



UNIVERSIDAD NACIONAL DE ASUNCIÓN

Facultad de Filosofía

Instituto Superior de Lenguas

Licenciatura en Lengua Inglesa



“Towards a Deeper Understanding of the Social Role of Women in the 1920s Through a Literary Analysis, from the Feminist Approach of Two Short Stories Written by Katherine Mansfield.”

Hacia una mayor comprensión de la función social de las mujeres en los años 20, mediante un análisis literario de dos cuentos cortos escritos por Katherine Mansfield desde la perspectiva feminista.

**An undergraduate research project submitted in fulfillment of the requirements to
obtain the degree of Bachelor of Arts in the English Language**

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Tesina para optar al grado de Licenciatura en Lengua Inglesa

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Abstract

This thesis examines the social role of women in the 1920s through a feminist literary analysis of two short stories by Katherine Mansfield. Despite extensive research on women's social status in the early 20th century, the detailed representation of women's experiences in Mansfield's works remains underexplored. The study employs feminist literary criticism to analyze "Miss Brill" and "Bliss", focusing on character development, narrative techniques, and thematic elements that illuminate women's social roles. The analysis highlights themes of household confinement, class consciousness, and the new feminist awakening, revealing Mansfield's subtle critique of the demands society places on women. The narratives show how women handled challenging social situations, frequently defying expectations while appearing to fit them. Mansfield's short stories offer a subtle perspective on women's experiences in the 1920s, challenging simplistic narratives of the era and revealing the tension between societal expectations and individual desires. This research contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of women's history and literature of the early 20th century, suggesting new avenues for exploring the intersection of gender, class, and social change in modernist literature.

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Dedication

Ana Cabral

To my parents, who always supported my career decisions.

To Jessica and Mónica for their time, recommendations and emotional support.

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To my family, thank you for always being there for me. Thank you for being my biggest cheerleaders.

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I must experience first; how can I write about things if I don't experience them.

Katherine Mansfield

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Chapter I

1. Introduction

Throughout time literature has been a gateway for writers to express their feelings, admire beauty, criticize and satirize government, society's rules, and traditions. Writers use their own experiences as well as their imagination to take the readers to another world in which they can relate with the different stories and even come in contact with their deepest emotions.

Frank Myszor (2001) stated that "Katherine Mansfield made her reputation by writing short stories" (p. 37). Mansfield started writing right after the First World War when the literary movement called Modernism began. Mansfield's short stories stand out, not because of the plot but rather for their authentic recreation of life (Myszor, 2001). Gillian Boddy agrees with Myszor on this idea, and points out that most of Mansfield's experiences either good or bad help her to build her writing style and that her stories are related to her life (Boddy, 1988).

There are hints of the features that would later characterize her writing – the spontaneous joy in living things; ... the moments of joy and disillusionment. Already these contrasts were part of the fabric of her life and of her writing (Boddy, 1988, p. 11).

Most writers use their life experiences as an inspiration for their writings. In Mansfield's short stories, the reader can identify aspects or situations of her life that she may have gone through. Most of these situations have to do with Mansfield being a woman ahead of her time and society's rejection of her behavior; such as her sexual identity, her role as a woman and her rejection of social constraints (Boddy, 1988).

It is true that most of her characters are female. She was frequently concerned with the particular relationships in which women were involved- with their children, with each other and with men. The role of women in society is central to much of her work, and most obviously so in the German stories. (Boddy, 1988, p. 171)

From the beginning of history, females have always been subjects of repression. The role of women was strongly established; but as time went by, some of these constraints changed. Women started to seek independence and gender equality. This was also seen in literature. At the beginning of their writings, women wrote using male pseudonyms, as it was traditionally believed that women did not have the same intellectual abilities as men did (Plain and Seller, 2007).

Through this analysis the authors will analyze how the role of women influenced Katherine Mansfield's short stories during the 1920's. The short stories to be analyzed are: *Miss Brill* and *Bliss*. The analysis of the stories will be carried out from the Feminist Approach. In this literary analysis, some concepts of the feminist approach will be applied. The key definitions that will be mentioned are: gender, patriarchal society, androcentrism, alienation and women seen as private property, among others.

1.2 Definition of Key Terms

Androcentrism: dominated by or emphasizing masculine interests or a masculine point of view. (Webster's dictionary)

Alienation: a withdrawing or separation of a person or a person's affections from an object or position of former attachment. (Webster's dictionary)

Biological Determinism: The belief that biological differences between men and women determine their social roles, critiqued by feminist scholars like Toril Moi and relevant for understanding Mansfield's exploration of women's constrained roles in patriarchal society.

Gender: According to the World Health Organization, gender refers to the characteristics of women, men, girls and boys that are socially constructed. This includes norms, behaviors and roles associated with being a woman, man, girl or boy, as well as relationships with each other. As a social construct, gender varies from society to society and can change over time.

Gender Performativity: Introduced by Judith Butler, this concept refers to the idea that gender is a set of performed actions rather than an innate quality, useful in analyzing how Mansfield's characters "perform" their socially prescribed gender roles.

Gynocriticism: Coined by Elaine Showalter, this term refers to the study of women's writing and the establishment of a female literary tradition, relevant to Mansfield's contribution to modernist literature.

Intersectionality: A term popularized by Kimberlé Crenshaw and emphasized by Rebecca Walker; it refers to how different aspects of identity (race, class, gender) intersect to create unique experiences of oppression. This can enrich your study of class and gender in Mansfield's characters.

Patriarchal Society: According to Simone de Beauvoir, a patriarchal society consists of a slave-master relationship in which the man is the master and the woman is the slave. In other words, women depend on men up to the point in which men are in charge of assigning women their roles in society.

Proto-feminism: referring to early forms of feminist thought and action before the official feminist movements, useful for situating Mansfield within a lineage of female writers challenging patriarchal structures.

Sexual Politics: Kate Millett's term for how patriarchal power is enforced through literature and cultural narratives, which can help unpack the power dynamics between men and women in Mansfield's stories.

1.3. Research Questions

Considering the Feminist Approach and the role of the women in the 1920's, these are the following research questions that were brought up to us:

- What is the social role of women in Katherine Mansfield's short stories *Bliss* and *Miss Brill*?
- How do the author's life experiences affect and shape the female characters in *Bliss* and *Miss Brill*?
- What are the main issues discussed and how can they be related to the Feminist Approach?

1.4. General Objective

To analyze the role of women displayed in Katherine Mansfield's short stories *Bliss* and *Miss Brill* through the application of the Feminist Approach.

1.5. Specific Objectives

This literary analysis will focus on these specific objectives:

- Describe Katherine Mansfield's two short stories: *Miss Brill* and *Bliss* with an emphasis on the role of the female character.
- Compare Katherine Mansfield's life experiences with the main characters of the two short stories: *Miss Brill* and *Bliss*, with an emphasis on the role of women.
- Review Katherine Mansfield's two short stories: *Miss Brill* and *Bliss* from the perspective of the Feminist Approach.
- Provide complete information on the context and setting in which these two short stories take place, including the plot, language and secondary characters.

1.6. Purpose

The study will provide a deeper understanding of Katherine Mansfield's description of the social role of women in the 1920's focusing on *Miss Brill* and *Bliss* short stories and taking into account the perspective of the Feminist Approach. Moreover, this literary analysis will serve to describe how the social women movement's environment affected and shaped her writings.

Chapter II

2. Methodology

In order to collect appropriate data for this literary analysis and to find the answers of our research questions, this study will require exploratory, descriptive, analytical and contrastive research. Therefore, the study will be qualitative and descriptive research.

The historical background of women rights during the 1920's, Katherine Mansfield's and her relation with this social movement and women of the 1920's to which the stories make reference will be analyzed and appraised within the concepts of the Feminist Approach. The two short stories "*Miss Brill*" and "*Bliss*" will be analyzed from the feminist theory in the following aspects: plot summary, women characters, symbolism, setting and the application of the Feminist Literary Theory.

The analysis will also focus on the author's biography and the literary and political movements that contributed to Katherine Mansfield's work. It will also describe features of the society in the 1920's, taking into account the historical background of the Anglo-American and European Feminist Literary Theory. In addition, it will portrait the role of women in literature.

2.1 Data Collection

The main sources that will be used to address the research questions are the two short stories "*Miss Brill*" and "*Bliss*" by Katherine Mansfield. Both short stories will be used as primary sources of data and interpretation. Moreover, to answer questions related to the analysis, the following books were consulted: biographical books, literary analysis books, journal articles related to literary criticism, feminism and modernism.

2.2 Data Analysis

After extensive reading of primary and secondary sources, these will be analyzed in a qualitative manner. After the analysis, a comparative and contrastive analysis of the primary sources will be carried out. The Feminist Approach shall be applied in order to study the most important aspects related to the way women are described in the two stories. This approach will help to analyze all the controversial situations and experiences that women go through such as exclusion, suppression, alienation and exploitation (Lynn, 2008). As Lynn (2008) states, “Feminist criticism, like feminism itself, is concerned, of course, with the status of women” (p. 229).

2.3 Scope and Delimitation

The purpose of the study is to analyze how the short stories describe the social role of women in the 1920's. In order to reach a deeper understanding of the relationship between Katherine Mansfield's life experiences with the main characters of the two short stories, complete information on the context and setting in which these two short stories take place, including the plot, language and secondary characters will be provided.

Consequently, the Feminist approach is going to be used. Feminist approach's concepts will be covered concerning social and historical aspects that take part in the role of women from the short stories during the 1920's.

The analysis will be grounded in feminist literary criticism, a theoretical framework that examines literature from the perspective of women's experiences and the societal structures that shape gender roles (Showalter, 1985). This approach will allow for a nuanced exploration of how Mansfield's narratives reflect and challenge the prevailing attitudes towards women in the early

20th century. While historical and psychological aspects will be integral to the analysis, providing context for the characters' motivations and behaviors, the study will not delve into issues of racism or white privilege. Instead, the focus will remain on the gendered experiences of the protagonists, their struggles against patriarchal norms, and the ways in which Mansfield's writing illuminates the complexities of female identity during this pivotal era. By concentrating on these elements, the study aims to contribute to the broader understanding of women's literary representation and the evolving discourse on gender roles in the 1920s.

Chapter III

3. Review of Literature.

3.1. Historical Background

3.1.1. Women in the 1920's

There were three main events that took place in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. These were, the Civil War, the Industrial Revolution and the First World War. These historical events set many precedents of changes in the social role of women. Women's role changed so drastically, that it affected many aspects of society specially, in the year 1920.

Before the Civil War and First World War, women were subdued to be housewives. Taking care of children and being well trained to deal with household chores was pretty much their main role in society. However, the role of housewife was left aside or in some cases accompanied the role of a worker. Women had to come up with a solution to balance these two roles. "The question therefore is no longer should women combine marriage with careers, but how do they manage it and how does it work." (Degler, 1964, p. 668)

According to Lord Bryce (as cited in Degler, 1964, p. 653), "it is easier for women to find a career, to obtain work of an intellectual as of a commercial kind, than in any part of Europe." The Civil War was very important for Feminism, because it gave women the chance to study and stand out from men. Women were now able to pursue a career which was mostly permitted to men. During the war, women took part not only as nurses but also took new roles in the economy of the country, they overlapped men in factories and education.

Another important event was The Industrial Revolution of the nineteenth century, which played an important part in the new role of women. Women were seeking equal opportunities

thus, “the industrial revolution provided the impetus of women’s aspirations for equality of opportunity.” (Degler, 1964, p.654) The feminist movement was a consequence of the industrial revolution. Women were seeking their place in society due to men working in factories. These men were taking away women’s house chores such as laundry, clothing, and prepared foods. (Degler, 1964) According to Degler “the most direct way in which industrialization altered the social function of women was by providing work for women outside the home.” (p. 656).

Many job opportunities became available to women thanks to The Industrial Revolution. The places which were mainly occupied by men, started to be filled up with women.

New opportunities for women opened up in business offices... Some of the available positions were telephone operator, typist, clerical worker and the stenographer, alongside with nurses, seamstress, cotton mill operator and teacher. (Degler, 1964, p. 656).

Therefore, thanks to these opportunities women became more socially independent. “...Emancipation of women related increasing opportunity in business and professions... as well as the development of independent social lives for women”. (Freedman, 1974, p. 382) However, this independence was not easily achieved. Women had to first, have access to university which meant to have the same level of education as men; once they graduated, they could apply for a job that was no longer a men’s field. Finally, they could become economically and socially independent, even though they did not earn the same amount of money as their male counterparts. “Many of the most unpleasant and low-paid jobs were done by women, and most exploitative were done by married people who had no better jobs to turn to” (Braybon, 1981, p. 25).

World War I had similar changes from the Industrial revolution in the sense of social changes towards women’s labor. Regarding female labor force there was a raise in jobs

opportunities due to the fact that men were fighting. Thus, women's interests changed: they no longer focused only in housekeeping activities but they were also involved in men's job positions. "Groves outlined the effects of industrial employment during World War I in raising women's expectations and in a "heightening of the feelings of self-interest" (Freedman, 1974, p. 380).

However, some people did not think the same. They thought these women were taking away their jobs "by working for lower wages" (Braybon, 1981, p. 17). Although women could work, society did not accept the fact that a married woman from the middle class could have an occupation other than taking care of her family. On the other hand, this was not the case for married women from lower classes. "The new middle class did not approve of married women working. To them a leisured wife was a sign of a man's success" (Braybon, 1981, p. 18).

In conclusion, historical occurrences like the American Civil War, the Industrial Revolution, and World War I had a tremendous impact on the development of women's roles during this crucial time in the early 20th century. These advances marked a change from conventional home responsibilities to active involvement in the workforce by reversing social norms and giving women access to previously unheard-of chances for education and labor. Despite these improvements, there remained resistance in society to the recognition of women's independence and professional achievements, especially from middle-class norms. However, the foundations established during this time sparked the feminist movement and prepared the ground for continuing efforts to achieve gender equality in the social and economic areas.

3.1.2. Women's Rights During the 1920's

The 20's was a very important decade for women. During this decade women changed the view they had on family, sexual mores, work force and most importantly political

activism...however, that includes changes in the family and sexual mores, women's participation in the work force, and the political activism of these newly enfranchised citizens..." (Dumenil, 2007, p 22).

Women political activism started before the 1920's due to men's oppression during part of the World War I period. The first women's movement founded in America was the National American Women Suffrage Association (NAWSA). NAWSA's main concern was that America paid more attention to war for a democratic government and did not take women's rights into account. In other words, America's government was fighting abroad for a cause that had not apparently been applied in its country. "Congressional Union members picketed the White House during World War I to protest that while the country fought a war for democracy abroad it denied women their democratic rights at home" (Dumenil, 2007, p. 22).

In America there were a few women's movements that fought for the right to suffrage. Among these were the National Woman's Party (NWP), the League of Women Voters and the NAWSA as it was previously mentioned. There were in total 14 movements that after 1923 paid special attention to an amendment of equality of rights (Dumenil, 2007, p. 23).

In conclusion, the 1920s marked an important period for women in America, as they redefined their roles within the family, the workforce, and society at large. The emergence of political activism, inspired by women's denial of democratic rights during World War I, was crucial to this change. The campaign for suffrage was led by groups like the National American Woman Suffrage Association (NAWSA) and the National Woman's Party (NWP), which eventually laid the foundation for later equality-focused movements. These 1920s initiatives were crucial in changing society attitudes and improving women's rights, and they established the groundwork for more action and reform in the years that followed.

3.1.3 Katherine Mansfield and Women's Rights in her Time.

Women's movements in New Zealand started around the last decade of the eighteenth hundreds. Katherine Mansfield spent most of her life in England but she remained informed about what was going on in politics, especially regarding women's politics. According to Boddy (1988), Mansfield admired her suffragettes counterparts but did not take action as a member of one of these movements. "Although not militant she was an independent free thinker who understood completely the need for personal freedom and equality. As such she was impatient with stereotyped sexual roles" (Boddy, 1988, p.110).

The right to vote was one of the main issues along with equality matters. New Zealand got this right before Britain in 1893. Mansfield had the opportunity to take a stand sometimes during some protests. Of course, not all of them happened in New Zealand. In May 1913, Mansfield was obligated to get off a bus for insulting a woman. Mansfield believed that all of these movements play an important role for women writers. "All of this suffragist movement is excellent for our sex- Kicked policemen or not kicked policemen" (Boddy, 1988, p.113).

With the rise of women's movements, the role of women changed. Katherine Mansfield worried about the future of her counterparts, but mostly about her writer counterparts. She did not consider herself a feminist but that did not prevent her from agreeing with political women's parties. In September 1908, she escaped from a suffragettes meeting and stated that she could only help with her work and not as suffragette.

The room grew hot and in the air some spirit of agitation of revolt stirred and grew. It was over at 10:30. I ran into the street- cool air and starlight ... And decided I could not be a suffragette—the world was too full of laughter. Oh, I feel I could remedy the evils of this world so much more easily—don't you? (Alpers, 1980, p. 328).

To conclude with, Katherine Mansfield's life and work were shaped by the women's movements of her time, particularly those in New Zealand and England. Although she did not actively participate in suffragist activities, Mansfield supported the principles of personal freedom and gender equality. Her views on women's rights were complex; she admired the suffragettes but felt that her contribution to the cause would be better made through her writing rather than direct activism. Mansfield's engagement with the issues of her time reflects a degree of understanding of the broader feminist movement, highlighting her commitment to challenging traditional gender roles and advocating for women's intellectual and creative freedom.

3.1.4 Brief History of the Feminist Movement in the UK and USA.

As it was previously mentioned, wars played an important role in the creation of feminist or women movements in Europe and America. In America, it started around the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th. American women took the abolition of slavery as a precedent and the civil war as evidence that their right to suffrage should be accepted (Clemens, 1993, p. 757).

Women's groups were established in 1880; however, the main goal had to wait a few years. These groups went through a long and conservative fight. Women's parties were created and took part in politics. According to Clemens, women could participate in this matter due to a change in social identity of institutions.

The ability of women's groups to enter the political arena without being fully co-opted suggests that processes of conservative organizational transformation are conditioned by both the social identity of those organized and the character of existing political institutions (Clemens, 1993, p. 757).

There were three important waves of feminist movements. The first wave focused mainly on equal rights for men and women. However, the second wave of feminism did not agree completely with their first leaders. “Second-wave feminists defied the patriarchal status quo by declaring women different.” The theory the second wave stated was that not only women deserve the same rights as men, but also accept that they were different in many aspects and that these differences should be embraced. “A distinctly female authorship was salvaged from the scraps of mainstream literature and promoted as part of a historicizing of women’s literary achievement” (Gambaud, 2007, p. 95).

The third wave of feminism combined the first two debates. The main goal was to answer the questions of these previous debates. Third wave agreed on many of the concepts brought up by the former leaders but improved the context of these debates. According to Gambaud, “Third-wave feminists are invested in articulating theories explaining why, in spite of the work done, the debate persists and how to transcend it” (Gambaud, 2007, p. 96).

In summary, different waves of the feminist movement have developed in the UK and the USA, each responding to the socio-political setting of its own era. The battle for gender equality has undergone constant transformations according to these movements, which began with the first wave’s emphasis on accepting gender differences and ended with the third wave’s synthesis of earlier discussions. The first wave was motivated by the Civil War and the liberation of slavery. The intricacy of feminist advancement is highlighted by women’s organizations’ capacity to participate in political activism without sacrificing their distinct social identities. Together, these waves draw attention to the persistent challenge of addressing gender injustice in the past and present in a society that is changing all the time.

3.2. Feminist Literary Theory

3.2.1. The Anglo-American and European Feminist Literary Criticism

Steven Lynn (2008) stated that feminist criticism has transformed the study of literature by bringing attention to how gender and sexuality are represented. (p. 32)

Plain and Seller (2007) stated that the Feminist literary criticism started during the “second wave feminism”, this concept is used to explain the emergence of movements in the United States and Europe during the Civil Rights campaigns in the 1960s. All of this was the result of “centuries of women’s writing, of women writing about women writing, and of women – and men – writing about women’s minds, bodies, art and ideas.”(p. 2) When we talk about the Feminist literary criticism, one cannot just look for the movements started in the 60’s, but examine the history behind all of these events. “...feminist literary criticism is a source of pleasure, stimulation, confirmation, insight, self-affirmation, doubt, questioning and reappraisal: it has the potential to alter the way we see ourselves, others and the world.” (Plain and Seller, 2007, p. 3)

During the medieval ages women were subject of rejection in male circles, women were confined into household chores, motherhood; and were believed to be “the weak sex.” Some of them could spend the rest of their life not knowing how to read or write; and even women lived under such a strong patriarchal society. However, some women were fortunate to learn how to read and write, but only in English. They were not allowed to learn Latin. Education was still limited only to a certain social class. Patriarchal society had always ruled the world by oppressing women and not allowing them to show their true potential. Men always dominated

every aspect of women's life. "Women had no legal independence and rarely any social identity in this period without reference to their fathers or husbands." (Plain and Seller, 2007, 28)

Throughout the years, even that writing was seen as dangerous and threatening to religious and social orders by the patriarchal authorities; these social constraints did not stop women from writing. (Plain and Seller, 2007, p. 29) Some female writers even published books, poems under male pseudonyms due to patriarchal values. In the 17th century, female writers began to publish their works such as printed books in a variety of genres including poems, plays, conversion narratives, advice books, translations, letters, devotional texts, prophecies, pamphlets, memoirs and works of philosophy and fiction. These women were part of the proto feminist, just because they decided to leave all of those social constraints behind and just write.

This was a period in which 'continuing constraints as well as new freedoms' provoked 'an outburst of writing by women', and although in general women's literacy levels remained low, they nonetheless acquired far greater visibility as both producers and consumers of texts. From pamphlets to poetry and from devotional literature to advice books, women became active participants in literary culture. (Plain and Seller, 2007, p. 7)

In addition, women started to act as feminist critics; they became interested in reading other women's works. From here, according to Helen Wilcox (2007) we can see the three main components of a feminist critical approach: attention to women as writers, as subjects and as readers. (p. 31) The most important sign of feminism and feminist literature during this period was that they wrote.

Thus women writers of the early modern period were acting as feminist critics themselves in their self-conscious discourses on the nature of their work. These

observations are frequently to be found in the prefatory material preceding female-authored texts, including dedicatory poems and epistles, apologies and letters to their readers. (Wilcox, 2007, p. 32)

Toril Moi in *Sex, Gender and the Body* (2005) explains that in the 1960's the concept of gender was defined as a social construction. On the other hand, sex was defined as a biological determinism. (p. 30) In addition, biological determinism is characterized by two aspects; "a sexual biology which I shall label the 'pervasive picture of sex'"; and "the belief that science in general and biology in particular both could and should settle questions about women's role in society." (Moi, 2005, p. 6)

As it was mentioned before feminist literary criticism is concerned on how gender and sexuality is represented. In the Middle Ages women were represented as the weak sex. Males and females had their different roles in a patriarchal society. But they found a way to stand out and show men that they can be equals; even though this fight has not finished yet.

3.2.2 The Role of Women throughout Literature.

The representation of women within texts had always been the main focus on the Feminist literary criticism. In the early modern period, women wonder about these representations. Therefore, it took two forms; the first one was the female condemnation of male authors for their inadequate images of women. "...the inconstant lover, the nagging wife, the shrewish spinster, the disdainful mistress or the seducing whores." (Wilcox, 2007, p. 34) The second one was the creation of alternative female characters. Women were disgusted and offended by the characterizations men wrote about.

Jane Austen was a pre feminist contributor to a history of pre-feminist writing (Plain and Seller, 2007). Austen did not experience any revolutionary changes for women but her characters were unique. According to Plain and Seller, the stories talked about women with a certain level of education and Austen worried about the economical and emotional issues of women. “a witty demonstration of the value of women’s education and a powerful defense of that most ‘female’ of literary forms” (Plain and Seller, 2007, p. 8).

Next in line of pioneer contributors to the feminist writing is Virginia Woolf. It is fair to say that not only was she one of the first female contributors, but also one of the privileged ones. Woolf and her husband owned a printing press, this helped many authors, including Virginia herself to publish her writings and those contemporary authors as Katherine Mansfield, T.S. Eliot, just to mention a few (Habib, 2005).

Virginia Woolf, a pioneering feminist writer, explored the constraints placed on women in her works, particularly in *"A Room of One's Own"* (1929). She argued that women needed financial independence and personal space to create literary works, highlighting the systemic barriers that had historically limited female authors. Woolf’s contributions to modernist literature challenged traditional narratives and gave voice to the female experience, paving the way for future generations of women writers to express themselves more freely (Gambaudo, 2007).

According to Myszor, Woolf’s writings were a representation of revolt against the Victorian society’s restrictions. Virginia was not popular or admired from the beginning as a female writer. However, it was not until feminist critics in the 1960’s highly praised her writings that she changed her reputation of one of the weak modernist writers.

In contrast, T.S. Eliot's portrayal of women in his poetry often reflected a more traditional and sometimes problematic perspective. In works like *"The Waste Land"* (1922), female characters are frequently depicted as symbols of decay or objects of desire, rather than fully realized individuals. This approach, while reflective of certain modernist themes, has been criticized for perpetuating stereotypes and limiting the agency of female characters. The juxtaposition of Woolf's and Eliot's treatments of women in literature underscores the complex and often contradictory representations of women in 20th-century writing, highlighting the ongoing struggle for equality in literary representation (Gambaudo, 2007).

3.2.3 Contributions of Key Feminist Theorists to Feminist Literary Criticism

Second-Wave Feminism and the Birth of Modern Feminist Literary Criticism

The scholars from this period focused on the cultural and social structures that shaped gender inequality. Key themes included patriarchal oppression, the distinction between biological sex and socially constructed gender, and the representation of women in literature.

Kate Millett

According to Millett in *"Sexual Politics"* (1970), a direct critique of patriarchal control over women's bodies and sexuality was launched, extending this analysis to literature. Millett's concept of "sexual politics" describes how patriarchal power operates through literature, revealing how male authors such as D.H. Lawrence, Norman Mailer, and Henry Miller portrayed women through objectifying and degrading lenses. This played a significant role in the second wave of feminist literary critique, which aimed to highlight the misogyny found in classic works. Millett's work fits within this analysis of early feminist criticism because she openly questions how male authors shaped cultural views of women, resonating with Wilcox's observations on the misrepresentation of women. This critique of patriarchal control over women's bodies and

sexuality can be applied to Mansfield's stories, which often explore the tensions between women's desires, social expectations, and their constrained roles. In stories like "Bliss" and "Miss Brill," Mansfield gently critiques the limited agency given to women and the emotional labor they must perform within patriarchal structures. Millett's ideas can help dissect how these societal constraints shape the internal worlds of Mansfield's female characters.

Elaine Showalter

An early proponent of "gynocriticism", Showalter introduced the concept of a "female literary tradition" in *"A Literature of Their Own"* (1977), emphasizing the need for criticism that centers on women's writing. She outlines three stages: the "feminine" phase (women writers imitating men), the "feminist" phase (active protest against male dominance), and the "female" phase (exploring the complexities of women's experiences in their own voices). Showalter's work could extend the discussion of how women, from the early modern period, asserted their presence in literary culture despite patriarchal oppression. Her framework also helps to understand the evolution of women's writing, from covert resistance (writing under pseudonyms) to more overt feminist expression (e.g., Woolf, Mansfield). Showalter's focus on the development of a distinct "female literary tradition" is relevant to Mansfield's place within modernist literature. Mansfield, like Virginia Woolf, was part of a literary movement that began to focus on women's inner lives and subjectivities. Showalter's framework helps highlight Mansfield's contribution to this tradition, as she created narratives that center women's perspectives and emotions, challenging male-dominated literary forms. Mansfield's stories are often about women's inner conflicts, making Showalter's focus on the "female phase" of literature particularly useful.

Third-Wave Feminism and Poststructuralist Influences

Third-wave feminists focused on the intersection of gender with other identities, such as race, class, and sexuality, and challenged the binary frameworks of earlier feminist thought.

Judith Butler

In “Gender Trouble”, Butler (1990) revolutionized gender theory by arguing that gender is performative, not an innate essence but an identity constructed through repeated actions. Her critique of the binary distinction between sex and gender challenges standard feminist perspectives and opens up new avenues for comprehending the diversity of identities and experiences. Butler’s insights could contribute to the issue of how women’s representations, particularly in patriarchal literary traditions, are performative activities that reinforce gender roles rather than reflections of biological disparities. This aligns with Toril Moi’s distinction between sex and gender and adds depth to how we understand the "weak sex" stereotype from the medieval period as a constructed identity. Mansfield’s stories often reveal the performative nature of gender roles. Using Butler’s framework to analyze the performative features of gender in Mansfield’s stories, we may learn how these characters resist or comply with societal conventions.

Rebecca Walker

A prominent figure in third-wave feminism Rebecca Walker is often credited with bringing intersectionality into feminist discourse. In her 1992 “*Ms. Magazine*” article, “*Becoming the Third Wave*,” she called for a new feminist movement that embraced not only gender but also race, sexuality, and class. Her work critiques the white middle-class orientation of second-wave feminism and places an emphasis on activism and the personal aspects of feminism. Walker’s emphasis on diversity and multiplicity could provide depth to this analysis of the "role of women" in literature by emphasizing how racial and class factors shaped historical

feminist movements, which were never homogenous. Walker's appeal for an intersectional feminist interpretation can advance this understanding of Mansfield by fostering a more complex interpretation of the characters' experiences that goes beyond their gender. Mansfield writes mostly on women in her stories, although several of her pieces—like *"The Daughters of the Late Colonel"*—also address social differences. Even if they aren't always at the forefront of Mansfield's stories, bringing in Walker's emphasis on the intersections of race, class, and gender could lead to a discussion of the numerous hierarchies Mansfield obstacles.

Incorporating these feminist theorists provides a comprehensive overview of how feminist literary criticism has evolved, from second-wave critiques of patriarchy to third-wave and poststructuralist challenges to gender binaries and intersectionality. These scholars broaden the theoretical framework, connecting the historical misrepresentation of women to more complex understandings of identity, power, and resistance across cultures and gender identities. By integrating these feminist scholars into our analysis of Katherine Mansfield's stories, could provide a much richer and multifaceted interpretation of her work. These scholar's theories could enable the idea to explore not just the gender dynamics at play but also how class, race, colonialism, and even non-binary identities influence Mansfield's characters and narratives.

Chapter IV

4. The Author

4.1 Biography

Katherine Mansfield was born Kathleen Mansfield Beauchamp on October 14th, 1888 in Wellington, New Zealand. She was the third child of Hal and Annie Beauchamp. She had two older sisters and one younger sister, who died due to contracting infantile cholera. Later on, her younger brother was born (Alpers, 1980). Her father was Hal Beauchamp, who worked for an old importing firm, and soon became part owner of Bannatyne & Co. Her mother Annie Beauchamp was known to be a beautiful, sensitive and fastidious woman; who was frequently ill. Katherine was mainly raised by her grandmother Mrs. Dyer, whom she deeply loved. As Boddy claims (1988) “The person to whom Kathleen turned out most frequently for love and understanding was her grandmother, Grannie Dyer.” (p. 3)

When she was four years old, they moved to a country house in Karori, where she had many childhood memories. Along with her sisters she attended the local school in Karori. In 1898 she started going to the Wellington High School in Thorndon. During that same year, her first published story appeared in the *High School Reporter*, she was only nine years old (Boddy, 1988). The following year they moved to another school, Miss Swainson’s, a private school. Her teachers described her as a bright and rebellious young lady, and always stood up for being among the school’s best writers and speakers. (Boddy, 1988)

In 1903, Katherine and her sisters attended the Queen’s College in London. Three years later they came back to New Zealand. However, Katherine wanted to stay; she wanted to pursue an artistic career and London was the perfect place. According to Kaplan (1991), she was determined to escape from the restrictions of family, colonial life, and bourgeois social conventions. In 1908 Katherine returned to London. In 1909 she married George Bowden, a music teacher she met at a dinner party in St John’s Wood. However, not everything went well.

As Boddy (1988) mentions, “He soon discovered that her changes in mood and appearance were almost a complete change of personality.” (p. 26)

They were married for nine years. Is it believed that she got married to prove her heterosexuality since Katherine was also attracted to women. Berkman (1951) claims “She had looked to find in marriage security and freedom for artistic development—an illusion born of disillusion” (p. 34). In addition, shortly after the wedding, Mansfield left her husband. Before getting married, she had many lovers. A few months after the wedding, Mansfield found out she was pregnant from Garnet, a former lover. Back in New Zealand, after hearing about Katherine’s life and sudden marriage; her mother was worried and went to England. (Boddy, 1988) “The news of her marriage, followed soon by the cabled announcement of her separation from her husband, brought her mother to London. She found her daughter with child, and admittedly not by her husband” (Berkman, 1951, p. 34).

During this time, she traveled to Bavaria, far from Ida Baker, known as L.M.; her mother was aware of Katherine’s lesbian relationship; and separated the girls. (Alpers, 1988) In the summer spent in Germany it is believed that she had a miscarriage or even had an abortion “...she found that the loss of her baby was more than she could bear alone: she craved a child to care for” (Alpers, 1988, p. 98).

In 1911, she met John Middleton Murray, soon they became friends. Later on, it culminated into a relationship. After Mansfield got the papers from her divorce from Bowden, Katherine married Murray in 1918. (Berkman, 1951) “...they were soulmates united by their devotion to literature and longing for harmony in their own psyches and the world around them...” (Berkman, 1951, p. 356) When Katherine contracted tuberculosis, everywhere she went

or stayed, guests complained about it and asked the room to be fumigated. (Boddy, 1988)

Katherine Mansfield died in 1923 due to tuberculosis.

Katherine Mansfield faced both personal and professional obstacles throughout her life, which influenced her body of work. Mansfield's early years were shaped by the social standing of her family as well as her quest for autonomy. Her decision to leave the restrictions of colonial and bourgeois life was demonstrated by her studies in London and her subsequent return to England in 1908. Mansfield had a difficult personal life, marked by a brief marriage, complex relationships, and health issues, but her creative accomplishments are evidence of her courage and commitment to her work. Despite the fact that she passed away at the age of 34, her significant influence on modernist literature endures.

4.2 Katherine Mansfield and Modernism

Frank Myszor (2001) defined modernism “as an essentially reaction against the Victorian age” (p. 30). Modernist writers were interested in the psychology and behavior of the character. Even though their methods varied from writer to writer, “there was much less need to tell a story in the traditional way” (Myszor, 2001, p. 30). Metaphors, symbolism and ambiguity were commonly used. One characteristic attitude from modernism was the alienation; “...alienation between the people in society and between the artist and society” (Myszor, 2001, p. 30). Another characteristic was the “creation of dynamic original forms in which to contain a newly awakened sense of present reality” (Kaplan, 1991, p. 6).

The literary movement, modernism, provided not only a new form of portraying stories but also explored new themes. Women writers played an important role shaping this movement. Sydney Janet Kaplan's work, *Katherine Mansfield and the Origins of Modernist Fiction*, focused

the attention on the contributions of women like Mansfield, who were the first to write with new narrative techniques and explored the personalities of their characters in depth (Kaplan, 1991). Although it is important to mention that Katherine Mansfield was preceded by Virginia Woolf with these narrative techniques of modernism.

Virginia Woolf is probably one of the most prominent women writers of modernism, applied stream-of-consciousness techniques to explore the inner lives of her characters. The stream-of-consciousness is exemplified as the reader being able to listen to the deepest thoughts of the characters. Woolf's novels, such as *Mrs. Dalloway* and *To the Lighthouse*, are marked by their deep psychological awareness and chaotic scenario. Woolf's and Mansfield's stories emphasized the subjective experience and the passage of time, distinguishing them from their male contemporaries like James Joyce and T. S. Eliot. Kaplan (1991) notes that Woolf's innovative approach to narrative and character development was instrumental in the evolution of modernist fiction. Thus, providing a voice for the complex experiences of women during this era.

Katherine Mansfield and T.S. Eliot, both key figures in the modernist movement, significantly influenced the literary landscape of the early 20th century. Myszor (2001) highlights that, while Mansfield's short stories focus on the subtleties of human relationships and psychological depth, Eliot's poetry delves into the fragmentation and alienation of modern life. Both authors employ innovative narrative techniques—Mansfield through free indirect discourse and episodic storytelling, and Eliot through stream of consciousness and allusive imagery. Their works reflect a shared modernist preoccupation with exploring the inner workings of the mind and the complexities of contemporary existence. Myszor (2001) asserts that Mansfield's intimate portrayal of everyday moments complements Eliot's broader examination of societal disintegration, together offering a comprehensive picture of modernist concerns. Thus, Mansfield

and Eliot, though distinct in their approaches, collectively advance the modernist agenda by pushing the boundaries of literary form and content.

During her teenage years Mansfield was mainly influenced by Oscar Wilde. "...Wilde was Mansfield's principal stylistic influence..." (Boddy, 1988, p. 12). Kaplan (1991) stated that her early writing was so clearly modeled after Wilde. Kaplan (1991) claims that during 1906-1908 she had her most active lesbian experiences. While reading *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, Wilde had a great power over her, this was evident in her pursuit "to find self-fulfillment through sensuality" (Kaplan, 1991, p. 22); this granted her to express her desires for women. "Wilde did not influence her desires, but his ideas allowed her a space in which such desires might be recognized and named" (Kaplan, 1991, p. 22). Also, by having the example of Dorian Gray, Katherine recognized her sexual desire between men and women. "Wilde provided her with the impetus to seek experience, to express sexuality and not deny the body..." (Kaplan, 1991, p. 28). She also felt linked to this character because they share something in common: their bisexuality. The main influence Oscar Wilde had on Mansfield was to allow and help her in her writing process to express what was denied at that time. "...these feelings of guilt about her sexuality" (Boddy, 1988, p. 17). Kaplan (1991) explained that young Katherine could perceive how art may spring from sexual desire.

It is believed that Katherine was introduced to the writings of Chekhov while she was staying in Bavaria. She had always admired Russian writers, and later on they influenced not only her writings but also her lifestyle (Boddy, 1988). Katherine admired him deeply as a man and writer. She helped translate some of Chekhov's letters from Russian to English in collaboration with Koteliansky. Mansfield's works had many similarities with Chekhov's, that even some experts thought it was plagiarism. However, Chekhov's stories were an inspiration to

her (Boddy, 1988). Katherine learned from Chekhov that the character and mood were more important than the plot of the story: "...but like him she sought to write not of the superficial, external things of life but of the hidden world... There are no great events, just ordinary happenings in the lives of ordinary people" (Boddy, 1988, p. 174).

In her writings Katherine discussed the role of women and how sexual practices affected them. But also, her short stories "reflect a need to express a specifically female vision" (Kaplan, 1991, p. 6). Kaplan (1991) notes her stylistic evolution derived from social change, rise in women's expectations and alterations in their roles in society. Mansfield created a distinctive storytelling voice that highlighted the details of interpersonal connections and the difficulties of daily existence. Her work stands out from that of her predecessors because of her modernist approach, which was defined by free indirect language and episodic narrative. It also aligned with the movement's emphasis on psychological depth and alienation. Mansfield made significant contributions to modernist literature by exploring topics of gender, sexuality, and the changing roles of women in society. Her creative passion and her capacity to portray the complex aspects of the human experience are demonstrated by her legacy.

Ultimately, Katherine Mansfield's inventive storytelling methods and examination of psychological complexity helped to shape modernist literature. She distinguished herself as an important figure in the movement with her use of free indirect debate, sequential storytelling, and an emphasis on the inner selves of her characters. Mansfield's artwork demonstrated the modernist concerns of disintegration, alienation, and the intricacy of interpersonal interactions. She was influenced by authors like Chekhov and Wilde and gave gender and sexuality-related subjects a unique voice. In the end, Mansfield's contributions to modernism could be found in her ability to push the bounds of literary form while capturing the minute details of ordinary life.

4.3. Katherine Mansfield and Feminism

As it was mentioned before Katherine was aware of everything related to women's politics. She did not consider herself a feminist but that did not prevent her from agreeing with political women's parties. In her writings one can see that she was aware of these changes. She was conscious of the social changes women were facing.

Her upbringing was rather feminist, she was born in a working-class family, and they had no servants. Her parents believed that a well-educated woman would give her a more secure sense of women's intellectual achievements and possibilities. They wanted Katherine to have a career of her own and go to university. Also, since in New Zealand suffrage was already achieved, Katherine spent her younger years in an environment in which it was assumed that women might participate in the political process. (Kaplan, 1991)

Before going back to England, she started reading a book called *Come and Find me* by Elizabeth Robins, it was a feminist book. While reading it, this gave her a sense of power and what a woman is capable of.: "We are firmly held with the self-fashioned chains of slavery. Yes, now I see that they *are* self-fashioned and must be self-removed" (Alpers, 1980, p. 61).

Katherine believed that she needed power, wealth and freedom in order to have the same opportunities as men.

Here then is a little summary of what I need- power, health and freedom. It is a hopelessly insipid doctrine that love is the only thing in the world, taught, hammered into women, from generation to generation, which hampers us so cruelly. We must get rid of that bogey- and then, then comes the opportunity of happiness and freedom. (Alpers, 1980, p. 61)

In England, Katherine tried to participate in a suffragettes meeting, but she decided she would rather help through her writings. She considered herself as an independent free thinker and understood the need for personal freedom and equality (Boddy, 1988). As it was mentioned, she could only help through her writings. Many of her characters were women accepting patriarchy; women were separated and victimized by the male-dominated society: "...and yet in order to survive in the cruel world, they must depend on men for economic and emotional support..." (Aihong, 2012, p. 101). But the most important of all was the way she was portraying the role of these women. As a woman and as a writer Katherine Mansfield could not separate herself from "her role as a woman when she was writing" (Aihong, 2012, p. 101).

The feminist view of Mansfield's short stories poses an interesting argument in the manner in which feminists appear to be convinced that female writers should be seen to restore the image of women, by way of portraying restorative female characters and in understanding the multifaceted role of women being equal to that of men. (Knickelbein, 2010, p. 5)

In order to sum up, Katherine Mansfield's writing provides an insightful examination of women's positions and difficulties in a society controlled by males. Despite not identifying as a feminist outright, her writing shows an in-depth awareness of the social and political changes that affected women in her era. Through her characters, Mansfield draws attention to the emotional and financial reliance that women experienced, while also criticizing patriarchy. Her writings are a subdued yet effective means of promoting equality and individual freedom. In the end, Mansfield's contribution to feminist literary discourse is noteworthy because of her ability to entwine her personal experiences as a woman with the larger fights for gender equality.

4.4. Katherine Mansfield and the 1920's Society

During the 1920's, society had changed in better ways for women. These women wanted the same rights and freedom as men, and they achieved those rights by competing with men in marriage and even in sexual independence. "It consolidated woman's position as man's equal" (Freedman, 1974, p. 373). Moreover, this sexual freedom helped many writers, especially Katherine Mansfield to express her sexuality. According to Kaplan (1991) when we talk about Mansfield, we talk about sexuality: "Her attempts to experiment with sexuality in her own life and the creative results of such experimentation need to be explored in relation to theories about the construction of gender and about sexuality" (p. 9).

The 20's changed women's habits, such as smoking, dressing and the involvement of women in social reform.: "...the 1920s to make ample references to signs of the moral revolution: premarital sex, birth control, drinking, contempt for older values..." (Freedman, 1974, p. 377) And also a very important goal was achieved, divorce was accepted. Mansfield had to wait for 6 years to divorce Bowden and be able to marry Murray.

Katherine Mansfield was certainly different from many other women of her time. She was able to experiment not only with her sexuality but also put that experience into her writings. During the 1920's her work was widely recognized throughout England. However, that recognition due to her background did not give her the prestige she wanted among the English intellectuals. She was seen as a newly rich colonial. "She could not claim connections with the comfortable world of the academic and artistic establishment; neither could she gain admiring... from the left-wing bourgeoisie, who might have adored her if she had risen from the working class" (Kaplan, 1991, p. 12).

At the same time, she met Virginia Woolf with whom she shared letters, viewpoints and opinions. Nevertheless, Mansfield was captivated by the sense of security Virginia had. Even though Mansfield had a bourgeoisie colonial background, for many years she lived over the edge financially; this would have linked her “with many of the attitudes and values of bohemia” (Kaplan, 1991, p. 12). She always remained an outsider from society. Katherine compared her life with Virginia’s life in her writings; therefore, she can express her self-awareness of exclusion (Kaplan, 1991).

Chapter V

5. Analysis of *Miss Brill* and *Bliss*

The following table highlights the main points raised in the analysis below. The comparative table indicates common themes in "Miss Brill" and "Bliss," demonstrating how both stories explore the complexity of female identity in a patriarchal culture.

Aspects being	Miss Brill	Bliss
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compared		
Plot	Miss Brill, an aging woman, spends her Sundays listening to others' conversations in a park, only to be harshly reminded of her loneliness when overhearing cruel remarks about herself.	Bertha, a young woman, throws a dinner party in celebration of her happiness and sexual awakening, only to discover her husband's affair with her friend Pearl.
Women Characters	Miss Brill: An elderly, lonely woman who finds solace in observing others and believes herself to be part of their world, but is left feeling alienated.	Bertha Young: A young, seemingly happy woman, full of life and energy, yet ultimately trapped by societal expectations and her husband's infidelity.
Symbolism	The fur coat symbolizes Miss Brill's emotional state and loneliness. The coat, once a source of pride, becomes a symbol of her isolation after she realizes her insignificance to others.	The pear tree symbolizes Bertha's sexual awakening and fertility, while the blissful day turns bitter after she discovers her husband's affair, representing disillusionment.
Setting	A public park on a Sunday afternoon, emphasizing Miss Brill's routine and her role as a passive observer in a shared but isolated space.	Set mostly in Bertha's home, during a dinner party with guests. The setting reflects Bertha's domestic sphere and her entrapment in the private space of marriage.
Gender	Miss Brill's existence is defined by her gendered role as a solitary woman on the fringes of society, expected to be quiet and unnoticed.	Bertha's role as a wife and mother defines her identity, and despite her youthful energy, she is constrained by her gender and the expectations placed upon her in her domestic life.
Patriarchal Society	The story subtly criticizes how society sidelines older women like Miss Brill, who no longer serve a direct purpose in a patriarchal system.	Bertha exists within a patriarchal structure where her husband's power and deceit undermine her sense of happiness and fulfillment. Her joy is revealed to be superficial under the weight of societal expectations.
Androcentrism		The story reveals how Bertha's

	Miss Brill's story highlights the lack of male figures and their power over her, showing how androcentrism excludes women from meaningful social roles.	identity revolves around her husband and his infidelity, reflecting androcentric norms where men's desires dictate women's happiness and societal roles.
Alienation	Miss Brill is deeply alienated from society. She imagines herself as part of the world she observes but is ultimately shunned, highlighting her isolation and invisibility as an older, single woman.	Bertha experiences a sudden sense of alienation after the revelation of her husband's affair. Her earlier "bliss" is shattered, and she feels emotionally cut off from her own life.
Women as Private Property	Miss Brill is treated as insignificant and invisible, implying how older women are discarded and overlooked in a society that treats women's value as contingent on their beauty or usefulness to men.	Bertha is essentially "owned" by her husband, as her happiness is tied to his fidelity. When he betrays her, her "property" status is exposed, as her worth seems bound to his actions.

In “Miss Brill” and “Bliss”, Katherine Mansfield presents two distinct yet interrelated portrayals of women constrained by societal gender norms. In “Miss Brill”, the protagonist, an aging, solitary woman, finds meaning by watching and listening to others in the park, imagining herself part of their lives. Her illusion of connection is shattered when she overhears cruel remarks about her, leading to an overwhelming sense of alienation. Gregor (1997) notes that Mansfield critiques the ways patriarchal society marginalizes older women, relegating them to the fringes where they become invisible and insignificant. Miss Brill's beloved fur coat, which she treats like a companion, symbolizes her deteriorating emotional state and loneliness. As Gregor suggests, this coat "represents the fragile self-worth women are left with after society deems them irrelevant." Moreover, her isolation in the public setting reflects the gendered

dynamics of space, as Miss Brill is alienated from meaningful social engagement and fulfillment, left to passively observe rather than participate.

In a similar way, “Bliss” explores the internal confinement of a younger woman, Bertha, who outwardly enjoys a blissful existence but is similarly trapped by patriarchal expectations. Moi (2005) observes that the story’s pear tree symbolizes Bertha’s sexual awakening and burgeoning desire for independence, emotions she feels but cannot fully express within the boundaries of her marriage. Though she believes herself to be in a harmonious relationship, Bertha’s happiness is shattered by the discovery of her husband’s affair. According to Moi (2002), Mansfield uses Bertha’s disillusionment to underscore how women in patriarchal societies are “defined through their relationships to men, often existing as mere extensions of male authority.” Bertha’s perceived “bliss” is exposed as an illusion, as her identity and happiness are tied to her husband’s actions. Both “Miss Brill” and “Bliss” examine the oppressive structures of gender and patriarchal society, where women are either erased or treated as private property, dependent on male validation for their sense of worth.

5.1. *Miss Brill*

5.1.1. Plot Summary

Miss Brill is a middle-aged woman who likes to go every Sunday to the Jardins Publiques. That Sunday she decides to wear her shabby fur coat. The Jardins Publiques is more crowded than usual, which means that the season has begun. She could tell that because the band is playing “louder and gayer”. Every Sunday she sees the same people, Miss Brill is always eager to make some conversation with strangers, but none of them has ever talked to her.

Miss Brill is fascinated by everything she sees or listens to at the park from her “special seat”. This curiosity makes her listen to other people’s conversation, and carefully watches who are in the plaza: children running around, young couples greeting or even buying flowers, a mother chasing her little ones. Suddenly, something caught her attention, a woman wearing an “ermine toque” and a gentleman in gray. The girl is trying to make some conversation but the man is not interested and walks away. Miss Brill loves to sit there watching it all, like it was a play. “...They were all on the stage. They weren’t only the audience, not only looking on; they were acting. Even she had a part and came every Sunday..” (Manfield, n.d., p. 206). She is feeling very excited about the thought of being an actress.

Miss Brill sees a young couple approaching. They sat near her and as always, she prepared to eavesdrop on the conversation. She calls them “the hero and heroine”. The girl seems a little bit nervous saying to the boy “Not here, not yet” but the boy looks at Miss Brill in a contemptuous way, and mocking her “old silly mug” referring to her fur.

On her way home, Miss Brill usually treats her with a slice of honey-cake, but this time she passes the baker’s. She goes into her little dark room, just like a cupboard. She takes off the fur really quickly, puts it in a box. When she is putting the lid on, she hears something crying.

At the heartbreaking end to Katherine Mansfield’s “Miss Brill,” we see how the protagonist’s happy delusions at first contrast sharply with her tragic reality in the end. The harsh comments made by the young couple upend Miss Brill’s Sunday habit, which was formerly a comforting and imagined connection. Her illusion of being a vital component of the park’s colorful “play” disintegrates, leaving her defenseless and alone. The last scene of the novel, in which Miss Brill hastily removes her cherished fur and hears it “cry” in its container, represents her own repressed feelings and the agonizing realization of her isolation. Mansfield skillfully

illustrates the vulnerability of social rejection and the destructive effects of human self-perception, inspiring readers to consider the silent anguish that might lie beneath seemingly normal lives.

5.1.2 Description of Women's characters

Miss Brill is described as a lonely middle-aged woman, who every Sunday enjoys going to the park, where she sits in her favorite spot fascinated with every person that goes there. "This allows her to appreciate and criticize people for what they say and how they act. Sometimes she even sympathizes with the other people in the park" (Nayebpour, 2017, p. 111). It seems like she is trying to read people's minds, to find out what they are thinking and feeling. She eavesdrops on every conversation she hears from her seat. "...Miss Brill always looked forward to the conversation. She had been quite an expert, she thought at listening as though she didn't listen, at sitting in other people's lives just for a minute while they talked round her" (Mansfield, n.d., p. 205). In this way it seems like: "she creates her own version of reality, or her mental reality, which is disconnected from the real reality" (Nayebpour, 2017, p. 111).

We can also describe her as an observant and imaginative woman: "...there was always a crowd to watch" (Mansfield, n.d., p. 205). Her observation skills don't fail to notice everything that happens in the park. As it was mentioned before, she creates her own reality. She is fascinated by everything in the Jardins Publiques, she is pleased to be there, watching it all. "Miss Brill's voyeurism is unhealthy: she feeds on the lives of others to compensate for the sterility of her own life" (Murray, 1990, p. 61).

At one moment, she is enjoying the band playing, paying attention to every tune they play. It seems like the band is aware of every feeling the person Miss Brill is watching. "...the

band seemed to know what she was feeling and played more softly, played tenderly, and the drum beat.” (Mansfield, n.d., p. 206). Then she realizes that all of this might be a play and she is an actress. “She is acting her own manuscript. She creates her own rule of her imagination” (Nayebpour, 2017, p. 116). This makes her believe that she is part of a community. Her participation in the “play” makes her feel meaningful: “Oh, how fascinating it was! How she enjoys it! How she loved sitting there, watching it all! It was like a play. It was exactly like a play.” (Mansfield, n.d., p. 206).

Also, she is characterized as a heroine who lives independently and relies on herself. It is implied that Miss Brill is a teacher. However, Miss Brill makes us think she looks happy, even though she feels lonely (Wilany, 2015). “There is a faint of hysteria about Miss Brill: the exaggerated liveliness of her thoughts and speech contrasts with her dead appearance” (Murray, 1990, p. 60).

Even though Miss Brill sees many people around her age, she rejects them. Because she sees herself in them. This is reflected in her own later rejection by the young. Miss Brill’s rejection of old people because they have nothing interesting to offer her, she thinks they have “something funny” (Murray, 1990, p. 61). “...there was something funny about nearly all of them. They were odd, silent, nearly all old, and from the way they stared they looked as though they’d just come from little dark rooms or even - even cupboards!” (Mansfield, n.d., p. 205).

By this moment in the story, Miss Brill thinks “she has a place in the community of the Jardins (a symbol of life itself) but others disagree” (Murray, 1990, p. 62). But an encounter with a young couple changes it all: “They were beautifully dressed; they were in love. The hero and

the heroine...” (Mansfield, n.d., p. 207). As it was mentioned before, she was not sympathetic with old people in the park, this young couple is intolerant of her.

“But why? Because of that stupid old thing at the end there? asked the boy. ‘Why does she come here at all- who wants her? why doesn’t she keep her silly old mug at home?’ ‘It’s her fu-fur which is so funny,’ giggled the girl. ‘It’s exactly like a fried whiting’” (Mansfield, n.d., p. 207).

This conversation changes it all for Miss Brill. “But at the end of the afternoon, Miss Brill is as dead as any of the aged people on the benches...” (Murray, 1990, p. 63). The young couple’s conversation is very disrupting for Miss Brill mental’s state. This has a ‘painful impact’ on her.

The boy’s three-word insult-stupid old thing- questions her perception about herself. It has never crossed her mind to look at herself as an old woman, let alone as a stupid, and as a thing. Likewise, the girl’s statement questions her very valuable asset- her fur. She laughs at Miss Brill’s fur, and humiliates her (Nayebpour, 2017, p. 118).

For the first time in the story, Miss Brill’s narrative has changed. The reader can feel her sadness and heartbreak, and it is time to face her reality. “She herself belongs to a dark room which is like a cupboard. Besides that, she finds her fur not worthy of any attention.” (Nayebpour, 2017, p. 118).

"Miss Brill" portrays the harsh reality that frequently accompanies loneliness as well as the fragile and tragic nature of self-perception. Katherine Mansfield adeptly depicts the inner world of Miss Brill, a woman who creates a fantastical life to counteract her loneliness. Miss Brill imagines herself as a part of a larger community and has a fleeting sense of significance through her Sunday practice of people-watching. She is forced to face the upsetting reality of her

marginalization when a young couple's hurtful comments break her delusion. Mansfield sensitively captures the emotional fragility of women like Miss Brill, negotiating a society that marginalizes the elderly and alone, as her internal monologue changes from bright to melancholy. This profound moment of realization reflects the broader themes of alienation and the harsh judgment society places on women, particularly those who do not conform to traditional roles or expectations.

5.1.3 Symbolism

There are two main objects that are mentioned in the story: the fur and the band. Both are mentioned and related to the main character of the story, Miss Brill.

The fur can be interpreted as something she cherishes, something she takes care of. Miss Brill takes care of the fur just like a loved one, careful and nice.

...Miss Brill put up her hand and touched her fur. Dear little thing! It was nice to feel it again. She had taken out of his box that afternoon, shaken out the moth-powder, given it a good brush, and rubbed the life back into the dim little eyes (Mansfield, n.d., p. 204).

The fur seems to be the only interaction she has besides her students. Miss Brill only talks to the fur or has an inner self dialogue, but never communicates to the other people from the Jardin Publiques. She wants someone to share things with. "She addresses the fur, and fantasizes about the life of "the little rouge" as she endows the beloved inanimate object with vitality and warmth" (Cooper, 2008, p. 110). According to Cooper (2008), "her decision to wear the fur was because of a 'love-object in a neurotic relationship' not because of the weather (p. 110). "The air was motionless, but when you opened your mouth there was a faint chill, like a chill from a glass of iced water before you sip..." (Mansfield, n.d., p. 204). The fur is also described as being like a

faded star, which symbolizes Miss Brill's fading hope for companionship. It is a reminder of her loneliness and her longing for companionship.

The fur represents her, when the boy from the young couple refers to her as a 'stupid old thing' and the girl compares her fur to a "dried whiting".

The fur, a treasure kept for special occasions, is the outer skin of a long dead animal, preserved in moth-powder, and now the worse for wear; Miss Brill is very like her fur, a fact noticed by the young couple later (Murray, 1990, p. 61).

It has such an impact on her, she even forgot her Sunday treat at the bakery. Miss Brill hurries home, puts the fur back in its box. Even Though she did not accept and lived in her fantasy world, Miss Brill realizes her loneliness. Overall, the fur is a symbol of Miss Brill's loneliness, her longing for companionship, her desire to be noticed and appreciated. "It is the loneliness of human existence. Miss Brill has nothing to love, or to love her" (Murray, 1990, p. 63).

The band gives Miss Brill a cheerful atmosphere. "... the band sounded louder and gayer. That was because the season had begun" (Mansfield, n.d., p. 204). The songs the band are playing represent her feelings throughout her time in the park. "Now there came a little 'flutey' bit -very pretty! -a little chain of bright drops. she was sure it would be repeated. It was; she lifted her head and smiled" (Mansfield, n.d., p. 204). The band symbolizes the joy and happiness that Miss Brill feels when she is in the park.

Miss Brill enjoys the band, in addition the band plays in sympathy with the feelings of not only Miss Brill but also the people in the park. At one moment, Miss Brill sees a gentleman and a lady wearing an ermine toque. The lady is very pleased to see the gentleman, however the

gentleman is not. He rebuffs her. The gentleman rejecting her blows smoke in her face. "...even while she was still talking and laughing, flicked the match away and walked on" (Mansfield, n.d., p. 206). Even though the ermine toque is hiding her hurt, 'she smiled more brightly than ever'(p. 206). The band seems to notice all of these scenes. They play in sympathy with the feelings of the ermine toque (Cooper, 2008). "But even the band seemed to know what she was feeling and played more softly, played tenderly, and the drumbeat. 'The Brute! The Brute!' over and over" (Mansfield, n.d., p. 206). The band is the connection that Miss Brill feels with the other people in the park. She is able to observe the people around her and feel a sense of belonging, even if she is not actually part of the group: "Her awareness of the activities of the park is acute and filled with the dubious joys that come from being a spectator who believes that watching the passing is 'like a play'" (Cooper, 2008, p. 113).

Miss Brill believes that she and all the people in the park are on a stage and everyone is part of a play. As Miss Brill is realizing that she is one of the performers, the band starts to play.

...and what they played was warm, sunny, yet there was a faint chill- a something what was it? - not sadness-no, not sadness- a something that made you want to sing. The tune lifted and lifted, the light shone; and it seemed to Miss Brill that in another moment all of the them, all the whole company would begin singing (Mansfield, n.d., p. 207).

For Miss Brill the band is a reminder that she is not alone, that she is part of something. She is able to find a sense of belonging in the park, therefore the music of the band helps her to feel connected to the people around her.

In conclusion, Mansfield's masterful use of symbolism in "Miss Brill" serves to illuminate the protagonist's inner world and her complex relationship with her surroundings. The

fur, a central symbol in the story, embodies Miss Brill's loneliness, her yearning for companionship, and her fading hopes. It acts as both a comfort and a painful reminder of her isolation. The band, on the other hand, symbolizes the vitality of the park and the connection Miss Brill seeks with the world around her. Its music mirrors the emotional landscape of the characters, providing a soundtrack to their silent dramas. Through these symbols, Mansfield crafts a poignant portrait of a woman struggling to find her place in a world that seems to have little room for her. The interplay between the fur and the band highlights the tension between Miss Brill's internal fantasy world and the harsh realities of her external environment, ultimately revealing the fragility of her carefully constructed illusions. Mansfield's nuanced symbolism thus serves not only to enrich the narrative but also to provide profound insights into the human condition, particularly the universal experiences of loneliness and the search for belonging.

5.1.4 Setting

The setting of Katherine's Mansfield "Miss Brill" is centered in two places, The Jardin Publiques and her room. This setting is significant in reflecting the isolation and loneliness single middle-aged women have to face during the time the story was written.

The Jardins Publiques is a central setting in the story. The gardens are a place of activity and social interaction on Sunday afternoons, with people coming and going, playing music, and enjoying the warm weather. "Miss Brill is a regular patron at the Jardins; she is attracted to it by the sheer vitality of the scene" (Murray, 1990, p. 60). Miss Brill spends her Sundays sitting in the park and observing the other people who come and go. The park is described as a lively place, filled with the sounds of laughter, music, and chatter.

Little children ran among them, swooping and laughing; little boys with big white silk bows under their chins, little girls, little French dolls, dressed up in velvet and lace. and sometimes a tiny staggerer came suddenly rocking into the open from under the trees, stopped, stared, as suddenly sat down ‘flop’, until its high stepping mother, like a young hen, rushed scolding to its rescue. Other people sat on the benches and green chairs, but they were nearly always the same, Sunday after Sunday... (Mansfield, n.d., p. 205).

The Jardin Publiques also serves as a contrast to Miss Brill’s own solitary existence. While the garden is a place of activity and social interaction, Miss Brill is an outsider, a spectator to the life of the park rather than a participant. “She may think she has a place in the community of the Jardins (a symbol for life itself) but others disagree” (Murray, 1990, p. 62).

According to Copper (2008), Miss Brill is remarkably emotionally dependent on her routine of going to the park every Sunday. These are the emotional effects of loneliness and isolation by society. “The park bench becomes the vantage point from which she views the outside world as it passes in front of her, but does not communicate with her” (Cooper, 2008, p. 110).

The setting of Miss Brill’s room is described as small and cramped, and serves as a stark contrast to the lively atmosphere of the park. The cupboard room symbolizes Miss Brill’s own small, solitary existence and serves to highlight her loneliness and isolation in the larger world. “Miss Brill’s box-like room is a confining cupboard or coffin: there are no windows from which to view the world, if she had the proper vision to see” (Murray, 1990, p. 63). Her apartment is a place of refuge for her, a place where she can escape the loneliness of her everyday life, but it also serves to emphasize her loneliness and isolation in the larger world. “...there was something

funny about nearly all of them. They were odd, silent, nearly all old, and from the way they stared they looked as though they'd just come from dark little rooms or even-even cupboards!" (Mansfield, n.d., p. 205).

Miss Brill is unaware that she herself looks odd and comes from a cupboard room. Her cupboard room is a reminder of her lack of freedom and her inability to escape her current situation. The room is a physical manifestation of her loneliness and her longing for something more.

5.1.5 Application of Feminist Concepts

Katherine Mansfield's "Miss Brill" presents rich opportunities for feminist literary analysis, particularly through themes of alienation, isolation, identity, and the impact of societal expectations on women. Applying feminist concepts deepens our understanding of how Mansfield critiques the societal norms that dictate women's worth. Considering gender roles and expectations, Miss Brill embodies the struggles of female identity in a world that often sidelines older women in a patriarchal society.

Moreover, within gender roles, this analysis reveals that there is an invisibility of women illustrated by Miss Brill's realization of her own insignificance and the cruelty of others towards her. It can be argued that this invisibility often stems from a patriarchal society that values women primarily for their looks and youth. It also illustrates women's objectification, disempowerment, and loneliness.

Toril Moi (2005) discusses alienation by examining how societal norms and structures can isolate women from their identities and experiences. "To be alienated is to identify with the Other's image of what a woman is by attempting to freeze one's subjectivity into the desired

picture, thus denying freedom by turning existence into essence” (p,216). In addition, Moi (2005) argues that this alienation is deeply rooted in cultural narratives that diminish women’s agency. Thus, alienation becomes a critical lens through which to understand the complexities of female identity, as women navigate their roles within a society that often marginalizes them.

The story illustrates a female perspective of the world as well as it offers examples of women’s resilience. Mansfield, as a female writer, provides a unique perspective on the female experience in a patriarchal society. The author uses Miss Brill’s observations of others in the park as a way to challenge the traditional male gaze in literature and offer a female perspective on the world. Moreover, considering its narrative perspective, the story is told from a limited third-person point of view, mainly from Miss Brill’s perspective. This narrative choice allows readers to empathize with her experiences and see the world through her eyes, emphasizing the importance of women’s voices and perspectives in literature. Relatedly, there are also examples of feminist resilience. In this case, Miss Brill’s decision to put her fur stole away in a box at the end of the story can be interpreted as a form of feminist resilience. She may be rejecting the societal expectations and judgments that have marginalized her and deciding to keep her inner world and identity private.

Murray (1990) explores the complex lives of women in Mansfield’s stories, highlighting how characters like Miss Brill navigate societal expectations and personal desires. This duality is evident in Miss Brill’s participation in Sunday park visits, which can be interpreted as both a conformity to social norms and a personal ritual of self-expression. The invisibility and objectification of women, particularly older women, in Mansfield’s works reflect broader societal issues of the time. In the story, Miss Brill is objectified by the young couple who mock her when she overhears their comments about her fur stole.

.. ‘But why? Because of that stupid old thing at the end there?’ asked the boy. ‘Why does she come here at all? - who wants her? Why doesn’t she keep her silly old mug at home?’ ‘It’s her fu-fur which is so funny,’ giggled the girl. ‘It’s exactly like a fried whiting’ (Mansfield, n.d., p. 207).

This illustrates the objectification of women, especially older women in society. Such objectification can have profound effects, leading women, especially those of advanced age, to feel disempowered and devalued based on superficial judgments regarding their appearance and age. This societal tendency to equate worth with youth and beauty further exacerbates feelings of inadequacy and invisibility among older women, reinforcing harmful stereotypes that diminish their contributions and experiences.

As Cooper (2008) argues, Mansfield’s narratives often serve as a platform for exploring authentic female selves within restrictive social contexts. The author’s use of a limited third-person perspective in "Miss Brill" allows readers to empathize with the protagonist’s experiences, challenging the traditional male gaze in literature and offering a nuanced view of women’s inner lives and struggles against societal expectations.

Moi’s (2005) examination of sex, gender, and the body provides a framework for understanding the complexities of female identity in Mansfield’s stories. Miss Brill’s experience of isolation and her subsequent resilience can be seen as a reflection of the broader struggles faced by women in navigating their place in society. Cooper (2008) further emphasizes how Mansfield’s characters often embody a search for authentic selves within societal constraints. This is evident in Miss Brill’s decision to put away her fur stole, which can be interpreted as an act of self-preservation and resistance against societal judgments. Murray’s (1990) analysis of

the double lives led by women in Mansfield's stories resonates with Miss Brill's public persona and private inner world, illustrating the multifaceted nature of female experiences in early 20th-century society and the subtle ways in which women assert their identities within restrictive social norms.

Judith Butler's (1990) theory of gender performativity offers a delicate view of the protagonist's identity in light of societal expectations of femininity. Miss Brill develops her sense of self through a series of carefully controlled acts, and she enjoys her job as an observer in the park. She imagines herself as an important part of the social scene, dressed in her fur coat and enjoying the illusion of connection with the other parkgoers. Her performance emphasizes Butler's claim that gender is not an innate quality but rather an act influenced by social standards. Miss Brill's personality is shaped by her contacts with others, and she takes satisfaction from her imagined involvement in their lives. However, her joy is ultimately a façade that masks deeper feelings of isolation and longing for authentic connection. Butler's concept of performativity illuminates how Miss Brill's carefully maintained self-image is contingent on societal validation, which is abruptly stripped away by the couple's harsh judgment. The shattering of her illusion forces her to confront the dissonance between her internal self and the external perceptions imposed by society. Through this lens, Mansfield's portrayal of Miss Brill becomes a poignant commentary on the constraints placed on women, illustrating how the pressure to perform femininity can lead to profound emotional turmoil when those performances are challenged or rejected.

In conclusion, through the experiences of "Miss Brill", Mansfield critiques the societal norms that dictate women's worth, particularly emphasizing the invisibility and objectification that older women face in a patriarchal society. The narrative illustrates how these societal

pressures can lead to feelings of disempowerment and loneliness, aligning with Toril Moi's insights on alienation as a mechanism that confines women to prescribed roles and diminishes their agency. In addition, Mansfield not only portrays the struggles of women like Miss Brill but also hints at their resilience, particularly through her protagonist's quiet act of putting away her fur stole, a symbol of rejection against societal judgments. This complexity of female identity, coupled with the dualities of conformity and self-expression, underscores the nuanced portrayal of women navigating their roles within a restrictive society.

5.2 Bliss

5.2.1 Plot Summary

Bertha is a thirty-year-old married woman that lives a wealthy and happy life. She and her husband have money, a beautiful house and a baby girl. This short story takes place at Bertha and Harry's house, the house has all kinds of luxurious items such as paintings, different rooms and a garden.

The garden is very important to the housewife. There is her beautiful pear tree. The story begins with Bertha Young describing her feeling of bliss for the dinner and guests she's planning to have that night. For Bertha there is one special guest to which she feels attracted to, Miss Fulton. Everything Bertha does is to please her husband and also the beautiful Miss Fulton. "For some strange reason Bertha liked this, and almost admired it in him very much." ... "When he looked up at her and said: *"Bertha, this is a very admirable soufflée!"* she almost could have wept with child-like pleasure" (Mansfield, n.d., p. 151). Although it is more probable that Bertha enjoys to please Miss Fulton rather than her husband.

Although Bertha loves her little baby girl, she does not spend enough time with her, not as she would like to do so: “*Why have a baby If It has to be kept not in a case like a rare, rare fiddle-but in another woman’s arms?*” (Mansfield, n.d., p. 145). Bertha cannot understand why she is not in charge of her baby, why she has to have a nanny do absolutely everything that may help her have a real mother daughter bond. However, Bertha does not change everything set by society aggressively, she only makes minor changes like defying the nanny when giving dinner to her little B.

Finally, Katherine Mansfield’s “Bliss” provides a comprehensive picture of Bertha Young’s inner world, bringing to light every detail of her feelings and aspirations. Bertha appears to have it all—affluence, a loving family, and a stunning home—but her happiness is ultimately false and transient. Her attraction to Miss Fulton is a sign of a deeper, unsaid desire that goes beyond her traditional duties as a mother and a wife. The feelings of alienation Bertha feels from her child highlights the conflict that exists between what society expects of women and what they want for themselves. Mansfield gently criticizes the restrictions imposed on women in early 20th-century society via Bertha’s voyage, showing how these constraints are frequently imposed by external appearances and household responsibilities.

5.2.2 Description of Women’s Characters

Bertha Young is a confused woman. She is bored of her amazing life and tries to get more adrenaline by flirting with another woman. Bertha does not have to worry about money or being a stay home mother, she is a privileged woman that loves her baby daughter and husband. Although she has got everything and her life is what could be called easy, it frustrates her not being able to raise her baby and spend more time with her. “*How absurd it was. Why have a baby*

If It has to be kept not in a case like a rare, rare fiddle-but in another woman's arms?"

(Mansfield, n.d., p. 145).

However, that is what is expected from a wife like her, having a babysitter and just directing the orchestra of being a well married woman with all the luxury one can imagine.

"They didn't have to worry about money" (Mansfield, n.d., p. 147).

Miss Fulton is a clever woman. She pretends to be interested in Bertha, while in fact she is all part of a sadistic game. The fact of being the woman Bertha's husband is actually in love with may give her a sense of power over Bertha, which is misunderstood by the latter. Although Pearl Fulton is sharp, Bertha still feels something intriguing about her, all of this Bertha loves, and shows her disapproval towards criticism against Miss Fulton. "Harry said *"No."* Voted her *dullish*, and *"cold like all blond women, with a touch, perhaps, of anaemia of the brain."* But Bertha wouldn't agree with him; not yet, at any rate" (Mansfield, n.d., p. 146).

Mrs. Norman Knight is comfortable with her life and will not let anyone tell her how to live her life. She adores her monkeys and has an unconventional way of dialogue with her husband. She is what Mansfield ironically describes as a modern woman. (p. 146) Modern because she does not have kids but treats her pets as if they were her offspring.

On the other hand, Little B's nanny is a courageous woman. Even though she works for Bertha Young, she makes it clear that she knows best when raising a baby. It is like she enjoys showing off her closeness with the baby girl.

Very offended, Nanny handed her over *"Now, don't excite her after her supper.*

You know you do, M'm. And I have such a time with her after!" ... "You're wanted on the

telephone," said Nanny, coming back in triumph and seizing her Little B" (Mansfield, n.d., p. 146).

5.2.3 Symbolism

There are two main objects that are mentioned in the story, the pear tree and the rare fiddle. Both are mentioned and related to the main character of the story, Bertha Young. Although it is not an object, the baby also adds symbolism to this story. The character of the governess also provides symbolism and contrast with the main character, Bertha.

The pear tree could be interpreted as a woman's body. A tree that gives beautiful and delicious fruit according to the season. Just as women give birth, the pear tree produces fruit. The tree can be seen as something forbidden like in the bible (Chantal, 1999). Why does Bertha love that tree? How does the image of a tree help to increase the feeling of Bliss? The reader may ask all these questions and then understand that the tree has the same name as the woman Bertha likes the most, Miss Pearl Fulton. Bertha also seems to feel attracted to her husband for the first time and is seen as she was not supposed to feel that way. Mansfield is clearly stating that at that time women were not having sexual relationships for pleasure rather than for mere reproductive purposes.

However, the character of Bertha seems to be in love with her husband and dependent on him. The pear tree is what reminds her of Miss Pearl. This is also a connection to the author's life who was supposed to have a lesbian relationship with her friend Ida: "she met Ida Baker, the girl who acted as the "wife," in her life." (Cooper, 2008, p. 11).

The rare fiddle is also compared to the body of a woman. Bertha questions why a woman's body has to be covered with clothes that are no longer used. "*Why be given a body if you have to keep it shut up in a case like a rare, rare fiddle?*" (Mansfield, n.d., p. 143).

Bertha's relationship with her baby has a deep symbolism of the author's life. According to her biography (Alpers, 1980), Mansfield's mother, Annie Beauchamp did not raise her and did not have a bond with her. In other words, little B is portrayed as Katherine Mansfield in her childhood. As Keith Gregor (1997) states in the article "*Blissful Thinking: Katherine Mansfield and the En-gendering of Modernist Fiction*", Mansfield portrays her main character as a person totally confused by her emotion and unable to communicate what she feels due to societal limitations (p. 72).

Warmth and affection can be seen in Bertha's interactions with her child, emphasizing her role as a devoted mother. She does, however, present parenthood with a hint of irony. Although she loves her child and has a strong bond with it, her times of extreme happiness appear unrelated to her role as a mother, raising the possibility of a contradiction between her own emotional experiences and society's expectations of motherhood (Gregor, 1997).

The nanny's character and interaction with Bertha also have some symbolism with the author's life. The governess is a strict woman that helps Bertha with the development of little B. Bertha seems to rely a lot on the well-being of her baby with the nurse. The nurse could be seen as how Katherine was expected to be by her mother, a woman who followed the rules and made sure others actually comply with that. However, Bertha can be seen as how Mansfield expected her mother to be, caring, loving and understanding. Mansfield's description of the nurse can also be displayed as a protest towards the expectation from women in 1920's by the society.

Ultimately, Nurse's character contributes to the thematic exploration of social roles and relationships in "Bliss" (Kaplan, 1991).

Mansfield effectively conveys the complicated emotional territory of her female protagonist in this emotional section. Vivid sensory elements such as the bend of Little B's neck and the transparency of her toes convey an emotional love and admiration for her that perfectly captures the essence of personal moments and the depth of female relationships. The larger themes of women's experiences, emotional complexity, and the challenge of expressing oneself completely in a culture that frequently silences women's voices are all captured in this moment. The main character's intense happiness and her incapacity to communicate or act on it appropriately reflect larger societal constraints on women's autonomy and self-expression in this era. Readers are encouraged to consider the intricacies of feminine identity, the depth of women's inner lives, and the various ways in which women negotiate and defy society expectations by Mansfield's nuanced portrayal. Thus, this section functions as a miniature version of Mansfield's larger examination into the emotional reality and actual experiences of women.

5.2.4 Setting

The setting of Katherine Mansfield's "Bliss" is centered around the suburban home of the protagonist, Bertha Young. This setting is significant in reflecting the social expectations placed on women during the time period in which the story was written. Bertha's home is a representation of the traditional gender roles that women were expected to fulfill, with a focus on domesticity, homemaking, and childcare.

The suburban setting and the focus on the home also reflect the social expectations for women to conform to the traditional role of wife and mother. Bertha's husband, Harry, is depicted as a successful businessman who is always away from home, leaving Bertha to tend to the house and care for their young daughter. This reinforces the idea that women were expected to stay at home, while men went out into the world to work and provide for their families.

"Really-really-she had everything. She was young. Harry and she were as much in love as ever, and they got on together splendidly and were really good pals. She had an adorable baby" (Mansfield, n.d., p.147).

The setting of Bertha's home also serves to highlight the limitations placed on women's lives, both physically and socially. Bertha is trapped in her domestic role, and her longing for something more reflects the restrictions placed on women during this time period. Through the setting of Bertha's home, Mansfield explores the themes of gender roles and social expectations, and the ways in which these expectations limit the lives of women. The setting serves to reflect the challenges faced by women in a male-dominated society and highlights the need for women to break free from these limiting social expectations.

She went into the drawing-room and lighted the fire; then, picking up the cushions, one by one, that Mary had disposed so carefully, she threw them back on to the chairs and the couches. That made all the difference; the room came alive at once (Mansfield, n.d., p. 147).

The garden is also an important part of the setting. Bertha spends a lot of time in the garden, and it is a place of solace and beauty for her. The garden is described as being "full of sunshine and shadows and the murmur of bees," (Mansfield, n.d., p. 147) and it is a place where

Bertha can escape from the pressures of her life. The garden is a symbol of Bertha's inner peace and contentment, and it serves as a contrast to the rest of her life. "How strong the jonquils smelled in the warm room. Too strong? Oh, no. And yet, as though overcome, she flung down on a couch and pressed her hands to her eyes. "I'm too happy-too happy!" she murmured" (Mansfield, n.d., p. 147).

As it was previously mentioned, in the garden, Bertha comes into a moment of liberty and passion. The garden wakes up in her not only feelings of joy but also, attraction towards her husband and her friend Miss Fulton. According to Judith Neeman (1986), this is a reflection of Bertha and her forbidden thoughts related to a more biblical point of view.

5.2.5 Application of Feminist Concepts

Katherine Mansfield's "Bliss" offers a wide range for feminist literary analysis, exploring themes of gender roles, identity and objectification, through the experiences of its main character, Bertha Young. Applying feminist concepts from Toril Moi and Elaine Showalter allows for a fine examination of how Mansfield critiques and navigates the complexities of early 20th-century womanhood. Moi's (2005) understanding of how gender and sexuality are constructed offers an angle through which she can see Bertha's interpersonal relationships and inner struggles. Gender, according to Moi (2005), "is a cultural and social construct that shapes human identities and behaviors in addition to being a biological fact" (p, 24). This complex dynamic is exemplified in "Bliss," as Bertha navigates her duties as a wife, mother, and socialite under the constraints of a patriarchal society.

Elaine Showalter's (1985) concept of the feminist critique of literature is used as a tool for examining women's roles and representations in literature. In "Bliss," Mansfield emphasizes

the conflicts between individual aspirations and social standards by portraying Bertha Young's emotional and psychological journey over the course of an apparently perfect afternoon. As Mansfield's critique of women's limited alternatives in a world controlled by males, Bertha's brief feeling of independence and subsequent disillusionment at the end of the narrative reflect feminist worries about the limitations of traditional gender roles. Taking Showalter's (1985) feminist critique about the "woman as a reader", it can be concluded that Mansfield is directly making fun of what women read about at that time and also lived. Bliss is a clear example in which women had to worry about hosting the best dinner parties, a luxurious house and kids, the latter's responsibility was shared not with the husband but with a governess.

Mansfield's use of setting in "Bliss" is crucial to understanding feminist themes within the story. The domestic space, meticulously described and adorned, symbolizes Bertha's adherence to societal expectations of femininity and domestic bliss. Moi (2002) claims that domestic environments commonly represent women's places of control and imprisonment in literature, reflecting society's larger patriarchal structures. The image of Bertha's home and the garden party she throws in Katherine Mansfield's work discreetly conveys her psychological distress and her desire for greater significance and connection beyond the surface aspects of her life. These environments represent Mansfield's criticism of gendered limitations and societal expectations by shaping Bertha's experiences as well as serving as triggers for her introspective insights and existential reflection.

In addition, Mansfield's depiction of female subjectivity in "Bliss" is consistent with Toril Moi's investigation into the construction and disagreement of women's identities in patriarchal settings. feminist literary theory, according to Moi (2005), aims to identify and evaluate the ways in which literature contributes to the cultural construction of gender norms and ideologies. In

"Bliss," Mansfield effectively connects Bertha's outward deeds and interior thoughts, illuminating the complexities and inconsistencies present in her search for happiness and pleasure. Bertha's interactions with Pearl Fulton, a lady she finds seductive and enigmatic, upend her ideas about who she is and where she fits into society. This highlights Mansfield's subversion of conventional gender norms and expectations.

Moreover, Mansfield's narrative technique in "Bliss" aligns with Showalter's notion of women's literature as a space for exploring alternative narratives and perspectives. Showalter (1985) argues that feminist literary criticism aims to amplify women's voices and experiences within a literary tradition dominated by male authors and perspectives. In "Bliss," Mansfield employs a stream-of-consciousness technique to delve into Bertha's interiority, allowing readers to empathize with her desires, fears, and uncertainties. This narrative strategy not only enhances the complexity of Bertha's character but also invites readers to reconsider conventional narratives about women's lives and choices.

Furthermore, according to Judith Butler's (1988) theory of gender performativity, Bertha embodies the complexities of happiness and joy within her domestic life while simultaneously carrying a weight of suppressed desires. In the story, she meticulously constructs her identity as the idealized homemaker, finding fulfillment in her beautiful garden, her loving husband, and her vibrant social life. This performance of domestic bliss is a reflection of societal expectations that dictate how women should express their happiness—through nurturing, beauty, and social engagement. Bertha engages in this performance with enthusiasm, hosting gatherings and curating an image of contentment. Yet, beneath this veneer of joy lies an unacknowledged yearning for deeper emotional connection and personal fulfillment, suggesting that her happiness

may be more performative than authentic. This internal conflict highlights Butler's assertion that gender identities are not inherent but rather shaped by societal norms and expectations.

As the narrative unfolds, Bertha's performance becomes increasingly fraught with irony. She follows the social scripts imposed upon women, portraying an idyllic life filled with love and companionship. However, her unexamined assumptions about her marriage and happiness prevent her from recognizing the emotional distance that exists between her and her husband, Harry. This disconnect underscores Butler's idea that identities are fluid and subject to disruption; Bertha's blissful perception begins to unravel when confronted with the harsh realities of her relationship. The climactic moment of revelation—Harry's betrayal—serves as a brutal awakening, shattering her constructed identity and exposing the fragility of her performance. In that instant, Bertha's suppressed wants are laid bare, revealing the profound isolation she had masked beneath her cheerful façade. Through Butler's lens, Bertha's journey becomes an effective criticism of the societal pressures that dictate women's roles, illuminating the often-hidden struggles between performance, identity, and the pursuit of genuine fulfillment.

To sum up, Katherine Mansfield's "Bliss" is a fascinating work for feminist literary study since it makes use of theme searches and narrative techniques that align with the ideas of gender, identity, and representation set up by Elaine Showalter and Toril Moi. Mansfield offers a complex portrayal of female subjectivity within a patriarchal society by challenging traditional gender roles and societal expectations through Bertha Young's journey of self-discovery and disillusionment. The short story "Bliss" is a substantial contribution to feminist debate in literature because of its rich symbolism, complex characterizations, and narrative details that encourage readers to interact critically with topics of gender, identity, and societal limits.

Chapter VI

6. Limitations and Recommendations of the Study

6.1 Expanding the Scope of Analysis

6.1.1 Incorporating Intersectional Feminism

While this study applies a feminist approach to analyze Mansfield's works, it is crucial to acknowledge that feminism is not a monolithic concept. Incorporating an intersectional feminist perspective, as developed by scholars like Kimberlé Crenshaw, could provide a more comprehensive analysis of women's experiences (Moi, 2002). This approach would consider how factors such as race, class, and sexuality intersect with gender to shape women's social roles.

Examining the works of Black feminist writers alongside Mansfield's stories could illuminate the diverse experiences of women across racial and cultural lines. For instance:

1. Zora Neale Hurston's "*Their Eyes Were Watching God*" (1937) offers insights into the intersection of race, gender, and class in the American South.

2. Toni Morrison's "*The Bluest Eye*" (1970) explores the impact of internalized racism on Black women's self-perception and social roles.
3. Audre Lorde's essays in "*Sister Outsider*" (1984) provide a theoretical framework for understanding the interconnected nature of various forms of oppression.
4. Bell Hooks' "*Ain't I a Woman? Black Women and Feminism*" (1981) offers a critical examination of how racism and sexism have shaped Black women's experiences throughout history.

This comparative analysis could reveal how different forms of oppression intersect and influence women's lived experiences and literary representations, providing a more nuanced understanding of feminist issues across diverse contexts.

6.1.2 Diverse Perspectives in Feminist Literature

To enrich the analysis and provide a more comprehensive view of women's experiences in literature, it is recommended to incorporate works from a diverse range of feminist writers. This approach would allow for a more nuanced understanding of how different cultural, racial, and socioeconomic backgrounds shape feminist narratives and portrayals of women's social roles.

Consider including analyses of works by the following authors:

1. Maya Angelou: Her autobiographical work "*I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*" (1969) offers powerful insights into the experiences of Black women in America, addressing themes of racism, trauma, and resilience.

2. Octavia Butler: Her science fiction novel "*Kindred*" (1979) provides a unique perspective on the legacy of slavery and its impact on Black women's identities and relationships.
3. Ntozake Shange: The choreopoem "*For Colored Girls Who Have Considered Suicide / When the Rainbow Is Enuf*" (1976) explores the experiences of Black women through a combination of poetry, music, and dance.
4. Lorraine Hansberry: Her play "*A Raisin in the Sun*" (1959) examines the intersections of race, class, and gender in the context of the American Dream.

By comparing these works with Mansfield's stories, the study could explore how different authors address common themes such as identity, agency, and societal expectations across various cultural contexts. This comparative approach would highlight both the universality of certain feminist concerns and the specificity of experiences shaped by intersecting factors such as race, class, and cultural background.

Furthermore, analyzing these diverse perspectives could help identify evolving trends in feminist literature and trace the development of feminist thought over time. This broader scope would provide a richer context for understanding Mansfield's contributions to feminist literature and her place within the larger tapestry of women's writing.

Chapter VII

7. Conclusion

The short stories "Miss Brill" and "Bliss" by Katherine Mansfield provide a rich tapestry that can be used to examine the social role of women in the 1920s. Feminist analysis of these works demonstrates the complicated manners in which women negotiated the limitations placed upon them throughout this historical period, in addition to the restrictions itself. Both short stories "Miss Brill" and "Bliss," which reflect the period's wider societal expectations and gender standards, powerfully capture the intense loneliness and despair felt by women in the 1920s. Mansfield's characters struggle with their sense of identity and self-worth within a rigid societal structure that frequently excludes and dismisses them. Both characters are seen in periods of great introspection and sensitivity.

In the narrative of the same name, Miss Brill represents the struggle that women go through in trying to find significance and connection in their lives, only to find themselves cut off from the very society they so desperately want to be a part of. Her weekly routine of watching the world from her park bench discloses an unconscious desire for approval and acceptance, which is finally dashed by an unkind realization. Because Miss Brill's identity is so closely connected with her sense of how others see her, this story emphasizes the emotional and psychological effects of societal judgment on women's perceptions of themselves.

In a comparable manner Mansfield addresses the subject of self-delusion and the damage that results from leading an illusion-based life as opposed to a reality-based one in "Bliss." Bertha Young, the main character, illustrates the ideal of the ideal mother and wife, but her blissful existence is revealed to be an elaborate façade. The surprise of her husband's treachery acts as a potent critique of the flimsy social conventions and the exaggerated expectations put on women. Mansfield criticizes the restrictions placed on women's lives and the frequently disastrous results of living inside these boundaries through Bertha's terrible awakening.

Feminist theory provides light on Mansfield's criticism of the patriarchal systems that limit and dictate women's positions in these stories. Women in the 1920s were frequently defined in relation to males, with their identities constructed by their responsibilities as spouses and mothers rather than as independent individuals in accordance with Simone de Beauvoir's definition of the "Other" in "The Second Sex" (Beauvoir, Borde & Malovany-Chevallier). Mansfield's characters fight against these roles in their attempts to find a perspective on self that transcends further what is required of them by society.

Aihong Ren and Sylvia Berkman's scholarly examinations support the idea that Mansfield's writings offer a complex analysis of women's lives in the early 20th century (Ren & Berkman). While Berkman's critical analysis provides an understanding of the ways Mansfield's literature disrupts conventional gender norms, Ren's studying of the female characters in Mansfield's writings demonstrates the internal and external difficulties faced by these women.

Mansfield's writings are part of a larger literary movement in the 20th century that saw women authors attempt to recover stories that had long been controlled by male viewpoints. By emphasizing women's lived experiences, Mansfield challenges the patriarchal presumptions that

had dominated literary discourse and provides a more complex and sympathetic interpretation of the societal difficulties that women in the 1920s encountered.

7.1 What is the social role of women in Katherine Mansfield's short stories *Bliss* and *Miss Brill*?

In both stories, the main characters follow all the social norms imposed to them. Miss Brill, a single woman who works as a teacher, might be obedient to what society expects from her, however, the character clearly suffers from isolation. In "Bliss", Bertha is the woman married to a man who provides for her and her baby. Bertha is what in the 1920's was a sign of success for her parents, she had a house, a husband, a kid and a social life.

Miss Brill, a solitary middle-aged woman, finds joy in her weekly Sunday visits to the park, where she observes passersby from her preferred bench. As Nayeypour (2017) notes, "This allows her to appreciate and criticize people for what they say and how they act. Sometimes she even sympathizes with the other people in the park" (p,111). She appears to attempt to decipher others' thoughts and emotions, intently listening to nearby conversations. Mansfield writes, "Miss Brill always looked forward to the conversation. She had been quite an expert, she thought at listening as though she didn't listen, at sitting in other people's lives just for a minute while they talked round her" (p,205). This behavior suggests that Miss Brill constructs her own version of reality, distinct from the actual world around her. As Nayeypour (2017) observes, "she creates her own version of reality, or her mental reality, which is disconnected from the real reality" (p, 11).

Bertha Young is a woman experiencing inner turmoil. Despite her seemingly perfect life, she feels unfulfilled and seeks excitement through a flirtation with another woman. As a wealthy

individual, Bertha is free from financial concerns and the demands of full-time motherhood. While she adores her infant daughter and husband, she finds herself frustrated by her limited role in childcare. Her privileged lifestyle, which many would consider ideal, leaves her feeling conflicted. Bertha questions the logic of having a child only to have it primarily cared for by someone else, likening it to keeping a valuable instrument locked away: "How absurd it was. Why have a baby If it has to be kept not in a case like a rare, rare fiddle-but in another woman's arms?" (Mansfield, p 145).

In conclusion, Katherine Mansfield's "Bliss" and "Miss Brill" offer profound insights into the social roles of women in the early 20th century. Both protagonists, while adhering to societal expectations, experience deep-seated dissatisfaction and isolation. Miss Brill's weekly park visits and Bertha's seemingly perfect life mask underlying emotional turmoil. These stories illuminate the constraints placed on women, regardless of their marital or social status. Mansfield skillfully portrays the internal struggles of her characters as they navigate the disconnect between societal norms and personal fulfillment. Through these nuanced portrayals, Mansfield critiques the limiting nature of prescribed female roles, suggesting that conformity to social expectations does not guarantee happiness or self-realization. Ultimately, these stories serve as poignant commentaries on the complexities of female identity and the silent struggles many women faced in a society that often overlooked their inner lives.

7.2 How do the author's life experiences affect and shape the female characters in *Bliss* and *Miss Brill*?

Mansfield's "Bliss" and "Miss Brill" stories allow the reader to recognize features or circumstances from her life that she may have experienced. The majority of these events include Mansfield being a woman ahead of her time and society's rejection of her behavior, such as her

sexual identity, her function as a woman, and her rejection of social restraints. Driven by bravery and resolve, she abandoned her familiar surroundings to face the uncertainties and hazards of living in an unfamiliar setting (Murray, 1990). In her writings one can see that she was aware of these changes.

Katherine Mansfield's own experiences as a woman navigating early 20th-century society profoundly influenced her portrayal of Bertha Young in "Bliss." (Alpers, 1980) He suggests that Bertha's inner turmoil and complex emotions reflect Mansfield's personal struggles with societal expectations and her desire for personal fulfillment. Mansfield had an unconventional lifestyle, thus her rejection of traditional gender roles are mirrored in Bertha's character, particularly in her moments of epiphany and her conflicted feelings about her marriage and sexuality. "What Miss Fulton did, Bertha didn't know. They had met at the club and Bertha had fallen in love with her, as she always did fall in love with beautiful women who had something strange about them" (Mansfield, p,147). According to Cooper (2008) this is also a connection to the author's life who was supposed to have a lesbian relationship with her friend Ida. "she met Ida Baker, the girl who acted as the "wife," in her life." (Cooper, 2008, p. 11)

Alpers (1980) states that Mansfield's own path of self-discovery, as well as her experiences with love and relationships, are said to have had a significant influence on the rich representation of Bertha's emotional terrain.

During her time in Europe, Mansfield's experiences of isolation and alienation shaped the character of "Miss Brill". Her status as an outsider influenced the creation of Miss Brill as a lonely, observant figure. (Murray, 1990) Kaplan (1991) argues that Mansfield's personal troubles with illness and sense of dislocation are discreetly woven into Miss Brill's personality. Both scholars emphasize how Mansfield's own loneliness and astute observations of society are

reflected in Miss Brill's intricate inner world and her heartfelt attempts to connect with others. They argue that Mansfield's ability to depict the complexities of human emotions in her characters is directly related to her own life experiences as a woman who frequently defies society's conventional norms.

As a result, it is possible to interpret Mansfield's representations of female characters as an accurate representation of her personal experiences and feminism. Her stories frequently portray women suffering from existential crises, illustrating the conflict between one's own identity and society expectations. This conflict recalls the influence of the broader feminist criticism of the day, which questioned the constrictive roles that were placed on women and advocated for more freedom and self-determination.

7.3 What are the main issues discussed and how can they be related to the Feminist Approach?

The short stories "Miss Brill" and "Bliss" by Katherine Mansfield shed light on a number of important topics that are consistent with feminist literary criticism and provide significant insights into the societal roles that women played in the 1920s. The protagonist of "Miss Brill," who is isolated and uses eavesdropping to create a dream world, highlights the restricted possibilities given to older, solitary women in society. Miss Brill's weekly ritual at the park turns into a moving allegory for the marginalization and loneliness faced by women who lack the mold of the typical wife and mother. In the same manner, "Bliss" looks into the inner struggles of Bertha Young, a married lady who appears to have everything that society finds admirable—a spouse, a kid, and stable finances. However, Bertha's feelings of unhappiness and her inexplicable attraction to Pearl Fulton illustrate how restrictive traditional gender norms are.

Feminist literary analysis centers on the disparity that exists between women's inner life and society expectations. This is explored in both stories.

It is clear from comparing Mansfield's writings to feminist theories by academics like Gillian Boddy and Toril Moi that Mansfield's stories are critiques of the gendered power dynamics that endure even after the 1920s, rather than just reflections of their historical context (Moi, *Sexual/textual Politics*; Boddy). The complex ways in which Mansfield portrayed the social relationships and inner conflicts of her characters provide an insight into the larger feminist critique of the time, which makes her stories an important contribution to our understanding of women's identities and roles.

From a feminist perspective, these stories challenge the patriarchal structures of the 1920s by exposing the psychological toll of conforming to narrow social expectations. Mansfield's nuanced portrayal of her characters' inner turmoil aligns with the feminist approach's emphasis on women's experiences and perspectives. The stories critique the idea that marriage and motherhood are the ultimate fulfillment for women, as seen in Bertha's discontent despite her "perfect" life. Moreover, the subtle exploration of female sexuality and desire in "Bliss" challenges traditional notions of femininity. By focusing on the internal lives of her characters, Mansfield gives voice to the unspoken frustrations and desires of women, a key aspect of feminist literature. These stories can be seen as early examples of literature that questions gender roles and advocates for a more complex understanding of female identity, paving the way for later feminist discourse on women's autonomy and self-realization.

In conclusion, from a feminist perspective, Katherine Mansfield's "Miss Brill" and "Bliss" provide significant insights about the social role of women in the 1920s. Her portrayal of women struggling with both personal disillusionment and cultural expectations offers a critical

viewpoint on the constraints placed by patriarchal conventions. Thus, Mansfield's art not only reflects the culture of her day but also advances current conversations concerning gender, identity, and individuality.

Mansfield asks readers to reevaluate the responsibilities and reality of women in her day and in the modern era through her perceptive and empathetic stories. Katherine Mansfield chose to pursue a self-determined path that offered the potential for greater personal fulfillment, despite the increased personal risks it entailed.

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