that undergird its comfort. This also implies that this story recognizes the limits of individual resistance in a situation where social conventions still offer a sense of belonging, security, and pleasure.



Fig.6

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The Daughters of the Late Colonel presents one of Mansfield’s most overt depictions of patriarchal power. Its protagonists are Josephine and Constantia, middle-aged unmarried sisters who have lived for years under the domination of their father, a military colonel. The father's death appears to create a space for emancipation. The sisters no longer have to obey his immediate commands or live their lives around his presence. But the story shows his authority still works in their minds and behavior.

This distinction is important in the case of external domination and internalized oppressions.” Control from outside is exercised by direct commands, threats and control of resources. Internalized oppression occurs when an individual adopts the assumptions of the prevailing authority and adjusts their behavior to fit.
Josephine and Constantia cannot imagine what to do with their father absent. Their conversations keep coming back to practical questions, memories, and fears. For an independent person, simple decisions become sources of uncertainty.

The colonel’s authority survives as a mental structure. His daughters have learned to anticipate his disapproval and to translate their desires through the possibility of his judgement. However, his physical absence does not immediately erase the habits of obedience they learned during their time together. What is important about Mansfield’s treatment of the father is that the main oppressive force in the story is not always physically there.

The reader feels its impact through the daughters’ hesitation, fragmented recollections, and the difficulty in forming independent intentions. Josephine and Constantia are not persons in their own right but mere extensions of their father. Their lives have revolved around his authority, with little space for independent experience.
Their singleness is relevant, but the story does not imply that marriage in and of itself would have freed them.

Their predicament, however, exposes the limits of gendered expectations and paternal power on their development of autonomous identities. The sisters are middle-aged, without having defined themselves outside of their family roles. They know who they are by what they have to do, what they can say, and what they think their father would or would not accept.

The sisters' circumstances make it harder to think of the oppressed as always consciously fighting back. They are unlikely to contest their father’s authority and are limited in their language to describe their condition. Their submission has become a part of their

normal way of living. The story illustrates the harm caused by denying women the chance to exercise autonomy from a feminist perspective. Independence is not merely the shedding of formal constraints; it is also a question of learning to trust one's judgment and to recognize the legitimacy of one's own desires.

Memory is one of the central mechanisms through which the colonel's authority persists. The sisters remember his behavior over and over and anticipate what judgment he might have made. Their memories are not impartial records of the past; they affect the choices available to them in the present. Their hesitations make the father's authority visible. They may consider doing something and wonder if he would have approved.

How it works is both the actions of the father and the behaviors that his daughters took on as a consequence of their interactions with him. And their constant yammering makes one wonder if their upbringing had something to do with their language skills. They ask the same questions instead of getting to the point.The difficulty of imagining a future without the past is a sign of the lack of confidence in one's own speech.

This is only reinforced by the fractured form of Mansfield's story. What sisters think isn't always straight. They dredge up old grievances, floating and echoing. The storyline reflects the mental toll of being chronically dominated. The sisters' home is more than a place. They are socialized and constrained by the social environment. Home has traditionally been associated with feminine stability and duty. But what Mansfield does offer is a house which has become a psychological prison.The father's death still weighs on the familiar spaces, habits, and things.

This photograph challenges the notion that women are naturally drawn to domestic happiness. Home, then, has a double meaning: as a safe haven and a basis of stability, and as an obstacle to independence and development. The sisters' story shows that the value of a home is in the relationships that make it. In households where women experience power imbalances and lack of encouragement to take initiative, women may find that their identities are weakened rather than strengthened. The story's investigation of home routine goes deeper in exploring the relationship between gender and time. The lives of the sisters have been dictated by repetition and it appears that their future might take on the same patterns. Their situation is no simple question of freedom. Taking down an oppressive person doesn't often mean taking down the mental framework that allowed them to do it.

In addition to losing their father, the sisters also lack a structure within which to make decisions on their own. Given their struggles, it's reasonable to assume that autonomy is something one develops via time. People learn to make choices through exercising discernment, experiencing consequences, and finding the legitimacy of their desires. Constantia and Josephine have had little opportunity to hone these skills.

The novel depicts patriarchal authority as a self-perpetuating structure across the ages. Even when the power source is gone, its influence is still there in habits, anxieties, and expectations. The sisters' uncertainty doesn't mean women can't be self-sufficient.

Our assumption about their reluctance is based on a societal arrangement that has prevented them from developing skills in making decisions on their own. There is no definitive end that separates the present from the past. The sisters have epiphanies but never quite succeed in shedding their former selves.

Such unfinished business is central to Mansfield's portrayal of patriarchal restriction. The story will not reduce liberation to a mere victory story. Even though the girls are technically free, they are nevertheless enslaved by their mental patterns.

Moreover, readers are invited to recognize the extent of internalized power through the lack of a victorious ending. A father's death is a turning point but freedom is a more complex process. So, *The Daughters of the Late Colonel* is a powerful booster at patriarchy in Mansfield's art.

Father would never forgive them. That was what they felt more than ever when, two mornings later, they went into his room to go through his things. They had discussed it quite

calmly. It was even down on Josephine's list of things to be done. "Go through father's things and settle about them." But that was a very different matter from saying after breakfast: "Well, are you ready, Con?" "Yes, Jug—when you are." "Then I think we'd better get it over."(*The Daughters of the Late Colonel*)

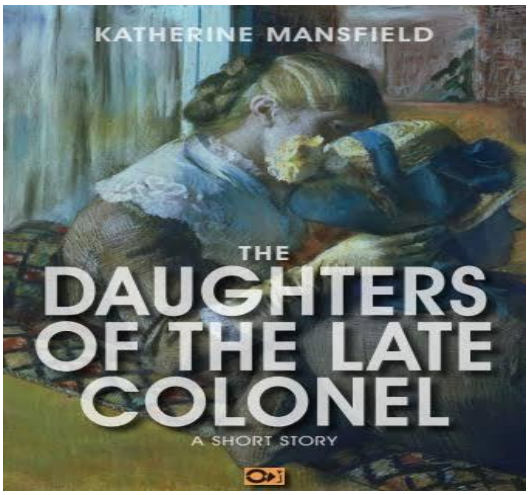


Fig.7

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It demonstrates how women's identities are shaped by family power, which in turn limits their prospects and makes them doubt their own judgement. Memory, quiet, and repetitive thought are the tools Mansfield uses to illustrate the consequences of oppression, which can linger long after the dominant power has departed.

In *Miss Brill*, the emphasis moves from the patriarchal norms of marriage and family to the lived reality of a politically marginalised woman. A single woman named Miss Brill spends her Sundays people-watching in a public garden. Her daily activities provide her with a sense of stability and belonging to a bigger group of people.

Mansfield doesn't tell us much about Miss Brill's financial situation, but her Sunday ritual of reading alone and her job as a reader give the impression that she has little opportunity to interact with others. She prefers to observe others than to commit to meaningful connections.

Consequently, her identity is scrutinised by those she has never met. Although she lacks stable relationships and a solid social standing, her innovative involvement in public life has given her a sense of importance. The novel reveals the harsh reality of a society where a woman's visibility can be determined by her capacity to fulfilll expectations, which get more challenging to fulfilll as she gets older. Just because Miss Brill is in a public place doesn't mean anyone will pay attention to her.

Moreover, her background makes navigating the challenges of autonomy and solitude more difficult. She does not have a parent or husband who controls her like other characters in Mansfield's work. A solid identity may not be the result of a lack of direct domestic authority, though. Social marginalisation can also hinder women's opportunities.

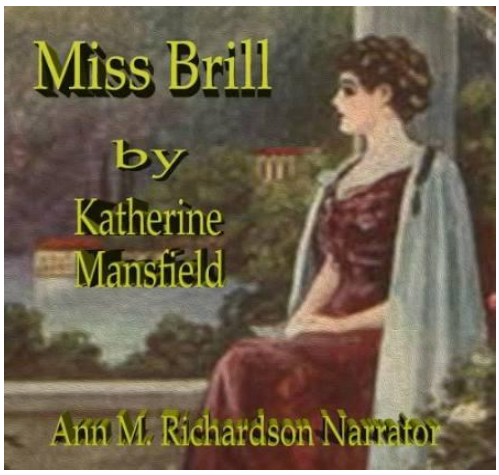


Fig.8

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Among the story's most significant metaphorical objects is Miss Brill's fur. Looking at its form and caressing it tenderly, she fantasises about making it her home. Fur becomes a symbol of loyalty and friendship. The object's significance rests in the fact that it

bestows a personification on what may be viewed as an ordinary accessory by Miss Brill. When close human contact is lacking, this creative act establishes a private bond to fill the resulting hole.

The item represents Miss Brill's creative resistance to loneliness as much as it does her isolation. She finds a momentary sensation of connection through imbuing inanimate objects with emotional significance through her imagination.
This prevents the protagonist from being a helpless victim.

Miss Brill has a vivid imagination and may easily identify with others on an emotional level. The issue is that her made-up universe doesn't have enough people to help it through humiliation. For Miss Brill, everyone in the garden is a stage. She thinks everyone plays a part, and her part is to just be there. This view has significance since it reveals that seemingly unrelated findings are, in reality, related. It enables Miss Brill to shift from observing to actively engaging. Even the most unimportant people, in her view, play a role in maintaining the social fabric. A feminist theory could propose this creative framework as an antidote to social exclusion.

Even though she may not have a formal position in society, Miss Brill manages to carve out a meaningful life for herself. The link between one's sense of self and the approval of others is another theme that her ideology touches on. Because she knows the crowd has her back, she doesn't feel threatened. Prior to meeting the young couple, her sense of self was based on an untested social interpretation.

Miss Brill responds immediately and passionately. She no longer performs the necessary rituals to ensure her survival. She returns to her dwelling and stows her fur. She had built an identity through her weekly visits, and her act symbolises their elimination. Particularly intriguing is the fur's return to its container. A thing that was once a source of comfort now brings feelings of shame and agony. When the social conditions that uphold a symbol's meaning crumble, the symbol's meaning can be reinterpreted in an instant, as this transition shows. No wonder! Miss Brill nearly laughed out loud. She was on the stage.

She thought of the old invalid gentleman to whom she read the newspaper four afternoons a week while he slept in the garden. She had got quite used to the frail head on the cotton pillow, the hollowed eyes, the open mouth and the high pinched nose. If he'd been dead she mightn't have noticed for weeks; she wouldn't have minded.

But suddenly he knew he was having the paper read to him by an actress! "An actress!" The old head lifted; two points of light quivered in the old eyes. "An actress—are ye?" And Miss Brill smoothed the newspaper as though it were the manuscript of her part and said gently; "Yes, I have been an actress for a long time." (*Miss Brill*)

Additionally, the episode demonstrates the extent to which people's imaginations may overcome systemic exclusion. Miss Brill may succeed in making herself feel welcome, but she will never be able to make other people notice her. Because she lacks the support of friends and family, her creative autonomy is at risk.

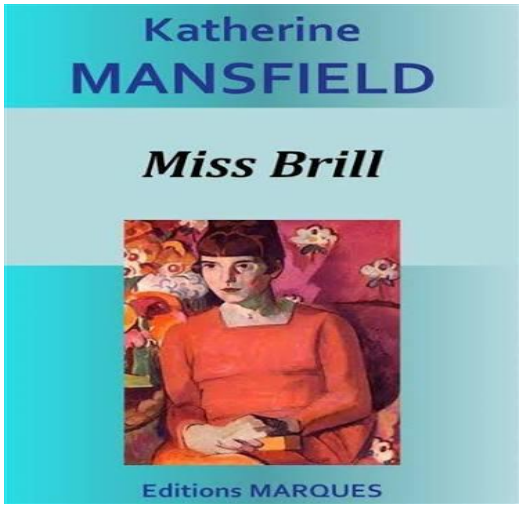


Fig.9

https://www.google.com/search?q=Katherine+Mansfield%27s+the+singing+lession&sca_esv=aae8b36161dbb831&hl=en&biw=1600&bih=765&udm=2&sxsrf=APpeQnt4qG3lSPtxnz_6Z25YO4JZCIoWJw%3A1791822991195&ei=jwzNapWuC-HgseMPpdSz8QE&ved=

In contrast to Laura Sheridan, Miss Brill does not publicly dispute the social

stigmatisation she faces. She doesn't stand up to the couple or protect herself; instead, she goes away. You can't just write off this response as a flaw. The meeting takes place in a social setting where Miss Brill is helpless and has no history with the people who degrade her. Confrontation may not get her the accolades she wants. Her decision to remain silent highlights the difficulty of taking action when one is on the margins. It is possible to have a deep and meaningful inner existence without the social authority to share it with the world.

As a result, the story's climax serves as a significant criticism of the societal context in which female identity is constructed. Miss Brill has already built an ideal world that defines what a meaningful life might be like, so she certainly has no shortage of creativity in this regard. Because she is a socially isolated lady, she is especially susceptible to the harsh realities of that world, which contribute to her suffering.

So, Mansfield's investigation of patriarchy continues in "Miss Brill." It suggests that, instead of men exerting their dominance in the home by physical force, gendered constraints can be enforced through social exclusion and mockery. Identity is presented in the story as both a creative achievement and a socially vulnerable condition.

In *The Singing Lesson*, the author examines how women's social status relates to their emotional dependence. Mistress Meadows teaches music. She gets a letter from her fiancé that upsets her emotional equilibrium. The letter implies she might have been mistaken about the marriage they were anticipating. Her answer was that she will come to the classroom and do the singing lesson. Her professional demeanor mirrors her inner conflict.

Viewed in this way, the novel is about the difficulties of maintaining a coherent public persona as the intimate attachments of a woman threaten her sense of security. Miss Meadows herself does not confine herself to home affairs. Among other things, she's a teacher. This separates her from other characters whose lives are largely determined by marriage or paternal power.

Love connections are emotionally draining but her job doesn't make it any easier. The story is about the intricacies of women's independency. Even if paid employment provides some independence, the social importance of marriage and the psychological effects of the rejection of love are still present. For Miss Meadows, the relationship is of profound emotional significance, and the idea of its ending threatens her future self-conception. That, in turn, does not mean that strong feelings about something are tyrannical. It is a truer representation of the precariousness of depending on another's love and acceptance for one's safety net. Music is about coordinated expression and that is why the singing lesson is so relevant in this context. Since the pupils' performance is affected by the teacher's mood and directions, it is necessary to guide their voices. Miss Meadows's emotional mood is audible due to the classroom activity.

The tension of this character is like that of others in Mansfield's work. Josephine and Constantia are caught up in the conventions of family life; Bertha Young is trying to find herself in domestic forms; Laura Sheridan is torn between competing moral concerns and societal demands. Even Miss Meadows needs to face the fact that she isn't the same as the character she's playing.



Fig.10

https://www.google.com/search?q=Katherine+Mansfield%27s+the+singing+lession&sca_esv=aae8b36161dbb831&hl=en&biw=1600&bih=765&udm=2&sxsrf=APpeQnt4qG3lSPtxnz_6Z25YO4JZCIoWJw%3A1791822991195&ei=jwzNapWuC-HgseMPpdSz8QE&ved=

It also shows that emotional acting is not a female monopoly. But social norms that come with being a woman may cause Miss Meadows to value romantic approbation in her future plans. Miss Meadows's emotional response raises questions about both a woman's autonomy and the nature of love. Women can desire intimacy and commitment, and not sacrifice autonomy. Things start to go wrong when she begins to rely on the relationship for her self-esteem, or when social norms say she can't move on with dignity without him. Her discontent means that the marriage Miss Meadows is waiting for is about more than just love.

Maybe think of it as you of the future more than their relationship, her fiancé's letter ends her hopes and dreams for the future. It would be wrong to generalize from the story's portrayal of women's employment and marriage to the whole period and assume that all women were financially dependent on men.But it reveals that even for women in public service, romantic expectations can cross into their emotional and professional lives.

The problem of autonomy is made more complicated by the change in the emotional tone of the story. The relationship status is a quick way to see what kind of mood Miss Meadows is in as new facts are revealed. And, Mansfield says, becoming emotionally independent is not a picnic. Instead she constructs a character whose true identity shifts depending on her circumstances.

The Singing Lesson extends Mansfield's larger investigation of female identity by demonstrating how patriarchal control can be exercised through the standards women apply to them so as to be socially respectable and romantically appealing.

The prospect of romantic rejection has a severe impact on Miss Meadows' private emotional world, even though she is able to work and exert professional power. So, the story defies easy categorisation as either dependent on the state or independent of it. Her story exemplifies how complex webs of interconnected relationships shape an individual's sense of self. A woman might be strong in her career while still being emotionally fragile. Sometimes she'll be sure of herself, and other times she'll be more reserved.

The way Mansfield portrays these inconsistencies is one of her skills as a writer. She does not limit her female characters to a specific socioeconomic position. Intersections of job, family, love, socioeconomic status, chronological age, and emotional memory shape their identities.



Fig.11

https://www.google.com/search?q=Katherine+Mansfield%27s+the+singing+lession&sca_esv=aae8b36161dbb831&hl=en&biw=1600&bih=765&udm=2&sxsrf=APpeQnt4qG3lSPtxnz_6Z25YO4JZCIoWJw%3A1791822991195&ei=jwzNapWuC-HgseMPpdSz8QE&ved=

So, *The Singing Lesson* extends the central argument of the paper that patriarchal restrictions are more than the confinement within the home and direct orders. They may also work in part by cultural expectations about marriage, success in love, and the importance of intimate relationships for women's mental health. The present research paper's five stories explore diverse female identities, yet when compared, they show certain commonalities. Not every woman in Mansfield experiences the same kind of oppression. Their ages, social class, marital status, family connections and financial resources put them in different positions. However, expectations are ever-

present in shaping their identities, making it difficult for individuals to define themselves autonomously. Their story is that of the marriage of Bertha Young and Miss Meadows.

Bertha feels her life has been fulfilling when she gets married. Her family life, her child and her social position all indicate she is secure in herself. In contrast, the revelation that closes Bliss reveals the great distance between her expectations and the realities of her relationship with Harry. The uneven emotional knowledge of Bertha and Miss Meadows is underlined. Both women depend on their relationships with men for the knowledge and decisions that affect them. This ambiguity illustrates the difficulty of being independent when your future relies on close relationships.

The Daughters of the Late Colonel is blunter in its exposure of patriarchal dominance. The colonel has control of his daughters and it is difficult for them to see a life without him. Bertha and the sisters draw a helpful comparison. Josephine and Constantia are under the thumb of their father, while Bertha is in a secure marriage and has material comfort but in any case it should be recognized that a woman's independence does not depend wholly upon external conditions.

Mansfield thus depicts the patriarchal dominance as a psychological training process that begins with an instant interruption and continues over time. The Garden Party adds a layer of complexity to the analysis by illustrating how women can be confined even while enjoying social privilege. Laura Sheridan is the heiress of a wealthy family, and she has the luxury of throwing lavish parties and micromanaging her maids.

Miss Brill shifts the conversation away from the conventional hierarchies of families and marriages. Without stable social relations, and with the possibility of relying on imagined recognition, her story emerges as one of precariously balanced identity.

Miss Brill does not have a father figure as Josephine and Constantia do. Unlike Bertha, she does not live in a cosy home with her family. She lacks Laura's privileged position and so cannot influence societal events. Her story shows that freedom from direct domestic control is no guaranty of belonging in society. Women's negative self-perceptions may be exacerbated by advancing age, social stigma, and social isolation. Miss Brill's imagination is aroused and she feels a sense of freedom at first in her solitude but the shame of the young couple shows how fragile is an identity that needs the approval of others.

Thus, the story reveals the social aspect of female self-hood; people require both the ability to envision themselves differently and circumstances in which their existence can be recognised and appreciated. Many sorts of quiet predominate throughout Mansfield's fiction. Constantia and Josephine are unable to express their own intentions.

Bertha is unable to immediately consider what her finding could mean. Laura finds it difficult to articulate her feelings to the relatives of the deceased man. Following her humiliation, Miss Brill withdraws. There is more than one correct interpretation of these pauses. A few mention the limitations of the language that is available, while others express dread or perplexity. Their shared significance in bridging internal and external expression is their only commonality.

Even if they lack the social assurance and language tools to articulate them, Mansfield's characters have complicated interior lives. By being silent, the reader is able to experience the weight of gendered expectations.

CONCLUSION

So, finally it is concluded that the patriarchal dominance considered as a system rather than men's actions. Famously, Simone de Beauvoir investigated the cultural and historical processes that define woman in relation to man in The Second Sex. The idea that femininity is static and inherent is challenged by her claim that women are constructed as the other.

To grasp how Mansfield built her female identity, this idea is useful. As a wife, daughter, respectable young woman, emotionally engaged fiancée, or socially acceptable companion, many of her characters find their identity in the roles that others offer them. Families and

communities have high expectations of them, thus they do not develop their identities independently.

Being a good wife and mother is crucial to Bertha Young's happiness. Because Josephine and Constantia have always been seen as extensions of their father's authority, they find it impossible to fathom life outside of it. The way Miss Meadows' fiancé handles their relationship is crucial to her emotional wellbeing. While learning this lesson, these characters face the difficult task of creating an identity that does not rely on the approval of others. The feelings and anticipations in "Brill" by de Beauvoir do not fully explain why, in addition to private desire, the Bliss is necessary to question the societal categories that define a woman in order to find her genuine identity.

Another useful lens is Judith Butler's notion of gender performativity. Gender Trouble is Butler's critique of the idea that gender identity is a fixed quality that is expressed in actions. In some seemingly naturalistic understandings of manhood and femininity, repetition of behaviors, traditions and expectations perpetuates gender norms.

The theory, used carefully with Mansfield, illuminates how social roles wield their power. Women should be the epitome of femininity, show proper emotions, dress properly, remain connected to their families and not engage in activities that threaten social stability and such assumptions are so prevalent they are taken for granted.

In *The Garden Party* Laura Sheridan is invited to join in the rites of her aristocratic social circle. Her dress, her actions, and her input into the party planning all contribute to the presentation that supports gender and class. Miss Brill's choice of clothing and her Sunday meetings with the masses form the protagonist's public identity. Butler's paradigm further illuminates the precariousness of such performances. When women come to see the distance between their roles and their inner lives, the naturalness of gender norms is challenged.

This is the sort of disruption that Mansfield's characters often experience, even if they are not always successful in their attempts to assume a new identity. The modernist treatment of awareness is interesting in the light of Mansfield's feminist preoccupations. Rather than a narrator who explains everything and delivers a final moral judgment, Mansfield often employs symbolic detail, restricted points of view, shifts in emotional tone, and free indirect discourse.

By these means the reader is placed in the world as it is seen through the eyes of characters whose understanding is incomplete or changing and this type of story is all the more relevant when the protagonists are women whose social positions restrict their freedom of expression.

In *The Daughters of the Late Colonel* the jumbled ideas and repetitive chats of the sisters show how their father's power has permeated their brain patterns. The tension in Bliss is a dramatic contrast between Bertha's subjective feelings and the exterior world, the joy she experiences and the discovery of the deception that follows. In Miss Brill the fragile self-image of the protagonist is displayed in the move from imaginative participation to agonizing exclusion.

Thus the modernist form reflects gendered experience. The reader is presented with a tangled web of contradictory information rather than a simple tale of female oppression. With these theoretical perspectives in mind, this paper focuses on the stories themselves. Feminist literary criticism provides a broad scope to examine gendered power. De Beauvoir's work explains the formation of women as relational identities, Butler's work explains the reproduction of gender norms and Mansfield's depiction of the psychological effects of these norms is explained by modernist narrative theory.

These are not the ideas that are meant by 'Bliss'. "You don't have to use the stories to support every theory. Instead, we apply each framework to the part of the text where it is most appropriate. The intention is to show how social influences shape female identity, whilst maintaining the ambiguity and artistic complexity of Mansfield's work.In "Bliss" Mansfield most illuminatingly explores the paradox of outer domesticity and inner uncertainty.

Miss Bertha Young appeared to be most fortunately situated. She has a happy home life, a sophisticated social experience, is married to Harry Young and has a young child. She is the picture of the stereotypically nice middle-class woman. But this seeming steadiness is called into question at the start of the novel. Bertha cannot say what it is that makes her so happy. Perhaps she is too happy. She has trouble controlling her physical, instinctive, irrational emotions. More excitement for her than the home life of ordinary days. It is worth noting this level of emotional intensity; it suggests a person who does not identify fully with stereotypically feminine roles.

Bertha is not only a mother and a wife. She has emotions that she can't control inside. Meanwhile, there is no comprehensible language for her to comprehend it. She is confused about the source of her joy. This suggests that the individual may not always have a crystal-clear sense of who she is. Bertha has a lot of thoughts and assumptions about her situation, but they don't always add up. Instead of starting with a physical clash, Mansfield uses a psychological condition to establish the story's fundamental conflict. It is also important to recognise the societal importance of Bertha's position. In many economical ways, money buys her freedom from want.

Bertha has a home, social group, and spare time, unlike the women who depend on domestic work for their living. However, having privilege does not grant you emotional independence. Evident deprivation and seemingly happy marriages are both ways in which patriarchy can impose its limits, as her narrative demonstrates.

Although Bertha finds her identity in marriage, the novel raises doubts about the institution's ability to provide the connection she seeks. She seems to think that her emotional space is separate from Harry's. Part of her joy stems from the fact that she views her marriage as a fruitful partnership. The picture is jeopardised by Harry's actions, though. Bertha finds it emotionally taxing to read his impatience, dismissal, or lack of patience. The contrast between Harry's inner conduct and that of Bertha is remarkable. Harry's more pragmatic or irritable tone implies they are on different emotional wavelengths.

Objectives of the Study

The main objectives of this research are:

- Representation of female identity in selected short stories of Katherine Mansfield.
- To study the effects of patriarchal authority on the emotional, social, and psychological lives of women.
- To analyse how Mansfield's fictiprogramme portrays marriage, family, domesticity, and female dependence.
- To analyse the correlation between gender and social class in "The Garden Party" and other stories selected.
- To study the internalization of patriarchal authority in "The Daughters of the Late Colonel".
- To explore the themes of isolation, humiliation and the need to belong in 'Miss Brill'.
- To explore the connections between modernist narrative strategies and the representation of women's consciousness.
- To what extent do Mansfield's stories challenge traditional definitions of feminine fulfilment and respectability?

This research adopts a qualitative interpretative methodology based on close textual analysis of internalised materials, which are five short stories by Katherine Mansfield: *Bliss, The Garden Party, The Daughters of the Late Colonel, Miss Brill, and The Singing Lesson.* These stories have been selected because they represent different types of female experience and illustrate different ways in which social expectations shape women's lives. The analysis considers characterisation, imagery, symbolism, narrative perspective, dialogue, silence, plot structure, and endings. The relationship between a character's external circumstances and his inner consciousness receives special attention.

The present research paper also discusses how Mansfield's use of limited

perspectives and psychological narration complicates the reader's understanding of gender, authority, and identity. The theoretical framework is based on feminist literary criticism, Simone de Beauvoir's depiction of woman as socially constituted as other, Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity, and certain concepts associated with modernist fiction. The theories are used as interpretive tools, not as claims that Mansfield consciously anticipated every later feminist formulation.

The present research paper is mainly related to the textual and literary aspects of the writer. It does not attempt to build a comprehensive biography of Mansfield or to regard fictional characters as direct representations of the author's personal life. Historical context is used when it helps to clarify the social assumptions concerning marriage, domesticity, class, and women's autonomy.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Katherine Mansfield's place in modernist literature is tied up with her ability to reveal psychological experience through the trivial. Her fiction often eschews the conventional plot structures that organise experience in a clear sequence of conflict and resolution. Instead, it emphasises brief moments when a character's perception of herself or the world becomes disturbed.

This method is particularly important for the study of female identity. Women in traditional narratives are often defined by their relation to men, their contribution to 'Bliss', family life, 'Party', their eventual fulfilment of "Colonel", and Dome Brill's expectations.

Mansfield frequently refuses us such closure. Her female characters are still unsure, contradictory, and difficult to label. The most significant conflicts arise from within consciousness, leading to experiences defined by external action. Her employment of symbolism and her changing narrative perspective also suggest the modernist nature of her writing.

Objects take on emotional weight, conversations reveal more than the speakers intend, and insignificant details betray lurking tensions. Thus, Mansfield introduces the central conflict of the story through, in *Bliss*, the pear tree symbolises Bertha Young's feeling of emotional balance, and in *Miss Brill*, the fur symbolises Miss Brill's desire for companionship and self-knowledge. These details are not mere adornments of the narrative. They offer access to experiences that the characters themselves may not fully understand.

Thus, Mansfield's modernist technique allows a critical examination of gender without relying on explicit authorial pronouncements about women's oppression. Feminist criticism is concerned with how literature represents gender, power, identity, and the social organisation of women's lives. Feminist interpretation is especially useful in the case of Mansfield, whose stories often expose contradictions in the apparently respectable worlds women inhabit.

The scholarship on Mansfield's depiction of women in the social system has not simply explored the link between gendered social expectations and the desire for authentic identity. Lucille Cooper, *Is There a Woman in the Text? A Feminist Study of Katherine Mansfield's Search for Authentic Selves* in a Sample of short stories examines how Mansfield's characters struggle with socially imposed roles and hiding their inner selves.

Critical discourse analysis is used to examine *Bliss* in the Asian Journal of Human Services to analyse the construction of gender and power. The story constructs male authority and female disadvantage through its linguistic and social structures. This research supports looking at not just what Mansfield's characters say but also how language reflects unequal relationships.

The present research paper develops this concern across several stories rather than confining its discussion to a single text. It takes into account both the overt dominance of males and the more subtle social processes through which women learn self-regulation.

The Daughters of the Late Colonel is especially significant for feminist analysis in that the father is absent from most of the physical action, but his authority still

influences the lives of his daughters. Josephine and Constantia have been obedient to him for years, and his death does not immediately bring freedom. They cannot make ordinary decisions. This is an example of how domination can be internalised. *The Case of an Absent Patriarch: A Study of Internalised Oppression in Katherine Mansfield's Story 'The Daughters of the Late Colonel* by Ayesha Khan explores the persistence of authority from the perspective of internalised oppression and disciplinary power. The study argues that domination can exist without the individual who exercised domination.

The paper extends this argument by comparing the sisters' situation to that of Bertha Young's marital confusion and Miss Brill's reliance on imaginary social recognition. The expectations the characters are trying to fulfil have already shaped their sense of self. Gerardo Rodríguez-Salas's study of *The Daughters of the Late Colonel* tracks the intersection of gendered experience, repetitive domestic time, and the modernist epiphany. Drawing on Julia Kristeva's discussion of women's time, Rodríguez-Salas explores how routine and bliss can expose the symbols imposed on women by social structures.

In *The Singing Lesson*, domestic arrangements seem to confirm Bertha's happiness, but the apparent Miss Meadows' work persists despite the transformation of her private emotional world. In *Miss Brill*, the weekly ritual of going to the public gardens provides a temporary structure for an otherwise isolated life, despite the domestic arrangements that seem to confirm Bertha's happiness.

In *Bliss*, domestic arrangements appear to confirm Bertha's happiness, but the seeming stability of her household conceals underlying emotional uncertainty.

In this sense, the present study considers time and routine as significant components of patriarchal experience. Repetition can be a source of security, but it can also be a way women remain imprisoned in identities they did not freely choose.

Existing criticism provides useful readings of Mansfield's treatment of gender, psychological identity, and patriarchy. The studies of "Bliss" have concentrated on the linguistic construction of gendered power. The studies of *The Daughters of the Late Colonel* have concentrated on internalised oppression and the relationship between gender and repetitive time. More generally, feminist scholarship has also explored Mansfield's depiction of women's search for authentic selves.

This paper addresses these issues through a comparative analysis of five stories. Its main analysis is on the different ways in which patriarchal constraints operate in domestic, familial, social, and emotional settings. It argues that fragmented consciousness, symbolic objects, irony, and unresolved endings are not just stylistic features; they are necessary to the representation of female identity as a process shaped by conflicting social pressures.

This indicates a research gap but there may be a comparison of these stories in the past by scholars. The final submission should verify the latest scholarship through academic databases and incorporate any additional relevant studies found during the literature search.

A feminist reading of *Bliss*, for example, asks why Bertha's identity is so wrapped up in marriage and domestic success. In *The Daughters of the Late Colonel*, the story examines why two adult women cannot make decisions on their own after their father's death. In *Miss Brill*, it considers the relationship between female visibility, age, and social recognition.

Yet, feminist analysis must avoid the temptation to see any male character as a symbol of evil or any female character as a passive victim.

Mansfield's fiction is more complex. Her female protagonists sometimes play right into the assumptions that confine them, and their relationships with other women can be filled with impressions and anticipations, but these do not necessarily lead to rivalry, judgement, and fulfilment.

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