

## A Study of the Conscious and Unconscious Perception of the Status of Happiness in Katherine Mansfield's Short Story *Bliss*

Ala Eddin Sadeq<sup>[a],\*</sup>

<sup>[a]</sup> Zarqa University, Jordan.

\* Corresponding author.

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### Abstract

Kathleen Mansfield is one of the outstanding twentieth century short story writers. Her short story *Bliss* (1922) describes a day in the heroine, Bertha Young's life who is preparing for a grand dinner party to be held in the evening in her own house. She intends to reveal to all her guests her utter exultation and contentment with husband Harold. She imagines that she has everything she hopes for in her marriage to him. Eventually, the experiences of the party climax into a disastrous realization both of her husband's deception of her and her own naive and unconscious perception of the true meaning of the status of the bliss in her life with him. She also discovers that complete happiness or rapture is either non-existent or superficially achieved within the social reality of male domination and female role playing.

As a modern writer, Katherine Mansfield adopts different means, such as magic realism, symbolism, psychoanalysis, Marxism and feminist theories in delineating her female protagonist's real dilemma. This paper attempts to examine the different techniques that are used by Mansfield in dealing with her central character's dilemma. The paper also aims to shed light on the female predicament in the late Victorian era and to promote a clear understanding of the true meaning of happiness in human life. The nature of the heroine's moral, personal and social crisis and her progression to a state of maturity will be thoroughly investigated in the paper.

**Key words:** Conscious; Perception; Self-Delusion; Magic realism; Romanticism; Repulsive self deception and contradictions; Feminism

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Reality cannot become the ideal, the dream; and it is not the business of the artist to grind an axe, to try to impose his own vision of life upon the existing world. (Stead, 1977)

### SECTION ONE: INTRODUCTION

Kathleen Mansfield is the pen name used for Kathleen Beauchamp Murry (1888–1923). She was one of the outstanding twentieth century short story writers and a poetess whose poems reveal her overwhelming interest in using nature imagery to enhance her social and moral ideas in her work. Kathleen Mansfield was born and brought up in New Zealand. She left for Great Britain in 1908, where she encountered modernist writers such as D.H. Lawrence and Virginia Woolf and, eventually, they became close friends. Indeed, Woolf wrote in her diary after Mansfield's death that they "had something in common which I shall never find in anyone" (Bell, 1977, p.227; McLaughlin, 1978; Smith, 1983). Mansfield also read the works of Marcel Proust, Wordsworth, Coleridge, T. S. Eliot, Oscar Wilde and other English writers of the early twentieth century. Her stories often focus on moments of crisis which cover a short period of time, approximately a day, in which the central character passes from a stage of innocence to personal and social awareness (Daly & Saralyn, 1994; Jones, 2010).

Mrs. Dalloway (1925, as cited by Woolf, 2009) is a novel by Virginia Woolf which details a day in the life of the heroine, Clarissa Dalloway who prepares for a party to be held in the evening. Katherine Mansfield's short story (Mansfield, 1922) *Bliss* (first published in *The English Review* in 1920 and later in the collection *Bliss and Other*

*Stories*, 1922) also describes a day in the heroine, Bertha Young's life. Like Clarissa Dalloway, Bertha Young is preparing for a grand dinner party in the evening in her own house. Unlike Mrs. Dalloway, who seems miserable and totally discontented with her family and her married life to her husband Richard, we first meet Bertha Young in a state of rapture, reflecting her transient happiness and contentment with everything around her. However, the experiences of the party for the latter climaxes into a great disappointment and resignation as she realizes her husband's deception and her own naive and unconscious perception of the true meaning of the status of the bliss in her life.

However, at the end of her party ordeal Mrs. Dalloway realizes that all her miseries and negative feelings are mere self delusions related to the neuroses of the middle age. She discovers that the true meaning of happiness and fulfillment in her life resides in being close to her family ties and responsibilities as a wife and a mother. The experiences of the party result in similar crucial awakening in the life of Bertha Young, but in a totally opposite direction: The status of bliss and anxiety she has been experiencing at the start of the party changes into utter misery coupled with her emergence from the state of childhood naivety to the recognition of herself as a female patronized her domineering husband. Her conscious perception of her true female position reinforces a new understanding of the meaning of bliss in her life. She realizes that complete happiness or rapture is either non-existent or superficially achieved within the social reality of male domination and female role playing.

As a modern writer, Katherine Mansfield adopts different means, such as magic realism, symbolism, psychoanalysis, Marxism and feminist theories in delineating her female protagonist's predicament and her ultimate transformation. She also employs poetic and dramatic techniques for the same purposes in the story. This paper attempts to examine the different techniques that are used by Mansfield in dealing with her central character's dilemma. The paper also aims to shed light on the female predicament in the late Victorian era and to promote a remarkable insight to the true meaning of happiness in human life. The nature of the heroine's moral, personal and social crisis and her progression to a state of maturity will be thoroughly investigated in the paper.

This paper is divided into five sections. The first section is an introduction that states the main ideas of the study. Section two focuses on the central character, Bertha Young, describing her personality and attitudes to life and people around her while she is preparing for the party which climaxes in a tragic self realization for her. Section three discusses Bertha's romantic clothing of the reality of her life with her husband Harold. Her traumatic awakening from self delusion will be studied in section four. This section will also examine Mansfield's use of different techniques in describing Bertha's awakening and

moral and her social progression. Section five summarizes the main findings of the paper.

## SECTION TWO: BERTHA'S CHARACTER AND SELF-DELUSION

The first part of Katherine Mansfield's short story *Bliss* stages the protagonist Bertha Young inhabiting a world of magic realism (Rogers, 2011), a paradise on earth and a colorful version of the reality in which she is overwhelmed by overflowing feeling of happiness that words are not sufficient enough for her to describe:

What can you do if you are thirty and, turning the corner of your own street, you are overcome, suddenly by a feeling of bliss –absolute bliss –as though you'd suddenly swallowed a bright piece of that late afternoon sun and it burned your bosom, sending out a little shower of sparks into every practice, into every finger and toe?...that all her feeling of bliss came back again, and again she didn't know how to express it -- what to do with it (p. 137).

It is important to note that Bertha's present situation cannot be regarded as living in a world of pure fantasy or illusion, because she is not escaping reality to daydreams. This reality is too perfect for her, and her personal satisfaction and insurmountable happiness in her married life to Harold are not in question. In her seminal study *Fantasy. The Literature of Subversion*, Rosemary Jackson argues that fantasy refers to that "which is visionary, unreal ...and it is linked with the individuals' existential anxiety and unease in real world (Mansfield, 1922, p.52)". Bertha's world can neither be composed in a fairy tale tradition, for she does not totally cut herself off from reality. She seems to plant her temporal or mundane world with magical dream –like elements to blend above all her inner feeling of the magic of complete happiness with her outer being, since she imagines that she has everything she hopes for in her married life; namely a wealthy husband, a lovely daughter, and a nurse and a servant as serving commodities, in addition to having sophisticated friends and a beautiful garden to be proud of:

*Really --really -- she had everything. She was young. Harry and she were as much in love as ever, and they got on together splendidly and were really good pals. She had an adorable baby. They didn't have to worry about money. They had this absolute satisfactory house and garden. And friends – modern thrilling friends.... And there were books, and there were music... (my italics, p.146).*

Bertha's supreme blending between outer reality and her inner feelings into a melting pot of magic also helps her to create an alternative version of reality which will assist her to encompass her innate experience of being "perfectly" and "divinely" in a state of bliss "like the" slender pear tree in fullest, richest bloom in her garden (Mansfield, 1922, p.145). Although, Bertha defines her condition from the very start as being in a state of absolute bliss, at the same time she lacks the verbal

capacity to express its true meaning. (Gregor, 1997, p.75) This unconscious motivation for inventing a substitute reality for herself is captured in her insistence to “bring the carpet up to the table”. Undoubtedly, the table here is a symbol of reality which she wants to co-coordinate with the magic carpet of Sindibad from *One Thousand and One Nights*. Bertha’s verbal incompatibility and her failure to articulate the limit of her innate feeling of joy which seems reminiscent of Gudrun’s feeling of “still happiness” in D. H. Lawrence’s grown jewel work *Women in Love* (Lawrence, 1987) published in 1920 (Martin, 2010, p.96) are depicted in her own wondering: “Oh, is there no way you can express it without being ‘drunk and disorderly’? How idiotic civilization is! Why be Given a body if you have to keep it shut up in a case like a rare, rare fiddle?”. The heroine’s reference here to the “rare fiddle” is crucial. In this particular instance, it highlights the central notion of the complexity lies in expressing for herself and the readers this rare and extraordinary moment of exultation and transient happiness she is actually embracing on the very day she is preparing to have a grand party in her house.

However, the technique of mixing the fantastic and the real in the delineation of the heroine in this part of the story is of great importance: It does not only confirm Mansfield’s status within modern writing, but also places Bertha’s potentiality within childhood perspective of naivety and innocence. In her earlier mentioned work Jackson states that “children have a different conception of ‘self’, and blend their inner life with reality more freely than adults, who are conversely more alert to the objectivity of facts and the potential distortions deriving from perceptions and references” (Jackson, 1981, p.45). Thus, from the very start of the story we are made aware of the despairing fact that although Bertha is at the prime age of thirty, yet she has not crossed the boundaries of her childhood to reach maturity as adult. Mansfield’s initial introduction of her character shows her trying to express her benumbing sense of elation in a manner similar to that of a child when given a precious gift or playing with other children in a playground and feeling innocently happy:

ALTHOUGH Bertha Young was thirty she still had moments this when she wanted to run instead of walk, to take dancing steps on and off the pavements, to bowl a hoop, to throw something up in the air and catch it again, or to stand still and laugh at – nothing – at nothing simply (p. 137).

The apparent discrepancy in Bertha’s character is ironically illustrated in the capitalization of the word “ALTHOUGH” in the very first line of the story. Thus, when Nanny tells her that little B clutched the ear of a dog when she took her to the park, Bertha stands paralyzed as a helpless child unable to show any mature response to the situation: “Bertha wanted to ask if it wasn’t rather dangerous to let her clutch at strange dog’s ear. But she did not dare to. She stood watching them, her hands by her side, like the poor little girl in front of the rich girl

with the doll” (Mansfield, 1922, p.141).

In the above quotation, the heroine’s allusion to her resemblance to our Else, one of the major characters in Katherine Mansfield’s short story *The Doll’s House* is of great significance. As the little poor girl whom Aunt Beryl “shooed out” with her sister from the house “as if they were chickens” (Mansfield, 2011) and prevented them from seeing the doll’s house, Bertha appears utterly incapable of facing the challenges of her adult reality. Bertha’s Our Else - like image of helplessness is magnified theatrically in her description standing still with her “hands by her side” like an obedient but a confused and helpless child in the above quotation. In practical terms, her child-like excitation and playfulness are remarkably drawn in the manner she arranges the fruit bowl on the table in her dining room and later in the spontaneity with which she disposes the cushions one by one on the couches in her drawing room (Mansfield, 1922, p.145).

As she enters her dining room, which for her becomes the initial stage upon which she is going to enact her limitless happiness with her husband Harold, whom she blindly believes the main cause of being in bliss, she states that “in her bosom there was still that bright glowing place – that shower of little sparks coming from it” (Mansfield, 1922, p.137). When the maid, Mary, brings “the fruit on a tray and with it a glowing bowl, and a blue dish,” (Mansfield, 1922, p.139) Bertha, in a manner echoing the romantic poetess Christina Rossetti in her poem “A Birthday” (1830-1894), begins to arrange them in a way to show that the evening party is a private celebration for her beloved Harold has come to her. Rossetti’s poem describes her preparation for a party in which she uses sparking colors to express her love and gratitude for a man whom she considers the day of her meeting with him as her actual birthday:

Raise me a dais of silk and down;  
Hang it with vair and purple dyes;  
Carve it in doves and pomegranates,  
Work it in gold and silver grapes,  
In leaves and silver fleurs-de-lys;  
Because the birthday of my life  
Is come, my love is come to me. (Rossetti, 2011)

Likewise, Bertha, in her decoration and arrangement of the fruits on the dining table, focuses on the matching of bright silver, red and gold colors to enhance the image of her complete happiness and contentment in her married life to Harold:

There were tangerines and apples stained with strawberry pink. Some yellow pears, smooth as silk, some white grapes covered with a silver bloom and a big cluster of purple ones. These last she had brought to tone in with the new dining – room carpet Yes, that did sound rather far – fetched and abused, but it was really why she had brought them. She had thought in the shop “I must have some purple ones to bring the carpet up to the table” ... When had finished with them and had, with them and had had two pyramids of these bright round shapes, she stood away from the table to get the effect ....

This, of course, in her present mood, was incredibly beautiful....She began to laugh, No, no I'm getting hysterical (p.139).

Within these imaginary and romantic approaches to reality, the two bright pyramids, in the above quotation, refer to herself and her husband Harold reaching the peak of insurmountable state of happiness together. The irony is that the pyramids, from the perspective of Mansfield's feminist ideology in the work, refer to the male authority which Bertha is unknowingly celebrating. When Harold phones to tell her that he will be ten minutes late for the party, she naively ponders: "What had she to say? She'd nothing to say. She only wanted to get in touch with him for a moment. She couldn't absurdly cry. "Hasn't it been a divine day" (Mansfield, 1922, p.143)! Bertha's shrouding everything related to herself and her life with illusory divinity crystallizes her utter obliviousness of the reality of Harold's deceptive nature. Bertha's tendency to illusions is highlighted further in her refusal to see her reflection in the mirror. We are told that while waiting for Mary in the dining room, she "hardly dared to look into the cold mirror" (Mansfield, 1922, p.139). When she dares to have a glimpse of herself: "It gave her back a woman, radiant, with smiling, trembling lips, with big, dark eyes and an air of listening, waiting for something...divine to happen...that she knew must happen...infallibly" (Ibid). There is no doubt that this exaggerated mirror image is that of a romantic dreamer than Bertha's real self. For the very reason, she insists that maid should not turn the light in the room. With an unprecedented self-confidence, she informs her: "No, thank you. I can see quite well" (Ibid). The image of the darkness in the very room she is going to celebrate her love for Harry is an emblem of the darkness within herself which stands as a clear obstacle in the way of her attaining any responsible conduct in her life. Mansfield reiterates the shortcoming of Bertha's character, once more, in the latter's skeptical attitude to her little daughter B in the nursery. Instead of providing the needs of her child Bertha contemplates yet again "that all her feeling of bliss came back again, and again she didn't know how to express it -- what to do with it" (Mansfield, 1922, p.142). With Bertha's final declaration the curtain falls to announce the end of the first act to pave the way for the second and most crucial act prior to her gaining full self-realization in the party.

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### SECTION THREE: BERTHA'S ROMANTICISM ABOUT HAROLD

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Mansfield's description of her heroine in this part of the story focuses further on her inclination to romanticism and emotional response to her environment. She also draws attention to her paramount concern for her appearance in the party. As a romantic figure in a painting by the romantic poet and painter Gabriel Rossetti, Bertha

plans to wear a "white dress, a string of jade beads, green shoes and stockings" (Mansfield, 1922, p.146) so that to coordinate her angelic hostess image within the inventive romantic atmosphere of her drawing-room which is going to be the first stage for celebrating her love and happiness in the party:

She went into the drawing-room and lighted the fire; then, picking up the cushions, one by one, that Mary had disposed so carefully, she threw them back on to the chairs and the couches. That made all the difference; the room came alive at once. As she was about to throw the last one she surprised herself by suddenly hugging it to her passionately, passionately. But it did not put out the fire in her bosom. Oh, on the contrary! The window of the drawing-room opened on to a balcony overlooking the garden. At the far end, against the wall, *there was a tall, slender pear tree in fullest, richest bloom; it stood perfect, as though becalmed against the jade-green sky.* Bertha couldn't help feeling, even from this distance, that it had not a single bud or a faded petal. Down below, in the garden beds, the red and grey tulips heavy with flowers, seemed to lean upon the dusk. *A grey cat, dragging its belly, crept across the lawn, and a black one, its shadow, trailed after.* The sight of them, so intent and so quick, gave Bertha a curious shiver. (p. 144-145, my italics)

The above passages are illuminating examples of Mansfield's creative talent in placing Bertha's dilemma within the romantic tradition of using nature imagery to mirror her agonies in reality. This shift in the author's technique is in a parallel line with the shift in the delineation of the heroine's female crises in a new light. It is worthwhile to start with the mention of the cats in the above quotation which is not coincidental. In reality cats are known to be deceptive animals by nature. At the same time they are symbol of warmth and coziness. Thus, while the black colored cat symbolizes at this stage in the course of the development of the narrative, Bertha's own self-deception and blindness to reality, the grey cat reflects her unrealistic and naïve formulation of the warmth engendered by her ardent feeling of bliss with Harry. Inevitably, the image of the cat recalls in the reader's mind the short story *Cat in the Rain* (Hemingway, 2011), by the American author Ernest Hemingway. Hemingway illustrates in the story how a nameless American wife feels starved for attention and love in her marriage to a dominating husband, who insists to have her hair cut too short like boys. He uses the cat as a symbol of the warmth of fulfillment she inspires to achieve in her relation with him.

Unlike the heroine of the story *Cat in the Rain*, Mansfield's character creates, in her magical realistic world, an illusory version of her perfect happiness and fulfillment with her husband Harold, symbolized, as mentioned earlier, in her reference to the grey cat. This is because, like Kezia in Mansfield's short story "The Doll's House", who adopts herself to accept the rigid rules of social conformity that prevent her from establishing a humanitarian contact with the two poor Kelvey sisters from her school, Bertha is trained from an early stage in her life to adjust to the reality of being patronized by the male members of her society in return for a luxurious

and irresponsible way of living. This is perhaps the reason why she has never contemplated the nature of her relationship with Harold, nor consciously acknowledged the existing unbridgeable gap between herself and her promiscuous husband. The disparity between Bertha and Harold is genuinely illustrated in their conversation about their guest, Miss Fulton. When Bertha declares that "Miss Fulton was rarely, wonderfully frank", we are told that Harold seems reluctant to agree with his wife's point of view about Miss Fulton:

Harold said "No." Voted her dullish and "cold like all blond women with touch, perhaps, of anaemia of all brain." But Bertha wouldn't agree with him; not yet, at any rate. "No, the way she has been sitting with her head a little on inside, and smiling, has something behind it, Harry, and I must find out what that something is." "Most likely it's a good stomach," answered Harry. He made a point of catching Bertha's heels with replies of that kind "Liver frozen, my dear girl, or "pure flatulence," or "kidney disease," ...and so on. For some strange reason Bertha liked this, and almost admired it in him very much (p.144).

This argument between Bertha and Harold on the surface appears trivial and almost insignificant, but as any other speeches delivered in the story, the conversation embodies a deep understanding of the true nature of Bertha's crisis. However, Harold's provocative description of Miss Fulton, in the above quotation, as "good stomach," "anaemia of all brain," "Liver frozen" or "pure flatulence" is no more than a cover up for the reality of sharing a secret affair with her. Bertha naively conceived his words as indications of his male intelligence and superiority. In formulating this image of him, she is actually justifying for herself her blind reliance on him as her savior. Her vain and superfluous image of Harold conveyed in a mental soliloquy, parading him as a chivalric hero in a romantic fiction:

Harry had such a zest for life. Oh, how she appreciated it in him. Against another test of his power and courage—that, too she understood. Even when it made him just occasionally, to other people, who didn't know him well, a little ridiculous perhaps ... (150 my italics).

While Bertha's romanticized image of Harold's character justifies, though temporarily, the notion of her being in a state of bliss, it also pinpoints the deficiency underlying the very nature of her relationship with him, highlighted in his calling "my dear girl" (Mansfield, 1922, p.144) and earlier in the story as "Ber" (Mansfield, 1922, p.143). His words seem to be an inherent confession that she exists, as his daughter B, no more than an object in his household, alienated, thus, from her real role and responsibilities (Oakley, 77-82). Watching her little B in the nursery, Bertha contemplates: "How absurd it was. Why have a baby if it has to be kept – not in a case like a rare, rare fiddle – but in another woman's arms" (Mansfield, 1922, p.141). Bertha's statement foreshadows, figuratively, her understanding of herself being merely a valuable object safely guarded in a protective sheath, symbolized in the image of Harold as a savior. Yet, we

are made aware of the fact that "Bertha Young desired her husband. Oh, she'd love him –she'd been in love with him, of course, in every other way, but not just in that way" (Mansfield, 1922, p.141). In retrospect, Bertha's psychological confusion depicted in the above quoted lines is a haunting insight into destructiveness of the values or ideologies of her bourgeois middle-class which conceive her being only as a commodity, belonging to her husband and her husband's world and before him to her father and to her father's world. In his interesting Marxist analysis of Bertha's case, Chantal Cornut – Gentille D'arcy states that:

...just like the nurse, Bertha embodies, in Marx's own words: "a commodity like any other article of commerce, and consequently {is} exposed to all the vicissitudes of competition and all the fluctuations of the market." Within this in mind, "Bliss" may be perceived as a cynical exposition, through Bertha, of the enforced and remarkable status of "woman –as- commodity" within an oppressive patriarchal system ... (p.249)

From this perspective, Bertha's story cannot be seen as sole sentimental rendering of a moment of transparent feeling of joy in a woman's life in a single day. It is, indeed, a palpable revelation of a feminist imputation engendered precisely through the negative knowledge provided by the very structures which repress and deflect her feeling of bliss (Ibid). In effect, instead of the idealized romantic picture which she draws of herself and her husband as a couple- being "as much in love as ever" (Mansfield, 1922, p.158), her situation climaxes into a repulsive self deception and contradictions that she has to accommodate within her sentimental little fictional pieces of living in heaven with Harold.

#### SECTION FOUR: BERTHA'S AWAKEN

The final part in the drama of a day in the life of the heroine concludes in a moment of epiphany leading to her self-realization. This part is characterized by Mansfield's extensive use of symbols. Each symbol has different levels of interpretations, depending on the alternating stages of the heroine's awakening, which takes place at the very end of the party to mark figuratively the end of Bertha's delusions about herself being in a state of bliss with Harold. In particular, this crucial moment of realization in Bertha's life happens when she discovers Miss Fulton's flirtation with her husband. As Miss Fulton prepares to leave the party, Bertha notices that her own husband Harry rushes to help her star-like sparkling quest to put on her silver mink coat in a manner to show his secret compassion for her:

And she saw ... Harry with Miss Fulton's coat in his arms and Miss Fulton with her back turned to him and her head bent. He tossed the coat away, put his hands on her shoulders and turned her violently to him. His lips said: "I adore you" and Miss Fulton laid her moonbeam fingers on his cheeks and smiled her sleepy smile (p.160).

Mansfield intentionally structures this transitional moment of self discovery within a triangle form of

relationships so that to highlight the three dimensions of Bertha's self realization. The first level of her awakening is precipitated her awareness of the unreality of the notion of her being protected by Harold's warmth and love. In this particular instance, the black cat is associated with Bertha's blindness and the echoing imagery of the pear tree becomes a symbol of Harry's deceptive reality. She is as just deceived by him as she has been alluded by the very bisexual nature of this tree, thinking that it has represented womanhood in a state of rapture. The "tall pear tree" (Mansfield, 1922, p.145) now becomes an incarnation of Harry's reality. Her obliviousness of his character is typically shown in her misinterpretation of his remarks on "his shameless passion for the white flesh of lobster" (Mansfield, 1922, p.153). She thinks that he is alluding to his contentment with her as a dutiful wife. The reality is that Harold is indirectly alluding to his admiration for Pearl Fulton's white complexion. Accordingly, the second stage of Bertha's self-discovery is precipitated by the Knowledge of the falsity of believing herself in a state of bliss with her husband. A reality which is, yet again, depicted in the analogy she has earlier made between herself and the blooming perfect pear tree within her walled garden. Now this walled garden becomes a metaphor for imprisonment in unconscious self-delusions about the reality of her relationship with Harold.

The third and most crucial realization springs from her understanding of the true nature of the affinity between herself and her friend, Miss Fulton. The latter is associated now with the image of the grey cat, since she appears to be after the imagined stability, security and the warmth of Bertha's life with Harold. Bertha has always unknowingly sympathized with Miss Fulton and most likely shared a kind of telepathy or spiritual identification with her. She has always inwardly acknowledged that Miss Fulton to be a dreamer, like herself inclined to romanticism and sentimentalism in life. For this reason, when she arrives dressed in white and silver colors which resemble almost the colors Bertha has chosen to wear in the party, she somehow feels elated about her premonition of the existence of some mysterious link between them. This resemblance between the two women serves as a significant turning point in the narrative, particularly when Bertha begins to conceive it in a new light. Prior to this event we are told that Bertha seems unable to express, in bare utterances, as in the case of her feeling bliss, the reason for liking or likening herself to Miss Fulton, whom Harold mockingly describes as a she-cat "dragging its belly" (Mansfield, 1922, p.145). She, suddenly, discovers that what they share together is the reality of conforming to a purely male-oriented patriarchal society which is once more symbolically indicated in the associating between Harold and the pear tree. At the very end of the story Bertha painfully repeats Miss Fulton's words about her pear tree: "Your lovely pear tree --pear tree – pear tree" (Mansfield, 1922, p.165). The pear tree becomes a

symbol of the truth of Harry's domination and seemingly protective authority, which both women passionately yearn for in order to ensure their everlasting happiness and fulfillment in life. For the first time Bertha begins to think that, like the solid pear tree, which is an outstanding item in her garden, Harold is dominating not only the garden of her own life but also the dreams of a woman like Miss Fulton, who exhausts all sources of femininity in order to have him. Now the dazzling and gleaming Miss Fulton becomes an embodiment of an equally haunting knowledge that women, within such a social standard, waste their lives and efforts on their external looks so that they shine like dolls in the eyes of their male partners. Their prime aim in doing so is to capture their attention and consequently win the privileges of their protection and financial supports. This perhaps is the reason behind the extraordinary care which Mansfield takes in the delineation of Miss Fulton's outward appearances and behavior in the party. The latter's elusive attitude, noiselessness and her aloofness in the party points to her patent derives for creating a positive impact on Harry. She consciously plans to have him, since she recognizes her desperate need of him to survive within her authoritarian social system. In her turn, Miss Fulton represents the "cold mirror" (Mansfield, 1922, p.139) which Bertha deliberately avoids to look at earlier in the story. She embodies Bertha's own inner withering and waste in her mood of caring only for the apparent superficial details of her life and in her relationship with Harry. In the present situation, the pathetic Miss Fulton emerges as her counterpart in the process of women victimization by a social system. Both seem paralyzed in transcending the boundaries designed for them in their world and are unable to shake themselves off its devastating impact on them. At this point in the story, the everlasting self engendered pear tree emerges a symbol referring, this time, not just to Harold but generally to all men in her society:

And the two women stood side by side looking at the slender, flowering tree. Although it was so still it seemed, like the flame of a candle, to stretch up, to point, to quiver in the bright air, to grow taller and taller as they gaze –almost to touch the rim of the round, silver moon. How long did they stand there? Both as it were, caught in that circle of unearthly light, understanding each other perfectly, creatures of another world, and wondering what they were to do in this one with all this blissful treasure that burned in their bosoms and dropped, in silver flowers, from their hair and hands (p.155-156) ?

Mansfield uses both characters to reveal the two façades of the opposing reactions given by women to the humiliating constraints of their environment. For instance, the manner in which Miss Fulton is delineated reveals her acting as an agent for the survival and the continuum of the very social system which negates her female identity and being. She repeatedly murmurs to Bertha: "your lovely pear tree" (Mansfield, 1922, p.161-162). The repetition portrays not just her envious nature of the latter for having Harold but also undermines her innate

satisfaction with the way male and female relationship is conditioned by the rigid constraints of her society. Her behavior typically foreshadows that of aunt Beryl, Isabel and other female characters in Mansfield's short story "The Doll's House," who likewise embrace the idea of the eternity of the system of conformity, in their case, to social class distinction. Bertha's character is employed to show the other side of the coin. Unlike Miss Fulton, Bertha, in reality, is in conflict with her crippling world, for she suddenly realizes that Harold and herself are living totally apart from one another. She is as alienated from him as he from her, because they are not being themselves but playing the roles assigned to them by the society. We are told that Bertha now understands why she "only wanted to get in touch with him for a moment" (143). Henceforth, her feeling of rapture because of being married to Harry has no credible or authentic root in reality. It is as imagined and as pretentious as her invented magical version of reality which she also conceives it to be an unconscious means for psychologically repressing her true feelings of failure and disappointment as a wife and a mother (Gentile D'arcy, 1999, p.51).

The drama of Bertha's life reaches its conclusion with the final stage of realization of the reason for her child-woman existence being "idiotic civilization" (Mansfield, 1922, p.138). Yet she is deprived from all chances of redemption from its controlling web. She will remain eternally trapped and unable of liberating herself from being "shut up in a case like a rare, rare fiddle" (Mansfield, 2011, p.138). In the eyes of the society she is privileged to have Harold and she will surrender to this notion for the rest of her life: "For some strange reason Bertha liked this, and almost admired it..." (Mansfield, 2011, p.144). Accordingly, Bertha's party can be cherished as a symbol for celebrating the birth of her new conscious but incomplete self. This time she is going to blind herself deliberately to Harold's reality in order to go on with her life, but with a clear understanding of her real obligations towards her daughter, little B, who, in her turn, will free her from former childish illusion of feeling bliss.

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## SECTION FIVE: CONCLUSIONS

The foregoing analysis of Mansfield's short story *Bliss* displays her at her best in using different techniques, starting from magic realism to symbolism, nature imagery, internal monologue, psychoanalysis, feminism and even Marxism in portraying her female protagonist's predicaments. Her aim in doing so is to depict her heroine both from inside, as an individual blinded by illusions, and from outside, as a victim of conforming to an authoritarian male-constructed social discourse, which reduces her life to mere nothingness and role playing. The essence of Mansfield's narrative strategy of exquisitely blending Bertha's inner life with her outer existence is to reveal the

underlying contradiction in her character as well as the fragility of the assumption of her being in a state of bliss with her husband on the day she is going to have a party. The depiction of Bertha Young stripped of all illusion at the end of the story foreshadows Mansfield's belief in the non-existence of complete happiness in adult reality of pain and responsibilities. However, the technique also assists in endorsing a clear perception of the very cause and the nature of the sufferings of women who are doomed, as her heroine, to a life time imprisonment in a state of child-like naivety and caring for appearances, instead of developing into independent and conscious adults.

Ultimately, Mansfield plans for her short story *Bliss* to have no end (Bennett, 2004, p.80). Probably, she intends to do no more than bringing into focus the nature of female struggle in the late Victorian era and, hence, reveal the process of their dehumanization in the system of conformity to male authority, but purely from the view points of a woman writer rather than from male author perspectives. She declares in her story that the "trouble with our young writing men is that they are still too romantic. You can't put out to sea without being seasick and wanting a basin" (Mansfield, 1922, p.157) She hopes that the solution or the denouement for female predicaments to be delivered by her predecessor Virginia Woolf, the pioneer of feminist movement in the twentieth century.

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