CHAPTER 2

THEMES
It is a convenient critical assumption that works of art have a theme, that is, that they have been created for a purpose, that of expressing, directly or indirectly, an emotion or an idea, a view of man or a view of life. Whether this is always true or not, it is useful to make that assumption in order to analyse the technique later in relation to the identified intention of the writer. It is logical, in any case, to try to identify first what the writer has attempted to do and then see how appropriate the technique is for externalizing or embodying the theme. We must also recognize that, quite apart from the technique which is mainly of interest to the critic, it is the theme of a work which primarily appeals to the reader as a human being.

It will be useful, therefore, at this stage of the study to identify the themes and thematic motifs in Katherine Mansfield's stories, the range of her interest in different aspects of life. The major themes will be identified with reference to the best examples of their presentation, and other stories embodying more or less the same themes will be briefly referred to during the analysis, in order to avoid repetition.

Katherine Mansfield's stories have themes from her own experiences, which is in the central tradition of the English
Novel, the affairs of every day heightened by sensitivity and presented in good writing. Her range was not very wide but she felt it was enough to express a universality of experience. She generally lays stress on characters and the relationships of people living together, bound by their emotions.

In many of her stories, we find recurrently the woman on her own and the predatory male and, as Katherine Mansfield advanced in age, so did her men and women characters. There is a young girl in *The Tiredness of Rosabel*, a woman in *Miss Brill*, and *Pictures*, an older defeated woman in *Life of Ma Parker* and *The Canary*. Another prominent theme is the problem of adjustment in human relationships —of husbands and wives, of lovers, of parents and children, and of the richer class with the poorer class. The stories dealing with the man-woman relationship, in which, mostly, the woman is an unhappy victim of an indifferent male are *The Man Without Temperament*, *Je Ne Parle Pas Français*, *The Little Governess* and *This Flower*. Katherine Mansfield often depicts married life and, in some, we have an unhappy relationship, where the husband is loving and trusting and the wife deserts him: *The Black Cap*, *The Escape* and *Marriage A La Mode*.

There are some stories which seem to be based on the idea that a happy relationship between man and woman seems impossible. The woman often seems to be the victim of an indifferent male.

A happy marriage is shown mostly in stories which are probably from her New Zealand life, that is, the life of her parents Stanley and Linda Burnell as they face life together,
Prelude, At The Bay, and The Garden Party are examples of this kind.

There are some stories written when she was in Bavaria, and in these, the theme is utterly satirical. These were published in a collection, In a German Pension, and themes of pretence and snobbery and affectation find expression in these satirical sketches.

Katherine Mansfield has written a number of stories in which she speaks of children and their relationship with one another and with adults in the family. There are many studies of children as she was sensitive to the uniqueness of a child's world, in which emotions are brilliantly in the foreground or vanished altogether, in which the present is dominant and neutrality intolerable. She expressed beautifully the life of children, based on a series of incidents constantly changing. She also knew the importance of touch in the life of the very young, as the essential means by which they are reassured, as in Prelude (Kozia derives great comfort from her grandmother). There are also some charming child-father relationships as in The Little Girl, where Katherine Mansfield presents the part which size played in the minds of children. New Dresses, Sixpence, Sun and Moon, A Suburban Fairy Tale, The Doll's House have all children seeking to understand the words of adults.

More than half her stories are based on or set in New Zealand. The Garden Party, An Ideal Family, Prelude, At The Bay, The Doll's House, The Voyage, Six Years After, The
Stranger, all have a New Zealand background, and concern themselves with a variety of family relationships spread over a life-time.

Katherine Mansfield's experiences between 1908 and 1912 deepened her ideas regarding the difficulties faced by a woman and not only did she try to live as a free woman, she also brought out her own feelings in some of her stories. At Lehmanns, This Flower, Frau Brechenmacher Attends A Wedding, are all stories, along with The Mating of Gwendolen, A Marriage of Passion and The Child Who Was Tired that give evidence of her dislike of and resistance to the conventional idea of the role of married women. Katherine Mansfield also wrote several articles for The New Age on feminist themes.

In The Man Without A temperament, we have a sick wife and a coldly patient husband. Here the sick woman is staying in a hotel trying to recoup her health and her husband seems to help her in a detached manner. We see Katherine Mansfield's sense of observation and humour in her accounts of the other people staying in the hotel.

The husband is constantly referred to as the Englishman and is considered unfriendly by all. He even scares little girls playing in the water. The man moves from the present to the past and then to the present again. He thinks of his wife in another place and another time. The two of them go for a walk and (this takes place in time present), the
husband leaves the woman on her own, for a while — 'goes for a little constitutional'. She is too tired to accompany him. He once again remembers moments in the past when she was in better health. They go back to the Hotel and once she is asleep, he recalls how the doctor had asked him to accompany her. His wife had said that she simply could not go alone. 'You're everything'.

Throughout the story, we get the impression that the man is attentive and carefully helpful to his wife, and yet there is an air of withdrawal about him. He seems to be going through the motions of a proper husband out of a sense of duty rather than love.

Bissan is a story which opens on a young happy wife Bertha, who seems to feel she has the best of everything, loving husband, money, friends, pretty baby; and then her husband Harry leaves her thoroughly disillusioned, for she finds him kissing another woman and fixing up an appointment with her for another day. The end is done up in a very subtle manner, and once again we wonder if a happy marriage is possible. Katherine Mansfield poses this question in many of her stories. Here we are led to believe in Bertha's happiness; then there is the incident of the party and the betrayal. Yet she knows that life will go on despite her sense of despair and disillusionment.

In The Little Governess, we have a young innocent girl who goes to Germany to take up a job as governess. She is
warned at the very beginning to be careful about staying inside the carriage. In the beginning, the girl is frightened and unsure of herself and then is slowly lulled into a false sense of happiness as her fellow passenger, old enough to be her grandfather, speaks to her of Munich and how she must do some sight-seeing.

The old man takes her on a sight-seeing tour of Munich and finally invites her to his flat after having delayed her sufficiently so that she is unable to meet the lady who had offered her the job. The man then tries to assault the little governess and she escapes, after taking a tram. She reaches the hotel to find a suave waiter who informs her that the lady who had come to see her had left after making enquiries about her. The idea of the predatory male is brought out in this story.

This Flower is another story where a young woman faces a humiliating experience when she is examined by a doctor with an unpleasant manner. He looked at her with a leer and told her that her pregnancy was confirmed. The man, Roy, with whom she is having an affair, is a callous, unfeeling fellow, and his only desire is to get rid of the baby. Thus, once the woman finds out the truth from the doctor, she begs him to keep it a secret from Roy and he agrees because of his love of mystery and intrigue. He tells Roy that she is weak and run down and Roy is filled with relief as, being selfish and shallow, he does not want too deep a relationship. For him, it was a case of infatuation and physical attraction; and he
had a totally selfish relation with the woman. He exclaims:

"I thought we were in for it this time.
I really did it would have been so —
fatal — so fatal."

_Psychology_ is a story where a man and a woman who
were in love now find that their feelings have changed and
they try to conceal this from each other, behaving in their
usual manner. Here, we have a relationship with no stupid
emotional complication, for passion would have ruined every-
thing. Both realize that their relationship is changing,
and try to cover it up:

"Again, there they were — two hunters
bending over their fire, but hearing
suddenly from the jungle beyond a
shake of wind and a loud questioning
cry."

The man leaves, and the woman, wanting him to stay
back, is unable to say so. She feels he has failed her.
The story is narrated with much irony and bitterness.

_Je Ne Parle Pas Francais_ is counted among Katherine
Mansfield's best stories, and is difficult to approach
without some knowledge of its biographical circumstances.
She seems to have built up the character of Rasul Duquette
around Francis Carco, the French writer with whom she had a
brief affair in 1915:

1. _The Short Stories of Katherine Mansfield._
   Alfred A. Knopf (New York 1954) p. 408
2. _Ibid._ P. 318
"The Tale of the Mouse, caught in the toils of the world's evil, abandoned by her lover," wrote Murry, "is Katherine's fate."

The story is in the first person, and the narrator speaks of Dick's and Mouse's (the woman) escapade together in Paris. It is once again a young woman who is left to fend for herself in a strange place, as her companion who had promised to marry her leaves a note telling her how he is unable to fulfil his promise. Mouse is childlike and vulnerable, and both Dick and his friend are shown to be weak. Raoul Duquette is, by his own admission, cynical and cheap.

When Mouse tells Raoul (after Dick has left her) that it is impossible for her to go home as all her friends think she is married, he escapes by promising to come the next day. He doesn't turn up once he realizes how little he can get out of it for himself. Thus Mouse, abandoned by both men and helpless, is in a desperate state and may once again surrender to another man in return for protection.

In such stories, Katherine Mansfield seems to be cynical and there are moments when we feel she does not believe in lasting love or friendship. She had written to Murry that Je Ne Parle Pas Francais is a protest against moral perversion which leads to personal betrayal.

Katherine Mansfield has also written some stories in which the roles are reversed, and it is now the man who is bitter and cynical while the woman deserts him. Still the theme is the same, that a happy relationship is quite impossible. We see this in the stories, *The Escape*, *Marriage A La Mode*, and *The Black Cap*.

*The Black Cap* has been written mainly in monologue form. A woman leaves her home and husband, and goes to meet her lover only to be disillusioned. She then takes the next train back realizing that she had behaved in an insane manner. This story was written for the *New Age* and, as Katherine Mansfield was absolutely against the idea of woman staying in the house — utterly contented and domesticated, we have the lines:

"I'm young — I'm too proud. I'm not the type of woman to vegetate in the country and rave over 'our' own lettuces."

*The Black Cap* was welcomed with relish by some of the *New Age* staff who felt this was Katherine Mansfield's opinion of Murry.

In *The Escape*, there is a trusting and loving husband who has an indifferent wife who is impatient with him, ridiculing his "exquisite belief in human nature." She seems to dislike everything. The man is utterly dejected with life.

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1. *The Short Stories of Katherine Mansfield.*
He felt himself lying there a hollow man, a parched withered man and, as it were, of ashes.

The story concludes on an ironical note. The woman tells her fellow passenger in the train that her husband, 'likes roughing it'.

The character of the man is shown to be weak — a tolerant husband failing in with his wife's wishes, something like what happens in The Man Without a Temperament.

Marriage A La Mode has a married man in a similar situation. He is very much in love with his wife and children, and is deserted by her for a corrupt set of 'Bohemian' friends. There is almost a cruel vein in the story as Isabel (the wife) reads aloud his love letter to her friends and they become hysterical with laughter.

Katherine Mansfield thus constantly explored the relationship of man and woman through her stories, and tried to show that:

"It is the hopelessly insipid doctrine that love is the only thing in the world...which hampers us so cruelly. We must get rid of that bogey — and then, then comes the opportunity, of happiness and freedom."

(Katherine Mansfield)

The theme of a woman on her own, lonely and suffering, is perhaps best seen in 'Miss Brill', who is seeking companionship. It is a sentimental story, and Miss Brill's feelings are conveyed through interior monologue. She goes to the park and sits on a bench, imagining that the young people around her need her as much as she needs them; that she and the other regular visitors are like 'a family', in comparison with the seasonal visitors. This theme of solitude against community is slowly built up as the old woman watches a series of visitors moving around the park, going about their business.

A young couple come and sit near Miss Brill, and she overhears their conversation:

"...Why doesn't she keep her silly old mug at home?" "Its her fu — fur which is so funny..." Cried the girl. "Its exactly like a fried whiting."

The young couple tear down the veil of illusion, leaving the poor woman with nothing. She realizes the cruelty of other human beings through the behaviour of the young couple, and the falsity of her sense of community is revealed to her in a very painful manner. She had thought she would be missed if she did not go to the park on Sunday afternoons; and it is now apparent to her that she would not be missed — that no one cares.

Thus, Miss Brill realizes that it was just her sentimental imagination that had made her feel she was wanted and, in the end, we sense, she will try to transform this painful experience too, by the power of her imagination, which is the saving grace in her life. This is suggested in the way she puts her fur away, showing her ability to adjust to the disillusionment.

In *The Canary*, a lonely woman, who has a canary for company, feels utterly lost when it dies. Within this framework, Katherine Mansfield explores some of the deepest themes of her work. The story is elegiac, and opens with the theme of mortality and remembrance. The entire story is an interior monologue and the narrative is in the first person. Katherine Mansfield freed the story from the author-narrator figure. The woman goes on to speak of the artistry of the bird's song, and of the human need for beauty. This need, she felt, was related to some felt flaw in human life:

"Then I loved the evening star. It seemed to understand this...something which is like longing, and yet it is not longing. Or regret—it is more like regret."

We are shown the emptiness in the woman's life, where she had few contacts with other human beings. There is a description of a 'cruel' and 'dreadful' dream which she could control only with the help of the bird.

This is a story of bereavement, and there is more of pathos. In the end the speaker asserts the uniqueness of the bird and emphasises that she would never keep another because its death was too big a loss. It could never be compensated.

A sense of normality is established for a while, as the woman feels that she will get over the death of the bird. The point of the story is made in the final paragraph where the woman says that there seems to be something sad in life which is different from illness and poverty and death, and wonders if everyone feels this. It is something akin to Arnold’s “eternal note of sadness”/Wordsworth’s “still sad music of humanity.”

*Revelations* is about a young woman who is shown suffering from nerves and she visits the hairdresser’s salon with the hope that he would soothe her, only to find that his daughter had died that morning. Monica leaves the place crying at the sadness of it all and decides to send flowers to the bereaved parents. The theme is one of mortality as in *The Canary*.

Ma Parker in the story, *Life of Ma Parker*, is again an old defeated woman, suffering because her grandson had died. As Ma Parker continues her daily chores, she cannot help remembering the way the little boy used to ask her for pennies and press himself close to her. Katherine Mansfield divides the story between the past and the present, and the
old woman remembers the struggle she had in bringing up six children (the theme of child bearing and the agony attached to it is also taken up by Katherine Mansfield not only in *At Lehmanns* but also in *The Birthday*).

Ma Parker felt that she had never harmed anyone in her life, and yet fate had been cruel and had taken away her grandson Lennie from her. She wondered why a little child had to suffer like this, where he had to fight for his breath and put up with so much pain.

At the end of the story, the old woman who had never cried in her life before another soul breaks down and walks alone on the road, dashed, in her misery. Such is the irony that she cannot find a place where she could cry without inquisitive eyes upon her. The story ends with the rain falling and Ma Parker still standing on the road, wondering.

Here, once again, we have a tragic theme (Katherine Mansfield's view is that we are helpless beings in the hands of fate and circumstance). The story is one taken from our daily lives. Such an incident could have happened to just anyone.

Katherine Mansfield was deeply aware of death, the more so after her brother Leslie died in the war, soon after joining; and in all the stories — *The Voyage*, *The Stranger*, *The Fly*, *The Life Of Ma Parker*, *Six Years After*, *The Garden*
Party, and The Daughter of the Late Colonel — we are aware of the presence of death as a threat or as the initiator of action.

In The Voyage, we have the young girl Fenella leaving home as her mother has died. The little girl is disturbed though not distraught, and the grandmother, though agitated at leaving her bereaved son, has learnt to sway with the blows of life. In The Garden Party, there are two absolutes, Life and Death, but they are conveyed without the least hint of abstraction.

The Garden Party is easily Katherine Mansfield's masterpiece. Here we have as the subject an adolescent's encounter with death. It is thus told as one character's story in a straightforward sequential narrative. Laura Sheridan is a young girl through whose consciousness everything is observed, including the day's events.

We have the young and carefree Laura, generous and full of life and, on the other hand, there is a world of poverty with a mean cottage, where a man dies. Here, again, we have a contrast between the butterfly world of the Sheridan and the stark intrusion of the workman's death, the grim realities of life.

The story opens with the Sheridans giving a garden party, and Laura Sheridan is asked to tell the workmen where
the marquee should be put. Her character as an adolescent is suggested by the affinity she feels for the workmen, her brother and her father. (Her father and her brother are more sympathetic.) Laura then returns to the house, and joins in the preparations for the party. Unfortunately, she overhears the cook telling the Godber’s man that a workman living in one of the cottages down the road had died. Laura’s first impulse is to cancel the party but her sister and her mother think differently. Her mother takes her mind off the workman’s death by showing her a pretty hat, and Laura forgets the episode, being young, and thus easily sidetracked.

They have the party, and a large number of guests have been invited. Once the party is over, Mr. Sheridan again reminds them of the labourer, and the Laura’s mother, whose vision does not extend beyond the garden, asks Laura to go and give the bereaved family the party leftovers.

It is now that Laura is shown making her first voyage of discovery, her contact with death. She goes to the cottage on her own without any family protection. Mrs. Sheridan shuns the work man but her daughter thinks differently. On reaching the dead man’s cottage, she finds the workman in deep slumber and so far away from them both —Laura and the woman who had accompanied her inside. Now, Death is mentioned as if it were something remote and peaceful. She also finds it beautiful.
Laura views the man as if he were from a fairy tale — a sleeping prince, whom she has managed to reach after great difficulty. She feels he must be left in peace as he was a happy man. He is above and beyond the world of garden parties and the sufferings in life.

Soon after this, she encounters her brother and tells him about her magical awakening. She tells him, "It was simply marvellous... isn't life...?" but what life was she couldn't explain. The story ends here, and Laura's process of growth closes though her learning is incomplete. Laura feels she has seen the full cycle of life of which death is only the last part.

The story The Fly is built around two old men, and the death of the Boss's son in war. It was written in 1922 and almost seems to be a statement by the writer that, though there is bereavement, life must go on. The old man tells his Boss that his daughter and her family had gone to Belgium, where they had visited his dead boy's grave. Soon he leaves the room, and the Boss is left to himself, brooding over the tragedy. The son's death had broken the father's spirit, and had left him with his life in ruins.

Then, the Boss sees a fly falling into the inkpot, and he takes it out. It flutters on the blotting paper only to be put back into the inkpot by the Boss. It is only when the Boss puts ink on it again, a second time, that it struggles
for life, its four legs fighting till it drops dead, absolutely still.

The story invites an equation between the Boss as he toys with the life of the fly, and God or the gods, playing with the lives of human beings, 'for their sport'. This idea dominates the whole story and is not modified by other events or developed by different images, — the symbol of the fly is too inflexible, while it is expressive.

In The Daughters of the Late Colonel, we have the Colonel's daughters grieving over his death. Here Katherine Mansfield employs an interior monologue, externalised by the use of the third person.

Katherine Mansfield has written several stories which deal with adolescent love, disillusionment, infatuation, and very often she has made fun of foolish romantic attitudes and language, as in The Sister of the Barberess, which is more of a satirical piece on the high-flown language of love, somewhat similar to G.B. Shaw's Arms and the Man.

Something Childish But Very Natural is "a love story which is evidently the Murrys' love-in-a cottage situation projected back to a couple of youngsters." Here is a story of two young people, their love for each other, and the excitement which they feel as their emotions develop.

Katherine Mansfield begins the story by showing a young man entering a compartment in a train; the weather itself seemed to reflect the mood of the moment. It was the most thrilling day of the year, the first real day of spring. Henry is a 'great fellow for books' and Katherine Mansfield writes:

"You would have thought that he had taken his pap with a tees propped before his nurse's bosom."¹

Henry gets charmed by a poem he reads called 'Something childish, but very natural'. He felt:

"it's got a smile of a dream on it."²

Suddenly, the train started to move while he was standing near the book shop and he jumped into another compartment where he found sitting, a young girl with marigold hair. He looked at her, and the poem persisted in his mind. He was unable to keep his eyes off her hair and they were both embarrassed.

Henry started a conversation with her and, while he spoke, he stared at her face and was greatly impressed by her beauty:

"How simply beautiful she is sang Henry's heart, and swelled with the words, bigger and bigger and trembling like a marvellous bubble."³

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² Ibid. p. 166.
³ Ibid. p. 167.
Being young and inexperienced, he was afraid even to breathe lest he break the bubble.

She soon left the train after telling Henry that she travelled up to London every evening. After much indecision, Henry decided to try his luck and he found her the next day at the station. They sat in the same compartment and she acted very stiff—she sat very stiffly with her knees pressed together and both she and Henry tried not to tremble. The girl was sixteen and Henry was eighteen. When she asked him what he'd been doing since they last met, Henry found he couldn't climb back to those mountains of days.

Henry found Edna's hair the most beautiful thing in the world and thought he had:

"swallowed a butterfly," and "it was fanning its wings near his heart."¹

They started going around together and, finding a dream-house, plan to live there:

The time before Edna was a dream and now he and she were dreaming together."²

He finally kissed her and their love blossomed.

Edna promised to come and stay with him as the house was empty, and Henry waits for her train which is two hours away. He imagines them living together in the house and

¹ *Ibid.* p. 170
² *Ibid.* p. 178
then he sees a white moth flying down the road, which was actually a little girl who had brought him a telegram. He thought it was a funny present and then, as he read it, the garden became full of shadows:

"they span a web of darkness over the cottage and the trees and Henry and the telegram." ¹

Yet Henry did not move and the story ends here, while the reader is left to draw his own conclusion. The end is evident, and omitting it is effective.

Mr. and Mrs. Dove was one of the last stories Katherine Mansfield wrote for The Garden Party collection. She wrote of the story:

"I finished Mr. and Mrs. Dove yesterday. I am not altogether pleased with it. It's a little made up. It's not inevitable. I mean to imply that those two may not be happy together — that, that is the kind of reason for which a young girl marries. But have I done so? I don't think so. Besides its not strong enough. I want to be nearer — far, far nearer than that. I want to use all my force even when I am taking a fine line. And I have a sneaking notion that I have at the end used the doves unwarrantably. I used them to round off something — didn't I? Is that quite my game? No its not. Its not quite the kind of truth I'm after." ²

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1. Ibid. p. 183.
In this, we notice her capacity for sensitive self-criticism and concern for "integrity".

In this story, there is a young, impressionable, insecure man who is about to venture into fruit-farming in Rhodesia. He is madly in love with a young and pretty girl, but is unsure of her feelings for him. He decides to propose marriage to her one day before he is to sail. The man's feeling of insecurity is beautifully captured in the way he peers at himself in the mirror, thinks he looks pale and that "his hair looked almost bright green."1 (It was the shadow from the trees outside.)

The girl he wants to marry, Anne, is an only child and from a rich family. He finds Anne alone and decides to ask her once and for all if she loves him or not. She tells him that though she's fond of him, she couldn't marry him. She shows him two doves that are playing out their game of courtship. The male follows the female dove everywhere, trying to woo her. Anne felt that if she married him, their life would be like that of the two doves. As she rejects him, she says:

"I've never felt so happy with anyone. But I'm sure its not what people and what books mean when they talk about love. ...But we'd be like Mr. and Mrs. Dove."2

1. The Short Stories of Katherine Mansfield.
   Alfred A. Knopf (New York 1934). p. 497

2. Ibid. p. 503.
Yet, in the end, Anne is sorry for Reggie, and she accepts his proposal. It is Reggie's quick departure and his hurt looks which make her change her mind. Anne calls after him, 'Come back, Mr. Dove.' Thus, the story ends on a happy note. The situation in the story is ordinary enough. There are many girls who may have said 'no' and from much the same motives. There is a complex interplay of feelings between Reggie and Anne.

The whole summer afternoon and Reggie's sense of elation are compressed into poetic language. The points in this story are characteristic, reaching well beyond the superficialities of The Garden Party environment.

In Taking the Veil, we have a young girl who is engaged to a man and gets infatuated by an actor, but as she imagines herself joining a convent, for the actor would never marry her, she thinks of her fiancé crying over her grave (she had died soon after joining the convent), his hair all white and tears running down his face. This makes her realise her foolishness and she goes back to him. The girl Edna's unsure feelings towards her fiancé and her uncertainties are conveyed in a very deft manner.

Katherine Mansfield shifts her focus from Edna going to the library to the time she attended the convent and saw the actor in the play, and then again to the time she imagines herself in the convent — back to the present, where
she decides that no harm is done.

"She is free, young and nobody knows her secret. Everything is still possible for her and Jimmy."  

The love which Edna feels for the actor is "hardly thrilling. Unless you can call the most dreadful sensation of hopeless misery, despair, agony and wretchedness thrilling."  

It is a story of an adolescent's day-dreams, more of a sketch — where we do not have the harsh impersonal realities figured in her other stories. It registers with great rapidity the moods of ecstasy, despair, the gift for arguing with oneself, all typical of adolescence.

A critic has observed: "Katherine Mansfield in her best New Zealand stories disciplined the expression of self, subduing it to the composition and content of the fiction. In the stories of adolescence this shows itself in crispness which sympathy keeps just on this side of cool amusement."

A Dill Pickle explores a young woman's love for a man who leaves her when they both feel at a certain stage that they are incompatible. They meet again after six years, and feel their love for each other returning; and then the woman is once again all alone when she realises that he hasn't changed and is still completely immersed in himself. She

1. Ibid. p. 593.
2. Ibid. p. 596.
was mistaken when she thought he had lost his vagueness and indecision. The ending is almost a pause, rather than a conclusion.

_Honeymoon_ is a story of a newly married couple, who are thrilled to be left on their own; and the girl Fanny mentions at least twenty times how wonderful it is to be quite alone. Fanny had made up her mind never to interfere with her husband's pleasures, and thus readily agrees to his bathing in the Mediterranean even though she had heard that 'It was an absolute death-trap.'

The two visit a hotel and try to behave as if it is a very common thing in their lives. George acts bored and Fanny, "trying to look as though she'd spent years of life threading her way through strangers," follows him into the hotel.

George and Fanny hold hands, and they seem blissfully happy. Fanny finds the music heavenly, and she asks George if he feels that he really understands her now:

"Do you feel", she said softly, "that you really know me, now". She goes on to say, "so often people, even when they love each other, don't seem to — to — its so hard to say — know each other perfectly. They don't seem to want to and I think that's awful... George, we couldn't do that, could we? We never could."

2. Ibid. p. 582
George reassures her, and then she sees a man standing beside the musicians who begins to sing in a thin faint voice, a song in Spanish. His voice seems to implore and entreat for something that is denied to him, and Fanny wonders if Life is like this too.

"There are people like this. There is suffering... Had she and George the right to be so happy?"

George, on the other hand, feels that the man's voice is funny, and that it is good to be at the beginning of a new life with Fanny.

They leave the hotel very much in love. George feels "that for two pins he would jump over the table and carry her off." He wants to go before "the old codger begins squawking again."

The idea of a young girl, newly married, happy, and yet unsure of her husband's feelings, is well brought out. Like Leila, in Her First Ball, Fanny, too, has a brief glimpse of the dark, a moment of realisation, which she is able to sweep under the carpet. The idea in both stories is that people, especially the young, tend to bounce back to hope—and to illusion—even when they have had a glimpse

1. Ibid. p. 582
2. Ibid. p. 583
3. Ibid. p. 583
of the abyss. The man, in *Honeymoon*, seems more practical than she is, and is ultimately able to assure her of his love.

In *Feuille De Album*, Katherine Mansfield writes about a young man who fights shy of old women and crowds. In the beginning the ladies try to woo him in different ways, each attempt ending in a situation that is 'hopeless'. Their various attempts failing, they give him up and feel, 'it can't all be as innocent as it looks!'

Soon, the young man gets attracted to a girl living opposite his house. He felt, she was — "well, just like him".

The young man makes all sorts of conjectures as to who the girl could be living with, what she did, her parent — the mother must be an invalid and, 'the father was dead...he had been a journalist'. He carries on a monologue and imagines himself quarrelling with her, eating together and making the most wonderful drawings of her.

One day he follows her to the market, and watches her doing her shopping. He follows her back to the house and, as she is about to open the door, he hands her an egg which, he tells her, had fallen down.

The ending is somewhat vague, and the reader feels there is more to come. In this story which is written in

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the style of an interior monologue, Katherine Mansfield completely absorbs herself in the character of the young man, thinking and speaking in his tone of voice.

The Sister of the Baroness formed part of the collected works published under the name, In a German Pension, and in this story, Katherine Mansfield is at her satirical best. We find her writing directly based on her personal experience.

The Germans hold in awe people of noble birth. The German guests are excited to learn that a Baroness is arriving with her daughter and thereafter, scene after scene, 'we see them humbling themselves before the Baroness' sister, who turns out in the end to be the daughter of a dressmaker.

The action of the story centres around events which are in themselves inconsequential but, at the same time, illuminate the characters and their movements. Katherine Mansfield makes fun of the high-flown language of love. There is a young student from Bonn who is enamoured of the Baroness' sister (maid), and he speaks of her hands as being "like white lilies lying in the pool of your black dress."¹ She replies that his hands are beautifully kept and the writer asks: "Was love then a question of a manicure?"² The student felt that "she was like a young tree whose branches had never been touched by the ruthless hand of man. Such delicacy!"³

1. Ibid. p. 49
2. Ibid. p. 49
3. Ibid. p. 48
Katherine Mansfield exhibits here, as elsewhere (e.g., *Taking The Veil*) a delightful sense of irony. The flowery language used by young people in love with each other has been given something like a mock-heroic touch. Katherine Mansfield is seldom cruel, and her irony is not without sympathy.

As said earlier, once Katherine Mansfield became acutely aware of the plight of women, she wrote stories depicting the loss of vitality in women who marry and have children. She felt that motherhood and intellectual and moral freedom were incompatible.

Some stories in *In A German Pension* deal with the problems of child-bearing of women forced into marriage against their will, and the ignorance regarding sexual matters which leads to so much distress and disillusionment in women.

*At Lehmanns* is about a young girl who helps a woman with the household chores as the woman is pregnant and about to deliver a child, any day. The girl, Sabina, is innocent and young, and so she readily does everything from lighting the fire to washing the endless cups and saucers. The mistress, a big woman at the best of times, we are told, had grown so enormous in the process that her husband told her she looked unappetising and had better remain upstairs and sew,
Sabina is made to understand that Frau Lehmann's bad time was approaching — that she had a baby inside her which had to come out — a very painful process indeed.

As Sabina is working in the cafe also, one day she offers wine to a young man who enters the cafe. She then sits aside watching him take out a book, and soon he shows her a picture of a naked girl sitting on a crumpled bed. He tells her that it could be her photograph. Soon, Sabina is asked to take food to the Frau, who is waiting upstairs. Her mistress is upset at being left alone while her husband is playing cards. "Dear Heaven, leave him alone. I'm nothing. I don't matter. ...and the whole day waiting here."¹

Sabina retires for the night with a happy feeling, relieved that her body is not like Frau Lehmann's.

The next day the lady is to deliver the baby, and there is utter confusion as she is in great pain and only the nurse is allowed inside. Soon, a doctor is also called, and Sabina sits quietly trying not to hear the groans. Just then, the young man who had come the previous evening enters the room, and Sabina is quite happy to see him.

She puts more wood into the fireplace and "The Frau was forgotten. The stupid day was forgotten."²

¹ Ibid. p. 76
² Ibid. p. 78
The young man holds her hand and suddenly he tries to kiss her, and Sabina begins to breathe like a frightened animal. She tears herself away from him and just then there is a shriek from upstairs. It is the thin wailing of the baby in the silence which makes her rush out of the room.

The birth of the baby and the young man's animal behaviour, his crude action, occur at the same time, and this is done to show how low a man can get. The girl is vulnerable, and is threatened by a brutal man. The possible seduction of the young girl is interrupted by the shriek of a woman in labour — the painful result perhaps of another male assault. Here, again, as in *Here First Ball*, a girl learns about the harsher aspects of life.

In *Frau Brechenmacher Attends a Wedding*, Katherine Mansfield builds her story around a woman who is tired of having babies and looking after her husband who orders her around. The story opens on the couple getting ready to attend a wedding. The man is shown to be selfish and self-centred. He tells his wife to dress in the passage, and Katherine Mansfield gives a sarcastic description of him:

"He stood in the kitchen puffing himself out, the buttons on his blue uniform shining with an enthusiasm which nothing but official buttons could possibly possess."  

Once they reach the house where the wedding is to take place, *Herr Brechenmacher* is so overawed that he forgets his

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rights as a husband and actually begs his wife's pardon for jostling against her in the crowd. He gets drunk at the party and presents the bride with a silver coffee pot containing a milk bottle and two cradles holding china dolls. The girl, Theresa, who was getting married, had borne an illegitimate child who was also attending the wedding. As the Frau watches her husband, she wants to go home and never come out again. She feels she is not strong enough, and the whole situation does not seem funny to her as she clasps her work-roughened hands together. She thinks that everyone is laughing at her for not leaving the room, for not standing up against her husband.

On their way back, she suddenly remembers the first night they had come home together.

"Now they had five babies and twice as much money but — "Na, what is it all for?" ¹

Her husband eats up all the food greedily (like an animal) while she pretends she's not hungry. Frau Brechenmacher retires to her room telling herself: "Always the same," she said "all over the world the same; but God in heaven — how stupid." ²

At the end of the tale, the Frau lies in bed and puts her arm across her face like a child who expected to be hurt

¹. Ibid. p. 61
². Ibid. p. 62
as Herr Brechtmacher lurches into the room.

It is again the story of a woman exploited by man to appease his desires.

This Flower is the story of a woman who tries to get a child aborted by an unfeeling doctor while the man involved looks on in an unconcerned manner. He doesn't care about the child and is interested only that the pregnancy should be terminated. He can't help but exclaim in the end as to how relieved he is that everything had gone off well:

"Oh! Oh! Oh! the relief! If you knew how frightened I've been," he murmured, "I thought we were in for it this time. I really did. And it would have been so — fatal — so fatal."¹

Here, too, the man is shown to be totally self-centred and selfish. He can only think of his safety and his pleasures.

The Child Who Was Tired whose basic plot was suggested by Chekov's 'Sleepy' (1888) is about a young girl who works as a maid and, being worn out by hard work, longs to sleep. The baby seems to come in the way of rest and sleep, and so she smothers the child. Katherine Mansfield tells us that the young maid is an illegitimate child, and this could explain her violent revulsion from sexuality and childbirth. This feeling is a strong undercurrent running throughout the story. This links it with the other feminist stories. At the

¹. Ibid. p. 408
very beginning, the Frau is given four children and another
is on the way. The poor maid is constantly on her feet,
lighting the fire, heating the coffee and also continues to
rock the baby in her lap as it was crying.

The master of the house tells her that there is
another baby on the way and she is horrified. "Another
baby! Hasn't she finished having them yet?" thought the
child.¹

"Two babies getting eye teeth — two babies to get up
for in the night — two babies to carry about and wash their
little piggy clothes."²

Some casual talk between a couple of gossips is
included in the story and this tells in great detail the
horrors of childbirth. "I was sick twice this morning", said
the Frau. "My insides are all twisted up with having
children too quickly."³

Old Frau Gerathwohl tells the expectant mother that
the maid was the free-born daughter of a waitress. "They
found the mother trying to squeeze her head in the wash-hand
jug, and the child's half silly."⁴

By the end of the day, the child becomes so tired that
she feels her back will break. Soon, a party of friends come

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1. Ibid. p. 93
2. Ibid. p. 93
3. Ibid. p. 97
4. Ibid. p. 97
to spend the evening and then all she hears is:

"Put on the coffee."
"Bring me the sugar tin."
"Carry the chairs out of the bedroom."
"Set the table."

The master of the house tells her to keep the baby quiet. Katherine Mansfield writes that he feels brave and lordly because of the beer inside him. This is an indication that he is otherwise a weak-charactered person. He is also greedy because he takes his own share of pudding and also the Frau's.

In the end the girl becomes disgusted and mutters that even Holy Mary couldn't keep the baby quiet.

"Did Jesus cry like this when he was little." She once again realises there is going to be another child, and then she has:

"a beautiful marvellous idea." She tells herself that the baby will not cry any more or wake up in the night. She picks up a bolster from the Frau's bed and covers the baby's face with it, and the child struggled, "like a duck with its head off wriggling."

In the end she falls on the floor, in deep sleep, heaving a long sigh of relief.

1. Ibid. p. 98
2. Ibid. p. 98
3. Ibid. p. 99
We feel that the murder of the child can be attributed to the young girl's despair at being imprisoned with the Frau, her husband and their endless babies. The girl is possibly half-witted as mentioned earlier, but there is no doubt that the sheer quantity of work she is obliged to do is enough to drive anyone to distraction.

The story is more of a psychological sketch, but Katherine Mansfield tries also to emphasize how degrading it can be for a woman to suffer in silence the troubles inflicted upon her by man.

In *Frau Fischer*, which is one of the many stories in *In a German Pension*, Katherine Mansfield writes, "But I consider child-bearing the most ignominious of all professions."¹

The story is written in the first person and Frau Fischer tries to convince the writer that what she needs is a handful of babies. We are told that the teller of the story finds it something of a risk. As she observes, (the narrator):

"To appear suddenly with handfuls of strange babies is not generally calculated to raise enthusiasm in the hearts of the average British husband."²

Both *A Marriage of Passion* and *The Mating of Gwendolen* deal with the theme of marriage as a financial and sexual

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¹ *Ibid.* p. 55
² *Ibid.* p. 56
transaction which is both restricting and degrading for women.

Even The Prelude has Linda struggling against her husband's attitude. He seems more of an animal to her, seeking to whet his appetite.

There is a feminist awareness running throughout her writing, in the sense that there is always a strong feeling of the wide gulf between a man's and a woman's experiences of life. Rarely do the experiences of the two sexes meet and become communicable (very much as in the fiction of Virginia Woolf), for example, At The Bay — the scene between Linda Burnell and Jonathan Trout.

Some of Katherine Mansfield's work may be classified as 'regional' stories. The Woman at the Store, Millie, Old Far, Ole Underwood. These stories show the influence of post-Impressionism. She handles the subjects with a new freedom. They deal with mental and physical extremes. All these stories examine pathological states of mind. They explore a life from which the writer was exempt as she had been cushioned from raw contact with the country. — She only had glimpses of it. She wrote with imaginative understanding and sympathy.

The Woman at the Store is essentially a story of atmosphere, and its events happen outside the boundaries

1. The story was published in New Zealand only.
2. Katherine Mansfield was greatly influenced by Van Gogh and Henry Matisse.
of the story itself. The main theme, the 'drama', is conveyed wordlessly by a child's drawing.

The story evokes a feeling of degeneration, and corruption and depletion. The woman is on her own and is exploited by man. Here, each event provokes another until we reach the final scene. In the story, one of the men, Joe, who was ever willing, finds the woman easy game. "She's female flesh."\(^1\) When the daughter is excluded from her mother's bedroom, she draws for the other rider a picture of a woman shooting a man and burying him in the ground. The man is obviously her father.

_The Woman At The Store_ thus, is just not a study of an interaction between a character and an environment, that is, the woman being driven to murder and the child to idiocy because of the surrounding bleak landscape with its dust and tussock grass — the cause is also a domestic situation.

The woman who was originally a barmaid, married and taken to the isolated store, found it tolerable only so long as the coach called once a fortnight. Soon her husband started leaving her for long periods and his indifference drove her to the violence that is at the heart of the story.

_Ole Underwood_ is again a story based on a local character from Katherine Mansfield's early Wellington years.

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1. *The Short Stories of Katherine Mansfield.*

He is a sailor who has been jailed for committing a murder. The woman he loved had been unfaithful and he had killed her lover. Katherine Mansfield builds up the man's mental turmoil and this is reflected also through the wildness and disorder of the landscape. Like *The Woman At The Store* and *Millie*, *Ole Underwood* is also a story about the dispossessed, the rootless. Throughout, Underwood is shown to be restless and his movements are abrupt. He is a type of an immigrant adventurer who hasn't been able to identify himself with any particular community. Katherine Mansfield worked on this theme as she was aware of the fine line that separated her own people (who were financially well off and socially on the right side) from figures like Ole Underwood who had failed.

As said earlier, she wrote several stories about childhood, the relationship of children with adults and with each other. *The Doll's House* is a beautiful story in which Katherine Mansfield writes with great clarity as to how three girls acquire a doll's house and have a lovely time showing it off to their friends. Side by side, she also touches on the class consciousness and snobbery then prevalent in New Zealand colonial life. The Kelvery girls study in the same school as the Burnell girls; their mother is a washerman and their father has been to prison. The Burnell children are told that they must not talk to the Kelveys and, since they set the fashion in all matters of behaviour, the whole school shuns the Kelveys.
This story appeared as the first story in The Dove's Nest. Kesia, innocent of all feeling of class consciousness, in spite of the social taboos, invites the Kelvey girls to see the much-talked-of doll's house. The spell is broken, while the girls look together with awe at the doll's house, when Kesia's aunt Beryl catches the Kelveys in the courtyard and chases them out. Still, the Kelvey girls are happy because they have seen the house.

This story brings out more clearly than any other of Katherine Mansfield's writings the fact that children can be cruel with the sanction of adults. The parental voice is heard, affirming the presence of social outcasts. The children mimic their parents' attitude and share the tendency to identify the outsiders and hold them away from the privileged area. The doll's house soon becomes a piece in the political game of in-and-out.

Miscellaneous Stories:

There are some excellent stories of Katherine Mansfield which cannot be classified strictly under any category, such as Her First Ball, Sun and Moon, Millie, A Cup of Tea and The Tiredness of Rosabel but all of them make very interesting reading.

Her First Ball has Leila going out for her first dance with the Sheridans of The Garden Party. From the very
beginning, the girl is unable to be casual about it like the
others. She finds everything new and exciting. Being an
only child, she does not know the thrill of having a brother
or sister. Clutching her fan, she found the atmosphere in
the ball room absolutely 'heavenly'. She is introduced to all
as the Sheridans' country cousin. Leila dances with different
people and soon she finds a fat old man confronting her. He
looks shabby in comparison to the others. The old man leads
her on to the floor and guesses that it is her first dance.
He tells her that he has been doing this sort of thing for
the last thirty years. To Leila, this is shocking as it
obviously means twelve years before she was born.

The man engages her in conversation, which gradually
shatters all of Leila's illusions and enchanting dreams. He
tells her that as the years go by, her smooth arms will turn
into short fat ones and that she would sit like the old
ladies, pointing towards her daughter. She would be unhappy,
for then she would have no partners. He expects Leila to
laugh but she becomes quiet at these sad thoughts:

"Oh how quickly things changed!
Why didn't happiness last forever?
Forever wasn't a bit too long."

She forces herself to mingle in the crowd again, to
dance out of politeness, though "deep inside her a little
girl threw her pinafore over her head and sobbed."

1. Ibid. p. 517
Katherine Mansfield wrote of *The First Ball* that it was only playing on the borders of the sea (the sea of adolescent discovery). She traces the feelings of a young girl going for her first dance and how she is completely disillusioned by a faded, fat old man. There is also the suggestion that while this painful knowledge cannot be wished away altogether, the young girl is able to bounce back to a happy mood, with the resilience of youth.

*The Tiredness of Rosabel* is the earliest of her stories to have a place in the collected edition of her work. The story is one where we see a rich girl/poor girl contrast and sexual rivalry. The source of the story lies in the remembered past, in the incident in the millinery shop where Rosabel works and where she meets the rich girl who is her alter ego. The two girls are linked together because the rich girl's fiance seems to find the shop-girl attractive. The hat suits her equally well. Thus, in appearance, the two girls are equal but, in reality, from the point of view of their economic status, they are worlds apart. The theme is developed around this basic contrast. In the end, Rosabel realises that she is only indulging in wishful thinking and goes to sleep, pulling the grimy honeycomb quilt around her. Katherine Mansfield makes a moral observation about Rosabel's heritage which was "that tragic optimism, which is all too often the only inheritance of youth."
In *Sun and Noon*, Katherine Mansfield describes a child's imaginative world which is very different from that of adults — and presents a picture of the sort of melodramatic universe which children inhabit and of their need to turn objective events into personal crises. Katherine Mansfield shows us a dinner party through the eyes of two children — *Sun and Noon*. They are filled with wonder at the preparations in the kitchen and there is a graphic description of the table: "All the lights were red roses."

Sun, who is more sensitive than his sister, is upset to see the lovely pudding broken. Here, we are given an idea of his sense of insecurity. (Katherine Mansfield had felt neglected as a child as her mother was fully occupied with the rest of the family).

The writer makes a dig at grown-ups who admire children when they come dressed in their best clothes: "Oh the ducks. Oh the lambs! Oh the sweets! Oh the pets!"

There is an artificiality about the atmosphere, and the pudding made up like a house symbolizes something beautiful to the little boy and he cries when he sees it half-eaten, with the beauty spoilt.

*A Cup of Tea* is about a young girl, rich and pretty, who plays fairy godmother to a poor girl no older than herself. The poor battered creature is dumbstruck when Rosemary takes her homewhile Rosemary feels it would be a great adventure and thrilling to give her a cup of tea. The
main theme, which is that of jealousy, is slowly built up as the girl nervously eats some bread and butter and the meal seems to transform her looks.

Rosemary's husband happens to see the girl and finds her 'absolutely lovely'. He tells her that he was completely bowled over by her looks. Hearing this, Rosemary is suddenly filled with jealousy, and she gives the poor girl some money and sends her out of the house as quickly as she can.

This story seems to run along the same lines as The Tiredness of Rosabel, turning on the rich girl - poor girl contrast and sexual rivalry.

Pictures is a story which moves around one character — Miss Moss who is a singer, desperate for a job. The situation in which she is found is a very natural one as the landlady threatens to throw her out if she does not pay her rent. The story is built up event by event. Miss Moss is shown to be dreaming of what she desires from life. Hence, the title — Pictures. We have her thinking of substantial breakfasts. At the end of the story when she is disheartened at still being jobless, she dreams of being the singer they wanted in a cafe.

We find Miss Moss enthusiastic at the beginning and then gradually losing her optimism as, from one place after another, she is turned away without a job. Finally, she is
picked up by a stranger in a café at a moment when she is filled with despair.

Here, we have Katherine Mansfield depicting in a candid manner how a desperate woman reacts in a certain situation and also the dreams of people and the harshness of reality.

**Millie** is a sort of New Zealand case study about a woman who is dispossessed. A man is murdered and Sid, her husband, goes to hunt for the young man who is suspected of having committed the murder. The woman wanders round the place remembering her wedding day and feels that time passes very quickly, and especially "if you hadn't anyone to talk things over with, they soon dropped out of your mind." They don't have children and she feels that her husband, who is 'softer' than she is, might be missing them.

Then she hears a sound and finds the murderer behind the wood-pile. He is a young boy, hungry and injured—his leg was bleeding. Millie can't help being sorry for him and feeds him some beef and bread. Once she has cleaned his face, a strange feeling unfolds within her:

"Some seed that had never flourished there, unfolded and struck deep roots and burst into painful leaf."

When the boy enquires, "when are they coming back," she knows that he is the murderer and yet she is unable to

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throw him out. She thinks to herself:

"They won't ketch him. Not if I can 'elp it. Man is all beasts. I don't care what e's done, or what 'e 'asn't done. See 'im through, Millie Evans."

Her husband returns and, as they retire for the night, the dog rushes out barking. He hears the young man outside as he is trying to escape. She sees her husband chasing the boy and "a strange mad joy smothered everything else. She shouts after them, 'Go it! Go it!""

It is the loneliness in her which makes her befriend the young boy and, in the end, she gives vent to her frustrations by shouting and shrieking like a mad woman. She is unable to see the young boy destroyed, who had given her a few moments of companionship and pleasure. On one occasion, she is a woman who possibly feels the instinct of motherhood and so she tries to save him. But at the end of the story, she is simply a frustrated woman, rejoicing in cruelty. The mixed drives and motives — unconscious in the woman — are revealed by the sensitive writer.

**At The Bay**

The Burnell world set the tone for all three of the major collections that Katherine Mansfield wrote, *The Prelude*, *The Doll's House* and *At the Bay*.

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The Burnells appear as a family group and are shown in domestic situations. This story is again one of discovery and the growth of that kind of awareness which belongs to a small child. Here, Kezia is just beginning to open her eyes on the possibilities of the world which Linda and Beryl foreshadow in their own problems.

At the Bay was written in 1921 over a period of about six weeks and is constructed as a series of linked episodes like The Prelude and The Daughters of the Late Colonel. Unlike these two stories, it has a controlling narrative framework which functions thematically as a means by which the major images of the story are drawn together. Here, Katherine Mansfield depicts a single day, from dawn to sunrise, in the lives of the Burnell family at their house at Crescent Bay. We have four new characters - Mrs. Stubbs, the store-keeper, the next door neighbours Mr. and Mrs. Harry Kember, Jonathan Trout; and the baby that Linda was expecting in The Prelude has been born.

The aim of the story is to tell us how all these characters behaved outwardly and also what some of them were feeling, their innermost thoughts. Katherine Mansfield also adds something of their past and present lives and also future lives in order to show us the "deeper strangeness." of their lovely surroundings, so that "our imagination is not allowed to go starving while our senses are feasted."
Katherine Mansfield shows us how each of the characters spends the day doing the simple, ordinary things in life and, while doing so, reflect in their different ways on the mysteries of life and death. Each reveals his or her secret thoughts.

We find all the characters asking the same sort of 'question', on the same day. We have Stanley Burnell, 'The Male animal', who tears off to office or is concerned with his morning swim. Then, there is the grandmother seeing to the breakfast. The children play on the beach and Linda dreams away her afternoon, in the deckchair. Mrs. Kember and her husband are there to bring the realities of 'life' to the notice of Beryl.

Linda's dream about marriage and her youth, her inability to love her children, is interrupted when the baby wakes up and she has a conversation with Jonathan Trout, who is upset about going back to his job. He is a pathetic figure who tries to hide his failure with 'his flowery absurdities in the language of light opera.'

The grandmother and Kesia discuss death, and the old lady is able to forget the question of death through their absorption in the physical present:

"Say, never, say never, say never, gurgled Kesia, while they lay there laughing in each other's arms. 'Come that's enough, my
squirrel! Thats enough, my wild peny,' said old Mrs. Fairfield setting her cap straight.
'Pick up my knitting.'

Both of them had forgotten what the 'never' was about.

The adults are shown to be always under stress because they look constantly towards the future, hoping for fulfilment and achievement. Beryl is disillusioned by the vulgar Mrs. Kember on the beach; and Beryl's encounter with her husband in the night more than disturbs her equilibrium. The maid visits Mrs. Stubbs for tea, and hears her talking about her husband who had conveniently died of dropsy - a man who "couldn't stand anything small." Even though Mrs. Stubbs seems to have numerous photographs, her true feelings regarding her husband are revealed to the maid, when she drops the broad hint:

"all the same, my dear," she said surprisingly, "freedom's best." Her soft fat chuckle sounded like a purr.
"Freedom's best", said Mrs. Stubbs again.

In the childhood scenes of At the Bay, Katherine Mansfield is at her best. The children play animal-grab on the ironing table in the Burnell's wash-house; yet their world is not set apart from that of the adults. It is intermingled with the shadows that troubles adult life.

"The childhood that we look back upon and attempt to recreate must be — if it is to

1. Ibid. p. 283
2. Ibid. p. 287
satisfy our longing as well as our memory — a great deal more than a catalogue of infant pleasures and pangs.  

The writer felt that a kind of haunting light must be set upon the scenes depicting childhood, and we have this in the card-game scene, not only outwardly, but there is a more subtle device at work.

Katherine Mansfield was living in the shadow of her own death and here we have three kinds of people throwing the haunting light on the world of childhood — the grandmother, the widow and Linda (who represents middle age). Kesia questions her grandmother about the death of her uncle William. That is in episode four of the story. Then Mrs. Stubbs, soon after, speaks of the freedom she has acquired after her husband's death. Both these episodes occur before the card-game. From the maid-servant's visit, we are taken to the game in the wash house, which ends after the frightening arrival of Jonathan. Later, we learn how Jonathan had spoken to Linda about his failure in life, his "lack of a guiding principle," his life in an office which he could not escape. His thoughts had been about the "shortness of life", and Linda had pitied him. It is Jonathan and Linda who show true insight, and it is in their conversation that fundamental issues are allowed to surface.

Though *At the Bay* belongs to a different story cycle, it is closely related in its underlying theme to *The Garden Party*. Both the stories try to overcome a deep sense of conflict. The stories try to find some kind of harmony. In these stories, both the writer and the reader (and the characters) try to 'see through' discontinuity: they make the same effort.

In this story, Katherine Mansfield tries to revive her dead grandmother and mother – her cousin Barry Waters (Pip), who died during the war and her uncle Val (who died prematurely).

Death is seen "in a flower that is fresh unfolded", as she expressed it herself – this is the theme of *'At the Bay'*, death which is unfolded below a life that is transparent.

V.S. Prichett has complained that an "indispensable element" of short stories, which he defines as "the sense of a country, a place, the sense of the unseen characters, the anonymous people, what we may call 'the others', is as weak in Katherine Mansfield's writing as it is strong in Chekov's."¹

*At The Bay*, he continues, is one of the minor masterpieces of our language. "but who are these people, who are their neighbours, what is the world they belong to?" He

concedes that 'At The Bay' has its background of mystery — life and death yet these characters seem to fall out of nowhere.

We may say that Katherine Mansfield's feeling for her country contributes its own set of overtones in 'At The Bay'. The 'deeper strangeness' of the scene is shown in the descriptions of the bay at sunrise and the deserted beach at low tide, in the silent bush and in that last glimpse of the moon, when all was still.

It is sufficient to say that there are no 'others' in Katherine Mansfield's New Zealand stories. The 'silent character' she presented in At the Bay was not a human society but the absence of one. Here we have the stillness of the bush, the disdain of the islands for the "huddled little pockets of colonial intruders." Here we are shown the loneliness and sense of deprivation. Katherine Mansfield pitied her people, and she used this as the "indispensable element" of her story.

In a letter to Dorothy Butt in Sept. 1921, Katherine Mansfield wrote:

"I've just finished my new book...The title is At The Bay. That's the name of the very long story in it - a continuation of Prelude. It's about 60 pages. I've been at it all last night. My precious children have sat in here, playing cards. I've wandered about all sorts
of places — in and out. — I hope it is good... It is so strange to bring the dead to life again. There's my grandmother, back in her chair with her pink knitting, there stalks my uncle over the grass; I feel as I write:

"You are not dead my darlings. All is remembered. I bow down to you. I efface myself so that you may live again through me in your richness and beauty and one feels possessed. And then the place where it all happens. I have tried to make it as familiar to 'you' as it is to me. You know the marigolds? You know those pools in the rocks, you know the mouse trap on the wash house window sill? and too, one tries to go deep — to speak to the secret self we all have — to acknowledge that."

The Voyage

This story also belongs to the New Zealand phase, and Katherine Mansfield wrote it at Chalet Lesse Sapins in August 1921. This story has many things in common with that of the Burnells, and of the Sheridan's of the Garden Party. It differs from them in this, that the setting is wholly fictional and has no links with other stories or episodes. Here we have the child's eye-view and the lucid detailing of the Garden Party. The completeness which this story exhibits has made it one of the most frequently anthologised of all her stories.

Katherine Mansfield herself wrote to Gerhardt:

"But when I wrote that little story I felt that I was on that very boat, going down those stairs, smelling the smell of the saloon...and the next I was Fenella hugging the swan neck umbrella. It was so vivid - terribly vivid - especially as they drove away and heard the sea as slowly it turned on the beach. Why - I don't know. It wasn't a memory of a real experience. It was a kind of possession." 1

In this story, the whole life of a girl is concentrated in one experience. The Voyage opens on the Wellington docks where the ferry for Piction is waiting. The setting is an industrial one. The little girl Fenella leaves by ship with her grandmother, most probably to live with her as her mother has died. They are seen off at the docks by Fenella's father.

This story has complete honesty and real power, and it is quick with the implications of the rhythm of life. The desolation surrounding the child is there but it is part of an encompassing movement which includes promise and comfort along with death. The grandmother is old and withered, and yet full of life and energy.

They heard the ship, and the bereaved father who gives Fenella a shilling makes her feel 'she must be going away for ever.' The ship moves off, and the strip of water

1. Ibid.
grows broader - "The face of the town clock hanging in the air," and nothing to be seen but a few lights.

The ship is almost an extension of the home and there are bunks instead of beds and a cabin for a room. "It was like being shut up in a box with grandma."¹ This was Fenella's impression of the cabin.

There is also humour which is mellow, for example the grandmother remarking 'what wickedness', when she learns the cost of ham sandwiches.

The old lady retires for the night and the domestic scene is given all its fulness and value in the grandmother's undressing. "There seemed a short sharp tussle and grandma flushed faintly. 'Snip! snap!' she had undone her stays."²

The writer has the ability to understand a child's reaction and thus we find Fenella wondering what it could be when she finds her grandmother searching for the ladder — her feet move all over.

As the gangway was lowered, Fenella and her grandmother moved over to a cart and were driven away. On reaching home, she went and met her grandfather who kissed her and found her nose as cold as a button.

The Voyage thus is more or less a series of fairly simple events, and its charm lies in the graphic description.

². Ibid. p.529
of the voyage. There is no bitterness or pathos in it.

The Wind Blows was the immediate product of Katherine Mansfield's reconciliation with her past and her country — the one thing needed to unite her divided talents. It is a story describing the life of a young girl on a day when the wind was blowing and Matilda had to attend a music lesson.

In her usual vivid style Katherine Mansfield goes on to describe the wind shaking the house and rattling the windows.

"It is a hauntingly beautiful Wellington fragment."¹ The wind blows, with its poignant queerly distorted glimpse of brother and sister walking by the harbour on a windy day.

Matilda attends a music lesson and everything seems to go wrong. Her skirt flies above her waist and she reaches the music room which she finds smelling of art serge and stale smoke and chrysanthemums.

We are then again taken back to the house, and Matilda's brother asks her if she would like to go for a walk. They cannot walk fast enough. "Their heads bent, their legs just touching, they stride like one eager person through the town."²

The two of them stand by the sea and watch a big black steamer approaching. There are two people leaning on board by the rail, arm in arm:


"...Who are they?" "...Brother and sister."
"...Now the dark stretches a wing over the tumbling water. They can't see those two any more. Good-bye, good-bye. Don't forget...
...But the ship is gone now. The wind — the wind."

The steamer then sails away and the wind continues to blow.

The story ends here.

In this story of childhood, there is a quality of perceptive insight. Katherine Mansfield understood the turmoil of the growing young mind — a recurring theme with her.

Matilda screams out 'Go to hell' at her mother, and these words suggest in a certain sense the gulf between the generations. But much more, the words convey not the insurmountable gap between youth and maturity but rather their paradoxical connection. Friction is as close, perhaps even more seemingly intimate and certainly more constant than amiability. If this is the negative testimony to the continuity between the ages, the positive evidence is the unimpeded flow of mutual understanding between the very young and the very old.

Katherine Mansfield wrote that the longer she lived the more she turned towards New Zealand:

"I thank God I was born in New Zealand.
A young country is a real heritage,
though it takes time to recognize
it. But New Zealand is in my very
bones. What wouldn't I give to have a
look at it." ¹
(Katherine Mansfield in a letter to
Harold Beuchamp).

It was this feeling which made her write stories
like *Old Underwood*, *The Doll's House* and *Her First Ball*.

The New Zealand stories seem to pay off a debt
which she felt she owed her country. She may have sensed
that her strength as a writer depended on finding some
kind of accommodation between New Zealand and her life in
England — her past and present life.

About *Taking the Veil*, which has been discussed
earlier, Katherine Mansfield wrote, "I can't say how
thankful I am to have been born in New Zealand, to know,
Wellington as I do and to have it to range about in.
Writing about the convent seemed so natural."

*Prelude,*

The story is about a family in New Zealand moving
from town into a house in the country. We have no plot
as such, that is, there is no series of causes and effects,
as Katherine Mansfield traces the life pattern of three

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generations, the Grandmother, Linda and Beryl and the children. It does not require a conclusion.

Here, we find Katherine Mansfield setting out to show how people of the household think and feel, their behaviour, the way they adjust to their new home — how their lives will change along with their surroundings. This is only on the surface, and we find a particular magic in the manner in which Katherine Mansfield shifts from person to person — an ever-changing focus. She moves from Burnell to the children's mind and thereon to the maid with every bit of her consciousness brought out.

There is every probability that the home may be Chesney Weld and the journey to Kerori, when Katherine Mansfield parents shifted houses.

We are dropped immediately into the story, the middle of a scene, with Linda Burnell sitting on a buggy: "There was not an inch of room for Lottie and Kesia in the buggy."

It seems as if we have come upon the situation by accident, and are left to interpret and understand it as well as we can. The story owed its origin to the fact that a spiritual and emotional crisis occurred in Katherine
Mansfield's life at a certain moment; which was her brother's death, and this made her aware of her vocation. It made her determined to reconcile herself with her country, and to achieve emotional stability. It is in _The Prelude_ that she was able to discover all the conditions necessary for the fusion of her genius and talents.

In the story, there is a happy marriage relationship — Stanley and Linda face life with confidence. Stanley is a man fond of food and country life and very particular about money. He is muscle-conscious and does physical exercises — more of an extrovert, uncertain about things within. He also conceals a softness in his nature which is revealed at some moments. He is content to have found a place of his own and excited at the prospect of a steady, secure life.

All the same, he is also filled with thoughts of disaster. Linda, on the other hand, is a dreamer, full of romantic ideals and hers is a most complicated nature. She accepts the move to a new house with resignation — the novelty of the new home passes her by, and she seems concerned with her own feelings. She gets so involved in the secret life of things, that the larger aspect escapes her. Life is like the Aloe to her. It is fierce and passionate, beautiful yet full of thorns. Life has its limitations.

In Beryl, the sister, we have a young woman full of romantic fantasies and these are shown with the right amount
of self-hypnotized wonder which is punctuated with fits of
domestic activity and grim moments of self-recognition. She
is happy to be in the new house and yet despondent at being
shut away so far from town — to rot in the country.

The Grandmother, Mrs. Fairfield, presents a contrast
to Linda's character. She is shown as a wise and wholesome
woman, cool and practical, exercising her influence on the
new house, whereas Linda, as we have seen, is misty in her
feelings, her identity a puzzle. For example, while Linda is
comparing life to the Aloe, Mrs. Fairfield is planning to make
currant jam. Mrs. Fairfield is Linda's hold on reality, and
Linda is able to appreciate her mother's nature. The old lady
tries to arrange everything systematically so that it may fit
in with her daily needs. In Mrs. Fairfield we have a woman
who stands firm and tranquil; she is saved from a touch of
sentimentality by a certain angularity of temperament. In
her relationship with Kezia, we find that, though she is old,
she has still preserved the capacity for true spontaneous
feeling:

"This relationship stands for all that her
New Zealand life meant to Katherine
Mansfield herself. It was the ground, the
standard, the subject and the nurse of her
best art." ¹

In the New Zealand stories - The Prelude being one of
them - we find Katherine Mansfield reconstructing a world with

¹ Walsh, William: Commonwealth Literature.
great fidelity and warmth. Children are able to live imaginatively and adults freely. In this story there is a reasonable openness of communication between the sexes and between different parts of society in which frictions are universal.

Katherine Mansfield portrays children as children, seen through their own eyes, and the eyes of other children, as we see in the case of Kezia and Lottie and Isabel Burnell. Then, there are moments in the story when some cruelty creeps in, and we find the handyman Pat, cutting off the ducks' heads:

"The children are first shocked, thrilled and then Kezia sums up their feeling with the words 'Head Back.' Linda compares her husband to a dog that is often a nuisance, at moments savage—"If only he wouldn't jump at her so, and bark so loudly and watch her with such eager loving eyes. He was too strong for her... There were times when he was frightening - really frightening."

Linda feels that life will go on, and she would continue to have children and Stanley would go on making money and

"the children and the gardens will grow bigger and bigger, with whole fleets of aloes in them for me to choose from.""

The aloe is the symbol of such an unavoidable condition.


2. Ibid. p.258
In this way we see that the stories Katherine Mansfield wrote were born out of that responsiveness to life, that struggle for inner clarity and a conscientious desire to tell the truth, which marked her character.

It has generally been said that Katherine Mansfield was influenced by Chekov but Murry denied this. However, Maugham felt that this was wrong:

"Of course she would have written stories, to do so was in her blood; but I believe that save for Chekov they would have been very different."  

Katherine Mansfield's stories take the reader immediately into the midst of things, and this proved intriguing to the reader. She was able to reproduce in her works the appropriate tone and idiom without the least sacrifice of an unaffected realism. Her stories deal with the lonely woman, children, the stiff imperviousness of adults to the feelings of the deprived working class, man-woman relationship and especially the problem of adjustment faced by married couples.

Katherine Mansfield has been able to consecrate the commonplace, particularly family life, with the help of her memory. She has done this in a manner which reveals the amazing richness of the ordinary.

Her stories often deal with the funny, the ridiculous, the exasperating and yet, at the same time, the author is able to come to terms with the problems of living and dying, with pain, fear and loneliness and, above all, with her own creativity. She was able to express her thoughts without the heavy lumber of narration. One wonders what this remarkable woman from New Zealand might have achieved further, had she not died young.