

ALIENATION AND ISOLATION IN THE SHORT STORIES OF KATHERINE MANSFIELD

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Abstract:

The meaninglessness of man's modern life caused by state of alienation, isolation has been reflected in a numerous literary works forming a thematic basis in the twentieth century. Mansfield directly focuses on this theme in her literary works and influenced many other prominent writers on this theme. This paper draws some views about psychological evaluation of characters in the case of alienation and isolation. In her story Miss Brill, the way Miss Brill behaves reflects her alienation and isolation in her society. In this study of Mansfield selected short stories with the same thematic basis, it shows how writers successfully deal with the same matter in different contexts of different literary genres. Mansfield short stories touch mainly on trivial and superficial incidents of an ordinary life of an ordinary family; Mansfield had her unique comprehension of the isolated relationship between people. The purpose of this paper is to show how Katherine Mansfield in her stories "Miss Brill" and others portray the themes of alienation and isolation, through her characters' behaviors in their societies and surroundings.

Key Words: Alienation, Isolation, meaninglessness, self-estrangement.

1. Introduction:

Mansfield started early to touch on human isolation and alienation in some of her early stories, and then she developed this theme thoroughly in her New Zealand stories where she guided the reader to experience the people's intense emotion for domestic affection as well as their solitude when suffering from cruelty of reality and estrangement among people. Mansfield spends her sweetest time in New Zealand when she was a child. As a rebellious daughter, she did not only suffer from her parent's neglecting, but was also regarded as a "different" girl, which forced her to withdraw to her lonely world. Being a premature child who was clever at observing and thinking, Mansfield had her unique comprehension of the complex human relationship around her. She paid her attention to the isolated relationship between people. An examination of prelude, at the Bay, The stranger, the Ideal family and other stories would be sufficient enough to confirm it.

In *the Sun and Moon* by Katherine Mansfield (1920) we have the theme of perfection and alienation, the story is narrated in the third person and after reading the story the reader realizes that Mansfield may be exploring the theme of perfection. In the story Sun is discontent throughout the story and does not feel as though he is part of the occasion or party. He feels alienation.

In *A Married Man's Story* by Mansfield (1923), we have the theme of escape, isolation and loneliness. The story is narrated in the first person and after reading the story the reader realizes that Mansfield may be exploring the theme of escape. It is as though he feels trapped and wants to escape from the life that he knows. The reader of the story also learns that the narrator was unhappy as a child, and this unhappiness is shown later in his life as he was living a lonely life as he is alienated from his society.

In the *Daughter of the late Colonel* by Katherine Mansfield (1920) we have the theme of freedom, isolation, alienation and uncertainty. The story is narrated in the third person and after reading the story the reader realizes that Mansfield may be exploring the theme of freedom. There is a sense that neither

Constantia nor Josephine is free. It is as though both women are imprisoned. They feel they are isolated by their society. .

In *The Baron* by Katherine Mansfield (1895), we have the theme of class and isolation. The story is narrated in the first person and from the beginning of the story the reader realizes that Mansfield may be exploring the theme of class. There is a sense in the story that the Baron isolates himself from others and may in fact be lonely. In *The Woman at the Store* by 'Katherine Mansfield' (1912), we have the theme of struggle, hardship, and isolation. The story is narrated in the First person and the reader realizes that Mansfield may be exploring the theme of struggle and hardship. In the story Mansfield may highlighting the fact that the woman at the store is isolated from the outside world and she may be lonely. In *The Garden Party* by Katherine Mansfield (1922) we have the theme of class, isolation and conflict. The story is narrated in the third person and the reader realizes that Mansfield may be exploring the theme of isolation. Through the setting of the story there is a sense that the Sheridan's are isolated from the world around them. In *Miss Brill* by Katherine Mansfield, (1920) we have the theme of paralysis and escape. The story is narrated in the third person and the reader realizes that Mansfield may be exploring the theme of paralysis. In the opening paragraph of the story Mansfield tells the reader that 'the air was motionless'. This line may be important as it suggests a paralysis in Miss Brill's environment. Thus there is no connection with outside world and Miss Brill appears to escape into a fantasy world.

Mansfield portrays her characters as an alienated People in her short stories. She records psychoanalytically problematic individuals. Through such an exposition Mansfield substantially underline the problematic psychological and sociological feelings and emotions of the modernist world. Many literary critics deal with the mental states of alienation and isolation, however, the consideration of anomie is disregarded in most cases. Thus, this paper explores the destruction and fragmentation of the human mind due to the mental states of alienation and isolation in the modern period. Dating from the modernist movement of the first quarter of the twentieth century, concerned with the growing industrial society and focused on rationality and rationalism through applying new form and styles of writing. They are searching to find order within disordered social standings. Moreover, modernism rejects the past to have an idealized future as Miss Brill does in this literary text (Cuddon 1998, 515-516). Mansfield highlights the fragmentation in the minds of modern individual through depicting an intellectuals and indecisive middle-aged woman-teacher. She portrays individuals with damage psyches and depicts how they become psychologically traumatized as a result of that global change.

Katherine Mansfield re-defined the psyche of prototypical modern people when she introduces Miss Brill to her reading public in *Miss Brill*. She portray a prufrok like English teacher in a French town who has a tendency to go walking regularly in the park as well as spending all her Sunday afternoons resting there. The way she behaves just reflects her sense of alienation and isolation within society. Mansfield emphasis is much more on the individual's mental states of alienation, isolation and loneliness. She reflects the dark side of inner nature's i.e. psychic reality for beyond the urban setting.

The concept of alienation originated in sociological and psychological philosophies: it was first defined by Hegel and plays a significant role in Kierkegaard, Durkheim, Wirth, Seeman, Marx, Nietzsche, Heidegger, Merton and Sartre (Schmitt 1994, 42). All of these thinkers express their views on the concept of alienation and isolation from different aspect and explain how individuals consider their existence within their social environment. Alienation occurs when an individual is unaware of herself or himself and is in an anxious state deciding to whom his or her personality belongs. The mental state of alienation occurs "when groups do not participate in (the) process of collective definition of what it means to be a human being, but, instead, have imposed upon them a conception of who they are" (Schmitt 1944, 46) In this quotation, the emphasis is on how individuals become alone in their surroundings. Thus, a sense of isolation and alienation go hand in hand, so the individual has the inadequacy of becoming a participant of collective definition.

According to Seeman's analysis of the state of alienation, five dimensions play significant roles: powerlessness, meaninglessness, isolation, normlessness or anomic mental state and self-estrangement or alienation. Ashley underlines these Five dimensions in a detailed theoretical basis (1998, 114). Most individuals experience these socio-psychological states in their lives when they feel themselves to be in a problematic situation within the social system. To illustrate, "powerlessness" is in the mind when the individuals realize that he or she is unable to influence their own destinies in industrial society (Israel 1971, 208). This indicates that human beings should conform to limited social organizations but not to their personal wishes or else they will become powerless. Yet it is the complexity of urban life that causes these Features, because it is predominantly city life as a proper place for the emergence of states of anomic characterization, isolation and alienation. Wirth describes urban life in the modern era as Featured mainly by alienation that embodies isolation and disorganization due to a large, dense, and heterogeneous way of life (1938, 1). Wirth asserts that in developing urban life, people consider themselves in an isolated situation within the complex phenomena of the city. Hence, when Wirth defines urbanism as a way of life, he puts forward the classic description of the social and psychological effects of urbanism on the fragmental states of anomie, alienation and isolation in communal life. Katherine Mansfield expresses the problematic minds of individuals as a result of living in her lonely environment. Miss Brill become depressive personality, as she feels herself alone and isolated within her surroundings.

Miss Brill in *Miss Brill* is in an anomic mental state because of her pursuit of loneliness, isolation, self-estrangement, powerlessness and normlessness. The story, published after World War 1, depicts the problematic mental state; Mansfield also depicts the mental destruction of human beings in the modern era through Miss Brill, and her anxious state of mind. Despite having a more positive psychological, it is evident that she cannot overcome her depressed psychology by the end of the story, and thus, becomes more isolated and alienated. Although, Miss Brill is self-conscious of her alienation when the story opens, she wishes to lay everything behind and forget her previous days. Miss Brill is a character who likes to sit and observe the participation of all the other individuals. She thinks as she is on a stage to perform a play,

Oh, how fascinating it was! How she enjoyed it! How she loved sitting here, watching it all! It was like a play. It was exactly like a play. Who could believe the sky at the back wasn't painted? But it wasn't till a little brown dog trotted on solemn and then slowly trotted off, like a little "theatre" dog, a little dog that had been drugged, that Miss Brill discovered what it was that made it so exciting...And yet it explained why she made such a point of starting from home at just the same time each week so as not to be late for the performance (Mansfield 2006, 270-1).

She feels herself to be a player and is in pursuit of her Sunday treats, buying a honey cake at the baker's when she returns home. Miss Brill lives in the modern world and has all her opportunities to lead a conforming comfortable life. That's why she is fond of acting. She is relaxed as she thinks others observe her being an actor.

They did not speak. This was disappointing, for Miss Brill always looked forward to the conversation. She had become quite 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 2006, 269).

These few lines reflect Miss Brill's loneliness. She pretends to be active in the park, combining the social gathering of players who are, in fact, the walkers there. Miss Brill becomes an expert of listening and observing but not participating in the conversations around her, she indirectly confesses her loneliness and alienation.

The band had been having a rest. Now they started again. And what they played was warm, sunny, yet there was just a faint chill a something, what was it? - Not sadness no, not sadness a something that made you want to sing. The tune lifted, lifted, the light shone; and

it seemed to Miss Brill that....

And Miss Brill's eyes filled with tears and she looked smiling at all the other members of the company. Yet we understand we understand, she thought though what they understood she didn't know (Mansfield 2006, 271). This quotation explains Miss Brill psychological and mental state. It reflects her desperate psychological orientation as Mansfield defines her as a crying person: her "eyes filled with tears". She does not participate in their activities but only "looked smiling at all the other members of the company". This expression implies her loneliness and alienation by calling the people there the "other members of the company". Such a psychological and mental state represents Miss Brill desperate life.

Miss Brill is rich enough not to be regarded as powerless in the world yet, when the visitors of the barks evaluate her wearing style as ridiculous and mock her she becomes a weak person. Although she has a fur kept well to wear on special days, she becomes a wholly poor individual in her life, as she loses her ideal, the appreciation of others. Her choice of Sunday treats in the park suggest that she is not satisfied with her comfortable life and decide to go to another area to relax, thus, she leaves her monotonous life behind. She is in search of identity trying to fulfill her ideal of finding a better and more confident way of life. She experiences a meaningless and futile life in her inner world; thus she is isolated and alienated when she leaves her daily life behind,

Just at that moment a boy and girl came and sat down where the old couple had been. They were beautifully dressed; they were in love. The hero and heroine, of course, just arrived from his father's yacht. And still...

"No, not now", said the girl. "Not here, I can't."

"Ah, be off with you, Said the boy in an angry whisper. Then: "Tell me, ma petite chere-"

"No, not here," said the girl. "Not Yet." (Mansfield 2006, 271-2)

The flirting young boy and girl call Miss Brill a "stupid old thing" and question the reason for her sitting there. This is a ridiculous situation for Miss Brill and she becomes terribly depressed because of this. This should be the climax of the short story in which Miss Brill decides to keep herself once again to her little room and hides her fur in the box forever. This is a means of having a desperate worldview: a time for her loss of self-reliance and a point of climax which underlines the existence of alienation in Miss Brill's life. She feels her life to be meaninglessness, thus, dives into the depth of isolation and alienation.

But to day she passed the baker's by, climbed the stairs, went into the little dark room her room like a cupboard and sat down on the red eiderdown. She sat there for a long time. The box that the fur came out of was on the bed. She unclasped the necklet quickly, quickly, without looking, laid it inside. But when she put the lid on she thought she heard something crying (Mansfield 2006, 272).

This quotation depicts the conclusion of the story. Mansfield hints at Miss Brill's dark room in which she has a desperate life and beings crying at the end, depicting her damaged and fragmented psyche. It is significant to emphasize that "Miss Brill" is ironical, because although Miss Brill is well aware of her alienation in life, she tried to revive herself by going to the park and refresh herself as a happy and self-confident individual. Miss Brill can be regarded as an anomic character especially when she leaves the entire world behind and keeps herself and her fur in her room. That is, she hates all her social gathering in the park and rejects everything she owns. She feels that her life is meaningless and considers herself to be a powerless person in her social environment.

2-Isolation in Mansfield's short stories

A Isolation in between couples

Prelude and At the Bay are known as Mansfield two prominent stories about an English family in New Zealand. Linda appears to be a happy and admirable woman and has whatever a woman aspires for: she has a wealthy husband who ensures the whole family a comfortable life; she has several lovely children; In spite of all this, Linda is not as happy as what other thinks her to be. She is always entangled

with her inner conflicts and never feels satisfied with her domestic life.

B. Lonely and helpless mother Linda

As a mother of three children, Linda is indifferent to them and even refuses to shoulder the responsibility of a considerate mother, which is shown from the very beginning of the story when the whole family is moving to a new house. Looking at the massive bags and boxes on the floor, she says “these are absolute necessities that I will not let out of my sight for one instant” (223)¹ without having look at Lottie and Kezia who are left behind as important as that luggage that she has to leave then and “Cast them off” (223). When Kezia and Lottie join the family at the new house at last, Linda also shows little interest in them and even does not open her eyes to see them, only to ask slightly “Are those the children” (229). Linda's abdication of the role to be a mother turns to be more open and apparent in *At the Bay*.

For Linda, it was “useless pretending” (453) to love the children since she is always indifferent to them and really hopes that they could be anybody's except hers. Though there is seldom any communication between Linda and her children, we are able to find a face-to-face talk between Linda and Kezia in prelude when they are watching the aloe through which their different attitudes to life are presented symbolically. Nothing grew on the top except one huge plant with thick, grey-green, thorny leaves, and out of the middle there sprang up a tall stout stem. Some of the leaves of the plant were so old that they curled up in the air no longer; they turned back, they were split and broken. Some of them lay flat and withered on the ground. (240). In Kezia's eyes, though the aloe is tall, it is thorny, which resembles much with her mother's present condition: though as a mother, she always appears to be so indifferent to her children that the latter could never approach her. She is just like an “island” (240) which separates herself from others and completely constrains herself in her own world. To Linda, on the other hand, the aloe has its different meaning: She is lonely as the aloe with all her energy and passion to life withered, as “split and broke” as the leaves of aloe. The aloe is not any symbolic of Linda's dread of pregnancy and childbirth but also her terror of the sexual intercourse with her husband, Stanley:

Linda is encouraged and her heart suddenly grown hard for she also hopes to be a person with Long and Sharp thorns for nobody could hurt her easily and Stanley, in particular, could never ask sex from her at his own will. Her illusion makes her connect her husband with her “Newfoundland dog” thinking that even her Newfoundland dog that she is so fond of in the daytime” (254) would not dare to come near her. As the story goes on, Linda's ambivalent feeling towards Stanley has been expressed plainly by means of her inner monologue: On the one hand, she really “loved and admired and respected him tremendously” (254) as long as he “wouldn't jump at her so, and bark so loudly, and watch her with such eager, loving eyes” (254) on the other hand, he was too strong for the delicate Linda although he was told by the doctor that she “may die any moment” (254). Driven by the contradictory feeling towards Stanley, Linda's heart is as dry as dirt and it often wanders in an isolated world.

Linda is as lonely as the aloe standing on the grassy island, surrounded with various dangers from both husband and children. Marriage and sexual life becomes her endless misery and “she was broken, made weak, her courage was gone” (443). So, she has to resort to dreams and fantasies to drive off the annoyance and fear of her real life.

C Safety Lacking father Stanley

Compared with Linda, Stanley in these two stories seems to live a much happier life as the powerful head of the family. We may find that he is a loving, but not understanding husband who could never mind Linda's frailty to meet his physical demands and his affection to his children also lacks warmth. He cannot always act as an over-complacent man especially when referring to his wife, Linda; For example, whenever he approaches near home, he always feels “assort of Panic” (241) and he feels secure enough only when he hears Linda says hi, which makes his heart “beat so hard”. (242)

As a husband, Stanley never recognizes that his just for Linda which he thinks natural is actually great pain to her. To Linda, the relationship between her and her husband Stanley is much more like the

customers and guests who respectively take what he needs that the lovebirds.

As a matter of fact, nearly all the characters of the two stories have their own secrete life unknown to the rest of the family: the vigorous and imperative husband the dreamy wife weary of childbirth, the young and pretty sister eager for a lover, the kind and patient grandmother the innocent children, each living unaffectedly in his own little world.

D-“Isolation” Between the most familiar strangers.

The stranger is probably one of the most typical stories revealing the theme of human isolation. Mr. Hammond is self-egoistic man whose possessive love for his wife finally makes him blind even to the object of his affection. He strongly believes that Janey loves him so much that he can have any demand on her. In effect, Janey has not loved Hammond affectionately as he believes. For instance, in response to his warm greeting, she didn't even bother to answer”; (369) As their cab passes through the brightest streets, Janey “drew his feels that she is so lightly, so remotely” (371) that he has to ask her to Kiss him in order to ensure her love towards him. Though Hammond is quite convinced that he and Janey love each other very much he has never tried to concern about her real needs and would never know why he could not obtain that love Janey gives even to a stranger but him. To Janey, similarly, she has no idea of the inner working of Hammond's mind and can't understand his inexplicable jealousy of a dead man who is evidently unrelated to their private relationship.

Therefore, there is only distance and alienation shared by the couple, which is also implied through the title the stranger. Hammond and Janey are actually the strangers to each other. Hammond is too much obsessed by self-love to understand Janey correctly and, regardless of her loving heart; Janey is unable to perceive the self-centricity that envelops the inner being of her husband. No wonder at the end we find that “they would never be alone together again.” (373)

E- “Isolation in an ideal family.

Human isolation does not only exist between couples like Hammond and Janey, but also lies even in an ideal family. The central image, Mr. Neave, is like Stanley Burnell, he is a wealthy merchant who is engaging in his business in New Zealand. As he is becoming old, his trade is taken over by his only son, Harold. But Neave could not completely rely on Harold whom he thinks too fickle to operate his business effectively. However, his wife Charlotte and the girls are always persuading him to make the whole business over to Harold “to retire and to spend his time enjoying himself” (422).

In response to the children's suggestion of “retire and enjoy”, Old Neave has to force a smile and he is really wondering that how they could live an extravagant life “if he'd gone in for hobbies” (422). The high fed life enables the girls to take everything for granted and seem to be indifferent, impatient and impolite to anybody and anything except for the extravagant material life.

For example at the sight of her father, Lola does not show any respect and love to him with her screaming voice saying “what a fright you gave me! Why isn't Charles here to help you off with your coat?” (423). However, old Neave is certain that his daughter has forgotten him and is not waiting for him as she said. Soon, he finds that every one of the family is happily indulging in their own world, talking and smiling, but none has paid attention to him: He's been forgotten. Old Neave has totally turned to be an outsider and a stranger to the family which he devotes all his life to sustain. Mansfield skillfully exposes old Neave's inward pain through his monologue which helps the readers understand that the wealthy material life does not bring people the corresponding rich spiritual life but isolation instead.

3- Conclusion

Finally, Miss Brill is isolated, alienated and an anomic character in this literary work as she manifests her split psyches. Mansfield reflects the significance of split mental cases for creating new writing in women studies. Although Mansfield writes in different contexts, most of her literary works can be evaluated in portraying similar mental and psychological cases. They detest their characters social gathering and manifest their hatred through their mental states of alienation, isolation, meaninglessness,

powerlessness, and anomie. Actually what Miss Brill reflect through her anomic mental state is the concept of escapism from her social gathering and from her city lives. After assessing such types of mental states, it is possible to interpret Miss Brill from her social environment. This story hints at the worthlessness of all social circumstances because of the loneliness of protagonist live. This indicates that loneliness, yet it is the reason for new creative works. As Miss Brill is alone, she expresses herself emotionally by means of her writing...

And In her New Zealand stories, Mansfield made every effort and did her utmost to put the commonest and tiniest incidents occurred to an unromantic family in an ordinary day, in which she paid her very attention and employed her sharp insight to depict lively and truly the existing and real "isolation" physically and mentally of the New Zealanders in that very times. People who feel isolated and aloof might be the father, mother kid, or the grandfather; or it may be an individual, a family, whoever and whatever it is, what can never be neglected is that it is Mansfield that enables us to feel vividly both the particular terrors and the inimitable delights of the small community which presents itself so life-like and real by presenting us her marvelous New Zealand stories.

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