

Art and society: a consideration of the relations between aesthetic theories and social commitment with reference to Katherine Mansfield and Oscar Wilde

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**ART AND SOCIETY: A CONSIDERATION OF THE RELATIONS BETWEEN
AESTHETIC THEORIES AND SOCIAL COMMITMENT
WITH REFERENCE TO KATHERINE MANSFIELD
AND OSCAR WILDE**

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ABSTRACT**AUTHOR:** Yukiko Kinoshita**Thesis Title:** Art and Society: A Consideration of the Relations between Aesthetic Theories and Social Commitment with Reference to Katherine Mansfield and Oscar Wilde**Degree:** PhD English**Description:** The chief purpose of this project is to discuss Katherine Mansfield's aesthetic ideas in connection with those of Oscar Wilde and *fin de siècle* Aestheticism. The proposed study will also analyse her Modernist technique in Symbolist terms, and consider her major themes from aesthetic and political points of view.

The primary, underlying concern of this study is to negotiate two, often opposing critical values: the aesthetic and the political. The artist's negotiation of the conflict between aesthetics (art) and politics (society) is a controversial 'modern' critical issue: the issue all serious artists and critics have been facing and consciously dealing with since the late nineteenth century. *Fin de siècle* Aestheticism and Symbolism form a dominant stream of Modernism because of this intensified shared concern over the delicate relationship between art, life and society.

Wilde's stress on the autonomy of art is related to his notion of an ideal relationship between art, life and society: he shows a keen awareness that the autonomy of art and the aesthetic self-realization of the artist could be realized only in a society without any social, cultural or moral hegemony, that is, in a society without moral, social or political oppression. The Wildean 'poeticization' of society lies in his politicization of art; and this aesthetic influences Mansfield's.

French Symbolism suggested to Wilde and Mansfield an aesthetic which enabled them to realize their Aestheticism. Wildean and Mansfieldian Symbolism attempt to 'shock' the reader: they aim at breaking the reader's reading habit, and his or her stereotypic point of view and fixed sense of values. Here lie not only the political potential of Symbolism as a Modernist aesthetic but also the aesthetic and political link between their Symbolism and avant-garde Modernism.

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ABBREVIATIONS

All references to Katherine Mansfield's stories in the text are to *The Collected Stories of Katherine Mansfield* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1981) unless otherwise stated. Also, all references to Oscar Wilde's writings in the text are to *Oscar Wilde: Plays, Prose Writings and Poem*, introd. Terry Eagleton (London: David Campbell, 1991) unless otherwise stated.

The abbreviations of other key works of Wilde and Mansfield and several other key texts are as follows:

- | | |
|----------------------------------|---|
| <i>Collected Letters of K.M.</i> | <i>The Collected Letters of Katherine Mansfield</i> , ed. Vincent O'Sullivan and Margaret Scott (4 vols. projected; Oxford: Clarendon, 1984-). |
| <i>Critical Writings of K.M.</i> | <i>The Critical Writings of Katherine Mansfield</i> , ed. and introd. Clare Hanson (London: Macmillan, 1987). |
| <i>Journal of K.M.</i> | <i>Journal of Katherine Mansfield</i> The Definitive Edition, ed. John Middleton Murry (London: Constable, 1954). |
| <i>Letters of K.M.</i> | <i>The Letters of Katherine Mansfield</i> , ed. John Middleton Murry (2 vols; London: Constable, 1954). |
| <i>Complete Works of O.W.</i> | <i>Complete Works of Oscar Wilde</i> , introd. Merlin Holland, Vyvyan Holland, and Owen Dudley Edwards (Glasgow: HarperCollins, 1994). |
| <i>The Manifesto</i> | Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, <i>The Communist Manifesto</i> , trans. Samuel Moore, introd. and notes. A. J. P. Taylor (London: Penguin, 1985). |
| <i>Politics</i> | Raymond Williams, <i>The Politics of Modernism: Against the New Conformists</i> , ed. and introd. Tony Pinkney (London: Verso, 1989). |

INTRODUCTION

*A Truth in art is that whose contradictory is also true.
(Oscar Wilde "The Truth of Masks")¹*

*Why must thinking and existing be ever on two different planes? Why will the attempt of Hegel to transform subjective processes into objective world-processes not work out?
(Katherine Mansfield Journal [26 November 1921])²*

To see the compatibility of seemingly opposing notions-- is always challenging to our intellect. Our mind's tendency to group, categorize and stereotype is a process of clarification, but we must not stop there. This intellectual habit must be broken as well: constantly to challenge our preconceptions and binary thinking by seeking the compatibility of 'incompatible' notions is the way to reach a truth. If we progress at all, our progress lies in breaking our intellectual habit. *This* is one route the Modernists propose. I will take it.

1 Perspective

The primary, underlying concern of my project is to negotiate two, often opposing, critical values: the aesthetic and the political. The artist's and the critic's negotiation of the conflict between aesthetics and politics-- their aspirations for artistic or intellectual perfection and their social commitment-- is an important modern issue: the issue all serious artists and critics have been facing and *consciously* dealing with since the late nineteenth century. I use the word 'modern' to refer to a psychological, cultural or political state which became unprecedentedly *distinct* around the turn of the last century and is still (or rather, increasingly) relevant to our contemporary consciousness.³ The conflict between aesthetics and politics involves several other, interrelated, modern critical issues: the artist's relationship with the reading public, his or her reaction to the bourgeois Establishment's cultural hegemony, the definition of 'culture' and 'tradition,' and the reconciliation between the artist's individualism (his or her freedom and autonomy which society should guarantee) and communalism (social and cultural roles which the public expects art to perform). The development of the reading public, which resulted from the empowerment of the middle-class, the spread of general education and the growth of the publishing market, changed the relationship between the intellectual in general (the artist in particular) and society. As cultural hegemony shifted from the aristocracy to the middle-class, the artist was forced to deal with market relations. The

artist was also made aware of the need to negotiate with the 'utilitarian' (or authority-serving) roles bourgeois society demands. For bourgeois society has found in art an ingenious means to perpetuate the status-quo: it desires to institutionalize art as a source of social and political stability. The artist as an intellectual was, on the other hand, not allowed to be indifferent to the growing social inequalities and the tensions between the upper and middle classes and the lower classes. The advancement of Capitalism led to the disintegration of rural communities; the immigration of the poor population into the city made social inequalities between the privileged and the oppressed visible; this marked state of exploitation led the intellectual to question the socioeconomic system which intensified class division. The nineteenth century saw the rise and development of revolutionary political ideologies like Socialism (or Communism) and Anarchism. Nineteenth-century and early-twentieth century literature witnessed the emergence of Romanticism, Naturalism, Realism, Impressionism, Symbolism and other avant-garde Modernist schools. All these aesthetic movements are 'modern' because the aesthetic principles of each movement reflect the artist's keen awareness as an 'artist' (as compared with an 'artisan'), social consciousness, and grasp and vision of culture and the significance of art in society: they reflect the issues our contemporary artists and critics are still consciously dealing with. I am aware that each of these political and cultural issues is dense: although the discussion of the relationship between art and society requires one to consider these political and cultural contexts, to discuss all of them minutely is out of the practical scope of my present study. My argument in the text does not go beyond implying the relevance of the proposed subject to modern socioeconomic and cultural issues.

My indirect, yet major thesis is that a 'good' Modernist work of art is *not* either aesthetic or social (political), but both aesthetic and social: an accomplished Modernist work of art not only satisfies technical requirements, but also contains a more or less challenging social critique. A careful reading never fails to lead one to a conclusion that a good work of art reflects the Modernist's aesthetic *and* social consciousness. One tends to understand, dogmatically, that Naturalist writers were social but inartistic while art-for-art's-sake writers were artistic but apolitical. The actual aesthetic process cannot be so clear-cut. The writers who are generally regarded as Naturalist or Naturalistic might prove to have been as fastidious about their writing as aesthetes; the writers who are grouped in the art-for-art's-sake school might, on the other hand, prove to have been as political as some openly socially committed artists. Pater, for example, in "Style," discusses Flaubert's artistic perversity and meticulousness-- Flaubert's method is usually regarded as Realist; and his theme, often, as Naturalistic. Ibsen and Chekhov started as

'Naturalist' writers; but critics do not dismiss their early writings as artistically careless. Aesthetes like Walter Pater and Oscar Wilde tend to be regarded as amoral and apolitical because their theoretical emphasis is on beauty (style), not on morality (content). However, their emphasis on the importance of 'form' should, primarily, be understood as a rebellion against a stifling, dogmatic Victorian morality and as a reaction to the moralizing, didactic attitude of the Victorian public towards art. Their claim that art should not be used as an easy political instrument of existing institutions is far from morally or socially 'decadent' from a contemporary viewpoint of art: it is a modern truism. Moreover, their views are innately radical. Their philosophical hierarchy alone can be politically challenging to the status-quo: equating beauty with truth and placing beauty over morality threatens socially accepted morality, for beauty equated with truth always suggests that the existing social order and morals serve the privileged and are, therefore, limited by the age. The superiority of beauty over morality proposes a higher morality and order.

2 Focus: Mansfield

My larger scheme is an attempt to discuss and define Modernism by re-evaluating Aestheticism and its method (Symbolism) politically: an attempt to demonstrate that the artist's conscious effort to resolve the conflict between aesthetic and social values forms one of the characteristics of Modernism. My project, then, has another, more concrete, practical purpose: that is, to re-evaluate Katherine Mansfield from a Modernist point of view: to show that Mansfield's works are Aesthetic in attitude and Symbolist in method, and that they demonstrate a consistent social consciousness.

I have judged that this attempt would not merely respond to my larger concern about the conflict between the aesthetic and the political; but that it would be worthy in its own right. Katherine Mansfield is an established Modernist writer: critics have traditionally termed her writing 'subtle'; the critical connotation of this adjective is that her writing is, generally, aesthetic *and* apolitical. Indeed, Jack Garlington reviews the critical trend of Mansfield study between the twenties and the fifties and notes that "the Great Frost" "descended on her work about the year 1936" (Garlington 53): few critics were interested in Mansfield's writing in years of political turbulence, for "little of Katherine Mansfield's work has a sociological basis" (Garlington 56); "the dismissal" could be closely related to "her failure as a 'sociological' writer" (Garlington 56). Garlington hints that Katherine Mansfield's major stories are, apart from a few Naturalistic stories, apolitical. Contemporary critics pay attention to her feminism; but Mansfield's political view has

rarely been discussed beyond that term. My close reading of her works will demonstrate her artistically *and* politically conscious attitude and style as a Modernist writer.

Mansfield has, besides, been regarded as a 'minor,' though skilful, Modernist writer: my discussion of Mansfield might help to revalue her as an accomplished Modernist writer. Mansfield's works have been, despite her fame as a short story writer, somewhat neglected by academia, considering critics' enormous passion for the works of her Modernist contemporaries such as Joyce, Woolf, and T. S. Eliot. Several explanations of this fact are possible. The critical neglect of Mansfield might be due to the genre Mansfield chose. Clare Hanson suggests in *The Gender of Modernism* that "there is a clear connection between Mansfield's choice of the short story form and her marginal position": "The short story is a genre which, both formally and in terms of its traditional context, has always been marginal, fragmented" (Scott 300). Modernist writers like James, Conrad, Chekhov and Joyce seemed to love this genre-- the form obviously met their aesthetic needs as well as their own material needs as professional writers and the commercial needs of the publishing market (its shortness fits the limited space of periodicals). The short story must have allowed these Modernists to sustain a sufficient artistic tension and concentration. The genre must have refined their aesthetic style and method while it secured their economic independence. It must have encouraged them to express a Paterian intensified moment or the sense of fragmentation of a metropolitan 'émigré'; the short story could be, socially, culturally and aesthetically, termed a Modernist genre.⁴ But it is true none of these writers wrote short stories only. James, Conrad and Joyce were, primarily, 'novelists'; even Chekhov was (and is) better-known as a playwright than as a short story writer. Critics, especially in the field of fiction, tend to take the length of a creative 'breath' (and productivity) as an indicator of creative gift and potential. Katherine Mansfield indeed has a disadvantage here. What critics need is, then, to regard her short stories as prose-verses rather than fiction: Mansfield's lines are not only musical, but, despite the smoothness of its surface, dense with symbols and pregnant with meanings.

Critics' prejudices against Mansfield's lack of 'authentic' cultural background (her 'common,' colonial background) and her sex (her being a woman) might have prevented them from treating her texts intellectually. T. S. Eliot hinted at the intellectual shallowness of "Bliss"; Woolf found the same story almost vulgar.⁵ The fact that she was a New Zealand banker's daughter seems to have socially and psychologically hindered her from mingling with highbrow Bloomsbury people in a natural manner: Sydney Janet Kaplan implies that both Mansfield's own inferiority complex and the subconscious superiority complex of 'Bloomsbury' made her "an outsider [of the group] to a

considerable extent” (Kaplan 12). New Zealand critics such as Ian Gordon and Vincent O’Sullivan, however, have been energetically working on Mansfield since the seventies. New Zealand academia has been keen on the aesthetic reevaluation of Mansfield’s writing as well as the basic scholarly task of editing her scattered works, letters and notes. The publication of substantial critical anthologies such as *The Fine Instrument* (1989) and *Worlds of Katherine Mansfield* (1991), and the most elaborate and extensive collection of her letters, *The Collected Letters of Katherine Mansfield* (1984-1993)-- shows their cultural and academic enthusiasm.⁶

The female sex is a disadvantage in most professional fields: the general tendency of literary criticism is that first-rate female writers (Emily Dickinson, Kate Chopin and even the Brontës, for example) were and still are more likely to be neglected by their contemporary critics because of their exclusion from literary communities, the lack of material and moral support, and the critics’ prejudice against their intellectual competence and professional commitment: they must wait for the coming generation’s reevaluation longer than their male peers. In this sense, the ‘promotion’ of the artistic and commercial values of Mansfield by John Middleton Murry, her husband and major Mansfield critic, did, in the long run, more harm than good to Mansfield study. The mystification of Mansfield by Murry seemed to have worked for a while: he, out of her, created a pure, sensitive, innocent tragic artistic figure-- the ‘feminine’ icon which could have been reactionary in the age of ‘decadent’ new women writers. This myth of Mansfield’s childlike, fragile femininity aroused critics’ sympathy for a while. According to Garlington’s study, Mansfield’s stories were enthusiastically welcomed and regarded as almost flawless in the twenties and the early thirties; but, as we saw, Garlington notes that “Great Frost” in the late thirties, and the gradual decline of critics’ interest in Mansfield in the forties and fifties. The Mansfield legend was alive and well in the fifties when Garlington conducted this research: he, sympathetically and yet somewhat patronizingly, comments: “The scattered writings, non-fiction prose [arbitrarily selected and edited by Murry], have as their chief appeal the record of an intelligent, sensitive mind faced with various problems that confront the intellectual in our day” (Garlington 51). Andrew Gurr and Clare Hanson note: “In the fifties and sixties there was a noticeable slackening of interest, and it is only recently [in the late seventies] that there has been a renewed interest combined with more well-informed criticism” (Hanson and Gurr 24). The cultural and political contexts of the fifties and the sixties would explain the “noticeable slackening of interest”: in the age of counter-culture, sexual revolution and militant feminism, who would, indeed, be much interested in pure, frail, virginal-- in a word, ‘feminine’-- Mansfield? “[A] renewed interest” was born because biographers’

elaborate research destroyed this old legend; and the 'new' Mansfield, a rebellious, even decadent, psychologically complicated 'new woman,' emerged.

Whatever the most probable reason might be, many Mansfield critics have been more interested in her life rather than her work, and this is somewhat ironical-- for, as we will see in Chapter Four, Mansfield aimed at an "impersonal" work of art by means of a "personal" (subjective) method: the dominance of a biographical approach seems, as it were, to transform her "impersonal" works back into "personal" raw materials. The established critical works which appeared before the seventies are Sylvia Berkman's *Katherine Mansfield: A Critical Study* (1952) and Saralyn R. Daly's introductory book, *Katherine Mansfield* (1965; the revised edition, 1994); and their analyses and interpretations of Mansfield text largely rely on biographical facts; while Daly's work, though not fully analytical, shows a sufficient interest in Mansfield's works, Berkman's work could be read as a biography, that is, an interpretation of Mansfield's life by means of her stories. Critics in the sixties and the early seventies, under the still dominant influence of New Criticism, kept contributing analytical studies of Mansfield's texts to academic journals; but their interest in Mansfield was, generally, not consistent: Mansfield seems to have been, for them, no more than one of many sophisticated minor writers. It is in the late seventies that, reflecting "a renewed interest combined with more well-informed criticism" (Hanson and Gurr 24), critics' collective and intensive effort to revalue Mansfield as a writer began to be observed: the special issue of *Modern Fiction Studies* (24.3[1978]) is, for example, entirely dedicated to Mansfield criticism. It is, nevertheless, not until the late eighties and the nineties that critics have begun to pay more conscious critical attention to her texts: in addition to the New Zealand critics' books, Sydney Janet Kaplan's *Katherine Mansfield and the Origins of Modernist Fiction* (1991), Rhoda B. Nathan, ed., *Critical Essays on Katherine Mansfield* (1993), another critical anthology, *Katherine Mansfield: In From the Margin* (Roger Robinson, ed., 1994), and an extensive collection of past and recent notable reviews and essays which enables us to overview a 'history' of Mansfield criticism, *The Critical Response to Katherine Mansfield* (Jan Pilditch, ed., 1996)-- were successively published in Britain and the US. Biographical research is, despite this increasing stress on the revaluation of Mansfield's work, still a dominant trend. Although Hanson's and Gurr's work (*Katherine Mansfield* [1981]) is, in book form, one of the first critical attempts to revalue Mansfield's writing, their approach is a mixture of textual and biographical analyses; C. A. Hankin's approach in *Katherine Mansfield and her Confessional Stories* (1983) is psychoanalytical and textual, and yet dominantly biographical. Only a committed textual analysis can, however, give Mansfield's writing an appropriate Modernist appraisal; at least it seems

to be a right way to respect her work and her intentions as a writer.

I am, nevertheless, aware that textual analysis alone would be, however closely done, feeble to justify the Modernist value of Mansfield's writing. I could reinforce my argument by locating her in the tradition of Modernist literature of English language, or even (as Modernism was transnational) of European languages. But the scope would be too wide to cope with in the parameters of this dissertation. I could, then, at least connect her with the *fin de siècle* early Modernists. To see the political potential of *fin de siècle* Aestheticism and Symbolism, and their influence on Mansfield meets my larger concern *over* the relationship between art and society; connecting *fin de siècle* Aesthetes like Pater and Wilde with Mansfield would help me to identify and clarify Mansfield's Aesthetic attitude and Symbolist aesthetics.

It, fortunately or unfortunately, turned out that this attempt to connect Oscar Wilde (and Pater) with Mansfield is not the first one. 'Fortunate' because it shows that connecting Mansfield with Wilde is not a reckless attempt; 'unfortunate' because my project is no longer new. Since Mansfield repeatedly refers to Oscar Wilde in her early journal, several critics have already pointed out her link with Wilde and Pater and her interest in Aestheticism and Symbolism. However-- here, fortunately-- most of the critics' central concern seems to be Wilde's influence on Mansfield's life rather than on her art.

This particular critical tendency results from the general tendency of Mansfield study; and what this general trend has resulted from is not hard to infer. Mansfield's character as a 'new woman' was suppressed by Murry; and it was only after his death that the materials Murry^{had} intentionally left out attracted biographers' attention and Mansfield's 'real' figure began to emerge. The chief efforts of Mansfield critics in the seventies and the eighties were aimed at destroying the myth and illuminating her complex personality and her emotionally entangled relationship with Murry. The critics' collective efforts resulted in reliable biographies such as Antony Alpers's extensively revised version of his original book (*Katherine Mansfield* [1954]), *The Life of Katherine Mansfield* (1980), Jeffery Meyers's *Katherine Mansfield* (1978) and Clare Tomalin's *Katherine Mansfield* (1987). As V. S. Pritchett points out in his article in *The New Yorker* (26 Oct. 1981), "Up to now Katherine Mansfield has been unlucky in her biographers"(196). Murry's "idealized depiction" (Pritchett 196) has made Mansfield unlucky in her critics as well. The fact that Murry, an authority of Mansfield criticism in his lifetime, tried to "make her 'an English Chekhov' " (Pritchett 200), or a modern Keats, tended to damage the critical analyses of her works:⁷ since other writers' influences on her writing were inclined to be trivialized, it probably took more time for

critics to locate her in the French and British Modernist tradition. Besides, Murry's editions of her journal, notebooks and letters needed re-examination and re-editing. Murry's editorial arbitrariness, his authority and his myth-making in a way enabled him to establish his wife's (and his) fame. We cannot, indeed, deny Murry's whole works and efforts; Mansfield critics pay a certain, if muted, respect to his editorial skills. Murry's 'achievement,' however, largely hindered the progress of Mansfield criticism: Hanson and Gurr, in *Katherine Mansfield*, hint at the negative effects of Murry's 'contributions' by observing: "The main problem is that most early criticism was done under the shadow of Murry's highly selective presentation and publication of his wife's writings" (24). Some of the notable, reliable editorial works that erase Murry's manipulation are Ian A. Gordon, ed., *The Undiscovered Country: The New Zealand Stories of Katherine Mansfield* (1974), Clare Hanson, ed., *The Critical Writings of Katherine Mansfield* (1987), Vincent O'Sullivan and Margaret Scott, eds., *The Collected Letters of Katherine Mansfield* Vol. 1-3 (1984-93; the last volume is still in progress) and Vincent O'Sullivan ed., *The Aloe: With Prelude* (1982).

The 'shock' of a new discovery seems to linger on and keep affecting the criticism of the nineties when Mansfield's new personality is fully illuminated and established. The biographical discovery seems to be still stirring critics' curiosity about and new passion for Mansfield's personality and life. Her bisexuality, in particular, has drawn critical attention, and the name of Oscar Wilde and *fin de siècle* Aestheticism (or rather, Decadence) has begun to be related to her works; her sexual orientation and the radicalism it involves have become a 'hot' issue. Mansfield's biographical episodes, journal and letters (and even the textual analysis of, say, "Bliss") suggest her bisexuality. Also, her frequent references to Wilde and other Aesthetic and Symbolist figures in her early journal and letters suggest her absorption in them. Critics, however, tend to suggest the influences of Wilde and his Aestheticism only in terms of her bisexuality, and their reference to the subject often stops at a somewhat superficial level: a reference to a deeper connection between Wilde and Mansfield supported by a close examination of the two writers' works is, for example, missing in most cases. Sydney Janet Kaplan's study (*Katherine Mansfield and the Origin of Modernist Fiction*) is, as the title shows, an ambitious work in which the author tries to elevate Mansfield's literary status to Virginia Woolf's and Joyce's; yet her study, despite its challenge and its abundant information, cannot escape this criticism of superficiality as far as it is concerned with her discussion on the link between Mansfield's and Wilde's aesthetic. Hanson and Gurr try to explore the development of Mansfield's artistic style and technique; they actually mention the names of Oscar Wilde and other *fin de siècle* Aesthetes, and refer to their

influences on Mansfield's Symbolist method. But they limit Wildean influence to her early works (the works before 1910).⁹ Hanson also discusses Mansfield's Symbolist method observed in "Prelude" (in "Katherine Mansfield and Symbolism" [1981]); her critical comments on Mansfield's Symbolism are suggestive, but her analysis does not demonstrate the relevance of Symbolism to Mansfield's work sufficiently. Kaplan who insists on Mansfield's anxiety about Wildean influence limits Wilde's influence to Mansfield's sexuality and to her early études.

Among the papers and books that deal with the influence of Oscar Wilde and Aestheticism, Vincent O'Sullivan's early study ("The Magnetic Chain: Notes and Approaches to K. M." [1975]) seems to be closest to my view. One of his chief interests is her sexuality; most of his practical analyses are restricted to Mansfield's early writings, letters and notebooks; and he does not refer to Mansfield's Symbolism in this essay-- he refers to her Symbolist techniques later in the "Introduction" to *The Aloe* (1985). O'Sullivan, however, does expand consideration of Wildean and Paterian influences to Mansfield's later works; he also notes their influences on Mansfield's being *and* art, and attempts a practical analysis of the issue. O'Sullivan comments on Wilde's influence on Mansfield: "I should be surprised if a painstaking search of the Mansfield canon did not turn up a couple of hundred instances (and by no means all of them from her apprentice work) of verbal links, echoes, or stylistic turns which could be followed through her submission, during the years of adolescent enthusiasm, to Oscar Wilde" (99). As for Pater, Wilde's mentor:

Mansfield's conception of life was, I believe, close to Pater's own, before that scholar's views were touched by the temperament and performance of Wilde to become something rather more sensational than he should have cared to father. This is something I put forward without any elaborate claim of direct influence on Mansfield, or of her conscious adoption. What I stake out by the similarities in imagery and tone, in the philosophy, if you will, that lies behind them, is that Mansfield was in an intellectual stream whose current was wide at the end of the last century, and stronger where it took its force from Pater. *Implicitly this claims that her technique as a writer, no less than features of her personality, may better be understood once this is accepted.* (Emphases added 101)

O'Sullivan, later in his paper, connects Pater's "The Child in the House" with Mansfield's sense of loneliness, and, further, hints at Pater's influence on her ephemeral way of grasping external phenomena. I am inclined to agree particularly with his latter point. I am, in my own way, going to discuss the influences of Paterian and Wildean Aestheticism on Mansfield's work, that is, "the similarities in imagery and tone, in the 'philosophy,' . . . that lies behind them" in Chapter Four as well as in other chapters on Mansfield: I hope that my demonstration and argument will provide O'Sullivan's idea

about the link between Pater, Wilde and Mansfield with an “elaborate claim of direct influence.”

3 Wilde

Although the emphasis of this study is on Mansfield, one third of my text will be devoted to a close analysis of selected writings by Oscar Wilde. The chief reason for this is that, despite the fact that Wilde was a well-known (or, for some, notorious) *fin de siècle* literary figure, academic study of Wilde is still at a relatively early stage for the reasons different from Mansfield’s. One obvious reason is that it took a considerable time for critics to become ready for his ‘notoriety’ (homosexuality) and to discuss his writing seriously: “As a figure not in English literature only, but in English social history, Wilde has been an embarrassment” (Fletcher and Stokes 51). Extensive and careful analysis of Wilde’s texts was not really done until the seventies; and even when critics attempt thorough analyses of some of his works (*The Importance of Being Earnest*, for instance), few consider his Aestheticism and his Symbolist method from aesthetic *and* political viewpoints. I need to discuss Wilde’s selected works from these points of view before I attempt to connect his aesthetic and political views with Mansfield’s.

According to Ian Small’s recent bibliographical analysis in *Oscar Wilde Revalued: An Essay on New Materials and Method of Research* (1993), the materials on Oscar Wilde are massive, but those which appeared before the seventies tend to be insubstantial in quality. Wilde’s commercial value as a *fin de siècle* Decadent icon has been enormous. His marketability has, however, encouraged his general reputation for flippancy (intellectual and moral shallowness): his ‘established’ flippancy as well as the moral threat which resulted from his social transgression long prevented serious critics and academics from engaging in study of Wilde. Most critics regarded him as no more than a “vulgarized” Pater (Warner and Hough Vol. 1, 124): Wilde had “a reputation” of “an infamous homosexual rather than a figure worthy of intellectual or academic attention” (Small 2). Small deplors the fact that:

... virtually no major writer in English has been so badly treated for so long by the academic and non-academic critical industries alike. This apparent paradox is easily explained. Mikhail’s total [the number (some 13,000) of the articles and books on Wilde estimated in E. H. Mikhail’s *Oscar Wilde: An Annotated Bibliography of Criticism* (1978)], although sounds impressive, is in fact made up of a great deal of trivia or ephemera, and such material has done little to enhance Wilde’s intellectual or literary reputation. At best it has simply been irrelevant to such judgements. (1)

Recent critics’ academic efforts had to be, therefore, first directed to the critical

appraisal of past (and even present) literature on Wilde: critics needed “the basic tools for a proper study of Wilde” (Small 1). Ian Fletcher’s and John Stokes’s bibliographical work (“Oscar Wilde” in *Anglo-Irish Literature: Review of Research* [1976]) is one of the first attempts in this line. After noting European (particularly German) academics’ consistent enthusiasm for and commitment to Wilde study which makes a contrast with British academics’ general neglect, Fletcher and Stokes conclude: “in all their dealings with Wilde, the English have been wrong about practically everything” (Fletcher and Stokes 55). As for the most recent bibliographical assessment-- in addition to Ian Small’s extensive critical study-- Joseph Donohue engages in a review of recent publications on Wilde in his two papers: “Recent Studies of Oscar Wilde”(1988) and “Oscar Wilde Refashioned: A Review of Recent Scholarship” (1993). These studies seem to be *necessary*. Small notes a dramatic, favourable change in the seventies: “serious academic study of Wilde as a writer” began as the social, cultural and academic climate became flexible and open “in the mid-1970s and 1980s” (Small 3-4). Nevertheless, Wilde “sells” well (Small 172): Donohue notes the fact that Wilde’s marketability, even today, tends to distract critics from serious studies of his life and work: “One sometimes feels that Wilde has attracted more than his share of bad or unsatisfactory books [by which he means such books as *Oscar Wilde’s London: A Scrapbook of Vices and Virtues 1880-1900* (1987) and *The Oscar Wilde File* (1988)]” (“Recent Studies of Oscar Wilde” 132).

Biographical studies of Wilde have been dominant: commercial writers were interested in Wilde’s scandal; academics including Richard Ellmann tend to take Wilde’s well-known comment on his life and work as it is: Wilde “had poured his genius into his life, . . . , putting merely his talent into his works” (Donohue “Recent Studies of Oscar Wilde” 125)-- this dominant biographical approach, in a way, disregards Wilde’s remark which manifests his pride as an artist: “Man is least himself when he talks in his own person. Give him a mask, and he will tell you the truth” (“The Critic as Artist” 50). Fletcher and Stokes, and Small agree that “all the biographies of Wilde [have] been characterized by their inaccuracy” (Small 11). Small as well as Fletcher and Stokes does justice to inaccurate, yet serious biographical works (like Pearson’s *The Life of Oscar Wilde* [1946]), but concludes that “[o]vershadowing all other studies of Wilde’s career is of course the biography by Richard Ellmann [*Oscar Wilde* 1987]” (Small 18). Nonetheless, even Ellmann’s biography which is impressive in both quantity and in quality is neither entirely free from “factual errors” nor from a flaw of “mythologizing” Wilde (Small 20): “Ellmann’s biography is not the life of Wilde but the tragedy of Wilde” (Small 20). Donohue pays a due respect to Ellmann as “the most thorough, if not in all ways the most satisfying, cartographer of the landscape of modern Anglo-Irish literature”; but

Donohue hints that it is high time for critics to turn their attention from his life to his writing: “for readers with substantial interests in Wilde’s plays, in Wilde as a dramatist and man of the theatre, Ellmann’s biography fails to satisfy in certain important ways” (“Recent Studies of Oscar Wilde” 123, 125).

Oscar Wilde, as an academic subject, has, however, become very popular in recent years: *MLA Bibliography 1981-1995* counts 416 entries of “Oscar Wilde”—the number is impressive: it nearly triples that of the Mansfield entry which counts 144; and Mansfield study has been gaining renewed critical attention, too. These recent studies of Wilde should, besides, be understood as academic in intent and treatment. The change Small notes is, then, remarkable, considering the fact that “in his voluminous writing, Leavis has nothing of significance to say about Wilde; and in Bateson’s *Cambridge Bibliography of English Literature* (1940) he is dismissed as a figure of minor importance” (Small 173).

As Fletcher and Stokes suggested in the seventies and Small notes now in the nineties, this popularity of Wilde is, as in the case of Mansfield, closely related to the political, social and cultural tendencies of our time: it reflects the rise of critical studies of colonialism (critics’ interest in Wilde’s Irishness), the emergence of the Gay and Lesbian Movement (critics’ liberated interest in Wilde’s homosexuality) and the interest in the nineteenth-century *fin de siècle* culture and society which results from our awareness that we are now in another *fin de siècle*. To name but a few, Irish studies include: David A. Upchurch’s *Wilde’s Use of Irish Celtic Elements in The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1992), Davis Coakley’s *Oscar Wilde: The Importance of Being Irish* (1994), and Richard Pine’s *The Thief of Reason: Oscar Wilde and Modern Ireland* (1995). Terry Eagleton’s play, *Saint Oscar* (1989), must be added to this list. Although Eagleton’s approach to Wilde is ‘non-academic,’ his chief intentions lie not only in the discussion of the relationship between Wilde’s Irishness and his radicalism (and conformism), but also in a deconstructive challenge to the distinction between academic and creative writings: it is a ‘critical’ play, or, in Eagleton’s term, “theatre of ideas” (*Saint Oscar* xi). The *fin de siècle* cultural and social studies include: Regenia Gagnier’s *Idylls of the Marketplace: Oscar Wilde and the Victorian Public* (1986) and Camille Paglia’s *Sexual Personae: Art and Decadence from Nefertiti to Emily Dickinson* (1990), Murray G. H. Pittock’s *Spectrum of Decadence: The Literature of the 1890s* (1993) and John Stokes’s *Oscar Wilde: Myths, Miracles and Imitations* (1996). The studies on Wilde and sexuality include: Patricia Flanagan Behrendt’s *Oscar Wilde: Eros and Aesthetics* (1991), Jonathan Dollimore’s *Sexual Dissidence: Augustine to Wilde, Freud to Foucault* (1991) and Ed Cohen’s *Talk on the Wild Side: Towards a Genealogy of a Discourse on Male Sexualities* (1993).

A fair assessment of Wilde as a person is followed by a better appreciation of Wilde as a writer: most critics of the eighties and the nineties are conscious of the analytical reading and critical assessment of Wilde's writing even when their focus is on the cultural, political and social contexts of Wilde's work. Richard Pine, for instance, notes: although he cannot help his "professional admiration" for Ellmann, "his [Ellmann's] treatment [of Wilde in *Oscar Wilde*] disappointed" him, "because it seemed to confuse biography with critical assessment" (*The Thief of Reason* xi). The publication of the anthologies and books of textual criticism reflects critics' enthusiasm to assess Wilde as a writer. These include: Harold Bloom, ed., *Oscar Wilde's The Importance of Being Earnest* (1988), Regenia Gagnier, ed., *Critical Essays on Oscar Wilde* (1991), and Norbert Kohl's *Oscar Wilde: The Works of a Conformist Rebel* (1989) whose careful treatment and in-depth argument about Wilde's texts seem to prove German academics' 'traditional' passion for him.

Despite the general neglect of the literary value of Wilde's writing before the seventies, some early critics pay attention to Wilde's Modernism: Edouard Roditi's *Oscar Wilde: The Maker of Modern Literature* (1947) is one of the first serious works in this line. Graham Hough, in *The Last Romantics* (1949), points out the strong influence of French Symbolism (Huysmans's *A Rebours*) on Wilde (*The Picture of Dorian Gray*). Frank Kermode also briefly refers to Wilde's aesthetic in *Romantic Image* (1957); he hints that Wilde could be regarded as a prototypic New Critic because of his "autotelic" view of criticism (which Kermode objects to) (Kermode 159). Both Hough's and Kermode's interpretation of Wilde are more critical than favourable. Kermode dismisses Wilde's critical attitude (Aestheticism) as apolitical. Hough hints at Wilde's 'plagiarism' and concludes: "Wilde's literary influence, however, was nowhere very great, and was certainly not accepted by the younger men of the nineties. . . . Fidelity to a private vision is precisely what is lacking in his work" (Hough 203-4). However, recent critics are willing to view Wilde and his writings as complex: according to Small, "The subject of Wilde the early or proto-modernist has naturally been taken up most enthusiastically by recent critics" (Small 185): many critics including Small himself begin to note a 'radicalism' of Wilde's aesthetic. Small, for example, in "Semiotics and Oscar Wilde's Accounts of Art" (1985), terms Wilde a "proto-modernist." Small maintains that Wilde's argument in "The Decay of Lying" makes his Modernist aesthetic explicit; that Vivian's stress on art's subjective, non-mimetic quality shows that "Aestheticism and the English decadence stand as key transitional moments [from the 'Victorian' (dominantly and naïvely representational)] to the "modern" [self-consciously fictional and artificial]" (50).

As for Wilde's politically 'modern' aspect, Masalino D'Amico discusses Wilde's

Anarchism in "Oscar Wilde Between 'Socialism' and Aestheticism" (1967). William E. Buckler in "Oscar Wilde's Quest for Utopia: Persiflage with a Purpose in 'The Soul of Man Under Socialism'" (1989) and Isabel Murray in "Oscar Wilde and Individualism: Contexts for 'The Soul of Man'" (1991)-- also deal with the relationship between Wilde's anti-bourgeois attitude and Individualism. Nevertheless, as we shall see in Chapter Two, few critics (neither D'Amico, Buckler nor Murray) seem to take Wilde's 'Socialism' seriously.

Recent critics never fail to see a certain connection between Wilde's Aestheticism, sexual orientation, and revolutionary views as a conscious rebel: Small notes the change of critical climate:

Today. . . the notion of politics has been enlarged to include all discourses of power and authority, rather than those simply of party politics. . . . *all* writers, by virtue of the fact that their medium is language, are now seen to be political animals, whether overtly or covertly so. Hence, the determination of the "canon" of literary works is now also held to be an essentially political process: the revaluation of Wilde's *oeuvre* which has taken place over the course of the past twenty years has therefore involved acknowledging the existence of a political agenda in his work, and discovering that the literary judgements of the past which marginalized him had their own political biases. (*Oscar Wilde Revalued* 156)

Aesthetically conscious, yet apolitical critics might have dismissed Oscar Wilde as a mere 'popularizer' or 'vulgarizer' of Pater; politically conscious, yet somewhat dogmatic critics might have been impatient with Wilde's seeming 'flippancy' and rejected him as apolitical. Thus, Wilde's work was slighted, misread and misunderstood: he was a victim of right-wing conservatism and left-wing sectarianism. Small suggests that today's critics are generally politically conscious and less sectarian; that they are, therefore, more fair and less hesitant to analyse the political views they see in literary texts. We are supposed to be less afraid of the conclusion which a close reading of the text leads us to. A more flexible political climate allows us to be true to what we recognize in the text; it helps us to be more careful about grasping what the text implies; it encourages us to refer to its politics as well as its aesthetics. I admit that, as Small notes, we are in a freer political climate; yet reading critical essays on Wilde makes me realize that we are, though freer than in the past, not free enough: our critical (and political) freedom and flexibility could still be a fallacy. For I seem to see recent critics' political hesitation in Wilde criticism: few seem willing to see the political views his text contains. Wilde criticism is so far reluctant to connect his aesthetic with his political view. The argument about Wilde's political views ~~does~~ not go beyond 'humanitarian' concerns or rebellious, anti-Establishment *attitude*. A closer reading, however, seems to show that Wilde's political view is indeed keener than this: it does not stop at the level of radical

sentiment; it could be interpreted as more 'theoretical,' that is, consciously examined and strategic. "Recent views of Wilde's exploitation of the media in late nineteenth-century consumerist culture" (*Oscar Wilde Revalued* 184)-- are suggestive: they hint that Wilde *knew* tough politics and how to cope with it: he was conscious of the strategy needed to achieve his goal. Eagleton, in the "Foreword" to *Saint Oscar*, terms Wilde an "Irish Oxfordian Socialist proto-deconstructionist" (viii): Eagleton notes "the complex relations between comedy and radical politics" (x), and hints that Wilde's "offensive irresponsibility of the aesthete" one observes in Wilde's comedies could be strategic (x):

If he sometimes has the offensive irresponsibility of the aesthete, he also restores to us something of the full political force of that term, as a radical rejection of mean-spirited utility and a devotion to human self-realization as an end in itself which is very close to the writings of Karl Marx. (x)

Wilde's stress on the autonomy of art (or art for art's sake) does not, as Eagleton suggests, simply reflect his aesthetic aspiration for 'pure' art as some might think; but it also aims at an ideal relationship between art, life and society-- his keen awareness is that the autonomy of art and the freedom of the artist would be achieved only in a society where the authorities do not manipulate people's consciousness, that is, in a society without moral, social or political hegemony or oppression. A closer analysis of Wilde's texts seems to show that Wildean 'poeticization' of society lies in his politicization of art: Wilde seems to have found a way to an ideal relationship between art and society in his politicized Aestheticism and Symbolism, which relate him with Mansfield and other Modernists.

4 Key Terms: Aestheticism, Symbolism and Modernism

Aestheticism, Symbolism and Modernism are intimidating terms when one tries to define the exact concepts they represent: one would rather avoid them if one could. These are, however, the terms which my present project has to deal with, and, though not directly, attempts to clarify.

The need for definition of these three dense, yet ambiguous literary terms occurs when I try to give a 'name' to the specific aesthetics which Oscar Wilde proposes in "The Decay of Lying." The interpretation of this essay of Wilde's becomes unexpectedly demanding because Wilde himself employs the terms 'Romanticism' and 'Realism' (and 'Naturalism' by implication): I attempt a definition of each term in the discussion of the essay in Chapter One. Indeed, the analysis of "The Soul of Man Under Socialism" requires one to define what Wilde means by 'Individualism,' 'Socialism' and 'Communism'; and an attempt to clarify these terms would involve the definition of

Anarchism-- my analysis of the essay in Chapter Two is, in effect, an attempt to define Wilde's Individualism and Socialism.

Names are useful: to name is to identify, to understand and to define. Yet names could be, like 'Ernest' in *The Importance of Being Earnest*, misleading when used carelessly: names could, as in *Earnest*, become a source of confusion rather than a means for clarification. If the use of names could be a source of confusion, perhaps it would be wise to avoid them; yet, then, how could one identify one thing and distinguish it from the other? We cannot reject names or the act of naming, for language consists in naming, that is, signifying, identifying and understanding. We may, however, be able to understand and make ourselves understood without employing those 'isms': this could be challenging. Yet how could one, then, explain, effectively, a certain cultural phenomenon or intellectual tendency commonly shared by a group of intellectuals and artists? Grouping could be wrong and perhaps we should treat them individually. The purpose of grouping is not, however, to stereotype; it is, indeed, to compare; to compare is to identify the similarities and differences between individuals; to compare or to group is, then, to identify their individual characteristics as well as what they have in common. 'Isms' are troublesome and even daunting, but they are useful.

Our effort in defining those terms in a given (chosen) text and context often helps us to realize that a 'familiar' term ('ism') is, in fact, still unclarified and our grasp of a certain intellectual phenomenon is still vague: it makes us see the need for a clarification of our understanding of the phenomenon and the term. Our attempt to see a text from the viewpoint of a certain intellectual tendency, on the other hand, often throws a new light on the text; it reveals the themes and features we failed to note. This attempt may even lead to a redefinition of the accepted definition of the key term. The act of defining a certain 'ism' in relation to an author (or viewing a certain author in relation to a certain 'ism') requires us to see his or her text from a collective as well as individual point of view; it involves an act of locating the author and his or her text in social, political and cultural contexts; it enables us to find out the shared *and* individual values of the author and the text. My research does not aim at defining Aestheticism, Symbolism and Modernism in general: its central concern is to discuss and clarify *Wilde's* and *Mansfield's* Aestheticism, Symbolism and Modernism in order to understand these two authors and the intellectual stream they belong to.

(1) Aestheticism

In my text, Aestheticism refers to a specific intellectual *attitude* toward art, life and society. It does not, as it is, signify any aesthetic (artistic method). It is often explained

as a *fin de siècle* cultural phenomenon (as ‘the Aesthetic Movement’); but in my study it refers particularly to a revised view of art often termed ‘art for art’s sake.’

Aestheticism rejects the utilitarian view of art: it insists on the autonomy of art. The assertion of the autonomy of art is most likely to lead to the assertion of art’s superiority over other fields of humanities. This tendency is understandable: those who insist on the autonomy of art (‘Aesthetes’) are artists, critics and lovers of art. Aestheticism is a tendency to view life and society *in relation to* art: it ‘poeticizes’ life and society: it rejects the status-quo and aspires to an ideal life and world which our imagination envisages. This poeticization of Aestheticism is politically double-edged: it could lead to a positive attempt to poeticize life and society. The desire for self-realization and the vision of an ideal world might make one confront the political, social and moral restrictions which hinder one’s self-fulfillment, and urge one to challenge them. The rejection of the existing world might, on the other hand, encourage one to withdraw from society into one’s own self-contained inner world: it could lead to social and political indifference.

The word ‘aestheticism’ might broadly refer to love of beauty, or a general art-loving attitude. Aestheticism (with a capital A), however, has a more restricted meaning: *fin de siècle* Aestheticism advocated by such figures as Walter Pater and Oscar Wilde involves philosophical, moral and political challenges: it refers to not only “a devotion to beauty” but also to “a new conviction of the importance of beauty as compared with-- and even in opposition to-- other values” (Johnson 1). It means “a new and serious challenge to more traditional and conventional ideas” (Johnson 1).

This *fin de siècle* view of and attitude towards art, or belief in the autonomy of art form a “modern” or Modernist attitude towards art (Johnson 1); it is a Modernist grasp of the relationship between art, life and society. The notion of the autonomy of art openly opposes utilitarian view of art. Pater, still vaguely, and Wilde, consciously, saw in art (or, more precisely, the poeticization of life and society) the possibilities of one’s moral and political freedom and self-realization. *Fin de siècle* Aestheticism opposes the position that art should serve and perpetuate the cultural and moral hegemony of the Establishment. Aestheticism makes explicit the view of the autonomy of art as opposed to conventional, utilitarian, narrowly didactic, therefore, authority-serving view of art. This ‘modern’ view of art belongs to the Romantic tradition: it is relevant to the artist’s awakened self-consciousness as *an artist* (as compared with ‘an artisan’), his or her quest for aesthetic self-realization, and his or her conscious revaluation of the significance of art in life and society. R. V. Johnson, in *Aestheticism*, suggests:

What was the place of art in relation to other values, such as morality and material utility? The question was not new: Sidney’s *Apologie for Poetrie* (1595) defends poetry against the puritans and utilitarians of Elizabethan

times. But the issue became an unprecedentedly sensitive one in the nineteenth century. (10)

“[T]he issue became ^{an} unprecedentedly sensitive one in the nineteenth century” chiefly because visible and yet increasing social inequalities in industrialized society intensified the political tension between the ruling upper and middle classes and the severely exploited lower classes. Bourgeois society became “unprecedentedly” conscious of the importance of securing moral and cultural hegemony: it found in art an effective means for moral manipulation. Institutionalized art would reinforce social stability. Such art would direct people’s moral behavior accordingly, make them turn away (or escape) from harsh reality, or divert their attention from political issues: it helps the Establishment to preserve the status-quo.

R. V. Johnson treats Aestheticism “in three applications”: “as a view of art; as a view of life; as a practical tendency in literature and the arts (and in literary and art criticism)” (12). However, Aestheticism does not, as it is, refer to any specific aesthetic theory, style or practice although it is tightly linked with Symbolist aesthetics. Pater’s and Wilde’s aesthetics are Symbolist. Indeed, what Johnson introduces to us as Aesthetic aesthetics is Symbolism. As I will emphasize in the following section on Symbolism, Symbolism provided ^a practical aesthetic *theory* and *method* (aesthetics) for Aestheticism which was no more than a *view* of or *attitude* towards art (and life and society).

Johnson’s assessment of Wilde reflects the critical trend of Wilde study before the seventies (*Aestheticism* was published in 1969). Johnson regards Wilde as a flippant vulgarizer of Pater’s Aestheticism. Johnson notes the possibility of a reconciliation between morality and Paterian Aestheticism. He discusses Pater’s essay on *Measure for Measure*, and maintains that, although “Pater was accused of advocating selfishness and sensuality” in *The Renaissance* (19),

even in the early Pater, we find an appreciation-- . . .-- that literature may have a moral import, without being didactic in any explicit and direct way-- without, that is, spelling out a ‘moral’ in the manner of a sermon or cautionary tale. (71)

Johnson, however, argues that Pater’s interpretation of Arnoldian ‘self-culture’-- Paterian intensification of every moment of life by heightened sensibility and alert intellect-- encouraged Pater to “disregard social, political and economic factors” (75). Johnson suggests that it is perhaps “Pater’s historicism”(by which Johnson means Pater’s knowledge and appreciation of traditional culture) that kept Pater moderate enough to appreciate the connection between morality (life and society) and art (74).

Johnson, on the other hand, regards Wilde as no more than a *fin de siècle* decadent

figure who positively “dissociate[ed] art from morality” (70). He insists on Wilde’s lack of “historicism”:

In his dialogue, “The Decay of Lying,” Oscar Wilde’s own spokesman expressly denies that ‘art expresses the temper of its age, the spirit of its time, the moral and social conditions that surround it, and under whose influence it is produced.’ Art ‘rejects the burden of the human spirit. . . . She is not symbolic of any age.’ In *The Renaissance*, however, Pater quite explicitly regards art and literature as reflecting ‘that complex, many-sided movement’-- as in his famous comment on the Mona Lisa: . . . (75)

Johnson, however, simply fails to follow Wilde’s argument here by disregarding the flow of Wilde’s logic (the textual context of this particular expression of Wilde’s), and taking Wildean paradox literally. Wilde’s purpose is to refute the ‘Realist’ (indeed, Naturalist) view that art should *primarily* mirror and represent the social status-quo. Wilde does not, moreover, entirely reject art’s representative aspect-- Vivian’s thesis in “The Decay of Lying,” for example, goes: “Life imitates Art *far more than* Art imitates Life” (Wilde 99). Wilde is simply *stressing* the ‘subjective’ (non-mimetic) aspect of art and suggesting the superiority of Symbolist aesthetics over Naturalist aesthetics. We shall discuss this point in Chapter One. As we will see in the following chapters, Wilde’s “historicism” in Johnson’s sense was not only as intense as Pater’s; but Wilde was also aware of the political *and* apolitical side of Aestheticism, and the tactics of bourgeois cultural politics. Wilde’s notion of self-culture is more consciously politicized than his mentor’s: Wilde’s Individualism made him realize the social and political factors that hinder Paterian self-realization. Wilde’s social awareness as an artist and critic made him attempt to connect art with life and society. Wilde politicizes Paterian Aestheticism in “The Critic as Artist,” “The Soul of Man Under Socialism,” and *The Importance of Being Earnest*. His politicized Aestheticism affected Katherine Mansfield’s view of the relationship between art, life and society: Mansfield’s works demonstrate the double-edgedness (the political and apolitical elements) of Aestheticism.

(2) Decadence, Symbolism and Aestheticism

Decadence, Symbolism and Aestheticism are often used interchangeably; but to draw a distinction between Decadence and Symbolism, and between Decadence and Aestheticism seems significant. Decadence connotes moral and political (and even aesthetic) attitudes which contrast with those of Symbolism or Aestheticism; and the choice of the term Decadence may suggest a specific political stance. One may, neutrally, use this term to specify the cultural and aesthetic characteristics of the 1890s. If not, one’s choice of the term is likely to signify one’s political affinity or affiliation. One’s deliberate use of the term Decadence could imply one’s positive affinity to the moral,

political and aesthetic views which Decadence (as opposed to Symbolism and Aestheticism) represents. Or it could connote one's disapproval of the anti-Establishment, revolutionary aspect of Aestheticism: it could suggest one's conscious debasement of what Aestheticism and Symbolism represent. Johnson notes that Decadence "is an elusive term, inevitably implying personal value-judgements" (Johnson 47).⁹

The chief difference between Decadence and Symbolism as critical and social phenomena is that Symbolism is, in terms of aesthetic and moral aspirations, far more serious than Decadence. Murray G. H. Pittock suggests that Decadence was only interested in the superficial features of Symbolism: while Symbolist "interest in magic and supernaturalism" was linked with the desire for "a 'central secret' hidden from hoi polloi, but revealed to artists" and "personal self-discovery" (Pittock 35), Decadence replaced Symbolist aspiration with self-indulgent "interest in extravagant experience" (Pittock 35), which is "the world of drink, drugs, and madness" (Pittock 36). Robert Goldwater in *Symbolism* pays attention to the same point. Goldwater compares Symbolist art with *art nouveau* (or Decadent art): he maintains that while Symbolism aims at 'serious' art, that is, aesthetic self-realization, the ultimate purpose of Decadent art lies in decorativeness. Goldwater's interpretive comment on the Symbolists' use of irregular line and the Decadents' use of smooth line is suggestive of the basic difference in attitude between the two seemingly similar schools:

Symbolist line [observed in Munch's pictures] reveals the impulse of its creator; its curves retain a weight and awkwardness which are evidence of a struggle to give shape to an impelling idea, of a conflict between control and expression, between awareness of form and an awareness of emotion. . . .

In contrast, the characteristic line of *art nouveau* [observed in Behrens's pictures] is light and graceful; seemingly self-generated, it is smooth and fluid, responsive only to its own character. At its best, its force appears to lie within itself and we take pleasure in its independent presence, free of any evidence of creation. (24-25)

The difference in attitude between Symbolism and Decadence results in the difference in each art's effect on the spectator: Symbolist art gives a 'shock' to the spectator whereas Decadent art gives him or her smooth pleasure. While sharing the similar subjects and style (fluid, two-dimensional, sensual and subjective style, love of androgyne image and the icon of the Fatal Woman, and supernaturalism), Decadence is largely restricted to the *fin de siècle* age: its decorative spirit is, at best, inherited by pop art and industrial and commercial designing; its sensationalism (as a style) and its outwardly rebellious, yet innately reactionary political stance are adapted by cultural industries such as pulp fiction and porno, occult and violent films. Symbolist aesthetics and its Aesthetic spirit,

on the other hand, influenced avant-garde Modernism: Symbolism survives as what Raymond Williams terms a “modern absolute” or “the defined universality of a human condition which is effectively permanent” (Williams 38).

Decadence is associated with *fin de siècle* vices: although anti-Establishment in its original intention, its self-exhaustive indulgence and self-destructive bad habits are ineffectual as revolutionary strategies; its anti-social aspect could be even, in effect, authority-serving and reactionary. The Decadents’ uncalculated, uncontrolled aggressiveness tends to encourage people to turn to conservatism. Just as Hedonism is a decadence of Epicureanism, so Decadence is a decadence of Aestheticism, whose aim of self-culture requires self-discipline; and whose ideal vision of life and society could be politically effectual. Decadence is a political, moral and aesthetic position for “those who live for kicks, however refinedly and sophisticatedly, will take their kicks where they find them” (Johnson 47).

However, this clear distinction between Symbolism and Decadence may at times be hard to sustain: the *fin de siècle* artist often changed his or her style according to his or her (commercial or Aesthetic) purposes or artistic means (illustrations, posters or paintings) or even aesthetic ‘phases’: many *fin de siècle* artists moved between the two schools. Goldwater points out:

There are many artists whose work contains something of both tendencies and blends their qualities. Ricketts’s illustrations for Wilde’s *The Sphinx* (1894) have more of the symbolist spirit than those for *The House of Pomegranates* (1891); Maurice Denis’ vernal scenes approach the peaceful harmonies of *art nouveau*, his paintings are defiantly symbolist. (26)

Oscar Wilde was, indeed, no exception: he seems to have been susceptible to Decadent pleasure and even charmed by its openly sensual, rebellious pose which irritated Victorian respectability; yet he was aware of its ineffectuality for self-realization or for social change. *The Portrait of Dorian Gray* reveals both his inclination to Hedonist pleasure and self-indulgence, and his awareness of their limitations; but the reader never misses Wilde’s ‘choice’ of Aestheticism. The development and the ending of the story fully suggest that Dorian Gray has chosen a wrong means for a right purpose. Dorian Gray’s Hedonism primarily aims at the intensification of his self and life. His self-indulgence, however, prevents him from achieving full self-realization: it positively mars his humanity. The decay of his soul which his portrait mirrors is the decay of Life. The last act of erasing this ultimate ugliness (the ugliness of his soul)-- his act of destroying his portrait-- is a culmination of his fugitive escapism: it signifies the death of his soul, which is the termination of his life.

Mansfield, in her stories, distinguishes Aestheticism from self-indulgence: “At the

Bay,” for example, expresses one’s sway from Aestheticism to easy self-indulgence and implies the self-destructive nature of Decadence; “Marriage à la Mode” exposes the reactionary nature of Decadent dilettantism. Both Wilde and Mansfield seem to have grasped Aestheticism to break with one’s habitual being, but been fully aware of the lure of Decadence, or the decay of Aestheticism.

(3) Symbolism

I would like to suggest that Symbolism provided Aestheticism with the practical theory and method which would realize an Aesthetic view of art, life and society. Symbolist aesthetics is based on a belief in the autonomy of art, in art’s elevated power to reach truth (a Keatsian notion of beauty as truth, truth as beauty), and in art’s potential to liberate us from moral, social and political restrictions.

Symbolist aesthetics is keenly aware of the characteristics which differentiate art from other intellectual fields. Art deals with beauty; beauty *primarily* appeals to our senses. Beauty in art is, nevertheless, related to our intellect as well, and is, therefore, different from the beauty of nature: the beauty of art relies on the artist’s subjective perception, and both imaginative and intellectual treatment: artistic beauty has *style*, and *style* has *content*, whereas (the beauty of) nature, as it is, has neither style nor content. There is no art which has style but no content, or content but no style. Although art, like other intellectual fields, has content, art must not be overloaded with concepts (content) since art is not philosophy (if one is able to express one’s concept in a philosophical means, what one needs is philosophy, not art). In art, style and content must be, ideally, perfectly united (or balanced): content is style; style is content.

An ideal art which satisfies these conditions-- an art which primarily appeals to one’s senses, and whose style and content are one-- is music: as Pater suggested, “All art constantly aspires towards the condition of music” (*The Renaissance* 106). Symbolist literature, therefore, finds the greatest aesthetic possibility of reaching the condition of music in the conscious use of evocative, associative and sensuous symbols.

Frank Kermode criticizes Symbolist aesthetics in *Romantic Image* because of its tendency to diminish the specific intellectual dimension of language: “words are not pictures, . . . words behave differently from things” (162). Kermode suggests that the Symbolists rejected intellectual discourse and made literature “non-discursive” (158). He stresses the fact that language is primarily intellectual and communicative. Indeed, Kermode’s criticism might be right about the Symbolist extremists (like Mallarmé in his last phase) who overvalued the synaesthetic effect of symbols and neglected the communicative faculty. Kermode’s criticism is, however, not effective as a criticism of

the Symbolists in general. The vagueness, rather than ambiguity, of Mallarmé's last poems could indicate the loss of the aesthetic balance between form and content. Also, the Symbolist belief that among various kinds of beauty, beauty equated with truth, that is, beauty which reveals truth is the highest-- shows that the Symbolists do not reject intellect. Language is more communicative and intellectual than music: it tends to appeal more to the intellect than to the senses; but because of this seeming defect as a means for art, language might contain greater aesthetic possibility than music. The metaphysical (or intellectual) element of language could make beauty as truth (the highest beauty) possible. Wilde, indeed, saw in language, not music, the possibility to achieve the highest form of art. Wilde was aware of the difference between vagueness and ambiguity and, in a way, predicted the danger of vagueness which the Symbolist extremists such as Mallarmé could fall into: Gilbert maintains in "The Critic as Artist": "To the aesthetic temperament the vague is always repellent. . . . we desire the concrete, and nothing but the concrete can satisfy us" (43). The effective use of symbols gives language (abstract metaphysics) concrete images (shapes). Wilde suggests in the same essay that literature can be "the highest art" because language is *both* concrete (relevant to style) *and* intellectual (relevant to content) (16). Symbols combine the concrete and the abstract in language: language made concrete by symbols (imagery, for instance) can lead to the highest art, that is, achieved aesthetic *style* (the concrete) as intellectual and emotional *expression* (the abstract):

Words have not merely music as sweet as that of viol and lute, colour as rich and vivid as any that makes lovely for us the canvas of the Venetian or the Spaniard, and plastic form no less sure and certain than that which reveals itself in marble or in bronze, *but thought and passion and spirituality are theirs also, are theirs indeed alone.* (Emphases added 16)

Symbolist literature can, because of its ambiguity (*not* vagueness), evoke "myriad meanings" ("The Critic as Artist" 28). If "beauty is the symbol of symbols" ("The Critic as Artist" 29), a symbol achieved by language is the most Symbolist, for the linguistic symbol is, due to its innate metaphysical and communicative faculties, appealing not only to the senses but also to the intellect: the appreciation of the linguistic symbol demands the full commitment of *all* the human faculties. Language, rather than music, is the best means to achieve art's highest goal (beauty as truth).

As for the Symbolists' belief in the elevated power of poetry to reach truth, Baudelaire, a Symbolist prototype, maintains in *Notes Nouvelles sur Edgar Poe*: "it is through and by means of poetry that the soul perceives the splendours lying beyond the grave" (qtd. in Chadwick, *Symbolism* 3). French Symbolists advanced Baudelaire's view: they "elevated the poet to the rank of priest or prophet or what Rimbaud called 'le poète-

voyant'-- 'the poet-seer'-- endowed with the power to see behind and beyond the objects of the real world to the essences concealed in the ideal world" (Chadwick 3). This aspiration for the ideal world or truth corresponds with Wilde's "*Amour de l'Impossible*" ("The Critic as Artist" 29).

(4) Symbolism and Modernism

Symbolism, in its narrowest sense, refers only to the French Symbolist poets "from about 1850 to about 1920" (Chadwick, *Symbolism* 52). In its broader sense, it refers to the "extensive repercussions," that is, "certain particular aspects of Symbolism. . . taken up by lesser poets and by writers in other fields and in other countries" (Chadwick 52). While Chadwick's *Symbolism* concentrates on French Symbolism, Anna Balakian's *The Symbolist Movement* starts with Swedenborg (whose mysticism formed a basis of Romantic and Symbolist aesthetics), goes through the Romantics, Baudelaire, French Symbolists, and the Symbolists' influence on European literature, and ends with the reference to Modernists such as Yeats, T. S. Eliot and even Beckett. Edmund Wilson's *Axel's Castle* includes many Modernist writers: it covers Symbolist (in a broad sense) writers between 1870 and 1920; that is, Axël (Villiers de l'Isle-Adam), Rimbaud, Yeats, Valéry, T. S. Eliot, Proust, Joyce, and Gertrude Stein.

I also use the term Symbolism in a broad sense: I will chiefly discuss Wildean and Mansfieldian Symbolism in the following chapters, particularly in Chapter One, Three, Four, Six and in the Conclusion; I also attempt to connect Wildean and Mansfieldian Symbolism with avant-garde Modernist aesthetic.

Critics understand that Symbolism forms one of many Modernist schools. Not a few critics note Symbolist influence on the avant-garde Modernists. Anna Balakian, though very briefly, touches on the influence of the Symbolist theatre on the avant-garde Modernist theatre:

Strangely enough, if the modern reader or viewer wished to appreciate the theater of Maeterlinck, he would be better equipped to face certain elements in the so called avant-garde drama of today, which stem directly from symbolist style; such seems to be the case with Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*, with the Italian theater of Ugo Betti, and with such cinematographic realizations as Bergman's, Fellini's, and Alain Resnais'. . . (*The Symbolist Movement* 137)

I agree with Balakian's point that there is an aesthetic link between Symbolism and avant-garde Modernism. However, I would suggest that the link is not simply aesthetic but also political: some Symbolists' politicized aesthetic seems to have resulted in the avant-garde Modernists' even more consciously politicized aesthetic. Symbolists like Wilde and Mansfield sought to intensify the interaction between the work of art and the

reader or the audience by breaking with the habitual (or conventional) relationship between them. Yet Symbolism in general, as an aesthetic, contains this politically radical potential. Clive Scott points out the fact that Symbolism changed the reading habit; his exposition of Symbolism hints at the aesthetic *and* innately political radicalism of Symbolism:

Symbolism contains within itself a shift from a romantic to a modernly ironic aesthetic. . . Mallarmé's eccentric but fastidious syntax *decentralizes* the sentence, *challenging rather than anticipating a resolution*. And often, this most scrupulous *grimoire* is momentarily *exploded* by sudden parenthetical collections of nouns, grammatically unconstrained, impatient, wonderfully erratic: . . . (Emphases added except for "grimoire," *Modernism* 206-7)

Edmund Wilson notes the same point: he also hints, in *Axel's Castle*, that Symbolist method has changed the relationship between literature and the reader. He suggests that the Symbolist artist aims at the unity of form and style, and that his or her work might achieve this unity; but that Symbolist art, as an effect, demands the reader's conscious, active reading: it requires the reader to dissect its content from its form in order to make sense of the text. The reader of the Symbolist text must infer the meanings (content) by means of given symbols (form), and intellectually organize its ambiguous meanings:

The Symbolists themselves, full of the idea of producing with poetry effects like those of music, tended to think of these images as possessing an abstract value like musical notes and chords. But the words of our speech are not musical notation, and what the symbols of Symbolism really were, were metaphors detached from their subjects-- *for one cannot, beyond a certain point, in poetry, merely enjoy colour and sound for their own sake: one has to guess what the images are being applied to*. (Emphases added 24)

Symbolist art is intellectually demanding. Kermode in *Romantic Image* tends to regard Symbolist literature as non-discursive, anti-intellectual and often apolitical: it is not, indeed, discursive in a conventional sense; but it *is* discursive. Wilson's view does not entirely disagree with Kermode's: it is a failure in the reader to make the text aesthetically or politically non-discursive. Indeed, the reader *can* almost always make it not only aesthetically but also politically discursive as Kermode himself does in his work. For is it, after all, more often the critic than the artist, who is intellectually lazy; who aestheticizes the text in the name of ambiguity, and leaves it merely vague without really interpreting it?

Symbolism attempted to 'shock' the reader: it, in a way, attempted to make the reader consciously connect the work of art with his or her life and society. It shakes not only the reader's reading habit, but their habitual, stereotypic points of view or fixed sense of values. I see, here, not only the political potential of Symbolism as a Modernist

aesthetic, but also the aesthetic and political link between Symbolism and avant-garde Modernism. I shall develop this idea in the Conclusion as well as in each chapter.

I am going to discuss Katherine Mansfield's Aesthetic attitude as a writer in connection with that of Oscar Wilde (and, where necessary, Pater), her Modernist techniques in Symbolist terms, and her major themes from aesthetic *and* political viewpoints. I hope that I will, through all these procedures, be able not only to give her a genuine Modernist title but, further, to clarify a criterion of critical judgment.

My hypothesis might sound more Marxist than Wildean but it does not really contradict Wilde's. The artist's concerns and commitment-- largely determined by social and cultural conditions-- give him or her a particular style. The artistic style varies from one artist to another but still shares a certain common element; for style is affected or, often determined by 'the age,' that is, by the external, historical (that is, political, social and cultural) conditions as well as by the specific internal, individual conditions. Achieved style (form) determines 'final' content (theme) whereas primary, 'vague' (unshaped) content (that is, 'raw materials') suggests and initiates 'rough' style. As Pater and Wilde points out, the work of art is expression which is style; but every serious art form is bound to contain a politically challenging theme since style does not spring out of nothing. The *delicate balance* between the artistic and the political, and between form and content-- even the orthodox New Critical school would agree-- provides one of the best literary criteria. Mark Schorer's key phrase, "technique as discovery," is truer to the critic than to the artist-- it is *the critic's* role and responsibility to discover the subtle social and political message (which is closely linked with its technique) in the text. For all works of art are *innately* political, and all good works of art are *potentially* radical.

Notes

¹ Wilde 126

² Mansfield *Journal of K.M.* 273.

³ I am aware that this definition is still very vague and merely frustrating. It is hard to define 'modern' or Modernism: a careful critic would never try to clarify the precise meanings in a sentence, a paragraph, or even a paper. Tony Pinkney maintains in the "Introduction" to Raymond Williams's *The Politics of Modernism*: "As critics of many persuasions have pointed out, 'modernism' is the most frustratingly unspecific, the most recalcitrantly *unperiodizing*, of all the major art-historical 'isms' or concepts" (Williams 3). My project is, in effect, a modest attempt to clarify 'modern' and Modernism.

⁴ Dominic Head, for example, discusses the short story as a Modernist genre in his *The*

Modernist Short Story: A Study in Theory and Practice.

⁵ T. S. Eliot, in *After Strange Gods*, comments on "Bliss":

Miss Mansfield's story-- . . . is brief, poignant and in the best sense, slight; In *Bliss*, I should say, the moral implication is negligible: The story is limited to this sudden change of feeling, and the moral and social ramifications are outside of the terms of reference. . . . As the material is limited in this way-- . . . -- it is what I believe would be called feminine. (36)

Woolf in her diary criticizes the same story as follows:

I threw down *Bliss* with the exclamation, "She's done for!" Indeed I don't see how much faith in her as woman or writer can survive that sort of story. I shall have to accept the fact, I'm afraid, that her mind is a very thin soil, laid an inch or two deep upon very barren rock. she is content with superficial smartness; & the whole conception is poor, cheap, not the vision, however imperfect, of an interesting mind. (*The Diary of Virginia Woolf* 179)

The two Modernist writers' responses are overtly or covertly suggestive of their distrust of Mansfield's intellectual competence. We shall come back to this point in Chapter Six.

⁶ The enthusiasm of New Zealand intellectuals for Katherine Mansfield is also reflected by Witi Ihimaera's anthology of her own novella and short stories, *Dear Miss Mansfield: A Tribute to Kathleen Mansfield Beauchamp* (1989). The coherent motif of Ihimaera's stories is Katherine Mansfield: Ihimaera, as a Maori writer, 'rewrote' Mansfield's well-known stories from the point of view of the oppressed; her novella "Maata" is about Mansfield's beautiful half-Maori school friend whom, according to Tomalin's *Katherine Mansfield*, adolescent Mansfield was infatuated with.

⁷ Clare Hanson and Andrew Gurr, in their *Katherine Mansfield*, refer to the critical trend of Mansfield study:

Criticism of Katherine Mansfield's work has tended to fall into four distinct categories: biographical criticism, interpreting the stories in the light of the known events of her life; studies seeking to isolate the special quality of her writing, often using such terms as 'delicacy' and 'sensitivity'; 'influence' studies, *in this case dealing almost exclusively with the influence of Chekhov on Katherine Mansfield*; and 'objective' critical studies which appeared in large numbers in the heyday of the New Criticism, . . . (Emphases added 23-4)

⁸ As for Hanson's and Gurr's reference to the link between Mansfield and Wilde, and her aesthetic and Symbolism, see Hanson and Gurr 10-1, 16, and 21-3.

⁹ Camille Paglia's use of the term Decadence in *Sexual Persona*, for instance, reflects her political stance. Her 'political' affinity to the ideology which Decadence represents and connotes is made clear in the text: she makes no real political or moral appraisal of the phenomenon called Decadence: she seems simply to ally herself to their innately reactionary "sensationalism," that is, their self-indulgence and rebellious pose. Her method belongs to the Decadent 'tradition': "My method is a form of sensationalism: I try to flesh out intellect with emotion and to induce a wide range of emotion from the reader" (Paglia xiii).

**Chapter 1: The Autonomy of Art and New Romanticism:
Wilde's Symbolism in "The Decay of Lying"**

Wilde, in "The Decay of Lying" (first published in 1889), questions the binary thinking which was eroding the late nineteenth-century artistic sphere, insists on the independence of art, and suggests a non-Naturalistic, subjective way of appreciating and creating works of art. He rejects Realism and Naturalism, or, more precisely, the mimetic, 'objective' method dominant in the late nineteenth-century European literary arena; he maintains that subjectivity and imagination constitute the most crucial elements of art, and proposes a new 'Romanticism.' His aesthetics disapproves of the Victorians' didactic, utilitarian attitude towards art which is, for him, a reflection of their philistine materialism and self-serving philanthropism.

The immediate problem the reader faces in reading "The Decay of Lying" is the definition of 'isms.' Wilde's new 'Romanticism' is new partly because late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century Romanticism-- the 'movement' of English Romantics, in the most exclusive sense, represented by such figures as Blake, Coleridge, Shelley, Keats and Byron-- was generally regarded as passé in the late nineteenth century. Nevertheless, as Lilian R. Furst reminds us, "Although the Romantic movement as such had lost most of its original impetus before the middle of the nineteenth century when it was superseded by Realism as the dominant mode, its ideas and styles were by no means extinct" (Furst 66-7); and Wilde was a conscious, self-appointed inheritor of this artistic legacy. What Wilde's aesthetics shares with the Romantic's is the high evaluation of imagination: the understanding of the work of art as a product of highly expressive (or 'subjective'), not mimetic (or 'objective'), activity; and the notion of the sublime and the grasp of art's "highest function" as unveiling "the infinite" (or the ideal) through the aesthetic transformation of "the finite" (or the actual) (Furst 41). Wilde's aesthetics agrees with the Romantics' positive use of symbols to fulfill the act of unveiling, and the highest philosophical status which the Romantics gave art as a chief means for revelation. It would be possible to argue, further, that Wilde's views on culture expressed in "The Critic as Artist" (1890) and "The Soul of Man Under Socialism" (1891) show a trace of the influence of the aesthetics of the German Early Romantics (such as Novalis, Wackenroder, and Tieck) who envisaged 'poeticizing' the existing world.¹ Also, Wilde's interest in 'fairy-tales' could be traced back to the German High Romantics' reevaluation of the Märchen as a highly imaginative mode of expression.² Wilde's 'Romanticism' is, nonetheless, new, that is, somewhat different from late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century Romanticism because there are some Romantic elements which Wilde's aesthetics

is critical of: Wilde rejected the Romantics' often observed adoration of nature and tendency to anti-intellectualism. The Romanticism he advocates in "The Decay of Lying" does not, unlike early Romanticism, assume that artistic creativity results from the artist's surge of passion, intuition or inspiration; or that it is inspired by nature-- the sublime in Wilde's 'Romantic' notion expressed in "The Critic as Artist" is mythical and pagan, but it has nothing to do with the Romantic "pantheistic enthusiasm" (Furst 3), or Rousseau's idealized primitivism.

There are, indeed, distinctive differences between the Romantics and Wilde in the understanding of the artist's creative process as well as his or her relation to nature. Wilde's 'Romanticism' proposes that artistic activity should be conscious and intellectual rather than intuitive and 'natural': the work of art is a highly 'artificial' product, not an "organic" one as Coleridge termed. Wilde also suggests the importance of the artist's control of emotion: that too much passion hinders artistic accomplishment.³ In Wilde's 'Romanticism,' nature ceases to be the artist's muse: artefacts and works of art replace nature. He, further, makes clear in "The Critic as Artist," his belief that artistic temperament is something consciously nurtured rather than innate: art is, in this sense, not the monopoly of artistic geniuses, but belongs to humanity. One's contact with works of art cultivates one's aesthetic taste and temperament, improves one's appreciation of beauty and inspires artistic creation. Wilde's view of artistic appreciation and creative process is, therefore, close to Pater's aesthetics expressed in "Coleridge": Pater does not deny the rare moments of intuition, but criticizes Coleridge's view of the work of art as an "organic" product: Pater stresses the highly intellectual and conscious aspect of a creative process:

What makes his [Coleridge's view] a one-sided one is, that in it the artist has become almost a mechanical agent: instead of the most luminous and self-possessed phase of consciousness, the associative act in art or poetry is made to look like some blindly organic process of assimilation. . . . Here there is no blind ferment of lifeless elements towards the realisation of a type. By exquisite analysis the artist attains clearness of idea; then, through many stages of refining, clearness of expression. He moves slowly over his work, calculating the tenderest tone, and restraining the subtlest curve, never letting hand or fancy move at large, gradually enforcing flaccid spaces to the higher degree of expressiveness. The philosophic critic, at least, will value, even in works of imagination, seemingly the most intuitive, the power of the understanding in them, their logical process of construction, the spectacle of a supreme intellectual dexterity which they afford. (Pater 49-50)

I will suggest that Wilde's 'Romantic' views on art are, indeed, Symbolist and not only close to Pater's, but largely correspond with T. S. Eliot's aesthetics.⁴ I am aware, though, that, as Furst, in *Romanticism*, and Marilyn Butler, in *Romantics, Rebels and*

Reactionaries, warn us respectively, the definition of Romanticism is never clear-cut; and that, thus, the distinction between Romanticism and Symbolism requires care.

Furst points out not only a close link between Romanticism and Symbolism, but she also refers to the 'modern' elements of Romanticism and suggests the close link between Romanticism and Modernism in general:

In Symbolism the heritage of Romanticism is apparent in the metaphysical conception of the universe existing in and through the poet, in the idealistic cult of beauty, in the mystical belief in a transcendental realm beyond appearances and in the attempts to convey the poet's perceptions in symbols. In technique as well as in outlook Symbolism is an elaboration of Romanticism, and the same claim is being made of Surrealism with its exploration of the subconscious. Indeed it can be argued that much of the writing of the twentieth century is in the wake of Romanticism; its anarchic individualism, ebullient imaginativeness and emotional vehemence were certainly implicit in the more extreme manifestations of the Romantic movement which offers precedents also for the search for new forms and symbols, the experimentation with time and place, the preference for an organic structure dependent on an associative fabric of recurrent images, the re-interpretation of myths, all considered characteristic of our century. (68)

Some critics such as Frank Kermode (in *Romantic Image*) and Eric Warren and Graham Hough (in *Strangeness and Beauty*) see more of the aesthetic continuity, rather than the break, between Romanticism and Symbolism; they regard Symbolism as *late* Romanticism, developed or intensified aesthetics of early (late eighteenth-century and early nineteenth-century) Romanticism. Still, critics including Kermode, Warren and Hough recognize the fact that there is a change of tone and stress within this continuity: a certain break between Romanticism and late 'Romanticism' or Symbolism. There *are*, as I mentioned, differences in consciousness and attitude, that is, in the grasp of the creative process and the attitude towards art and nature (and even life and society). If one, therefore, focuses on the break rather than the continuity as I am doing now, the employment of the term Symbolism will be acceptable: the introduction of yet another 'ism' could, I hope, be clarifying rather than confusing although my fear of oversimplification is doubled when I face the fact that the definition of Symbolism, like those of other 'isms,' tends to be vague. I do not deny the link between Romanticism and Symbolism: I am willing to see the cultural continuity, and accept the profound indebtedness of Symbolism to Romanticism. However, the emphasis and intensification of some elements of an old school usually make a new school: as Wilde maintains in "The Decay of Lying," aesthetic 'overemphasis' creates a new style. The Symbolists' "elaboration of Romanticism" (Furst 68) could, for example, be observed in their self-conscious and intellectual handling and evaluation of their own works (that is, what

might be called the attitude of 'the artist as critic'), more precisely, in the calculated effects of metaphors and imagery, and seemingly "organic," yet, in fact, well examined and analyzed architectural structure. Also, Wilde's concern on the relationship between art, life and society could be understood as a Romantic tradition; but one notes an intensification here, too. Wilde's (and other Symbolists') particular considerations of the interaction between the work of art and the audience (the reader), and the aesthetic and political effects of art on the audience's response-- predict the emergence of avant-garde Modernism, and should, therefore, be differentiated from the Romantics' consciousness.

Another problem the reader faces in "The Decay of Lying" is Wilde's loose use of 'Realism' and 'Naturalism.' These two terms were often confused and regarded as synonyms in the nineteenth century: according to Lilian R. Furst and Peter N. Skrine, even Zola, the passionate advocate of Naturalism, for example, used the two terms interchangeably (Furst and Skrine 5). However, this does confuse the reader. The definition of Naturalism by Furst and Skrine is helpful:

Realism is "a general tendency" in so far as every work of art "is realistic in some respects and unrealistic in others"[Harry Levin *The Gates of Horn* 64-5]. It was out of this general tendency to mimetic Realism that Naturalism grew. In many ways it has an intensification of Realism; . . it was not just a matter of choosing more shocking subjects, earthier vocabulary, more striking slogans or more photographic details. The true difference lies much deeper: at its core is the imposition of a certain very specific [scientific] view of man on Realism's attitude of detached neutrality. . . . Naturalism is therefore more concrete and at the same time more limited than Realism; it is a literary movement with distinct theories, groups and practices. (8)

The Naturalist's "affinity to science" is made clear by the definition of Naturalism offered by Paul Alexis: "A way of thinking, of seeing, of reflecting, of studying, of making experiments, a need to analyse in order to know, *rather than a particular style of writing*" [J. Huret, *Enquête sur l'évolution littéraire*, Paris, 1981, 189] (emphases added, Furst and Skrine 9). What Wilde opposes in "The Decay of Lying" is Naturalism, rather than Realism. He rejects not only the idea of art as a faithful reproduction of actual life but, particularly, the Naturalist's adoption of 'scientific' observation and analysis as an artistic method, meticulously descriptive style, and its didactic, utilitarian view of art. He, for example, attacks Zola but admires Flaubert and Balzac. Wilde believes that Naturalist method subordinates art to science, and Naturalist attitude subordinates the work of art to specific social and political conditions. Naturalism reduces art to no more than social or political document.

Wilde attacks binary notions popular among his contemporaries because he believes

that they form the basis of the public adoration of Naturalism. Wilde challenges binary notions such as fact vs. fiction, nature vs. art, life vs. art, and objectivity vs. subjectivity: the opposing notions the former of which is usually regarded as superior to the latter. Wilde, however, challenges this fixed habitual response and counteracts the binary attitude; his paradox reverses the conventional understanding of these notions.

(1) Fact/Fiction, Nature/Art, Life/Art, Objectivity/Subjectivity, and Naturalism/Romanticism

Wilde means to destroy the hierarchical notions of placing fact over fiction ('lying'), and nature and life over art; he believes that the higher appreciation of the external (the objective) over the internal (the subjective) prevents us from appreciating art for art's sake, for its artificial, "self-conscious" (80), therefore, unnatural qualities.

The Naturalists regard art as subordinate to nature, life and historical and social facts, and treat works of art as their servant; they regard art as a faithful imitation or reproduction of the external objects or phenomena. However, according to Vivian, Wilde's spokesperson in the essay, the adoration of the external (nature, life and facts) is wrong since the external cannot affect us so much as we might expect; also, as it is imperfect, it does not, basically, deserve our admiration.

Vivian insists that our subordination to nature is against our own nature: human beings are the most unnatural of all creatures. We feel nature "imperfect," and "uncomfortable" (71); our 'unnaturalness,' the characteristic that differentiates human beings from other creatures, has created civilization and culture: Vivian comments:

If Nature had been comfortable, mankind would never have invented architecture, and I prefer houses to the open air. In a house we all feel of the proper proportions. *Everything is subordinated to us*, fashioned for our use and our pleasure. (Emphases added 71-2)

Vivian concludes that "Art is our spirited protest [against Nature's imperfection], our gallant attempt to teach Nature her proper [subordinate] place" (72). The common belief that art imitates nature is also wrong; the fact is that nature, as it were, imitates art-- nature may seem to have many dimensions and facets, but its dimensions and facets exist only in the internal (subjectivity), not in the external (nature). Nature is, as it is, vague and chaotic; art *creates* and illuminates those dimensions and facets of nature: the artist's subjectivity gives the external objects angles, order and meanings, and makes them relevant to human life. Without subjectivity that gives objects forms (styles), nature simply exists but would be nothing to us: we are, to nature, objects no more different from

“the cattle that browse on the slope, or the burdock that blooms in the ditch”(72).

Likewise, Vivian maintains, the idea that art should serve facts is absurd: facts are imperfect; they are spiritually “vulgarizing mankind” (84). If art belongs to the sphere of beauty at all, it should not serve facts which are usually commonplace, boring, and, often, ugly: “facts are either kept in their proper subordinate position, or else entirely excluded on the general ground of dullness” (84). Unless the Naturalists find beauty in the life of the poverty-stricken and are attracted by it, they had better not write about them; if they dare to do so simply out of humanitarian motivations, they are, as artists, degrading themselves; the work of art will be unbearably didactic; they had better write critical essays or political pamphlets--if an Aesthetic artist emphasizes beauty of art or, more specifically, the beauty of form, the Naturalists would refute the idea by commenting that “he has ‘nothing to say.’” However, “if he had something [clear and obvious] to say, he would probably say it, and the result would be tedious”; “[i]t is just because he has no new message, that he can do beautiful work” (“The Critic as Artist” 58); it is his *primary* interests in, and adoration of ‘perfect’ beauty that make him an artist. Those Naturalists are “wrong not on the ground of morals, but on the ground of art” (76). Therefore, “[a]s for that great and daily increasing school of novelists for whom the sun always rises in the East-End, the only thing that can be said about them is that they find life crude, and leave it raw” (76). The Naturalists’ “scientific” analysis of human nature or life (78), that is, their unimaginative analysis of facts, is rather worthless. Some might arrogantly believe that the psychology and morality of the upper and middle classes are more sophisticated than those of the lower classes; nevertheless, human beings, regardless of our appearance, social class, education, sex, belief or ideology, share the same characteristics called “human nature”: Vivian argues:

It is a humiliating confession, but we are all of us made out of the same stuff Where we differ from each other is purely in accidentals: in dress, manner, tone of voice, religious opinions, personal appearance, tricks of habit and the like. The more one analyses people, the more all reasons for analysis disappear. Sooner or later one comes to that dreadful universal thing called human nature. Indeed, as any one who has ever worked among the poor knows only too well, the brotherhood of man is no more poet’s dream, it is a most depressing and humiliating reality; if a writer insists upon analysing the upper-classes, he might just well write of match-girls and costermongers at once. (77)

Universal human nature is a boring subject; people are more interested in fictional, striking types and masks which their lives can imitate. Vivian declares that “Life imitates Art far more than Art imitates Life” (99 ; art’s influence on our life could be more dominant than life’s influence on art:

This [Art's dominant influence] results not merely from Life's imitative instinct, but from the fact that the self-conscious aim of Life is to find expression, and that Art offers it certain beautiful forms through which it may realize that energy. (99)

Wilde does not totally deny the idea that art imitates life since life offers raw material for art. Yet he reminds the reader of another link between art and life; our longing for self-expression and self-realization encourages us to follow remarkable fictional figures as our role models, or makes us wish the realization (mimesis) of fictional incidents. Vivian's argument, indeed, reminds us of the fact that without "Life's imitative instinct," the authorities would see no need of censoring works of art: the existence of artistic censorship reflects the vague recognition and fear of art's strong influence on our life. Vivian, therefore, concludes that "the return to Life and Nature" (80), the slogan of the Naturalists which constitutes "modernity of form [Naturalistic form] and modernity of subject matter [Naturalistic subject matter]" is "entirely and absolutely wrong" (80); since art belongs to our "self-conscious" faculty (80), the return of art to "natural simple instinct," that is, the refusal of artistic self-consciousness and sophistication, is to deny the characteristics of art, which leads to "the true decadence" of art (81)

Vivian, further, points out that the borderline between fact and falsehood is less clear than one might think; what is taught or believed to be true often turns out to be false. Americans' worship of facts, according to Vivian, has encouraged them to despise the faculty of imagination and made them totally materialistic; but the irony is that the fact which has influenced their national character is actually a myth (lie):

Vivian. [reads his manuscript] "... The crude commercialism of America, its materializing spirit, its indifference to the poetical side of things, and its lack of imagination and of high unattainable ideals, are entirely due to that country having adopted for its national hero a man who, according to his own confession, was incapable of telling a lie, and it is not too much to say that the story of George Washington and the cherry-tree has done more harm, and in a shorter space of time, than any other moral tale in the whole of literature." . . . the amusing part of the whole thing is that the story of the cherry-tree is an absolute myth. (84)

Vivian's 'theory' of American culture is deliberately over-simplified; it is ~~another~~ 'myth.' His overt myth-making seems to reflect his view that one cannot trust 'scientific' theories or accepted 'history' as unquestionable truth. The moral of his overstated story is: it is ridiculous to worship facts when 'facts' are not always facts ; it would be much safer to believe in innocent, entertaining 'lies' than deceptive, dull 'facts.'

(2) The Ideal Form of Art

Vivian concludes: “As a method, realism is a complete failure” (83); the external can be “rough material” for art but it cannot be “an artistic method” (82). The mimetic method is limited partly because the object (the external) the artist tries to reproduce in writing or painting usually fails to present its archetype; the artist’s imagination has to make up for the deficiency of the material. Also, the reproductive power of the artist is limited; it is impossible for a painter to faithfully reproduce even a flower on a two-dimensional canvas or for a writer to fully reproduce someone’s day in a novel. As far as art tries to imitate or reproduce the external objects, it is bound to bear a subordinate status. Imitation or reproduction is second-rate: even if the painting or the description were a faithful reproduction of the external, its effects on us would be rather dull; it would be much nicer to see and feel the real thing than to appreciate the imitation. The late nineteenth-century worship of the external results from the lack of full understanding of our intellectual mechanism: the way our mind works is selective; we do not grasp the whole picture when we see something; our mind selects what is relevant to our interests and curiosity, and tries to grasp its whole shape and penetrate its essential quality by connecting the fragmentary impressions. Yet, the fact that the function of our mind is selective and that the nature of the work of art is selective does not mean that our mental function and artistic faculty are both limited and secondary; on the contrary, to “look at” the whole often means to understand nothing whereas to “see” several parts selectively and intensively enables us to penetrate the nature of the object (91). Vivian’s criticism of the mimetic method is an exaggerated one, but the reader can see his intention: Vivian suggests that the artist should rather take advantage of this reproductive limitations than docilely accept the secondary status as an imitator.

Vivian’s point is that art should be selective; the strength of art lies in selectivity. He argues: “It is working within limits that the master reveals himself, and the *limitation*, the very condition of any art is *style*” (emphases added 82). Artistic selectivity means the artist’s choice of the proper angle, or “style”; the artist needs to be imaginative and creative enough to find out a specific style to emphasize selected aspects. Vivian insists:

. . .the object of Art is not simply truth but complex beauty. . . . Art itself is really a *form of exaggeration*; and *selection*, which is the very spirit of art, is nothing more than an *intensified mode of over-emphasis*. (Emphases added 82)

Artistic expression must be, therefore, subjective, not objective. Vivian reverses the nineteenth-century’s fixed notion of the superiority of the West over the East: he

understands that occidental art tends to be imitative (objective) whereas oriental art tends to be creative (subjective); that the history of “the decorative arts in Europe” is, for example, “the record of the struggle between Orientalism” (whose characteristic lies in “its frank dislike of the actual representation of any object in Nature”) and “our own imitative spirit”; and that “[w]herever the former has been paramount... we have had beautiful and imaginative work in which the visible things of life are transmuted into artistic conventions” (83). The attempt of distinguishing between ‘objective’ and ‘subjective’ art might, however, be rather a futile effort, for works of art are innately subjective; the artist is sooner or later destined to turn to his or her subjectivity: Gilbert insists that “the objective [-looking] form is the most subjective in matter” (49):

The difference between objective and subjective work is one of external form merely. It is accidental, not essential. All artistic creation is absolutely subjective. The very landscape that Corot looked at was, as he said himself, but a mood of his own mind; . . . I would say that the more objective a creation appears to be, the more subjective it really is. (49)

Vivian does not deny the representative quality of art totally; but he judges that, due to the essentially subjective quality of art, the representative quality is secondary: if a work of art represents anything at all, it *primarily* represents the internal (the artist’s personality, views or moods), not the external (“the temper of its age, the spirit of its time, the moral and social conditions” [93]). Since the artist belongs to a specific age and society, his personality can, as Wilde points out in “The Soul of Man Under Socialism,” be affected by social and moral conditions; his works of art may, consequently, reflect them. However, when the representative quality of a work of art becomes too strong, that is, when what a work of art represents is too “obvious,” the work is bound to be a failure as a work of art; it is “inartistic” (“The Critic as Artist” 58); it lacks in artistic “subtlety” (“The Critic as Artist” 56); the lack of subtlety means the imbalance between form and content--content outgrows form. Gilbert’s criticism of Impressionist painters (which somewhat reminds the reader of Pater’s criticism of Medieval arts in *The Renaissance*) is one of the artistic imbalance of form and content caused by over-representation. Some Impressionists (Post-Impressionists) are, according to Gilbert, free from the evils of imitation and reproduction of the external, but are suffering from the flaw of over-representation. Gilbert argues:

Modern pictures are, no doubt, delightful to look at. At least some of them [Impressionists] are. But they are quite impossible to live with; *they are too clever, too assertive, too intellectual*. . . . They are suggestive. . . . If they have not opened the eyes of the blind, they have at least given great encouragement to the short-sighted, . . . Yet they will insist on treating painting as if it were *a mode of autobiography invented for the use of the*

illiterate, and are always prating to us on their coarse gritty canvases of *their unnecessary selves and their unnecessary* opinions, and spoiling by a *vulgar* over-emphasis that fine contempt of nature which is the best and only modest thing about them. One tires, at the end, of the work of individuals whose individuality is *always noisy, and generally uninteresting*. (Emphases added, "The Critic as Artist" 56-7)

Gilbert concludes that "[a] real [too intense] passion would ruin him [the artist]" ("The Critic as Artist" 58); Post-Impressionists are *too* articulate: a well-balanced, ideal work of art is subtle, not obvious, and suggestive of many dimensions of the object described. Therefore, in this sense, "no great artist ever sees things as they really are" (94), but "art never expresses anything but itself" (93). A 'representative' work of art could be still acceptable and enjoyable if the artist's personality is extraordinary and striking; "[t]he only portraits in which one believes are," for example, "portraits where there is very little of the sitter and a very great deal of the artist" (95). Nevertheless, the balance between form and content must, desirably, be achieved in some way; if the object described in a work of art strikes us as realistic and alive, it is because the artist "restrain[s]" the external and his *self* "*within his limitations*," "reproduce[s] his *type*" and "*appear[s] as he wished it to appear*" (emphases added 95). Gilbert insists that "the real artist is he who proceeds, not from feeling to *form*, but from *form* to thought and passion"; the artist's *discovery* of a new, beautiful *form* gives him *content*; it inspires him and draws out of him his subconscious notions (substance), or "the mere form suggests what is to fill it and make it intellectually and emotionally complete" ("The Critic as Artist" 58): form *decides* content. The artist's conscious, careful choice or invention of style forms expression; form and substance become literally inseparable; the unity of the two, as Pater suggests in "Style," becomes essential. The perfection and imaginative (therefore, realistic) power of art reside in the unity.

Selectivity and subjectivity (that is, the rejection of reproduction and the liberation of imagination) make art an autonomous organism; and art as an independent organism produces a reality different from our actual life or nature we see daily: a reality that enables the audience to penetrate the essence of the object and grasp truth.

Wilde's view that the work of art may be innately personal but that the artist's conscious effort (style) must transform what is 'personal' (or 'subjective') into something 'impersonal' ('objective')-- reminds one of T. S. Eliot's "Impersonal theory of poetry" (Eliot 40). Eliot concludes in "Tradition and the Individual Talent" that "[t]he emotion of art is impersonal," which seems to be almost identical with Gilbert's "A real passion ruins him[the artist]." Eliot maintains:

The mind of the poet [individual talent or personality] is the shred of platinum [which works as the catalyst in a chemical reaction]. It may partly or exclusively operate upon the experience [emotions and feelings] of the man himself; but, the more perfect the artist, the more completely separate in him will be the man who suffers and the mind which creates; the more perfectly will the mind digest and transmute the passion which are its material. . . .

.....
Poetry is not a turning loose of emotion, but an escape from emotion; it is not the expression of personality, but an escape from personality. But, of course, only those who have personality and emotions know what it means to want to escape from these things. (Emphases added 41, 43)

Eliot, while stressing the importance of impersonal quality of art, never fails to note the submerged but crucial importance of its personal quality. He suggests that the impersonal style is achieved through the artist's "conformity" (or fusion) between "the old" (artistic tradition or "the dead poets" [Eliot 38]) and "the new" (his own individual conditions and talent) (Eliot 40). Wilde does not seem to have any concrete theory of how the artist can achieve artistic subtlety; but what Wilde means by the development of taste or artistic and critical temperament in "The Critic as Artist" largely corresponds with Eliot's conformity to "the old" or "the historical sense" (Eliot 40, 38)-- Gilbert declares : "great works of art are living things-- are in fact, the only thing that live" (36); also, "the imagination that enables us to live these countless lives" is "simply concentrated race-experience," and "[t]he culture that this transmission of racial experiences makes possible can be made perfect by critical spirit alone. . ." (44) And Wilde's Individualism (the intensification of personality) involves Eliot's "the new" (the poet's individual 'talent' and specific social and cultural conditions) as well as "the old" (his absorption in the dead poets, or 'tradition'). Gilbert's conclusion that "[t]echnique is really personality" (61) appears to contradict Eliot's view; but Wilde's "personality" includes "the dead poets": technique or style is, both in Wilde's and Eliot's aesthetic, acquired through the fusion of the personal and the traditional; and the outcome (the work of art or artistic expression) has impersonal (or objective) looks.

(3) Symbolism

Wilde's new Romanticism, by emphasizing the limitation of the mimetic method, the subjective quality of art, style and the "fine correspondence" between style and content ("The Critic as Artist" 40), seems to advocate Symbolism although he does not employ the term. His preference of Symbolism is, though predictable, not made explicit in "The Decay of Lying"; yet in his later essay, "The Critic as Artist," the preference is made

clear: Gilbert appreciates the subject-matter (mythical, spiritual theme) and the imaginative, subjective style of Symbolist painters:

There is far more to be said in favour of that newer school at Paris, the *Archaicistes* [the Symbolist group who followed Gustave Moreau], as they call themselves, who, refusing to leave the artist entirely at the mercy of weather [like Impressionists], do not find the ideal of art in mere atmospheric effect, but seek rather for the imaginative beauty of design and the loveliness of fair colour, and rejecting the tedious realism of those who merely paint what they see, try to see something worth seeing, and to see it not merely with actual and physical vision, but with that nobler vision of the soul which is as far wider in spiritual scope as it is far more splendid in artistic purpose. They. . . have sufficient aesthetic instinct to regret those sordid and stupid limitations of absolute modernity of form [the Naturalistic, mimetic method] which have proved the ruin of so many of the Impressionists. . . . (57)

The Symbolist painters' rejection of nature as theme and method (mimetic method) appeals to Wilde's aesthetics. They found the ideal beauty in their imaginative, mythological world; the realization of an ideal vision on the canvas required them to use freer, often decorative, but still conscious, careful use of colour, patterns and composition. Gilbert sees, in decorative Symbolist paintings (here, art nouveau), not only an example of good works of art, but the possibility of real works of art that proceed "from form to thought and passion" (58):

It [the art that is frankly decorative] is, of all our visible arts, the one art that creates in us both mood and temperament. Mere colour, unspoiled by meaning, and unallied with definite form, can speak to the soul in a thousand different ways. The harmony that resides in the delicate proportions of lines and masses becomes mirrored in the mind. . . . By its deliberate rejection of Nature as the ideal of beauty, as well as of the imitative method of the ordinary painter, *decorative art not merely prepares the soul for the reception of true imaginative work, but develops in it that sense of form which is the basis of creative no less than of critical achievement.* (Emphases added 57-8)

Although Wilde never refers to Stéphane Mallarmé, his contemporary, his aesthetic seems to be similar to Mallarmé's definition of Symbolism "as the art of 'evoking an object little by little [by a series of decipherings] so as to reveal a mood or, conversely, the art of choosing an object and extracting from it an "état d'âme" (*Oeuvres Complètes* 869)' " (Chadwick *Symbolism* 1). The reader associates Mallarmé's definition with Gilbert's notion of good works that "make him [the critic] brood and dream and fancy," "the works that possess the subtle quality of suggestion" ("The Critic as Artist" 30-1), or his aesthetic notion of the "fine correspondence of form and spirit which is the only thing that can satisfy the artistic and critical temperament" ("The Critic as Artist" 41). Wilde does not mention any practical technique that can realize his aesthetic concept in the essay, but

he, like Pater and Mallarmé, tries to seek a literary analogy of music-- the correspondence of form and style, the direct appeal to one's senses, and the suggestiveness of music--~~which is the~~ Symbolist's ideal art. Wilde notices that the effective use of symbols will make the musical effect of literature possible: Gilbert insists: "what is true about music is true about all the arts. Beauty has as many meanings as man has moods. Beauty is the symbol of symbols. Beauty reveals everything because it expresses nothing" (29); and he concludes "the aim of art is simply to create a mood" which is equivalent to truth (45). Wilde could, as a critic, be sufficiently regarded as an advocate of Symbolism; whether Wilde was a conscious Symbolist writer or not would be, however, a different issue. It requires a careful examination of his works-- one of the reservations would be that Wilde did not seem to practise Mallarmé's (or Baudelaire's) "art of expressing ideas and emotions . . . by re-creating them in the mind of the reader through the use of unexplained symbols" (Chadwick *Symbolism* 2-3), or positively employ T. S. Eliot's "objective correlative," that is, "a set of objects, a situation, a chain of events which shall be the formula of that particular emotion" ("Hamlet" 145).⁵ One obvious exception would be *Salomé* whose Symbolist elements has been attracting critics' attention;⁶ yet how about his masterpiece *The Importance of Being Earnest*? Can we call it Symbolist in any way? -- I will examine the possibility in Chapter Three.

(3) Art/ Morality/ Society: A Conclusion

Wilde's major weapon to counteract the dominant force of the age is paradox; the paradoxical expression he employs has the power to make readers halt their fixed, ordinary flow of thinking; it often has a devastating power over the established sense of values. Wilde must have enjoyed this anarchic effect; but his paradoxical, deconstructive anarchism is simply his means: it is new, truer views, and a new order that he sought for through the destruction of the fixed, conventional views and order. The main thesis of "The Decay of Lying" is to give art (beauty) a status philosophically equal to those of other fields of humanities and science. Wilde was, as an artist and Aesthete, displeased with the subordinate status Victorian utilitarianism gave to art; he tried to destroy the hierarchical thinking and order, and reconstruct an alternative, yet truer order of values; his primary purpose was to defend his own aesthetic stance morally and philosophically. Wilde refused to accept nature and life as artistic means and aim: "all bad art comes from returning to Life and Nature [status-quo], and elevating them into ideals" (98); he was, however, aware of the complementary relationship between art and nature/ life; he at

least admitted that nature and actual life provide the artists with raw materials, although he, like French Symbolists, stressed the necessity of transforming the external (the material) to Mallarmé's "pure essences, unhindered by any echo of the concrete reality which surrounds us" (Chadwick *Symbolism* 4).

The structure of the essay counterbalances Vivian's somewhat excessive stress on the internal. The essay is carried by the dialogue between two characters: the style which reminds readers of that of Plato's; Wilde, a great admirer of ancient Greek culture, must have deliberately adopted this form for his essay. But Wilde's essay has a far more ingenious structure: he introduced the dramatic structure to his otherwise rather ordinary polemic essay. (He applied the same structure to "The Critic as Artist.") The reader finds two contrasting characters, Vivian and Cyril; Cyril is a patient listener, a moderator and interviewer representing conventional views. Vivian is, on the other hand, a shrewd extremist agitator representing new, radical views. Since Cyril does not actively oppose Vivian, the essay is basically polemic and illuminates Vivian's views. This dialogue structure, however, gives the discussion a balancing effect by providing multiple points of view: the existence of Cyril and the shifting roles of Vivian from the author to the commentator and critic of his own essay "Decay of Lying: A Protest," allow a fuller, round discussion. The reader notices that the essay has the title different from Vivian's original essay: Vivian's essay is "The Decay of Lying: A *Protest*" while Wilde's is "The Decay of Lying: *An Observation*." Wilde was aware of these moderating effects brought by the dramatic structure.

The structure, the setting and the characterization represent Wilde's aesthetic. The dramatic, that is, *fictional* structure reflects his preference for fiction (lying for a lie's sake) over fact. The conversation takes place in the library which symbolizes his preference for indoor, 'artificial' (or artistic and intellectual) life, culture and civilization over nature; the main actor of the drama is an inactive, bookish young Epicurean, Vivian who, Cyril criticizes, "coop[s] [himself] up all day in the library"(71). The setting and the characterization are suggestive of the theme: 'thinking' (intellectual cultivation) should be more valued than 'acting.' Wilde's sense of balance is, however, working all through the essay: the scene is, for example, set in the library of a country house, not of a house in London; also, it is Vivian, who refuses to go out and enjoy nature at the beginning of the 'drama,' that, later, suggests going out. Vivian in a way accepts nature or the external (as well as 'acting') as indispensable elements of his existence. The reader, nevertheless, notices another turn Wilde introduced to the scene: Vivian proposes going out on the terrace, that is, a modified, civilized nature, not to wild nature-- his preference for the

artificial is definite.

Wilde's deliberate use of moral terms for the aesthetic discussion reflects his political intention; and both the use of moral terms and his (Vivian's) keen social awareness make the essay a kind of social satire. The title "The Decay of Lying" challenges Victorian morality and suggests Wilde's critical attitude towards it. Vivian is, by defending the artist's interests and insisting high morality (Aesthetic discipline) the vocation requires, attacking the Victorian's moral shallowness and decadence. Vivian insists that the artist needs to free himself from "*the prison-house* of realism" (emphasis added 85), of "*careless habits of accuracy*" which is fatal to imagination (emphasis added 74); the artist must be a *true liar*. Vivian's oxymoron may strike the reader as absurd and amoral; but Vivian argues that the act of true lying, that is, the self-conscious, deliberate practice of art and aesthetic criticism, demands high morality; it "*requires the most careful study, the most disinterested devotion*" (emphases added 74). Highly accomplished works of art make us glimpse truth whereas facts often pretend to lead us to truth but fail us by betraying their falsehood. Vivian concludes: "[t]he only form of lying that is *absolutely beyond reproach* is lying for its own sake, and the highest development of this is, as we have already pointed out, Lying in Art" (emphases added 97). Wilde's Aestheticism never encourages immorality or amorality although many of his fellow Victorians were most willing to misinterpret it; his stress on form never means his rejection of content, for, in his concept, form and content must be one. The artist is, for Wilde, "the dreamer" ("The Critic as Artist" 66), that is, Rimbaud's "poet-seer" (le poète-voyant) who is "endowed with the power to see beyond the object of the real world to the essences concealed in the ideal world" (Chadwick *Symbolism* 3): Wilde's Symbolist aesthetics rejects the utilitarian view of art but innately involves social, political and, above all, revolutionary potential. As David Novitz suggests in "Art, Life and Reality," Wilde in a way connects art with life and society in "The Decay of Lying": Novitz hints that Wilde's essay could shake our 'comfortable' idea of the relationship between life and art (especially, 'high' art): the notion that "art, . . . , is somehow removed from the real world" (Novitz 301)-- art can often be our pastime because of this supposed irrelevance to our life. Vivian's paradoxical maxim: "Life imitates Art far more than Art imitates Life" (99) could imply art's potential power to break our habit: Novitz proposes that "Wilde has chanced on something important, that at the very point at which he wishes to see art as an end in itself, he recognizes the profound influence that it has on the shape of our world, on the hue of our thinking, and on our everyday behaviour. . . , that art is a formative influence in our lives, that it actually brings things and states of affairs into being" (Novitz 303). "The Decay of

Lying” is, in this sense, Wilde’s non-Naturalistic challenge to people’s habitual, apolitical view of art and life. We will see more of how Wilde connects art with life and society and what kind of political potential he finds in art in the following chapter.

Notes

¹ Furst explains the poeticization of the German Early Romantics as follows:

The revaluation of human existence began from the standpoint of the utter subjectivism preached by Fichte. Since the world depends on our perception, we can reshape it in a constantly progressive, magical idealism. The means to perform this poeticization is the creative imagination, particularly that of the artist, who for this reason occupies the supreme place in this scheme. The work of art has a mediating function in that it portrays, in a symbolical approximation, the artist’s vision of the transcendental realm to which his imagination gives him access. (Furst 43-4)

Wilde was not, as David Novitz notes in “Art, Life and Reality,” an extremist subjectivist: Wilde’s understanding of the relationship between art and nature expressed in “The Decay of Lying” is that nature does exist, but that it is our consciousness that gives it a meaning, or *relates* it to our existence. Indeed, the fact that he did not evade cultural and social issues prevented him from being a simple subjectivist: as we shall see in Chapter Two and Three, and in the Conclusion, it made his act of ‘poeticization’ of the world highly political. Unlike some German Romantics, Wilde’s poeticization of society, due to his social awareness, led to politicization of art.

² The *Märchen* or ‘fairy-tale,’ in the notion of the German Early and High Romantics, refers to “any tale that enter[s] into the realm of the imagination” (Furst 58).

³ I must be fair to the Romantics here: for, although “the cult of feeling” is usually regarded as one of Romantic characteristics, Furst suggests that this view could be one-sided: “in actual fact there was little vehement ‘overflow’ [in English Romantic poems] for emotion was not only ‘recollected in tranquillity’ but controlled by various factors: in Byron by the mocking note of irony, in Keats by the overriding ‘sense of Beauty,’ in Wordsworth by the observation of the outer world, and always by the use of imagery as an objective correlative that conveys, and yet at the same time, restrains feeling” (54-5).

⁴ My understanding of the relationship between Wilde’s and Eliot’s aesthetic largely corresponds with Richard Shusterman’s: his argument in “Wilde and Eliot” will reinforce my interpretation of Wilde’s aesthetic, and the philosophical link between the two writers. Shusterman’s essay persuasively demonstrates his thesis: “Eliot’s four most central and famous theories (viz., the objective correlative, the dissociation/ unification of sensibility, tradition/ individual talent, and the impersonal/ personal nature of great poetry) were all clearly adumbrated by Wilde, and sometimes even seem formulated as direct responses to Wildean pronouncements” (Shusterman 120).

⁵ Shusterman, however, suggests that Wilde employed a kind of objective correlative for *The Picture of Dorian Gray*: “the central portrait metaphor. . . can be seen as an extremely powerful yet archetypally simple example of the objective correlative” (133). See Shusterman 133.

⁶ See Styan 35-37.

⁷ Norbert Kohl, on the dialogue form of the essay, maintains:

There is no question here of equal partners, and the dialogue form is a mere pretence at intellectual discourse; in reality the speeches are monologue. . . . Nevertheless, the dialogue form does endow this essay, and also "The Critic as Artist," with a certain dramatic dynamism. If one compares them both with Arnold or Ruskin, each of whom offers ready-made conclusions in a single 'reliable' voice, one must admit that Wilde avoids giving the impression of a narrow finality simply by showing how his insights develop; the rigidity of the theoretical tract is thereby softened, allowing a certain flexibility and openness to the positions presented. . . . Furthermore, it was a form that gratified his penchant for conversation and for paradox. (83)

**Chapter 2: Utopian Communism and Epicurean Individualism
in "The Soul of Man Under Socialism"**

Ernest. You have told me many strange things to-night, Gilbert. . . . My friend, you are a dreamer.

Gilbert. Yes: I am a dreamer. For a dreamer is one who can only find his way by moonlight, and his punishment is that he sees the dawn before the rest of the world.

Ernest. His punishment?

Gilbert. And his reward. ("The Critic as Artist")¹

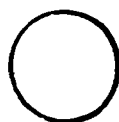
To many readers, especially those who accept the Victorian use of modifiers uncritically, Socialism or any political ideology might sound far-fetched for a writer like Oscar Wilde who tends to be regarded as a 'decadent' (or even 'immoral'), 'affected' aesthete. To those who are familiar with Wildean paradox and flippancy, Socialism or Communism sounds too heavy, too 'serious,' and too 'earnest,' and could be even a 'shock.'

"The Soul of Man Under Socialism" (February 1891) was (and still is) Wilde's challenge to the reader's stock response to his writing. For the suggested subject of the essay is openly political, that is, 'serious'; and its style (a traditional style of a polemic essay) and its straight-forward tone sound serious to the ears which are accustomed to Gilbert's and Vivian's playful voice. Indeed, the style and tone of "The Soul of Man Under Socialism" make a contrast with those of "The Critic as Artist" which was published at about the same time (July and September 1890): these two works are like contrasting twins. The conversational style of the latter gives the text a seemingly 'illogical'-- that is, paradoxical and tantalizing-- colour; the essay deals with the relationship between art and society but its focus is on art. "The Soul of Man Under Socialism" also deals with the issues concerning art and society but its focus is on society; but its traditional style strikes the reader as straight-forward and unaffected-- at least for Wilde's. A sceptical reader would be tempted to ask if this seriousness is a new Wildean rhetoric of playfulness.

The audience's response to this essay has, in fact, been ambivalent: many critics have shown some (or, often, great) scepticism towards his 'Socialism' even when they regard his social concerns expressed in the essay as serious. Terry Eagleton speculates:

It is hard to know what the lords and duchesses who lionized Wilde would have made of these political sentiments; perhaps they would have wondered-- as we might wonder today-- exactly how serious he was intending to be. ("Introduction" xxiii)

William E. Buckler maintains that the "impractical," "utopianist" argument of Wilde's



essay encouraged his conservative contemporaries (such as the *Spectator* intellectuals) to dismiss it as Wilde's habitual flippancy (Buckler 1); Isobel Murray informs us that it was, on the other hand, welcomed by his progressive contemporaries: that it was "admired by political thinkers as far apart as Shaw [a Fabian Socialist] and Prince Kropotkin [an Anarchist]" (Murray 198). Hesketh Pearson suggests that even the conservatives who did not appreciate Wilde's essay regarded it as potentially 'dangerous': Pearson hints that the publication of "The Soul of Man Under Socialism" became Wilde's social turning-point:

Wilde was once confessed that he liked to amuse the mob, to infuriate the respectable middle classes, and to fascinate the aristocrats. Up to the beginning of 1891 his efforts had been crowned with success, but in February of that year his essay *The Soul of Man Under Socialism* came out in *The Fortnightly Review*, and the aristocrats were no longer fascinated, though he was much too valuable an acquisition at house-parties and dinner-parties to be struck off the lists of eligible guests at Mayfair mansions and country castles. (Pearson 155)

Although Pearson's inference sounds rather emotional and lacks persuasive objective proof, Wilde might partially, if not fully, have betrayed his serious attitude as a social rebel to his audience; he, five years later, got an unusually severe sentence for a homosexual offence. The 'punishment'-- loss of property, two-year imprisonment and hard labour, and the following economically insecure exiled life-- devastated him so completely that we are, like Pearson, tempted to suspect that it was the Victorian Establishment's act of 'revenge' on Wilde's repeated 'rebellions': those who were familiar with his aesthetic and political beliefs could have easily imagined how effective the sentence would be to kill the spirit and creativity of this Epicurean, Individualist Aesthete.

Few contemporary critics fail to note Wilde's social and political awareness which seems to have grown intense towards the end of his career. Masolino D'Amico, for instance, maintains: "Between 1885 and 1890 journalism was the writer's [Wilde's] main activity. His articles, mainly book-reviews, show many a sign of his growing interest in progressive social theories. Socialism is sometimes welcome as the inspirer of a new and energetic art. . ." (D'Amico 118). Isobel Murray notes: "Leftwing politics had developed and divided a great deal in the eighties, and this was reflected in a flood of written lectures and articles, novels and manifestoes" (Murray 196). Murray suggests that this progressive current affected Wilde's reading and eventually his "political passiveness": she concludes that "it is clear that it was through his reading most of all that Wilde's political attitudes matured" (Murray 196). Many critics, even those (including D'Amico and Murray) who recognize Wilde's distinct political consciousness, however, remain

rather sceptical about Wilde's 'Socialism.' Wilde's explicit Individualism is likely to be associated with humanism or, by a more radical critic, Anarchism, but regarded as incompatible with Socialism. D'Amico, for example, argues that Wilde's Individualist disapproval of authoritarianism disagrees with (D'Amico's view of) 'Socialism'; he relates Wilde's political views expressed in "The Soul of Man Under Socialism" to those of Chuang Tzu (a Taoist philosopher, whose translated writing Wilde reviewed) as well as Godwin and Kropotkin. Murray recognizes a positive contribution of Wilde's writing to the turn-of-the-century political writing. She implies that Wilde's rhetorical method of challenging the reader's habits is alive in "The Soul of Man Under Socialism" as in his other writings: as he challenged the moral and artistic clichés of his age in "The Decay of Lying," he challenged its "political clichés" in this essay(198). Murray maintains:

. . . it [Wilde's essay] should be seen in a context of the main arguments of the time, in an age of much serious periodical literature. The manner of the essay has much to do with that debate, and I think the secret of why Wilde's essay captivates some and infuriates others, pretty well regardless of their political affiliations, is already to some extent indicated by his method here. Socialism, Individualism, Anarchy, Regimentation, machinery, labour-saving, slavery, are among words central to all the political polemic of the time, words that came to stand for slogans, for doctrines, for ultimate political clichés. They were very emotive, and at the same time capable of very different interpretations. When Wilde asserts that 'Civilization requires slaves' . . . , he seems to be asserting something many *laissez-faire* Individualists might privily assent to: when he continues that 'Human slavery is wrong, insecure, and demoralising,' (a splendidly chosen bouquet of adjectives, that!), he is typically deflating expectation, and winning the assent of a different political persuasion. (Murray 198)

Murray seems to be reminding us of the important effect of this "paradoxical, even playful use of key terms" (Murray 200): "Wilde was deeply aware, as his more earnest fellow-writers were not, of the ambiguities of language"; "[h]e used superficial oppositions to confuse or gently shock, and he found a new and deeper resonance for some of these terms" (Murray 200)-- and this style of Wilde's, of course, shakes the audience's (the reader's) uncritical acceptance of key terms and helps them to redefine the meanings.

Murray is also more careful about the relationship between Individualism and Socialism: she hints at the possible compatibility of the two often opposed notions by connecting Wilde's essay with Grant Allen's "Individualism and Socialism" ^{which} (appeared in *The Contemporary Review* [May 1889]).³ Yet, despite her committed, valid analysis suggestive of her recognition of Wilde's Socialism, her view of Wilde's political link with this ideology remains negative, for, in her essay, Wilde's political and philosophical views explicit in "The Soul of Man Under Socialism" are inherently assessed in relation to *De Profundis*. She suggests a deeper connection between Wilde and Emerson, and is

reluctant to give Wilde a Socialist colour: she concludes: “The backing of Emerson not only differentiates *The Soul of Man*, for all its topicality, from the continuing political debate in the periodicals: it underpins the Individualism proclaimed there, and the Individualism he went on to proclaim in the sadly changed world of *De Profundis*” (Murray 207). However, it could be risky to argue or treat these two essays on the same level. The differences in nature between the two writings must be considered: “The Soul of Man Under Socialism” is an intellectually controlled critical essay which Wilde, as a writer, addressed to the ‘public’ whereas *De Profundis* is a very emotional private letter written without his ‘persona.’ One must also consider the basic question: which reflects the philosophical and aesthetic core of Wilde’s art more, the writing of his mature phase or his last writing? Buckler also notes Wilde’s “iconoclasm” in “The Soul of Man Under Socialism,” and regards it “an effective intellectual strategy” (Buckler 11); but Buckler’s conclusion is, again, disheartening. He maintains: “His [Wilde’s] critical subject was not socialism but the soul of man, and the aesthetic effect he sought to produce was thoughtful surprise or startled insight” (Buckler 10). Buckler strikes me as evasive: it is as if he were avoiding dealing with political issues which exist in the text. Where, for instance, does Buckler think our “startled insight” or “surprise” leads to? Wilde’s iconoclasm could take us to a philosophical awareness; yet what is the nature of this philosophical awareness? Does it not, after all, shake and awaken our moral, social and political consciousness? As we will see later in this chapter, Nobert Kohl regards Wilde as a humanist conformist; Terry Eagleton views him as a Socialist but not a Marxist.

I will suggest that Wilde’s political views and social vision expressed in “The Soul of Man Under Socialism” are close to those expressed in *The Communist Manifesto*. I do not mean to say that Wilde was a confirmed Marxist; I would simply like to suggest that Wilde’s political views are as acute, and that his vision is as insightful and revolutionary as Marx’s and Engels’s in *The Manifesto*; and, therefore, that it could be more Socialist (or Communist) than many critics might think or even he himself might have thought.

Wilde makes no distinction between Communism and Socialism-- he remarks that his ‘Socialism’ refers to “Socialism, Communism, or whatever one chooses to call it” (358); nevertheless, Wilde’s choice of the term ‘Socialism,’ not ‘Communism,’ for the title of his essay might have been deliberate. For ‘Communism’ was regarded as more ‘dangerous’ than ‘Socialism’ although these two terms were used interchangeably: Engels points out in the preface to the English edition of *The Manifesto* : “. . . Socialism was, in 1848 [when he and Marx decided to publish *The Manifesto*], a middle-class movement, Communism, a working-class movement. Socialism was, on the Continent at least, ‘respectable’; Communism was the very opposite” (*The Communist Manifesto* 62). Wilde’s views and

ideas described in the essay *are* more Communist (that is, revolutionary) than Socialist (that is, according to Engels, 'bourgeois') at least in the sense that, like Marx and Engels, Wilde, in his essay, regards "respectable" Owenist social reforms as reactionary and supports the total change of political and social system including the abolition of private property. Wilde means by 'Socialism' the political system that "ensure[s] the material well-being of each member of the community" by "converting private property into public wealth, and substituting co-operation for competition" (358).

Wilde's choice of the term 'Socialism' might, then, reflect his political deliberation: it is possible that he preferred the term 'Socialism' to 'Communism' because he was, as I discuss this issue later in this chapter, aware of his own still 'Utopian' (not 'scientific') views of Communism: he might have regarded himself as disqualified as a Communist advocate. His choice of the term could, on the other hand, reflect his political prudence: he could have wished to give his audience a 'moderate' shock. He could not help despising and ridiculing the shallowness of the upper- and middle-class moral values and their self-deceptive philanthropy; he wanted to expose the limitations of the self-complacent middle-class pseudo-Socialism. He, however, loved to be treated as a celebrity by London's high society; he loved luxury; he needed patrons. Wilde's 'political' deliberation of choosing the bourgeois term (Socialism) rather than the proletarian one (Communism) was necessary since he addressed the Victorian upper- and middle-class audience. He, as a writer, needed the audience; he loved to be an literary 'agitator'; and he wanted his writing to be talked about. But his writing *must*, first of all, be read if it could influence them at all.

It seems, however, less plausible to think that Wilde apprehended the result of the publication of this possibly 'dangerous' essay; for he had been, by this time, experiencing the heated, clamorous public dispute over the 'immorality' and 'decadence' of *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890; the one with the preface, 1891). As Nobert Kohl points out, Wilde's reference, in his essay, to the tyranny of the public (especially journalism) and his defence of the artist's autonomy reflect this dispute over *Dorian Gray*.⁴ Wilde must have been a more convinced 'rebel' by the time of the publication of "The Soul of Man Under Socialism."

Some critics, chiefly based on biographical facts, suggest that this essay might have been influenced mainly by George Bernard Shaw's *The Quintessence of Ibsenism* (1891), more precisely, by his lecture on Socialism for one of the Fabian meetings (the lecture which formed the basis of his book).⁵ D'Amico rejects this possibility as "a legend" and emphasizes the influence of Chung Tsu on Wilde's writing (D'Amico 121). Murray concludes that Wilde's essay has many sources; and she refers to the writings of William

Morris, Chung Tzu, Kropotkin, Grant Allen, and Emerson. I do not mean to deny these hypotheses. I will suggest yet another, more basic and, therefore, inclusive 'source' which must have influenced all these names except Chung Tsu: *The Communist Manifesto*. Considering the fact that European and American intellectuals of the late nineteenth century were familiar with and more or less influenced by the philosophy of Marx and Engels, and that their British connection was tight (Marx and Engels published their *Manifesto* [the first German version] in London, Europe's political 'sanctuary'; Marx lived and died there as a political exile), it would be natural and probable to conclude that Marx and Engels affected the formation of Wilde's political views as well as those of other British and European intellectuals. The English first edition of *The Communist Manifesto* was published in 1850 (Helen Macfarlane's translation in the *Red Republican*); and what Engels called the English "authentic version" which was translated by Samuel Moore ("Authorized English Translation, edited and annotated by Frederick Engels") was published in 1888 (*The Manifesto* 67-8), three years before the publication of Wilde's essay; the French edition, to which Wilde must also have had access, had been published in 1850; a new French version, in 1885. The oratorical style of Wilde's essay somewhat reminds the reader of that of *The Manifesto*; and a close examination of the two texts shows that Wilde's political views largely coincide with those of *The Manifesto*. I intend to clarify Wilde's radicalism by relating his text to *The Communist Manifesto*. I will also focus on Wilde's Individualist, Utopian, Epicurean interpretation of Communism, which perhaps gives his essay, as Socialist writing, a unique status.

1 Communism and Individualism

Wilde regards charity or any philanthropic, humanitarian measure as a 'carrot' of the carrot and stick policy employed by the privileged class; charity consequently helps the privileged to maintain the present system: philanthropism is self-serving. Marx and Engels attack humanitarianism and philanthropism in *The Communist Manifesto*, defining it as fundamentally reactionary "bourgeois Socialism"; bourgeois Socialism only intends "reforms. . . that in no respect affect the relations between capital and labour, but, at the best, lessen the cost, and simplify the administrative work, of bourgeois government" (114); they conclude that "it[bourgeois Socialism] but requires in reality, that the proletariat should remain within the bounds of existing society, but should cast away all its hateful ideas concerning the bourgeoisie" (113-4). Wilde, as harshly and ironically as Marx and Engels, criticizes Victorian philanthropists in his essay: "their

remedies do not cure the disease: they merely prolong it. Indeed, their remedies are part of the disease. . . . The proper aim is to try and reconstruct society on such a basis that poverty will be impossible. And the altruistic virtues have really prevented the carrying out of this aim" (357-8).

Wilde's keen sense of Individualism gives him a fuller, even shrewder insight into the evil of charity: the philanthropist's act of charity degrades and demoralizes not only the humanity of the socially oppressed but also that of the privileged. Charity decays the philanthropist's morality; it makes "the sentimentalist" insensitive enough to "tyrannize over their [the poor's] private lives" (360): self-sacrifice is a rationalized form of selfishness. Charity also damages the human dignity of the poor; it creates the hopelessly tamed, "virtuous" poor who would "be grateful for the crumbs that fall from the rich man's table"; but, of course, "a poor man who is *ungrateful, unthrifty, discontented, and rebellious* is probably a *real personality*, and has much in him" (emphases added 360). Shaw's Doolittle, "one of the undeserving poor" (Shaw 58), in *Pygmalion* (1914), would, for example, be Wilde's ideal prototype of the working-class.

Wilde, like Marx and Engels, proposes a radical change of the existing social system, that is, the abolition of private property. He believes that abolition would liberate members of society both materially and morally: that it serves not only the advancement of the economic status of the poor but the individual member's moral and intellectual growth. Marx and Engels must have been conscious of the merit that the abolition of private property would bring to the individual's moral development when they stated in *The Manifesto* that "[i]n bourgeois society capital is independent and has individuality, while the living person is dependent and has no individuality" 98); but, still, their major concern is the material consequence of the abolition of the evil system, that is, the equal distribution of wealth, rather than its moral consequence. Wilde is, as a critic and artist, more interested in the moral effects of the revolution; it is through his individualistic critique of Capitalism that he reaches the same political conclusion as that of Marx and Engels, that is:

In place of the old bourgeois society, with its classes and class antagonisms, we shall have an association, in which the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all. (*The Manifesto* 105)

Wilde understands that the system of private property is devastating to both the proletariat and to the bourgeois. He shares the Materialist view that material conditions determine our consciousness: he thinks that the bourgeois system decides the type of Individualism; from the materialistic society only materialistic Individualism emerges. He presumes that the abolition of private property would prepare the new

conditions under which Individualism would enjoy full development; he shares with Marx and Engels the idea that “intellectual production changes in character in proportion as material production is changed” (*The Manifesto* 102). Wilde considers that intense poverty under the private property system not only “paralyses” the human spirit of the socially oppressed; but that the existence of private property limits Individualism: “the recognition of private property has really harmed Individualism, and obscured it, by confusing a man with *what he possesses*” (emphases added 362). The private property system makes one a slave of materialism and debars one from acquiring “the full expression of a personality, except on the imaginative plane of art” (366). Wilde supports Communism because, under the new conditions, “man reaches his perfection entirely through *what he is*” (emphases added 365); “With the abolition of private property, then, we shall have true, beautiful, healthy Individualism” (363).

2 Art and Communism

The Individualistic approach to and understanding of Communism alone make Wilde a rather unique Communist thinker in the late nineteenth century; but what makes him most unique is the fact that he was one of the few Socialists (and Communists) in that period who discussed the relationship between art and society, and the ideal social conditions for artists. The Fabian Society was, according to Ian Britain, not entirely indifferent to the relationship between art and Socialism although the common view is that the Society, in the history of British Socialism, represented “an indifference, even a hostility, to the arts” (Britain 4). The Society’s “heterogeneity,” however, allowed the members political “ambiguity, flexibility and inconsistency” (Britain 14): some members including George Bernard Shaw were critical of and consciously dealt with Socialist philistinism. The general air of Socialism at the turn of the century was, nonetheless, undeniably utilitarian. Kohl, therefore, concludes: “It was this aesthetic motivation that distinguished him [Wilde] from all the other socialists of the 1880s, for they [except such artists as William Morris] scarcely spared a thought for the role of art in the society of the future” (Kohl 129).

Wilde believes that the artist should be free from the authorities’ political, cultural and moral control; as Gilbert points out in “The Critic as Artist,” to create fine works of art, the artist needs to have a striking, unique personality; society must have the conditions where he or she can develop his or her personality fully; an ideal society for the artist would, therefore, be a fully-developed Communist society which would guarantee the growth of “new Individualism” (389). It must be a society where no

authority or no government exists: a society where the State would shrink into “a voluntary association that will organize labour, and be manufacturer and distributor of necessary commodities” (369); where “the public power will lose its political character” (*The Manifesto* 105) and will become “a mere superintendence of reproduction” (*The Manifesto* 116). Wilde argues that “there are three kinds of despots”: “the Prince,” the privileged class, “who tyrannizes over the body”; “the Pope,” religious authority, “who tyrannizes over the soul”; and “the people,” the public, “who tyrannize over the soul and body” (383). Wilde loves a society where Communist ideals would be fully realized, but disapproves of a totalitarian pseudo-Communist society where popular authority might restrict individual freedom. He dislikes many rash Socialists’ totalitarian tendency: “I confess that many of the socialistic views that I have come across seem to me to be tainted with ideas of authority, if not of actual compulsion” (362).⁶ He, as an Individualist, firmly believes that “it is only in voluntary associations that man is fine” (362). If Communism meant the simple shift of the political power from the bourgeois to the proletariat, Wilde would not sympathize with the system; if he approves of the temporary popular authority at all, all the members of society should, by that time, be reasonably cultivated; the new government should be sensible enough not to interfere with individuals; he actually insists that “art should never try to be popular” but that “[t]he public should try to make itself artistic” (372); he even suggests that Authoritarian Socialism can be worse than Capitalism especially when the Socialist revolution involves the governmental interference with individuals, which he believes will lead to cultural, intellectual degradation. Wilde argues:

It is clear... that no Authoritarian Socialism will do. For while under the present system a very large number of people can lead lives of a certain amount of freedom and expression and happiness, under an industrial-barrack system, or a system of economic tyranny [Authoritarian Socialism], nobody would be able to have any such freedom at all. It is to be regretted that a portion of our community should be practically in slavery, but to propose to solve the problem by enslaving the entire community is childish. (361)

Careless readers and dogmatic Socialists (or Communists) might conclude that this statement of Wilde’s is a strong proof of his innately aristocratic aversion to and disbelief in the working-class. Wilde, however, shares with Marx and Engels the fully-developed vision of Communist society-- Marx and Engels regard Communism as the only means to realize a society without oppression or exploitation, and, therefore, as a destination of human evolution; Wilde regards it as the only possible way to develop personality fully, and, therefore, as a destination which art and Individualism desire to reach. Wilde is, nevertheless, critical about *any* authority while Marx and Engels accept the temporary popular authority *if necessary*. Indeed, it is quite questionable that Wilde could stand an

under-developing Communist society where the public power would have to function as an organized political power to defend the proletarian interests against the bourgeois; for *The Manifesto* suggests that, even after proletarian revolution, society might still need some time to overcome the remaining class antagonism: during the transitional period to perfect Communism, the popular government cannot really be a *voluntary* organization but the government of “the proletariat organized *as the ruling class*” (emphases added *The Manifesto* 104): Marx and Engels speculate:

When, *in the course of development*, class distinctions have disappeared, and all production has been concentrated in the whole nation, the public power will lose its political character. . . . *If* the proletariat during its contest with the bourgeoisie is *compelled, by the force of circumstances, to organize itself as a class*, if, by means of a revolution, it makes itself *the ruling class*, and, *as such*, sweeps away *by force* the old conditions of production, *then* it will, along with these conditions, have swept away the conditions for the existence of class antagonisms and of classes generally, and will *thereby* have abolished its own supremacy as a class. (Emphases added 105)

Engels would have criticized Wilde’s notion of Communism as “Utopian,” not “scientific” enough; and Wilde would have willingly accepted this criticism. Wilde was aware that his views were still Utopian from orthodox Communists’ point of view: he has a Communist vision, but does not, for instance, have any practical theory of how to realize his vision fully-- and this might be one of the reasons why he did not adopt the term Communism in his essay.⁷

However, Wilde does not really fit in the category of Utopian Socialists. His views are far more radical than those of traditional “Utopian Socialists” such as “Saint-Simon, Fourier, Owen and others” (*The Manifesto* 115) and, in many respects, coincide more with those expressed in *The Manifesto*. The disciples of Utopian Socialism, according to Marx and Engels, underestimate the political potential of the working class and the class antagonism so much that they “endeavour and that consistently, to deaden the class struggle and to reconcile the class antagonism” and “still dream of experimental realization of their social Utopias, of founding isolated ‘phalanstères,’ of establishing ‘Home Colonies,’ of setting up a ‘Little Icaria’ ” ; they, therefore, “violently oppose all political action on the part of the working class” (*The Manifesto* 117-8), and mean to “*deaden* the class struggle and *reconcile* the class antagonism”(emphases added *The Manifesto* 117). But Wilde, on the contrary, as a social rebel himself, loves and welcomes “ungrateful,” “discontented,” “disobedient” and “rebellious” attitude from the oppressed (360); if Wilde underestimates the potential of the working class, it would be simply because he is keenly aware of the paralyzing effect of prolonged, intense poverty and misery on human beings; he, therefore, recognizes the absolute necessity of “agitators”

and political organizers (361). He was not a simple, good-natured bourgeois Utopian, whom he must have abhorred; he sees through the hypocrisy of the self-serving middle-class work ethic that every kind of work is equally valid. The fact is that there exist the kinds of labour which one not only dislikes but which destroy one's health and human dignity. Wilde says:

There is nothing necessarily dignified about manual labour at all, and most of it is absolutely degrading... many forms of labour are quite pleasureless activities, and should be regarded as such. To sweep a slush crossing for eight hours on a day when the east wind is blowing is a disgusting occupation. To sweep it with mental, moral, or physical dignity seems to me to be impossible. To sweep it with joy would be appalling. Man is made for something better than disturbing dirt. (369)

Wilde is, on the other hand, aware of the grim reality: "The fact is that civilization requires slavery"(370); he, therefore, proposes "the slavery of the machine," not "human slavery" which is "wrong, insecure, and demoralizing" (370). He argues that the future of mankind depends on "mechanical slavery" (370); and that, for that purpose, the radical change of the present system is indispensable: he believes that under Capitalism the introduction of the machine robs the working-class of the jobs which their lives depend on: Capitalism forces labourers to compete with the machine and, enslaves them morally and materially. Yet, under Communism, the wide-ranging introduction of machinery must profit mankind; Communism enables people to equally enjoy the privileges brought by the massive productive power of the machine. He dreams that:

while Humanity will be amusing itself, or enjoying cultivated leisure-- which, and not labour, is the aim of man-- or making beautiful things, or reading beautiful things, or simply contemplating the world with admiration and delight, machinery will be doing all the necessary and unpleasant work. (370)

This view of Wilde's is not only shared by Marx, but does not really contradict that of his fellow artist and more convinced Socialist, William Morris.⁸ Terry Eagleton states:

Marx believed that socialism could come about only by the eradication of drudgery-- that only then would men and women be free to realize their creative powers and capacities. And this, for Marx and for Wilde, meant the wholesale automation of labour, so that economic life could be left to look after itself. Both men see that economic revolution is necessary if economics is to cease absorbing so much valuable human time: in this sense, there is a kind of Wildean paradox built into Marx's own thought. (xxii)

However, Eagleton argues that Wilde's views on labour "contrast tellingly with those of his fellow socialist William Morris, whose aim was not to abolish labour but to transform it into a creative pursuit on the model of medieval craftsmanship" (xxii). Eagleton's point is only roughly right. Wilde's and Morris's views on labour are not really apart. Firstly, Wilde, in his essay, does not insist that *all* manual works are equally degrading and

should be abolished; on the contrary, he would have welcomed Morris's idea of transforming labour into a pleasurable, creative pursuit: Wilde's "cultivated leisure" includes "making beautiful things" (370). Secondly, Morris, like Wilde, maintains in "Useful Work versus Useless Toil" (1885):

the semi-theological dogma that all labour, under any circumstances, is a blessing to the labourer, is hypocritical and false; . . . , on the other hand, labour is good when due hope of rest and pleasure accompanies it. (Morris 135).

Even Morris did not have a clear idea of what to do with "useless toil" such as sweeping dirt. He did not deny the positive role which machines might perform: he maintains:

In a true society [under Socialism] these miracles of ingenuity[machines] would be for the first time used for minimizing the amount of time spent in unattractive labour, which by their means might be so reduced as to be but a very light burden on each individual. (Morris 134).

Morris himself, though somewhat cautiously, envisages "machinery being used freely for releasing people from the more mechanical and repulsive part of necessary labour" in "How We Live and How We Might Live" (1888) (177).

3 Epicureanism and Communism

One more characteristic element that differentiates Wilde from orthodox Communists would be Epicureanism; the difference in the interpretation of Christianity between Wilde and Marx and Engels is related to this characteristic of Wilde's Communism: Wilde's Individualistic interpretation of Christ's life distances his view from Marx's and Engels's while his Epicurean interpretation draws his view closer to theirs. Wilde, like Marx and Engels, is conscious of the limitations of Christianity as revolutionary force; he *does* not only hate the moral authority of Church (institutionalized Christianity); but his evaluation of its worldly, political power is not very different from the harsh criticism made by Marx and Engels:

Nothing is easier than to give Christian asceticism a Socialist tinge. Has not Christianity declaimed against private property, against marriage, against the State? Has it not preached in the place of these, charity and poverty, celibacy and mortification of the flesh, monastic life and Mother Church? Christian Socialism is but the holy water with which the priest consecrated the heart-burnings of the aristocrat. (*The Manifesto* 108)

The nature of Wilde's criticism of Christianity, however, is somewhat different from theirs; his views are both Individualistic and Epicurean. Wilde admires Jesus as an Individualist; but he sees the limitations of Jesus's stoic attitude. He argues that Jesus was "a God realizing his perfection through pain"; Christianity is "the worship of pain"

(387). Jesus's Gospel is Individualistic; it teaches one to reject materialism; it preaches the importance of what one is, not what one has. Still, Individualism one can achieve through Christianity is bound to be restricted by its emphasis on suffering. Wilde believes in pleasure, for pleasure is limitless while pain is "limiting" (386). He asserts that it is rare that pain, suffering or struggle improves one's personality: half of the strength of social rebels, for example, would be "wasted in friction" and "such battles do not always intensify strength; they often exaggerate weakness" (364).⁹ Moreover, sympathy with pain is not the highest: it is "the first instinct of man" and "the least fine mode" of sympathy (386). Sympathy with joy, on the other hand, is the highest; sympathy with joy "requires more unselfishness" while sympathy with suffering is "tainted with egoism" (386); for, he continues, "[a]nybody can sympathize with the sufferings of a friend, but it requires a very fine nature--it requires, in fact, the nature of a true Individualist--to sympathize with a friend's success" (386). Individualism through joy and pleasure must be, therefore, superior to Individualism through pain and suffering. If one believes in progress, the superiority of self-realization through joy will be even clearer; the field of joy is expanding while that of pain is shrinking; Individualism through joy belongs to the future and evolution while Individualism through pain belongs to the restrictive past and present and regression. Wilde assumes:

. . .when Socialism has solved the problem of poverty, and Science solved the problem of disease, the area of the sentimentalists will be lessened, and the sympathy of man will be large, healthy, and spontaneous. Man will have joy in the contemplation of the joyous life of others. (386)

Another limitation of Christianity is that Jesus's teaching of the total abandonment of society prevents one from making any "attempt to reconstruct society"; Jesus preaches self-realization "through pain or in solitude" but "man is naturally social"(387): one cannot live in perfect seclusion. Besides, Christian abandonment of society encourages political indifference; the willing acceptance of pain and suffering hinders social change; it gives no room to revolution. Christianity might be radical enough to deny private property; but it is not radical enough to abolish the materialistic system.

4 Conclusion: Wilde's Utopianism

Terry Eagleton comments on "The Soul of Man Under Socialism" that:

Part of Wilde's ironic self-awareness was his recognition that to live "aesthetically" could only be, in current social conditions, the privilege of a wealthy minority. If he was a socialist, it was because he hoped for a society in which every man and woman would be able to express themselves 'artistically'; and he was clear that this was impossible as long as the great majority of them were condemned to wretched toil. (xxii)

Eagleton is generally right; but he still seems to fail to see the crucial point: it is not only intellectuals' moral dilemma that made Wilde defend Socialism; the dilemma could be one of the main motivations that made him write this essay; but a natural flow of his thought guided him to Socialism or Communism. Wilde's Individualism, Epicureanism and Aestheticism drew him to a Communist vision; in his vision they should be not only the *object* or *raison d'être* of Communism, but the absolute *means* to realize Communism. Eagleton, further, argues that one of Wilde's most non-Communist characteristics lies in "his lack of emphasis on human solidarity-- in his failure to acknowledge that the full, free development of one individual is possible only in and through the development of all" (xxii-iii). Wilde might have lacked the sense of solidarity in the orthodox sense of the term; an articulate participant of a labour strike or a mass demonstration would be the last thing he might have been: he valued 'thinking' much more highly than 'acting': Gilbert comments: "Action is limited and relative. Unlimited and absolute is the vision of him who sits at ease and watches, who walks in loneliness and dreams" (42).¹⁰ However, although he was not a political activist, Wilde was, in a way, an agitator: Pearson argues that Wilde was, through his essays, inspiring (therefore, 'agitating') the (young) audience of critical mind though the Victorian Establishment must have said that he was 'decaying' the youth:

In this essay ["The Soul of Man Under Socialism"] more than anywhere else in his work he symbolized the spirit of youth's revolt against age, of frivolity against decorum, of irreverence against acceptance, of anarchy against institutionalism, of the individual against society, of beauty against ugliness, of art against commerce, of freedom against convention. (159)

Besides, Wilde was aware that all the members of society *must* be culturally developed in order to realize his notion of Individualism; he dreamed of a *renaissance* of ancient Greek society where all the citizens were, according to Gilbert, intellectual "art-critics" (11). Some readers might be rather puzzled about Wilde's closing remark of this essay: "The new Individualism is the new Hellenism" (389)-- the introduction of "Hellenism" may seem abrupt as a conclusion of the discussion on Socialism and Individualism. But his intention, here, becomes clear if the reader follows his logical flow: his ideal society is ancient Greek society which had the only one grave defect of human slavery; a Communist society of his vision is a *perfect* Hellenistic society-- Communism would set society free from any form of exploitation; under Communism (or new Hellenism), *all* the people would fully enjoy the fruits of civilization.

Wilde would have wished the intellectual, spiritual development of all partly because of his humane consideration for the oppressed and the guilty consciousness as a

privileged intellectual; but he was moral and shrewd enough to reach the conclusion that one's *full* self-realization is possible *only* where everyone's full development is politically, socially and culturally conditioned. Wilde could see the fact that the cultivation of all was *necessary* because the ignorance and bigotry of the public was a hindrance of his self-realization-- he *had to* attack, both in "The Critic as Artist" and "The Soul of Man Under Socialism," the lack of artistic understanding and taste of his contemporary critics, academics and the public (journalists and the general audience); but he knew that he was, by criticizing them, wasting the time and energy for his own cultivation; he needed to attack and, by doing so, enlighten his audience *for his own* fulfillment of Individualism: he must have been too well aware of and irritated by being "wasted in friction" as a rebel (364). Wilde, moreover, believed in Cosmopolitanism springing from Individualism; just as Marx and Engels believed in Internationalism (the unity of the proletariat of all countries), so Wilde believed in the moral unity of Individualists of all countries: Gilbert, in "The Critic as Artist," insists that "[t]here is no sin except stupidity" (65); that "it is only by the cultivation of the habit of intellectual criticism that we shall be able to rise superior to race-prejudices. . . . Criticism will annihilate race-prejudices, by insisting upon *the unity of human mind in the variety of its forms*" (emphases added 64).

Norbert Kohl does not appreciate Wilde's Socialist ideas expressed in this essay very much, either; Kohl's judgment of Wilde is ambivalent: his major thesis is, as the title of his book (*Oscar Wilde: The Works of a Conformist Rebel*) shows, that Wilde was a rebel but a Conformist who was no real threat to the Victorian Establishment; he concludes in "Authority and Autonomy: *The Soul of Man under Socialism*" that Wilde could not go beyond the middle-class Victorian Liberalism. Although he regards Wilde's rebellious attitude as "serious" and "humanitarian," he argues that Wilde's lack of the practical 'theory' for his Utopian vision proves that Wilde was far less committed to social causes, far less familiar ~~with~~ the reality of the oppressed, and, therefore, far less radical than the Fabian Socialists (Kohl 137): Wilde denounced humanitarian Liberalists as hypocritical; but he *was* one of them. However, Kohl's view of Wilde would be harsh: even though Wilde was not at all 'scientific' or theoretical, his Socialist vision was as radical and insightful as his contemporary Socialists such as Morris. Wilde's strength lies in his theoretical weakness: if his fellow Socialists' concerns on practical theories allowed the age restrict their political views, his indifference to the theories, in a way, enabled him to see beyond the age. The problem of the individual's freedom, especially the autonomy of the artist, under a Socialist regime which tends to be totalitarian, is not only one of Wilde's great concerns but one of the most critical issues of our time. Wilde's indifference

Chapter 2: Utopian Communism and Epicurean Individualism 64

towards the scheme for Socialist revolution and practice may show his lack of commitment to Socialism, but it is also due to his cool Materialist consciousness: he is aware how much our material conditions restrict our thinking and imagination:

A practical scheme is either a scheme that is already in existence, or a scheme that could be carried out under existing conditions. But it is exactly the existing conditions that one object to; and any scheme that could accept these conditions is wrong and foolish. (384)

Morris shares the similar views although his views on “a practical scheme,” are, as a more committed Socialist, more discreet:

Socialists are often asked how work of the rougher and more repulsive kind could be carried out in the new condition of things. To attempt to answer such questions fully or authoritatively would be attempting the impossibility of constructing a scheme of a new society out of the materials of the old, before we know which of those materials would disappear and which endure through the evolution which is leading us to the great change. (Morris 134)

Kohl also argues that there was nothing really “new” about Wilde’s views; and that his views are essentially conservative-- Wilde simply used Socialism to reinforce his “traditional” aesthetics, and Individualist doctrines (137): “The aesthetic absolutism of Wilde’s theory of art demanded anarchic individualism as its social framework” (Kohl 136); and “he was only converting his aesthetic theory into one of cultural and not social revolution” (Kohl 137). However, here, Kohl misses the essential points: in Wilde’s view, there is *no* social revolution *without* cultural revolution, and *no* (real) cultural revolution *without* social revolution. Wilde’s Individualism and Aestheticism are complementary and, therefore, inseparable; and his Socialism (Communism) is not simply a “vehicle” for his Individualism and Aestheticism (Kohl 136)-- Wilde’s Individualism and Aestheticism *must* not merely *desire* Communism but *enrich* it: his Aestheticism and Individualism require Communism as their means but they nurture it; his Communism requires Aestheticism and Individualism as its means but it nurtures them as well. Wilde’s views have something new; they combine Individualism and Communism, the seemingly separate, antagonistic notions.¹¹ Kohl’s criticism of Wilde’s middle-class Liberalism seems to be only partially right; for there exists *nothing purely new*: everything ‘new’ is not actually cut off from tradition, but it largely lies in the *transformation* of what is old; and this transformation is made possible by a new interpretation of the old and/or by the radical combination and the delicate balance of contraries. Wilde might have interpreted Communism from the point of view of a ‘Liberalist’ or a humanist, but he combined it with Aestheticism and Individualism and created his anarchic Communism, just as he created his new ‘Romanticism’ or Symbolism by combining ‘the Romantic’ (its stress on imagination and love of novelty) and the ‘Classical’(its stress on form and love of

tradition).

The Communist vision of society is, for Wilde, compatible with his Aesthetic, Individualistic, Epicurean vision; and in this compatibility of seemingly opposing ideas Oscar Wilde's strength and uniqueness are found most. He believed, as an Individualist, that society exists for its individual member, not each individual for established society; the fact that each individual is a social entity does not mean that each should conform to the existing social system and conventions uncritically and unconditionally; on the contrary, he or she should create a society which will serve the welfare of individual members. Wilde's Epicurean, Aesthetic, Individualist desires and aspirations made him conscious of the evils of the social conditions which hinder people from the fulfillment of aesthetic, joyful life; they made him envisage a society where one could be "a perfect man" who "is not wounded, or worried, or maimed, or in danger" (365): the society which is, Gilbert would say, so free from social oppression and misery that, there, art can exist for the sake of art and one can contemplate for the sake of contemplation. Wilde believed, or rather, *dreamed* that Communism would prepare the ground for such a society and that the "new Individualism" would in turn embellish the new society (389). The criticism of Marx and Engels of the Utopian Socialists is right and partly applicable to Wilde's political views; but it is also true that Utopian, imaginative thinking has nurtured Communist ideology. Wilde was conscious of the positive roles of the dream and the dreamer: he argues:

A map of the world that does not include Utopia is not worth even glancing at, for it leaves out the one country at which Humanity is always landing, and, seeing a better country, set sail. Progress is the realization of Utopia. (371)

Notes

¹ Wilde 66.

² Pearson believes:

[Wilde's sympathy with the poor and the downtrodden] eventually found expression in *The Soul of Man Under Socialism*, an essay that aroused the secret enmity of the rich and powerful classes at whose house-parties he was an invaluable entertainer. (136)

Also,

The essay did him a greater disservice with the governing classes than anything else he could have said or done, and at a time when they might have lend a helping hand they turned a cold shoulder. (161)

³ Murray introduces Grant Allen's argument:

His essay repeatedly draws attention to the use and abuse of words: "these-so-called Individualists," "the so-called Socialist," and he redefines his terms carefully. . . .

Allen's underlying positive argument is that true Individualists and true

Socialists have almost everything in common at present: both have “a strong sense of the injustice and wickedness of the existing system,” and both “aim at a more equitable distribution of the goods of life among those who do most to produce and defend them” (738). Their longterm aims indeed differ, but will not become practical issues for “a few hundred years,” during which time they can fight together against common enemies. In the end he appears to doubt whether some Socialists are Socialists at all— by which he means that he doubts whether they will support regimentation at the end of the day: . . . (Murray 200-1)

⁴ Kohl 123-4.

⁵ Hesketh Pearson, focusing on the friendship between Wilde and Shaw, rather too rashly, concludes that “[t]he origin of that remarkable essay [“The Soul of Man Under Socialism”] was an address on socialism by Bernard Shaw in Westminster. Wilde went to the meetings [of the Fabian Society] and spoke; after which he decided to put his faith on paper” (155). Norbert Kohl introduces J. D. Thomas’s interpretation (“‘The Soul of Man under Socialism’: An Essay in Context” [*Rice University Studies* 51, 1965]): although Thomas is, according to Kohl, more careful to decide which lecture of Shaw’s Wilde was most likely to be present at, he reaches the same conclusion of Pearson’s: Ibsen had already become fashionable in England of the 1890s and Wilde evaluated him highly; it is, therefore, quite probable that Shaw’s lecture which Wilde attended was the one that formed the basis of *The Quintessence of Ibsenism*: Thomas points out the parallel expressions between Wilde’s and Shaw’s essay. Kohl largely agrees with Thomas though he questions Thomas’s method of focusing on the source of the essay before discussing its content fully. For detail, see Kohl 123-4.

⁶ By “many of the socialistic views” which he found authoritarian, Wilde might have meant those of the SDF (the Social Democratic Federation) as well as some “narrowly utilitarian” members of the Fabian Society (Britain 4); according to Kohl:

Around the mid 1880s there were altogether three serious, competing socialist groups: the SDF under Hyndman, the Socialist League under Morris, and the hitherto little-known Fabian Society, which was founded in 1884. There were also a number of anarchist groups whose membership revolved round the journal *Freedom*. A few smaller associations which demanded land reform and which operated partly on a regional level completed the left wing of extra-parliamentary oppositions. (Kohl 127)

The SDF was the first Socialist body found in Britain and dominant; but its Marxism tended to be regarded as “too authoritarian” by the anarchists who first sympathized with its creed and joined the group (then, the Democratic Federation), but later broke with it (Kohl 127).

⁷ Eagleton points out that “Wilde has little positive conception of social relationships, and his socialism is the poorer for it” (xxiii). Kohl’s evaluation agrees with Eagleton’s. See Kohl 133.

⁸ Murray calls the often suggested disagreement between Morris’s and Wilde’s view on machinery and craftsmanship (manual work) a “legend” (Murray 197). She quotes Morris’s lines in “How We Live and How We Might Live,” “Useful Work versus Useless Work,” and “Art and Socialism,” and points out the striking similarities rather than the differences between Wilde’s and Morris’s views on the relationship between art and society. Murray, though, maintains that “Wilde and Morris differ in their ultimate visions”: “Morris wants to ‘substitute association for competition in all that relates to the

production and exchange of the means of life' (M 66), but it is characteristic of him that his aims are always communal: what is implicit is co-operation, rather than solitary individualism--. . ." (Murray 198). However, Murray fails to note that Wilde himself proposes the system that "ensure[s] the material well-being of each member of the community" by "converting private property into public wealth, and *substituting co-operation for competition*" (emphases added Wilde 358). As for Morris's stress on group work and Wilde's on solitary 'pleasure,' the difference in stress is not vital. It merely results from the difference in the nature of their respective professions: Morris, as an artist and craftsman, needed to work with other craftsmen whereas Wilde, as a writer, needed more private time to work alone. Both artists seems to have agreed with Socialist revolution whose ultimate aim is the freedom and welfare of all the members of society through the annihilation of social inequalities, not the state control of individuals.

⁹Wilde's experience of life in a gaol made him idealize suffering and say that living for pleasure is "limiting" ("De Profundis" 1026): "Behind Joy and Laughter there may be a temperament, coarse, hard and callous. But behind Sorrow there is always Sorrow. Pain, unlike Pleasure, wears no mask" (1024). He compared his suffering and fate to Christ's. However, Wilde knew more of what he was here (in "The Soul of Man Under Socialism") than in "De Profundis," which was written in gaol: For, ironically enough, his life proved his Epicurean theory. Suffering, far from perfecting him, destroyed him as a man and writer: his struggle and hardship during and after the imprisonment practically killed his spirits and creative genius. Murray also notes Wilde's change of view of pleasure and pain: "it[the essay] puts forward a world-view different from *De Profundis*, for example, mainly in the writer's recognition in that letter that the perfection of man through pain remains, as in the past and in Russia, the most available way" (Murray 202).

¹⁰ The fact that Wilde emphasized the importance of 'thinking' does not necessarily mean that he rejected 'acting' totally. The late nineteenth century was, in a sense, the age of 'acting,' that is, the age of social and political *movements*. Wilde's rather exaggerated emphasis on 'thinking' should be, therefore, understood as his typical scepticism and counterbalancing demonstration towards this dominant intellectual or cultural tendency.

¹¹ Murray's argument about Wilde's political and philosophical link with Allen will, in a way, reinforce this argument of mine.

Chapter 3: Anarchism and Symbolist Aesthetics in *The Importance of Being Earnest*

Hyperboles may apply just as much to petty things as to great, an overstraining of the facts being the common element. In a sense satire is the exaggeration of pettiness. (Longinus "Hyperboles" On the Sublime)¹

The main dramatic technique Wilde employed in *The Importance of Being Earnest* is "the exaggeration of pettiness": he applied hyperboles to what is habitually regarded as trivial such as eating, names (normally considered as less important than substance) and style (usually subordinate to content). The hyperbolic technique he adapted for the play is, specifically, paradoxical reversal: by reversing clichéd expressions, fixed notions and accepted values, he overemphasizes the importance of what is considered as petty and, as an effect, trivializes what society tends to treat gravely. The effect of this technique is anarchic and highly satirical; the play attempts to shake and destroy the accepted value system of society.² Paradoxical reversal is Wilde's favorite technique: he employed it to a greater or lesser extent in nearly all of his writings. The technique of reversal in *The Importance of Being Earnest* is, however, radically wide-ranging; it is adopted in every aspect of the play. The setting, the plot, the characterization and the manner of speech are anarchic; the play explodes the established, secure ground of hierarchical values with anarchic laughter. Anarchism and revolution are, in fact, a leitmotif of the play: the reader finds many references associated with political upheaval. A few examples:

Lady Bracknell. . . . I do not approve of anything that tampers with natural ignorance. Ignorance is like a delicate exotic fruit; touch it and the bloom is gone. The whole theory of modern education is radically unsound. Fortunately in England, at any rate, education produces no effect whatsoever. If it did, it would prove a serious danger to the upper classes, and probably lead to acts of violence in Grosvenor Square. . . . (464)

Algernon. Bunbury? Oh, he was exploded.

Lady Bracknell. Exploded! Was he [Bunbury] the victim of a revolutionary outrage? . . . (499)

Miss Prism. Yes, here is the injury it [her bag] received through the upsetting of a Gower Street omnibus in younger and happier days. Here is the stain on the lining caused by the explosion of a temperate beverage, an incident that occurred at Leamington. . . . (507)

The anarchic structure and leitmotif reflect Wilde's political consciousness. Also, the plot of the play stresses the importance of names, form and style, and is developed by the reversal of the importance of fact and fiction: as we will see, it reflects Wilde's Symbolist aesthetics: his appreciation of form as a primary quality of art and imagination as its

essential faculty.

(1) Conversational Reversal: the Parody of Cliché³

The audience notice abundant examples of reversing accepted notions in all the characters' speeches; and this manner of speech is most often demonstrated by the three most unconventional, unpretentious, witty characters of the play: Algernon, Gwendolen and Cecily. The parody (or the reversal) of clichés and accepted notions not only impresses the audience with the unconventionality of these characters; but it also gives the play two other effects: comic and satirical effects. The reversal shocks the audience simply because of its unexpected combination of words and the seemingly far-fetched association of notions, and invites laughter; it, also, throws critical light upon the accepted value system of the attentive audience because these parodies *are* paradoxical, not nonsensical.

Algernon, for example, in the first scene of Act One, comments on Lane's (his servant's) notion that marriage is a consequence of "a misunderstanding between" a young couple (451). This scene is very ingenious: it cleverly introduces the issue of marriage, the main issue of the drama; it also introduces one of its themes: anarchism--social upheaval and the destruction of the old social order. Algernon's conversation with his servant on social issues such as marriage is 'improper'; the servants' act of drinking their master's (Algy's) expensive champagne without permission (another topic of the conversation between Algy and Lane) is disorderly; Algy's attitude towards this somewhat rebellious act is 'anarchic' because he treats the matter in a very matter-of-fact way. Algernon not only fails to condemn them for their undisciplined, free-living manner, but positively approves of it: he complacently attributes the cause of their misconduct to "the superior quality of the wine" of a bachelor's establishment and a "demoralizing" effect of institutional marriage. He accepts his servants' act as reasonable and his own explanation as plausible. Algernon reflects on Lane's idea of marriage:

Algernon. Lane's views on marriage seem somewhat lax. Really, if the lower orders don't set us a good example, what on earth the use of them? They seem, as a class, to have absolutely no sense of moral responsibility. (452)

The idea that the lower class is responsible for the social standard of morality is, of course, a reversal of the idea that the upper, educated class has the responsibility to keep up a high moral standard of society. Algy's criticism of the lack of moral responsibility of the lower class overthrows the social hierarchy and exposes the moral decadence of the upper class.

Gwendolen's comment on her suitor's name is politically curious:

Gwendolen. Jack?... No, there is very little music in the name of Jack, if any at all, indeed. It does not thrill. It produces absolutely no vibrations I have known several Jacks, and they all, without exception, were more than usually plain. Besides, Jack is a notorious domesticity for John! She [his wife] would probably never be allowed to know the entrancing pleasure of a *single moment's solitude*. The only really safe name is Ernest. (Emphases added 462)

Gwendolen's comment implies the moral decadence of institutional marriage: she is reversing the conventional notion of a married couple's happiness in being together. Her reason why "Ernest" is attractive to her expresses her shrewdness: she loves a man called Ernest because of the suggested dualism-- the likely disagreement of his appearance (his name) and reality (his character), and his 'personas.' This underlying view of Gwendolen's shows her worldly knowledge that most of her contemporaries are leading double lives: a 'respectable' public life and an 'immoral' private life. She suggests that 'earnest-looking' people could be secretive; they could be attractive or "interesting" (488) because their duality implies their complex personality or multiplicity: it might suggest their real wickedness but it could also suggest that they are not naïve conformist simpletons. Gwendolen's view reveals her unconventional character, too-- she is not an innocent, ignorant, dependent young woman; she is worldly enough to see through the reality of Victorian marriage, and, like her majestic mother, tough and practical enough to accept it and take advantage of it. Her words and attitude, moreover, emphasize an aesthetic theme of the play: she is reversing the accepted sense of the values of names and substance (appearance and reality); she is insisting on the infallible 'power' of names (form or style), on their inspiring effect on one's imagination. She is not merely a cool realist, but a Romantic idealist who believes, in *her own way*, in the 'harmony' (disagreement) between names and substance; or, rather, she is a realistic Romanticist or Romantic formalist who chooses good appearance if appearance disagrees with reality. It is, therefore, *style* that is essential: the *name* Ernest is more important than what he really is (substance); it is quite characteristic of her to demand, at the moment of Jack's proposal, that he should follow all the romantic conventions and the chivalrous formality of a suitor.

(2 Anarchic Characterization and Setting⁴

- (i) Jack and Algernon:
the Reversal of Being Earnest and Being Trivial

Algernon and Jack are the source of the confusion of the play; and the confusion (Who is Ernest?) is the vehicle for the development of the plot. Their invention of fictional figures (Algy's Bunbury and Jack's Ernest), the changes of their names (Algernon to Ernest; Jack to Ernest) and their shifting roles corresponding with these changes, and the transformation of their fictional situation into the factual one (Jack's adoption of the name Ernest as the result of the discovery of his origin, and the revealed fact that Algy is Jack's real brother)-- all these elements give the play anarchic effects.

Algernon and Jack are contrasting, juxtaposed figures; the comparison between them reveals the moral theme of the play. Although both are leading double lives (Jack is enjoying his city life by creating an amoral brother with a misleading name, Ernest; Algy is enjoying his country life by inventing an invalid friend, Bunbury), the audience never fail to notice the differences between the two.

Algernon is a carefree Aesthete who knows how to enjoy life but, without any substantial inheritance, seems to be always in debt; he is a man who is "occasionally a little over-dressed" but "make[s] up for it by being always immensely over-educated" (482); he is an 'entertainer' at parties whom Lady Bracknell, his aunt and patron, counts on. (Lady Bracknell's parties, however, bore him immensely; escaping from her is his chief reason for inventing a fictional figure, Bunbury.) Jack is a wealthy but tasteless "utilitarian" (471). Algy criticizes his taste: "I never saw anybody take so long to dress, and with such little result" (482); and "[l]iterary criticism is not [his] *forte*" (456). Jack is rather too self-absorbed to entertain people; when he believes he is "amusing" other people" (452), he is, like Algy, "bored" and, actually, unlike Algy, boring (472). Cecily comments: "Dear Uncle Jack is so very serious! Sometimes he is so serious that I think he cannot be quite well" (472). Jack as Ernest is less serious as he does not have to wear a thoroughly respectable mask as Cecily's guardian; but Jack is, according to Algy, still "the most earnest-looking person" (455), that is, uninteresting. This seemingly trivial difference between the two characters is closely connected with the vital difference: Algernon is a light-hearted rebel against Victorian, affected respectability and double-standard morality, whereas Jack is a hypocritical conformist to these values. Jack is a secretive Bunburyist while Algy is a confirmed, open Bunburyist. Jack is leading a double life, a comic version of the life of *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, whereas Algy's double life is a parody of Jack's Victorian two-facedness. Jack pretends to be serious though he is actually never serious about anything; his attitude makes Algy claim that Jack's nature is shallower than his: "What on earth you are serious about I haven't got the remotest idea. About everything, I should fancy. You have such an absolutely trivial nature" (493). Algernon is consistently serious about being "trivial," that is, about

enjoying himself. Algy's serious triviality, as an effect, becomes a satirical criticism of Jack's moral disguise. The comparison between the two characters leads the audience to ask a crucial question: which is more morally decadent, which is more harmful, Epicurean Algernon or deceptively "earnest-looking" Jack (455)?

Jack intends to produce "a false impression" (455) and succeeds in doing so; he gives Cecily and Miss Prism such an elaborate story about his fictional brother that Ernest has "formed the chief topic of conversation" between them (484); he makes them believe that he is, in London, engaged with "philanthropic work" including the fruitless toil of reforming "wicked" Ernest (486). His "philanthropic work" is, of course, a euphemism for flirting with women: to become flippant Ernest and make love to Gwendolen. Jack, however, not only refuses to admit that he is a Bunburyist ("I'm not a Bunburyist at all" [457]); he is also self-righteous enough to criticize Algy's Bunburying "sententiously" (458). His hypocrisy becomes clearer to the audience when he needs to *act* to cover up his falsehood, that is, when he has to kill Ernest who, after Jack gains Gwendolen's love, becomes useless.

Enter Jack slowly from the back of the garden. He is dressed in the deepest mourning, with crape hatband and black gloves.

Miss Prism. Mr. Worthing!

Chasuble. Mr. Worthing?

Miss prism. This is indeed a surprise. We did not look for you till Monday afternoon.

Jack. [*Shakes Miss Prism's hand in a tragic manner.*] I have returned sooner than I expected, Dr. Chausable, I hope you are well?

Chasuble. Dear Mr. Worthing, I trust this garb of woe does not betoken some terrible calamity?

Jack. My brother.

Miss Prism. More shameful debts and extravagance?

Chasuble. Still leading his life of pleasure?

Jack. [*Shaking his head.*] Dead!

Chasuble. Your brother Ernest dead?

Jack. Quite dead. (477)

Since the audience knows that Algernon pretending to be Ernest is in Jack's Manor House, Jack's exaggerated acting triggers their laughter. Jack's over-emphasized seriousness, at the same time, reveals his moral pettiness; the obvious discord between his appearance and reality and between fiction (Jack's 'report' of Ernest's death) and fact (Ernest's [Algy's] physical presence) brings about a comic and satirical effect. Jack becomes almost villainous when he begins blackmailing Lady Bracknell in order to make her consent to his marrying to Gwendolen-- both Jack and Miss Prism would, indeed, be villainous figures if the play were not a farcical comedy.⁵

Algernon is leading a double life, too, but he is not a two-faced hypocrite. His absence caused by Bunburying might give a little inconvenience to Lady Bracknell, but his

Bunburying is harmless: his last bold Bunburying at Jack's Manor House even serves the welfare of Jack and other people as well as his own; it prompts three couples to get engaged. Algernon regards Bunburying as a game; it does not harm anyone as long as one keeps its "rules" (457). The rules are hinted at in the play: Bunburying-- one's free practice of entertaining oneself-- should be primarily disinterested: it seeks pleasure for pleasure's sake although it might bring about 'useful' side effects (just as it serves as Algy's good excuse to run away from Lady Bracknell's parties). Since it does not, as a game, have any other self-seeking purpose than entertaining oneself, one can give it up whenever one likes: Algernon simply "explode[s]" Bunbury when he finds another more attractive pleasure (499). His Bunburying is an open secret, for everyone knows that he is a carefree Epicurean:

Lady Bracknell. Good afternoon, dear Algernon, I hope you are behaving very well.

Algernon. I'm feeling very well, Aunt Augusta.

Lady Bracknell. That's not quite the same thing. In fact the two things rarely go together. (458)

People never expects him to be serious because he never pretends to be so: Bunburying is something people expect he might do. He never tries to appear better than he is; on the contrary, even when he is pretending to be Ernest, he need not act at all; pleasure-seeking, extravagant Ernest is exactly what Algernon is. The fact that he is a "serious" Bunburyist makes him indifferent to, and, therefore, rebellious against what Society expects from him; he never respects social conventions or "care[s] two-pence about social possibilities" (501).

(ii) The Reversal of the Male and the Female⁶

Gwendolen and Cecily are another set of juxtaposed characters. Both of them are 'feminine' in the sense that they are 'romantic'; they believe in their fictional characters (Ernest) and fall in love with them before they actually meet their 'Ernests.' Gwendolen and Cecily keep diaries and always carry them for their sentimental reasons. Gwendolen comments: "I never travel without my diary. One should always have something sensational to read in the train" (489). While Gwendolen's writing consists of accurate records of facts, Cecily's writings are imaginative: Cecily treats her diary as a novel. Cecily is an amateur writer who keeps a diary to publish it; she writes down fictional incidents and even writes (to her imaginary Ernest) sentimental letters which she can "hardly read" "without crying a little" (485). These two female characters are, however, quite unconventional; they are independent, unaffected and bold. Gwendolen is not a

docile girl: she is neither easily intimidated by nor yields to the authority of her elders. She parodies her elders' lament over the lack of the young's reverence for themselves: "Few parents nowadays pay any regard to what their children say to them. The old-fashioned respect for the young is fast dying out. Whatever influence I ever had over mamma, I lost at the age of three" (469). The education they are receiving is unconventional: Gwendolen is attending university lectures; Cecily is learning 'male' subjects such as German, political economy and geography, not 'female' subjects such as French, literature, dancing and drawing.

The radical reversal of conventional male/ female roles occurs in the scenes of marriage proposal: Gwendolen and Cecily in effect make their proposals of marriage to their suitors. Gwendolen first *urges* Jack to make a proposal of marriage to herself; she impatiently interrupts Jack in the middle of his faltering confession of love, and confesses her love for him without waiting for him to finish his speech. She plays the part of a suitor while Jack behaves like an innocent, inexperienced girl who is timidly waiting for her lover's confession. Gwendolen's male role is made even clearer at the moment of Jack's actual proposal; she dominates the situation and her lover:

Gwendolen. I adore you. But you haven't proposed to me yet. Nothing has been said at all about marriage. The subject has not even been touched on.
Jack. Well... may I propose to you now?
Gwendolen. I think it would be an admirable opportunity. And to spare you any possible disappointment, Mr. Worthing, I think it only fair to tell you quite frankly beforehand that I am fully determined to accept you.
Jack. Gwendolen!
Gwendolen. Yes, Mr. Worthing, what have you got to say to me?
Jack. You know what I have got to say to you.
Gwendolen. Yes, but you don't say it.
Jack. Gwendolen, will you marry me?
Gwendolen. Of course I will, darling. How long you have been about it! I am afraid you have had very little experience in how to propose. . . . (462-3)

Gwendolen overpowers Jack; she is an articulate speaker while he is incapable of expressing himself fully. Gwendolen, on behalf of her nervous, awkward lover, proposes marriage to herself and accepts it for herself.

Algy's confession of love to Cecily is a parody of Jack's. Although Algy is usually a wonderful conversationalist, Cecily is, in this scene, far more self-possessed and articulate than Algernon. She does not only accept his passion for her as a matter of fact; but she, as a writer, makes the most of this 'dramatic' occasion. She stuns Algy by writing down his words in her writer's notebook (diary), asking him to co-operate with her in recording them and giving him critical comment on his expression:

Cecily. . . . You can go on. I am quite ready for [writing down] more.
Algernon. [*Somewhat taken aback.*] Ahem! Ahem!

Cecily. Oh, don't cough, Ernest. When one is dictating one should speak fluently and not cough. Besides, I don't know how to spell a cough.
[Writes as Algernon speaks.]

Algernon. [Speaking very rapidly.] Cecily, ever since I first looked upon your wonderful and incomparable beauty, I have dared to love you wildly, passionately, devotedly, hopelessly.

Cecily. I don't think that you should tell me that you love me wildly, passionately, devotedly, hopelessly. Hopelessly doesn't seem to make much sense, does it?

Algernon. Cecily! (483)

When he proposes to her, she totally overwhelms him by telling him that they have been engaged for three months; and Algy's proposal is replaced by Cecily's imaginative story of a fictional Ernest and a fictional Cecily. Cecily has, as it were, arranged her marriage with him for herself long before he makes a proposal.

Lady Bracknell is, as her name, Augusta, implies, characterized as an authoritative figure who embodies Victorian material values and social conventions.⁷ She is, however, more than that: she is not really conventional. Her character also destroys the Victorian notion of masculinity and femininity. The male and female roles are reversed in her household; Lady Bracknell is 'masculine' whereas Lord Bracknell is 'feminine.' Lady Bracknell has the power and authority to settle all domestic and social matters; her husband is, on the other hand, a radically subdued, shadowy, frail, domestic figure who "is accustomed to" dining upstairs alone (460)--only his name is mentioned a few times but the audience never see him on the stage. The conflict between her humble origin and her present social status throws an anarchic light upon her character, too: her vigorous, decisive nature seems to have made her an influential member of London's high society despite the fact that she once was a girl of no particular importance. She, however, never feels ashamed of the fact but is quite open about it: she declares: "When I married Lord Bracknell I had no fortune of any kind. But I never dreamed for a moment of allowing that to stand in my way" (501). Her personality, obviously, did not allow her origin to hamper her social possibilities; she not only got married to Lord Bracknell but has actually outdone him.

Although Lady Bracknell is a convinced conservative, she is not a hypocrite; her candid, offhand speech often becomes a satire on Victorian society:

Lady Bracknell. As a matter of form, Mr. Worthing, I had better ask you if Miss Cardew has any little fortune?

Jack. Oh! about a hundred and thirty thousand pounds in the Funds. That is all. Good-bye, Lady Bracknell. So pleased to have seen you.

Lady Bracknell. [Sitting down again.] A moment, Mr. Worthing. A hundred and thirty thousand pounds! And in the Funds! Miss Cardew seems to me a most attractive young lady, now that I look at her. Few girls of the present day have any really *solid qualities*, any of *the qualities that last, and improve with time*. We live, I regret to say, in an age of

surface. . . . (Emphases added 501)

Lady Bracknell's sudden change in the view of and her attitude towards Cecily, and her substitution of material meaning for moral meaning are highly comical; besides, her confusion of moral values and material values produces a satirical effect. Lady Bracknell is attributing material meaning to moral words: the adjectives such as "attractive," "solid," and the expression like "the qualities that last, and improve with time" are referring to Cecily's enormous fortune, not her personal qualities. She is, however, conscious of her confusion; she concludes in a very matter-of-fact way that materialism she is demonstrating is a distinctive character of the Victorian age. The opening speech ("As a matter of form. . .") as well as her overall attitude tells the reader that she is yet another formalist in the play, but her formalism has no note of romanticism. As she herself admits, she lives "in an age of surface" and her conformist formalism makes her a creature of surface. Lady Bracknell's cool, realist awareness of the fact gives her speech a satirical punch, and her satire is directed to the shallow morality of society and the material trend of the age.

(iii) The Trivialization of Christianity

Christianity is anarchically debased in the play. Dr. Chausable is characterized as rather an irreligious, Pagan celibate who sometimes betrays his love of sensuous pleasure. He gives the same sermon (on "the meaning of the manna in the wilderness," a sermon which strikes one as worldly rather than spiritual) on practically every occasion (478); he makes love to Miss Prism in rather an 'indecent' manner for a canon. Jack is never sure whether he was christened or not-- it is the necessity of changing his name that makes him realize for the first time that this issue (christening), which is quite grave for Christians, is still unsettled. Algernon does not mind getting rebaptized. The religious meaning of christening is completely trivialized; getting a Christian *name* is given great importance; for young couples, Christianity has only "practical" values (504); it is merely the means to acquire the name, Ernest, which is vital to their happiness.

(3) Anarchic Structure: the Theme of New Romanticism

Gwendolen. *In the matters of grave importance, style, not sincerity, is the vital thing. . . . (497)*

Jack. . . . *it is a terrible thing for a man to find out suddenly that all his life he has been speaking nothing but the truth. . . . (509)*

Algernon. *The truth is rarely pure and never simple. Modern life would be very tedious if it were either, and modern literature a complete impossibility!* (456)

The development of *The Importance of Being Earnest* reverses the accepted values of facts and fiction; in the play, facts mimic fiction; facts are the mimesis of fiction:⁸ “Life imitates Art far more than Art imitates Life”(“The Decay of Lying” 99). Fiction is, in this play, placed higher than facts; the idea of the superiority of fiction over facts corresponds with that of the superiority of Romanticism over Naturalism. ‘Names’ are the leitmotif of this theme, for names represent style (form) and fiction; fiction (art) is the imaginative act of *limiting* chaotic facts, the act of *defining* (naming) shapeless reality. The name Ernest (the signifier) is treated as more important than who he is (the signified); Romantic ideals (what things should be) are more significant than facts (what things are) since the former, not the latter, reflects (or predicts) truth. Wilde blurs the borderline between facts and fiction-- ‘reality’ is what appeals to our subjectivity; the more relevant or the more appealing to our consciousness, sense and sentiment, the more real and the truer. Which is, then, Wilde seems to be asking the audience, more ‘real,’ fiction or facts? And which is more significant, style or substance?

Fiction is given an extremely important status in the play; if the title ‘the importance of being earnest’ signifies the moral and political theme of the play, its pun, ‘the importance of being Ernest’ signifies its aesthetic theme; it should be understood as the importance of ‘names,’ therefore, the significance of fiction. Fiction is indispensable to Jack’s and Algy’s life. Jack needs the fictional figure, Ernest, to enjoy freedom from moral and social restrictions; Algy needs Bunbury to escape from social obligations and enjoy himself fully. Fiction affects Gwendolen’s and Cecily’s life greatly; Gwendolen falls in love with the name, Ernest, before she actually meets Jack (Ernest); Cecily falls in love with ‘Ernest,’ has a fictional love affair with him. Cecily positively substitutes fiction for facts-- her Romantic attitude is symbolized by her substitution of fiction for non-fiction, that is, by the fact that she writes down her fiction in her diary (a note-book in which people normally write down ‘facts’). Cecily’s governess, Miss Prism, as her name suggests, used to be romantic enough to write (according to Lady Bracknell) “a three-volume novel of more than usually revolting sentimentality” (506); she, by mistake, substituted her novel for the baby (Ernest/ Jack) she was responsible for; she put the novel in the perambulator and the baby in her bag-- the act suggests that her novel (fiction), her *own* ‘baby,’ was, for her, more important than the baby-boy (factual substance). This episode implies the subjective superiority of fiction over facts. The plot of the play does not denounce her fairly gross ‘crime.’ The play, on the contrary, seems to positively overlook her immorality for the ‘romantic’ merit of her deed: the happy

ending (the young couples' fulfillment of love) makes all the characters (including Lady Bracknell) and the audience forget the issue: Dr. Chausible, a moral authority, never minds Miss Prism's past; they make a third happy couple. A highly fictional, too "romantic" story is, moreover, a fact in the play (470): Jack (Ernest), who was, as a baby, left in a bag by mistake but picked up and adopted by a benevolent wealthy gentleman, turns out to be a member of high society, a lost cousin of his fiancée. Jack's fictional brother becomes real; Algy turns out to be his brother. Jack's fictional name Ernest is revealed to be his real name. Fact loses its authority: the fiction revealed as truth satisfies their lovers, Gwendolen and Cecily; the conflicts between name and substance, and fiction and fact are beautifully harmonized; two young couples' love is fulfilled.

The attitude and notions of Algernon, an Epicurean Aesthete, remind the audience of Gilbert's and Vivian's. Algernon insists: "It is awfully hard work doing nothing. However, I don't mind hard work where there is no definite object of any kind" (469). He prefers fiction (art/ imagination) to fact (science/ accuracy); his preference is made clear in the very first scene of the play:

Algernon. Did you hear what I was playing [on the piano], Lane?

Lane. I didn't think it polite to listen, sir.

Algernon. I'm sorry for that, for your sake. I don't play *accurately*-- any one can play accurately-- but I play with wonderful *expression*. As far as the piano is concerned *sentiment* is my *forté*. I keep *science* for *Life*.

Lane. Yes, sir.

Algernon. And, speaking of *the science of Life*, have you got the cucumber sandwiches cut for Lady Bracknell? (Emphases added except "*forté*" 451)

Wilde drastically debases "the science of Life," which represents the worship of accuracy and fact: it is equated with cutting sandwiches neatly. The 'scientific' accuracy based on 'scientific' facts may be quite useful and necessary for day-to-day living but not essential to one's Life (soul). Algy's higher appreciation of "expression" and "sentiment" over "accuracy," "science" and "Life" (living) reflects one of the play's themes, the superiority of 'Romanticism' (the imaginative presentation of reality) over Naturalism (the mimesis of life based on the accurate analysis of facts).

The theme of the fusion of fiction and fact is made clear in the scene of Algy's proposal to Cecily: Aesthetic Algy and Romantic Cecily make no distinction between fiction and fact; they regard fiction as equivalent to fact:

Algernon. But was our engagement ever broken off?

Cecily. Of course it was. On the 22nd of last March. You can see the entry if you like. [*Shows diary*] "To-day I broke off my engagement with Ernest. I feel it is better to do so. The weather still continues charming."

Algernon. But why on earth did you break it off? What had I done? I had done nothing at all. Cecily, I am very much hurt indeed to hear you broke it off. Particularly when the weather was so charming.

Cecily. It would hardly have been a really serious engagement if it hadn't been

broken off at least once. But I forgave you before the week was out.
Algernon. [*Crossing to her, and kneeling.*] What a perfect angel you are, Cecily!
Cecily. You dear romantic boy!.... (485)

Both Algernon and Cecily most naturally accept Cecily's fiction as truth; and the importance of style (in fiction) is stressed here as well-- Cecily, in her fiction, broke the engagement with Ernest simply for the sake of style, that is, in order to give it a "serious" colour. The absurdity almost stuns the audience and produces a highly comic effect. Their matter-of-fact, uncritical acceptance of fiction as fact and Cecily's conscious stress on style emphasize the aesthetic theme of the play: fiction substitutes for fact; style in fiction is vital. Although Algy fails to get the name Ernest, Cecily is most willing to have him as her husband; their shared nature and values make their unity natural-- this ending could suggest Wilde's sense of balance: Wilde, despite his (over)emphasis on 'style,' does not entirely deny the importance of 'content.'

(4) Realist or Symbolist: Wilde's Aesthetic Theory and Practice

Vivian, in "The Decay of Lying," concludes:

All bad art comes from returning to Life and Nature, and elevating them into ideals. Life and Nature may sometimes be used as part of Art's rough material, but before they are of any real service to Art they must be transformed into artistic conventions. The moment Art surrenders its imaginative medium it surrenders everything. As a method Realism is a complete failure, and the two things that every artist should avoid are modernity of form and modernity of subject-matter [Naturalistic form and Naturalistic subject-matter]. *To us, who live in the nineteenth century, any century is a suitable subject for art except our own. The only beautiful things are the things that do not concern us. . . . Besides, it is only the modern that ever becomes old-fashioned Life goes faster than Realism, but Romanticism is always in front of Life.* (Emphases added 98-99)

As we examined, Wilde used Romanticism and Realism, the key terms of "The Decay of Lying," in a specific way; by Romanticism (or new Romanticism) Wilde actually meant Symbolism; and he meant Naturalism by Realism. Wilde was afraid that the late nineteenth-century Naturalism was confusing fiction with non-fiction; and that the adoration of fact was making the majority of the nineteenth century artists substitute scientific analysis for imagination as their creative means. Wilde insisted that fiction and non-fiction must be differentiated just as science and art must be differentiated: it is imagination that distinguishes fiction (art) from non-fiction (science); fiction must be primarily *imaginative*, not factual. Vivian's criticism of 'Realism,' as we saw, sounds rather unfair and perhaps too harsh, for all works of art are more or less imaginative no matter how 'Realist' they might be; also, all Symbolist or non-Realist works of art are

more or less mimetic. The distinction of the two seems to be the matter of artistic consciousness (artistic choice) and the degree of theory in practice. J. L. Styan, however, suggests that the drama is, as a genre, innately more Symbolist than any other art:

The stage has often been a great deal more than a mirror reflecting life and nature. Symbolism is never far away whenever an actor mounts his platform to imitate the world about him, since the act of putting life on exhibition is an act of reformulating reality: indeed, the existence of drama itself suggests there is an abiding need for symbolic representation. Symbolism in the theatre can therefore exist alongside realism, or it can eliminate realistic illusion entirely. (Styan 1-2)

Vivian's point would be that it is the artistic choice and the degree of theoretical achievement that matter in art: the main issues are the artist's views *and* attitude towards art (fiction) and the degree of imaginative quality in his or her work of art: the artist's full appreciation of imagination and the degree of the transformation of "rough material" into "artistic conventions" through imagination.

Yet, *how, then*, can we define *The Importance of Being Earnest*? -- the play has the appearance of Realism. Vivian's artistic views, especially, his outright rejection of mimetic method and his thesis on artistic beauty puzzle the reader of this play and Wilde's other society comedies; despite Vivian's Symbolist extremist conclusion that "[t]o us, who live in the nineteenth century, any century is a suitable subject for except our own," Wilde's society comedies (and his some of short stories and his only novel as well) have the Victorian setting. His fairy tales, short stories, early poems and early plays and *Salomé* (first French edition in 1893; English edition in 1894) can, regardless of the reader's artistic evaluation of these works, be easily connected to Vivian's aesthetic thesis; but how relevant is his thesis to Wilde's other writings, particularly to his society comedies which lack any obvious supernatural or mythical quality which is characteristic of some of his works such as *The Picture of Dorian Gray* and "The Canterville Ghost"? Why did Wilde choose a subject which he seems to have believed unsuitable for art? Might he not have written those plays seriously, but regarded them as second-rate?-- that is one possible answer. According to Styan, Wilde "considered his florid *Salomé*. . . to be his most important play" (35); *De Profundis* also reveals his high evaluation of this Symbolist play. Nobert Kohl's research seems to prove Wilde's increasing interest in Symbolist drama: Kohl examines Wilde's sketches, fragments and plans for future projects and concludes that:

There can be no doubt that his interest lay almost exclusive in the theatre, which is scarcely surprising in view of his success in the 1890s. But what is surprising is that neither of the surviving fragments-- namely, "La Sainte Courtisane or The Woman Covered with Jewels" and "A Florentine Tragedy"-- had anything in common with the subject-matter or style of the social comedies. In the former play, he returns to groups of characters, themes and

the exotic setting of *Salomé*, while the latter is an attempt at blank verse tragedy in the manner of the unfortunate *Duchess of Padua*. (309)

Vivian's thesis is, then, Wilde's 'final' thesis. Nevertheless, one question still remains: *The Importance of Being Earnest* has been regarded as a masterpiece and *is* a masterpiece even if his other writings are not. How can the reader explain this?-- if the reader chooses to regard the play as a fine work of art, a possible answer to the raised question is that Vivian's literary theory is at least partly wrong-- imaginative faculty in creating works of art should not be disregarded but subject-matter can be contemporary; if the reader regards his authentically Symbolist writings as rather feeble, perhaps subject-matter should be contemporary; his artistic attainment demonstrated in his last society comedy at least proves some merits of Realism. The appreciation of *The Importance of Being Earnest* proves that one of his artistic doctrines is feeble. T. S. Eliot's "historical sense" seems to give us an insight on this issue:

. . . the historical sense involves a perception, not only of the pastness of the past, but of its presence; the historical sense compels a man to write not merely with his own generation in his bones, but with a feeling that the whole literature of his own country has a simultaneous existence and composes a simultaneous order. This historical sense, which is a sense of the timeless as well as of the temporal and of the timeless and of the temporal together, is what makes a writer traditional. *And it is at the same time what makes a writer most acutely conscious of his place in time, of his own contemporaneity.* (Emphases added "Tradition and the Individual Talent" 38)

For Wilde, "the past" was present; his enthusiasm for Hellenism and his mythical inclination prove this, but what Wilde's mythical plays lack could be "the temporal"; and isn't *The Importance of Being Earnest* a fine piece of work because it is the delicate blend of "the past" (his study of comedy of manners) and "the contemporary" (his Symbolist consciousness and social awareness)? Or might *his* Symbolism expressed in the play be the perfect blend of "the past" (his study of Greek classics and Romanticism) and "the contemporary" (his own aesthetic and political awareness and response towards the Victorian age)? Yet could his Symbolist *Salomé*, in this sense, be a blend of "the past" and "the contemporary" as well? For Eliot's "the temporal" does not necessarily mean that the artist must deal with the contemporary "raw materials" directly: the artist can, for example, express his or her contemporary concerns ("the contemporary") by using historical "raw materials" ("the past"). If one judges *Salomé* as rather feeble (as I tend to do), where does this feebleness come from? One possible answer would be that *Salomé* as a blend lacks the balance of the two essential qualities whereas *Earnest* has achieved it. The next question one must ask is, then: what does this balance or imbalance result from?

Even though Vivian's theory is extreme, his main thesis that "the only beautiful things are the things that do not concern us" could be still relevant to Wilde's last society play. Vivian paraphrases this statement in "The Decay of Lying": "To art's subject-matter we should be more or less indifferent. We should, at any rate have no preference, no prejudice, no partisan feeling any kind." (79) The reader could understand that Vivian is referring to the artist's psychological and emotional distance or detachment from his subject-matter; as Gilbert points out in "[a] real passion ruins him"(58); his too strong passion for the subject-matter destroys his works of art. This thesis is shared and is supported not only by T. S. Eliot (his "impersonality" 'theory'), as we examined in Chapter One, but also by Longinus:

. . . there is a third type of fault in impassioned writing which Theodorus called *parenthyus*, or false sentiment. This is misplaced, hollow emotionalism where emotion is not called for, or *immoderate passion where restraint is what is needed*. For writers are often carried away, as though by drunkenness, into outbursts of emotion which are not relevant to the matter in hand, but are wholly personal, and hence tedious. To hearers unaffected by this emotionalism their work therefore seems atrocious, and naturally enough, for while they are themselves in an ecstasy, their hearers are not. (Emphases added "Defects That Militate against Sublimity" 103)

Wilde's Symbolist vision of the sublime might have encouraged him to further Longinus's theory; and made him conclude that "the only beautiful things are the things that do not concern us." Longinus, Wilde and Eliot seem to share the idea that the certain distance between the artist and possible subject-matter must be maintained to generate the most effective form: the artist needs to be familiar with and committed to his or her raw material; yet he or she needs to restrain the passion. In a way, the feebleness of his mythical plays-- that is, the possible imbalance between "the past" and "the contemporary" in *Salomé*, for example-- might chiefly result from the fact that Wilde could not, despite the temporal and spatial distance, escape from his strong passion and longing for the past.⁹ As for his society comedies, one could argue that his borderline consciousness (that is, his outsider/ insider consciousness) might have helped him to achieve the artistic distance: his Irish middle-class origin, his sexual orientation, his Aestheticism and anarchic Communism may have prevented him from becoming a real insider in British high society;¹⁰ yet the suggestion is not fully persuasive. Despite his commercial success, his society comedies written before *The Importance of Being Ernest* are in a way marred by his keen social consciousness; his satirical passion often dominates the drama. Wilde's witty, seemingly flippant but acute spokespersons (such as Lord Goring in *An Ideal Husband*) speak too much; although the play would be definitely boring without such Wildean characters, he (or she) gives it the air of his (or her) one-man show.

The Importance of Being Earnest manages to escape this flaw of Wilde's 'passion'; the artistic distance is kept and Wilde's enthusiasm seems to be well-disciplined. But the play does not merely show Wilde's artistic balance between the personal and the impersonal, that is, Eliot's "escape from personality" (Eliot 39). I am aware of the danger of over-simplification, but it appears as if his conflict between aesthetics and politics tended to split Wilde the artist into two and make him work in two separate directions: as if his Symbolist works reflected his artistic commitment while his social and political concerns led his creativity to society comedies. His last play, however, seems to suggest Wilde's another, more creative negotiation between art and society: the artistic achievement of *The Importance of Being Earnest* seems to suggest yet another aesthetic demand: the equilibrium of the aesthetic and the political. Wilde's ingenious mixture of Symbolist and anarchic technique, and his Symbolist and Socialist consciousness of art and society gives a seemingly traditional comedy of manners extreme absurdity and depth: his achieved balance between the aesthetic and the political has, as it were, enabled him to realize Eliot's "contemporaneity" and "conformity between the old and the new" (Eliot 39).

Despite its Realistic appearance, *The Importance of Being Earnest* is a highly imaginative work of art; even a rough analysis of the text enables the reader to see that Wilde's imagination successfully "translated" the "rough material" of the nineteenth-century Victorian high society into "artistic conventions" ("The Decay of Lying" 98). Yet the play could be located in the merging point of Symbolism and Realism. The play might be largely defined as Symbolist in the sense that it is "an extended metaphor" (Styan 26), or Eliot's "objective correlative"; the play, as a whole, refers to Symbolist aesthetic and social upheaval although the comic surface--the witty speech, the comically entangled situations, the unexpected development of the plot and the happy ending--cleverly blurs the deeper themes with a succession of the explosions of laughter. The characterization of the play is too extreme; their speeches are too witty; their situations and the plot are too absurd to be Realist in a conventional sense. The characters (especially the characters such as Algy and Cecily) are, while fulfilling their dramatic 'roles,' advocating Symbolism and revolution; the 'absurd' characterization, plot and situation of the drama fully serve its themes. W. H. Auden once commented that the play is "a verbal universe in which the characters are determined by the kinds of things they say, and the plot is nothing but a succession of opportunities to say them" (176); he defined the play as "the only pure verbal opera in English" (175). Styan suggests that Auden's definition might be "one definition of a Symbolist drama" (39): Styan is associating the musical quality of the play with Wagner's 'music-drama,' the origin of

Symbolist theatre.

Still, *The Importance of Being Earnest* strikes the audience as realistic -- so real that the play is often regarded as a representation of the Victorian Society and the age. It is not only because the Realist setting and dramatic device of the play reflect the mood of the age; but it is chiefly due to its imaginative quality. Vivian is right here: "Even those who hold that Art is representative of time and place and people cannot help admitting that the more imitative an art is the less it represent to us the spirit of its age" (93); and "[m]an can believe the impossible, but man can never believe the improbable" (96).

Notes

¹ Longinus 150.

² Nobert Kohl points out the political theme of the play; he concludes that the major technique of the play is paradox and suggests that its effect is 'anarchic': he says: ". . . in many instances they [the paradoxes] serve to explode established conventions, thereby exposing to view those aspects of reality that had hitherto been cloaked by existing norms" (268).

Rodoney Shewan also introduces the word "anarchic" to qualify the play although he does not develop the idea in his book: he defines *The Importance of Being Earnest* as "primarily a highly original fusion of Wilde's idiosyncratic redemptive comedy and his basically anarchic assumptions" (187).

³ Kohl would agree with my point: he explains Wilde's technique of paradox and its satirical effect by analysing Lady Bracknell's comment on Lady Harbury's hair: he points out that "[in this speech] [t]he conversational cliché ... is quite shattered by Wilde ..." (268). For detail, see Kohl 268-9.

⁴ I find most of Kohl's argument about the play clever and persuasive but I disagree with him at least on one point, that is, about the evaluation of the characterization of the play; he refers to Vivian's comment on universal human nature ("... we are all of us made out of the same stuff. . . . The more one analyses people, the more all reasons for analysis disappear. Sooner or later one comes to that dreadful universal thing called human nature" [77]): Kohl finds almost no difference between the characters of the play (they are "symmetrical" [267]) and, therefore, sees no significance in analyzing them: he concludes that "the characters at times [appear] almost mechanical, like puppets rather than people" (267-8). His point on Wilde's "reduction of individuality" seems to be rather over-stated (268). Although the reader notices the parallels and similarities among the characters, I do not believe that they are more identical than different: there *are* significant differences among the characters and if the reader disregards them, he or she fails to appreciate the social, political theme of the play fully.

⁵ Kohl regards it as a "farcial comedy" Kohl 272); his classification is shared with many other critics. Most critics never fail to note that Wilde's last play is farcical although its absurdity goes beyond the genre: his play is a 'serious' farce (or a 'society farce' with serious intentions), a mixture of a farce and a traditional comedy. Kerry Powell, for example, analyses the influence of Victorian farces on Wilde's play in *Oscar Wilde and the Theater of the 1890s*.

⁶ Both Kohl and Declan Kiberd notice the same point. For detail, see Kohl 263; and

Kiberd, "Wilde and the English Question" 13-4. Camille Paglia terms Wilde's deconstructive male/female characterization "androgynous" and connects the play to its *fin de siècle* cultural context: see Paglia "The English Epicene: Wilde's *The Importance of Being Earnest*" in *Sexual Personae*.

⁷ As for Lady Bracknell's conservative quality, see Kohl 264-5; Kohl does not care about Lady Bracknell's 'radical' qualities, which I find far more interesting.

⁸ Shewan points out: "The 'telling of beautiful untrue things' determines the action of the play. The higher reality is reached here through falsehood, lying" (190).

⁹ Harold Bloom might regard Wilde's imbalance between "the past" and "the contemporary" as a result of his failed attempt to overcome his 'anxiety of influence': that he could not liberate himself from his absorption in Hellenism.

¹⁰ As for Wilde's marginality, Kilbert's discussion is insightful and persuasive; his focus is on Wilde's Englishness and Irishness: his ambiguous feelings towards two cultures and the positive effects of his marginality on his writings. For detail, see Kilbert 13-5.

Chapter 4: INTERSECTION: Katherine Mansfield's Link with Oscar Wilde and the *Fin de Siècle* Aestheticism and Symbolism

1 "The Black Cap"

"The Black Cap" (1917) is a very short, absurd one-act comedy; the play may be dismissed as trivial-- it, so far, seems to have attracted no particular critical attention. It is, nevertheless, particularly important in terms of Mansfield's aesthetic and political linkage with Oscar Wilde, Walter Pater, and avant-garde Symbolism.

The reader notices the thematic and technical similarities between Wilde's *The Importance of Being Earnest* and Mansfield's "The Black Cap." Mansfield's play also reveals her Modernist characteristics. The aesthetic expressed in her play shows her inclination to *fin de siècle* Aestheticism and Symbolism. The protagonist's Aesthetic drive to break 'habit' reflects Mansfield's concern about the political potential of Aestheticism. (The reader will, here, note Pater's and Wilde's influence on Mansfield's writing.) Mansfield's play, further, implies her avant-garde consciousness of the obstinacy of habit. (Here the reader may see that Mansfield's consciousness goes further than Pater's and Wilde's). As for her avant-garde concerns, the reader might associate her play with Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* (1956). One can see the obvious difference between the two plays. Beckett's play is unquestionably avant-garde: it is provided with fully symbolic instruments, devices and setting; his concern about the way-out from our habitual existence is far more acute, and his consciousness of our 'dead-end' conditions is even keener than Mansfield's. "The Black Cap" is, at best, still at the threshold of theatre of the absurd. Yet, it is curious that, despite the gap between the years the respective plays were written, the two plays share the similar Modernist concern, and it is also a curious coincidence that, in Beckett's play, the hat performs one of the symbolic roles: all his characters have their hats (traditional bowler hats) on; the hat, a daily commodity, represents 'habit' as it does in Mansfield's play; and their act of exchanging their hats with one another is one of their vain struggles to break through their static, vegetable existence. "The Black Cap" may also be read as a comic parody of Ibsen's Naturalistic social play, *A Doll's House* which was written in 1879 and first seen in London in 1889; Ibsen's mature works are regarded as Symbolist whereas his early social plays are termed Naturalist or Naturalistic both in theme and in method. At least, the plot that the domesticated female protagonist attempts to desert her morally limited husband reminds the reader of Ibsen's play; probably Mansfield was, as a feminist, conscious of this play when she wrote "The Black Cap." But the reader should note that the ending of each play is different-- Nora deserts her husband whereas Mansfield's

protagonist leaves her husband but later *happily* returns to him; and this different ending shifts the thematic emphasis of the play: the key note of “The Black Cap” is, because of the keener awareness of the force of habit expressed there, more Aesthetic and avant-garde than Ibsen’s.

“The Black Cap” is, despite its realistic setting, not entirely Realist: it is at least as Symbolist as *The Importance of Being Earnest* : it can be read, just like Wilde’s comedy, as an extended metaphor or signifier. The protagonist’s speeches and the conversations in the play are too absurd to be authentically Realist, that is, not an exact reflection (or a faithful reproduction) of the actual world. The author’s focus is neither on the full, realistic description of each character nor on his or her moral development: all the major characters are *primarily* representative or symbolic. The extreme absurdity of the plot and the speeches, together with the symbolic characterization, serves its theme effectively as Eliot’s “objective correlative.” “The Black Cap” is avant-garde Symbolist in theme: the emphasis on “style” in the work of art, the idea of correspondence between form (appearance) and content (reality), Aestheticism as the critical force to break through the inert status-quo-- all, as I discuss later in this chapter, belong to the sphere of the avant-garde Symbolist.

1 Romanticism and Habit

To burn always with this hard gem-like flame, to maintain this ecstasy, is success in life. Failure is to form habits; for habit is relative to a stereotyped world; meantime it is only the roughness of the eye that makes any two things, persons, situations--seem alike. (Walter Pater “Poems by William Morris”)’

“The Black Cap” has three main characters: a lady (“she”) who is the protagonist, her husband (“he”) and her lover (another “he”). The lady and her husband,^{and} she and her lover are clearly contrasted; the contrast between the protagonist and her husband, and that between her and her lover throw light on the themes of the play: Aestheticism versus utilitarianism, and the political potential of Aestheticism as a force to break habit.

The lady’s husband represents an uncritical, unimaginative, habitual attitude, that is, blind complacency with safe but static everyday life, while she represents Aestheticism which challenges this ‘habit.’ The protagonist’s longing for adventures ‘threatens’ the benumbing monotony of their married life.

The first scene introduces the dominant habitual air pervading the couple’s household:

(A lady and her husband are seated at breakfast. He is quite calm, reading the newspaper and eating; but she is strangely excited, dressed for travelling, and only pretending to eat.)

She. Oh, if you should want your flannel shirts, they are on the right-hand

bottom shelf of the linen press.

He (at a board meeting of the Meat Export Company). No.

She. You didn't hear what I said. I said if you should want your flannel shirts, they are on the right-hand bottom shelf of the linen press.

He (positively). I quite agree! (642)

The domestic setting-- the breakfast scene, the act of eating breakfast and reading the newspaper, and the subject of the husband's interest ("a board meeting of the *Meat Export Company*")-- and the most domestic topic of their conversation such as the location of the flannel shirts suggest their inert daily life. The obvious lack of the communication between the husband and the wife shows their static relationship: her husband is so absorbed in the newspaper article that he does not bother to listen to her. The protagonist's forced repetition of this petty topic (the location of the shirts) stresses not only the domesticated relationship between the couple but also the pettiness of their present life. The husband's major curiosity-- the progress and outcome of the meeting of the meat export company-- indicates that he is a man in business, and that he is rather philistine; and the development of the play does not contradict this inference.

The difference in attitude towards habit between two characters is also suggested from this first scene: the wife is "strangely excited, dressed for travelling, and only pretending to eat" (excitement, strangeness, travels are all alien to habit) whereas the husband is "quite calm, reading the newspaper and eating." "She" is out of tune with her domestic surroundings. The reader is soon informed that she is dissatisfied with her present life and planning to elope with her lover: her romanticism revolts against the benumbing force of habit which her husband's matter-of-fact complacency represents. Her thorough romanticism makes her an Aesthete: 'moods' and 'style' are vital to her. "She" tries to 'direct' the parting scene with her husband to make it gorgeously "tragic" (644); she, as a stylist, wants to desert him like a heroine of some sentimental drama or at least like a Nora in *A Doll's House*. Yet, if her romanticism is thorough, his domestication, too, is thorough and extreme. Her pretext to cover up her romantic adventure is to go to the dentist. This banal and absurd (because most ineffectual and improbable) pretext invites the audience's laughter: going to the dentist does not explain the necessity of her travelling and staying away from home for several days at all. The absurdity of the play is that the monotony of daily life and his uncritical acceptance of it make her husband so hopelessly unimaginative and careless that he "beg[s] the question" of everything his wife might do (644). As she later comments, his "vegetable" mind takes her for granted as if she were one of his daily commodities (like "a clock"); she has "become the person who remembers to take the links out of his shirt before they go to the wash-- that's all!" (645); but she is "not the type of woman to *vegetate*" (emphasis added

645); at least her romanticism does not allow her to do so. The best ‘response’ her ‘artistic’ efforts can produce is his detached, realist comment: “My darling girl! This is like an exit on the cinema” (644). Her exaggerated romanticism and her husband’s philistine realism make a vivid contrast; and the total lack of communication between the married couple makes their conversation absurd: this absurdity triggers the audience’s laughter.

2 The Importance of Being a Stylist

Gwendolen. . . . *In the matters of grave importance, style, not sincerity, is the vital thing.* (*The Importance of Being Earnest*)²

Gilbert. . . . *Yes: Form is everything. It is the secret of life. Find expression for a sorrow, and it will become dear to you. Find expression for a joy, and you intensify its ecstasy.* (“*The Critic as Artist*”)³

The protagonist’s comment just after her failure to dramatize the parting scene, is typical of an Aesthete:

She. How strange life is! . . . All the glamour seems to have gone, somehow. Oh, I’d give anything for the cab to turn around and go back. The most curious thing is that I feel if he really had made me believe he loved me it would have been much easier to have left him. (644)

This paradoxical remark reminds the reader of Algy, Cecily, or Gwendolen. Cecily, for example, states while expecting to meet Algy disguised as Earnest, Jack’s immoral brother: “I have never met any really wicked person before. I feel rather frightened. I am so afraid he will *look* just like every one else” (emphasis added 474). The protagonist’s speech, apart from its Wildean comic effect, proposes the often neglected, but crucial effect of form (style) on mind: form decides one’s moods and even point of view. Vivian’s thesis: “Life imitates Art far more than Art imitates Life” (Wilde 99)-- is implied: indeed, the protagonist’s whole project (her attempted elopement) is a ‘Romantic’ rebellion against ‘nature’ or habit: a parodied demonstration of Vivian’s “Life’s imitative instinct” (Wilde 99). The comparison between her and her lover makes this aesthetic (Symbolist) theme clearer: “She” represents Aestheticism while another “He” represents moralism and functionalism; she values style (form) rather than content, and he values content rather than style. This difference is intensified by her lover’s inability to understand her Aestheticism-- “understand,” which is repeated towards the end of the scene, is the key word for the moral gap between them.

The protagonist’s characteristics as a stylist are emphasized in the scene where she is impatiently waiting for her lover: in her romantic notion of love, he, not she, *should* be

expecting her with “bought papers and flowers” for her and a carriage already engaged (646). But her lover betrays her expectation not merely by arriving late but also by wearing a shockingly tasteless cap. Their contrasting attitudes towards the black cap make the difference in values between them distinct. Like Gwendolen, what the protagonist wants most is his style, not his sincerity, while her lover, like Jack, conventionally believes that it is sincerity, not style, that matters most. He is a truthful lover but that is not enough for her; she wants him to be stylish: his appearance and what he is should, in her romantic mind, be one; or, even, his appearance is, in her Aesthetic notion, more important than his reality. The protagonist’s Aesthetic judgment of her lover, that is, her judgment by appearance, might prove to be right, for he could be another habitual person: his lack of style (‘art’) signifies his uncritical acceptance of habit.

The lady’s lover does not believe that his late arrival can be a vital issue for their relationship: the fact that he lets his lover wait vexes him simply because it is against the gentleman’s *custom* (social ‘habit’). He believes that his sincerity (content) will easily make up for his unintentional negligence (of style): he underestimates style and its effects. He may yet seem to stick to his ‘style’-- he feels uneasy without a hat on. He has not, however, got any style of his own: another gentleman-like *habit* of wearing a hat makes him upset at the loss of his hat and obsessive about wearing one: the hat serves him as a security blanket. He is only concerned about ‘content,’ that is, the practical function of the hat, not its aesthetic appearance: any hat will do; he does not mind borrowing a stranger’s cap (which is *functionally* a hat) regardless of its look. Besides, he has no taste: he cannot even judge whether it suits him or not-- he looks at himself in the mirror but cannot see what is wrong with his cap. His functionalism might make him as boring as her husband as his passion, which seems to be the only element that is making him romantic, subsides. The protagonist comments:

. . .if he has looked at himself in the glass, and doesn’t think that cap too ridiculous, how different our points of view must be.... How deeply different! I mean, if I had seen him in the street I would have said I could not possibly love a man who wore a cap like that. I couldn’t even have got to know him. He isn’t my style at all. (647)

The black cap is a symbol of bad taste, functionalism, the death of romance, conformism, the death of Aestheticism, and habit. Even her lover’s romantic words (he calls her “[m]y queen,” “my heart” [684]) do not make up for her disillusionment; it does not affect her Aestheticism, for his attitude towards the black cap has proved that he is not an Aesthete. The reader understands that she is not a shallow girlish romanticist, but a determined Aesthete: her revelation of the crucial difference in values between them leads her to abandon him willingly.

3 “The Black Cap” and *The Importance of Being Earnest*

“The Black Cap” owes most of its comic techniques to *The Importance of Being Earnest*; the techniques such as the situational reversal (the comic effect of reversing what the audience normally expect comes next), and the comic use of paradox (the comic shock of halting the logical flow of the audience), the comic use of hyperbole (the absurdity produced by exaggerating the importance of the trivial)-- belong to Wilde’s comic techniques as well as to Mansfield’s. Wildean paradoxical speech and situational reversal are the characteristics of the first half of the play: at the breakfast scene, the protagonist insists:

She. It does seem rather extraordinary that *on the very morning that I am going away* you cannot leave the newspaper alone for five minutes.

He (mildly). My dear woman, I don’t want you to go. In fact, I have asked you not to go. I can’t for the life of me see...

She. You know perfectly well that I am only going *because I absolutely must*. I’ve been putting it off and putting it off, and *the dentist* said last time... (Emphases added 643)

A Wildean situational reversal is distinct here. The audience are, at this point, not informed of the real purpose of her travel; but no one expects or believes that such a petty reason as getting the dental treatment can be selected as her ‘plausible’ excuse for her going away for several days. (And note, also, that Algy in *Earnest*, too, jokes about the dentist: he uses it as a metaphor for a *false* impression.) The comic effect of this scene is produced not only by the unexpectedness of this pretext but also by the fact that the characters *are* treating the triviality of life as a grave matter. The scene is, as an effect, satirically criticizing the husband’s habitual thinking and being; the protagonist’s exaggeration of the trivial is actually her challenge to habit, her *conscious* demonstration of her dissatisfaction with her unimaginative husband and their insipid life: she is trying to stimulate her prosaic relationship by *poeticizing* (dramatizing) it. She wants her husband to suspect her hidden intention: she wants a ‘scene.’ Her husband, on the other hand, shows no critical or intellectual response; her absurd reason is, for him, logical enough: he is a victim of habit and he is not even aware of it.

The influence of Wildean paradox in speech will be noted in the protagonist’s lament for her husband’s lack of imaginative, sensitive response: she shows her defiance to his matter-of-fact, calm acceptance of her absurd excuse: “Darling, don’t let us part like this. It makes me feel wretched. Why is it that you always seem to take *a positive delight in spoiling my enjoyment*” (emphases added 644). This is a kind of speech the audience might expect when her husband opposes her leaving home. The logical flow is that the

husband's fierce opposition to and restriction of his wife's freedom make her wretched; but, here, the wife is actually accusing him of his generosity, that is, his 'liberal' understanding of her freedom. Once the audience understand the protagonist's Aestheticism and her real motivation of her attempt, this seemingly absurd comment of hers becomes reasonable and true.

These paradoxical techniques are closely linked with the common themes of the two plays: one of the main themes of "The Black Cap" is the subtle and comical advocacy of the superiority of 'Romanticism' over 'Naturalism,' the superiority of style (form) over content, in other words, the artistic superiority of 'Romanticist' method over 'Realist' method; and both plays, respectively, challenge the audience's habit-- their habitual response and thinking. Mansfield's aesthetic and political concerns shared with Wilde's are expressed chiefly through the protagonist's attitude and response. Like Wilde, Mansfield is, by emphasizing the importance of style in the work of art, actually insisting on the oneness of form and content; as I will discuss later in the essay, Mansfield as well as Wilde is defending Symbolist aesthetic and practicing it in *her* writings.

4 Breaking Habit

Despite these technical similarities between two plays, Mansfield's play has technical devices which the audience do not recognize in Wilde's play; and these characteristics seem to be closely related to the theme Wilde's play hints at but does not really deepen: Mansfield's play seems to reflect her more intensified consciousness of the force of habit; habit itself forms one of the main themes of her play. The characters' eccentric attitudes and paradoxical speeches in *The Importance of Being Earnest* arouse, even in our contemporary audience, a sense of insecurity; yet at the same time they bring about the audience's hearty laughter-- it is a farce--and its harmonious happy ending gives them a satisfaction that all's well that ends well. "The Black Cap," on the other hand, accelerates the audience's uneasiness and insecurity towards the end, and the ending leaves them *vaguely* uneasy. This psychological effect may first result from the anonymity of characters, and is gradually intensified by the heroine's hysterical state of mind, the nervous laughter which her extreme reactions trigger, and the tragicomical ending. These devices are connected with the play's other major theme: breaking habit.

Since the play is very short, the characters' anonymity might be accepted as natural; but, still, it is not very natural in our daily life: knowing someone's personal details without knowing *even* his or her name is *unnatural* in our life. Not knowing their names, that is, not knowing their (social) identities, therefore, makes the audience

somewhat uneasy-- Mansfield's and Wilde's play make a contrast here: Wilde, in *The Importance of Being Earnest*, gave names to *all* the characters including servants: the name not only plays a crucial role in the plot but is relevant to its main theme; Wilde gave names to *all* the characters including the servants. Mansfield's play does not have the radicalism of Beckett's very short one-act play, "Not I," for instance; but the characters' anonymity in "The Black Cap" gives the audience a psychological effect, in some degree, similar to Beckett's play. Their anonymity tends to make them metaphors rather than realistic characters; it intensifies their representative quality: "She" and "He" can be us: and this realization may be rather disturbing for the audience. The hysteria of Mansfield's protagonist is, however, another, more significant source of the audience's uneasiness. The emphasized 'strangeness' of the play reflects Mansfield's more acute awareness and more conscious treatment of 'habit' than Wilde's.

(1)Hysterical Laughter

The protagonist's wild imagination romanticizes the situation, and even makes her nearly take her own romantic vision as fact-- the intensity of her romanticism reminds the reader of Cecily's in *Earnest*. The gap between her idealized vision and somewhat crude reality shocks and disillusions her-- the protagonist's heightened expectation, the hugeness of the gap and her exaggerated disappointment produce a comic effect. Reality always fails vision: her intensified disillusionment gradually makes her hysterical; her hysteria is funny; but its extremity disturbs the audience as well.

The protagonist's 'Romanticism,' for example, colours her relationship with her lover on her way to the station: the romantic idea of elopement alone gives her great excitement; it makes her impatient and even amoral. Her romanticization is already tinted by hysteria: her failed attempt to poeticize the parting scene with her husband and her disillusionment with his prosaic response are the chief source of her 'madness'; the force of habit overwhelms 'Romanticism.' Her failure simply accelerates her frustration: forced repression intensifies her expectation of the development of her new, romantic relationship with her lover. Her extremity and amorality make the audience laugh but they could be rather annoying: she monologizes:

I wish my heart didn't beat so hard. It really hurts me. It tires me so and excites me so. . . . This cab is only crawling along; we shall never be at the station at this rate. Hurry! Hurry! My love, I am coming as quickly as ever I can. Yes, I am suffering just like you. It's dreadful, isn't it unbearable-- this last half-hour without each other.... Oh, God! the horse has begun to walk again. Why doesn't he beat the great strong brute of a thing.... Our wonderful life! We shall travel all over the world together. The whole world shall be ours because of our love. Oh, be patient! I am coming as fast as I

possibly can.... Ah, now it's downhill; now we really are going faster. (*An old man attempts to cross the road.*) Get out of my way, you old fool! He deserves to be run over.... Dearest--dearest; I am nearly there. Only be patient! (645)

The protagonist learns, in the following scene, that her lover is actually late and that it is she, not he, who has to "be patient": the irony of the situation and, above all, the betrayal of this quickened expectation give the audience a comic shock. The protagonist's unyielding, yet vain effort-- she rationalizes this new, unexpected situation and makes another romantic interpretation or make-believe-- escalates the audience's laughter. She tries to believe that she arrives just too early; but the fact is that they have got only ten minutes before the train starts; she also tries to believe that some tragedy keeps him late: what makes him late, however, turns out to be the most commonplace incident: "the most absurd, tragic-comic" incident of losing his hat (a daily commodity) (646): habit, as it were, beats her again.

The protagonist's hysteria reaches its climax when she, without noticing it, sits on the black cap and crushes it. This unconscious act is symbolic: it represents her abhorrence of what the cap signifies (functionalism, Realism, bad taste, conformism and habit). Her physical touching of the object of her disgust is a reminder of the fact that she has, despite herself, chosen as her lover the person with bad taste, the person who does not mind wearing the black cap. Her reaction to the unintentional act (of sitting on the cap) is extreme: she "gives a positive scream" and runs away from it ("moves into the bedroom") (648). This exaggerated response is comical but, again, rather annoying to the audience: her obsession and hysteria towards seeming triviality are funny, yet puzzling.

(2)The Tragicomical Ending: the Failed Attempt to Break Habit

VLADIMIR: Was I sleeping, while the others suffered? Am I sleeping now? Tomorrow, when I wake, or think I do, what shall I say of today? . . . We have time to grow old. The air is full of our cries. (He listens.) But habit is a great deadener. . . . At me too someone is looking, of me too someone is saying, he is sleeping, he knows nothing, let him sleep on. (Pause.) I can't go on! (Pause.) What have I said? (Samuel Beckett Waiting for Godot)'

Mansfield's critical attitude towards habit and the potential power of Aestheticism to challenge the numbing force of habit are made distinct through the protagonist's attitude and remarks. The lady's Aestheticism prevents her from accepting, like her husband, a domesticated, static existence; it makes her deeply dissatisfied with her vegetable life: her heightened sensitivity dreams of escaping from this stale, futile present life, and longs for the strange and extraordinary; it makes her a feminist.

“The Black Cap,” however, suggests the difficulty of actually breaking through the status-quo: it ends with the protagonist’s ‘happy’ withdrawal into her old habit. After she abandons her lover, she believes that she has managed to escape from being the victim of habit, and is willing to return to her husband’s: she leaves her old habitual life behind by deserting him, but she nearly runs into another habitual life with her lover; leaving her lover makes her escape from this lure but getting back makes her remain trapped by the old habit.

The protagonist remarks at the end of the play: “Ah, I’ve escaped-- I’ve escaped! . . . Oh, it’s like *a dream*-- I’ll be home before supper. . . . There is cold fowl for supper left over from yesterday, and orange jelly.... I have been *mad*, but now I am *sane* again. Oh, my husband!” (emphases added 648-9). Her Aestheticism makes her realize that her seemingly “sane” daily life is actually ‘dead,’ and, therefore, “mad”; it gives her a “mad” “dream” which suggests her a full, therefore, “sane” life. The magic of Aestheticism does not, however, last long: her “sane” revelation is temporary: habit overwhelms her “dream” and draws her back to old insanity-- the thought of having “left-overs” for supper, of course, comes very naturally to the housewife’s mind, and the act is one of our most habitual, domesticated ones. This tragicomical ending, that is, her ‘safe’ return to the domesticated life seems to suggest that the awakened consciousness contains the possibility of our radical change; but that only the awakening of consciousness will not do, for external force (that is, our social conditions) as well as internal force (our love of security) constantly tries to drag us back to our original lot. This consciousness of the force of habit is perhaps Mansfield’s aesthetic inheritance from Pater and Wilde, but what Wilde did not consciously deal with although Wilde’s paradox, in practice, kept shaking the Victorians’ habitual thinking. Wilde seems to have rather believed in the power of Aestheticism to break with habit than been aware of this die-hard force of habit. Mansfield’s consciousness is more ‘advanced’ than her mentors’; she seems to be aware of both the political potential of Aestheticism *and* of its limitations, and this critical awareness and appraisal form one of her Modernist characteristics.

2 Mansfield and Symbolism

Mansfield’s aesthetics is Symbolist: she eagerly responded to Pater’s and Wilde’s Symbolism as well as French Symbolism, absorbed them, modified them and acquired her own Symbolist aesthetic. Before discussing the relationship between Mansfield and Symbolism, it would be better, for the sake of clarity, to provide an overview of Symbolist aesthetics in general.

(1) Symbolism

Symbolism is often associated with such key words as 'symbols,' 'correspondence,' 'music,' and 'associations.' Critics understand that French Symbolism originates in Baudelaire's poem "Correspondences" which the French Symbolists regarded as their "preliminary manifesto" (Dorra 10). Baudelaire's concept of "correspondence" refers to various kinds of aesthetic correspondences: the correspondence (commotion and eventual unity) of all the senses the work of art stimulates (synaesthesia), the correspondence (unity) of senses and intellect, the paradoxical correspondence (harmony) of contraries, and ultimately, the correspondence (unity) of form and content.⁶ Symbolist art aims at the correspondence (or the balanced, perfect unity) of form and content, and the Symbolist artist regards symbols or images (often mythical and usually mystical) as the most effective unifying element in art. All the evoked images are supposed to appeal, first, to the appreciator's senses, and, then, to his or her intellect: the interaction of all the interrelated images should, as an "objective correlative," effectively produce a unified (that is, overarching and overriding) image or an extended metaphor. This metaphor is regarded as a key to a revelation of truth: it would allow one to grasp the essence of what exists in this world, or even envisage an ideal state of the world: in Baudelaire's words:

Some perfumes are as fresh as the flesh of children,
Sweet as the sound of oboes, green as pastures
--and others corrupt, rich, and triumphant,

*Having the expanse of things infinite,
Such as amber, musk, benzoin, and incense,
That sing of the flight of spirit and the senses.*
(Emphases added, "Correspondences," Dorra 11)

This Symbolist method has much to do with the artist's understanding of the characteristics of art: the Symbolists try to seek the expression most suitable to the nature of art. The Symbolists distinguish art from other intellectual activities, and give it an independent status in the intellectual and cultural arena: art is not subordinate to philosophy or to ethics; it has an independent sphere in human activities. The Symbolists believe that the primary faculty of art exists in its appeal to senses, rather than to intellect; among all the genres of art, music is, in this sense, a ideal form of art; it directly appeals to one's senses, stirs imagination, and evokes a unified 'mood'; musical style and its effect (content) are one. Symbolism is, therefore, closely linked with Aestheticism in the interpretation of the nature of art and in the appreciative attitude towards art. In literature or in painting, the device of creating the artistic effect similar

to music is found in symbols; symbols primarily appeal to senses; they, like music, stimulate the reader's (or the viewer's) imagination. The conscious, well-considered use of symbols arouses many, but interrelated associations; those associations, if the artist is ingenious enough, produce one key note, one dominant impression or mood, which is relevant to the theme (meaning): they are, in other words, integrated as "objective correlative" into a unifying effect. However, the way from impression to the theme is never smooth: what a work of art signifies is, in Symbolism, suggestive, not obvious. A Symbolist work of art, therefore, always conveys the meaning subtly: its impression is enigmatic; it puzzles us and stimulates our intellect; *we* have to make sense of it.

Symbolism is, therefore, a subjective art form. Symbolist method theoretically arouses the spectator's *subjective* associations (for interpretation) whereas conventional Realist method chiefly arouses his or her *objective* associations (for resemblance). Symbolism changes the status of the spectator; it requires of him or her the committed act of 'reading'; the spectator must be perceptive to (must *feel*) the work of art and, then, clarify the enigma it arouses. The ultimate aim of Symbolist subjective method could, however, be called 'objective': it aims at penetrating into the surface of the object and gaining a revelation or a truth.

We can find symbols in the Realist work of art; but symbols in the Symbolist work of art and those in the Realist work of art are, according to Ursula Brunn's "Symbolism and the Novel," different in quality: the former is integrated while the latter tends to be scattered and lacks unity. If we risk the danger of oversimplification, the most clear difference between Symbolism and Realism will be found in the way of grasping 'reality' and the nature of grasped 'reality': it lies in the fact that, in Symbolism, the 'reality' of the work of art resides in the conscious interaction between the artist and the spectator, that is, in the artist's expression (deliberately chosen style) *and* the spectator's committed appreciation and interpretation of it, whereas, in Realism, the 'reality' of the work resides largely in the artist's technique of reproduction (realistic presentation). Realistic works of art require the appreciator's commitment as well, for our cognitive process is primarily subjective, and therefore, as Wilde points out, all works of art are innately subjective. Yet the required level of the appreciator's conscious commitment could be different, corresponding to the degree of the conscious use of evocative symbols and imagery: Realistic exposition is normally far less enigmatic; it does not necessarily demand the appreciator's effort of making sense of what is exposed. We could still conclude that Symbolist style and reality are more 'subjective' whereas Realist style and reality are more 'objective.' Brunn maintains:

The outstanding difference between such "realistic" symbols and the symbols of modern literature is that, unlike the latter, the former are not *compact*

images that make a single strong sensual impression, but are often extensive and not easily delimitable segments of reality. In addition they are always genuine components of reality, actually to be found in it (the true realist does not manipulate reality to produce them); they are not indications added by the author simply to make his meaning clear. This difference already shows the realistic and the symbolic novel. The former seeks meaning in actual experience and is content to be taught by it; the latter imposes a particular meaning on reality. Correspondingly, the symbol in the realistic novel is always causally related to its meaning-- the symbol represents the hidden cause; whereas in the symbolic novel it is a transcendent embodiment of the intended meaning : for example, a lamb can stand for an innocent victim or a bird with a broken wing for a frustrated longing. (Emphases added 359)

Although Brunn's definition does not fully satisfy us (there is, for example, no art that does not "impose a particular meaning on reality"), it is still valid; it helps us to understand the methodological difference between conventional Realist method and Symbolist method.

Although the prototype of *fin de siècle* Aestheticism and Symbolism is found in Charles Baudelaire's aesthetic theory and practice,⁶ it is Mallarmé who advanced Symbolism. Mallarmé refined Baudelaire's notion of 'synaesthesia,' that is, a play of associations (especially correlative chain-reaction of associations), and 'correspondences,' that is, "links between the sensory and the spiritual that musicality further stresses through the harmony and expressiveness of the prosody" (Dorra 10). Mallarmé is "reputed to have said that he had banished the word 'as' and 'like' from his vocabulary" (*Symbolism* Chadwick 2); according to this definition, we could conclude that Symbolist method is a metaphor without any explicitly indicated 'signifié,' whereas Realist method is a simile with indicated 'signifié,' or with a fairly clear consensus between the artist and the appreciator on what is signified. Symbolist signifier-signified relationship is, in Mallarmé's sense, one to multiple while that of traditional Realism is one to one.

The French and the British Symbolist movement were interactive: the origin of French Symbolism can be traced back to the influence of the literature of English language: Baudelaire's enthusiastic appraisal and study of Edgar Allen Poe's poetics.⁷ One might further point out the aesthetic links between the German Romantics, the British Romantics and the French and British Symbolists: the German Romantics' aesthetics gave a theoretical support to both French and British Romanticism; Baudelaire, a forerunner of the French Symbolists, developed his concept of "correspondence" under the influence of German Romanticism as well as Poe's. Henri Dorra maintains:

They [French philosophers such as Creuzer, Guigniaut, and Leroux] transmitted to the French romantic generation the concept of the symbol and its aesthetic implications as understood by Herder, Kant, Schiller, Goethe, Moritz, W. F. Schlegel (whose student Creuzer had been), and others. It was

the German poets who believed that the symbol could be drawn from every day life. Hegel, whose work on aesthetics was translated into French between 1840 and 1851, preferred the symbol drawn from nature to that drawn from ancient religions. Much influenced by German thought, the English poet Percy Bysshe Shelley noted that the objects of the world can generate a play of association: "Poetry... awakens and enlarges the mind itself by rendering it the receptacle of a thousand unapprehended combinations of thought. Poetry lifts the veil of the hidden beauty of the world, and makes familiar objects be as if they were unfamiliar." (Dorra 10).

Dorra suggests the influence of German Romanticism on Baudelaire's poetics, but does not refer to Baudelaire's interest in the British Romantics; but the first stanza of his "Correspondences" could be easily associated with Shelly's quoted remark. Baudelaire's first stanza goes: "Nature is a temple in which living pillars/ Sometimes emit confused words;/ *Man crosses it through forests of symbols / That observes him with familiar glances*" (emphases added, Dorra 11). It is less likely that Baudelaire was indifferent to the British Romantics: the influence of the English-language literature on Baudelaire could have multiple sources.

Mallarmé, a conscious successor of Baudelaire's aesthetics, was a teacher of English and familiar with British and American literature; his knowledge and appreciation of 'English' poetry must have helped to develop his Symbolist aesthetics. It is also likely that Pater and Wilde, the contemporaries of Mallarmé and other French Symbolists, were influenced by this aesthetic movement. Pater's essay on Morris's poems is, in fact, included in Henri Dorra's anthology of Symbolist theories. Warner and Hough refer to the influence of French Symbolism on British literature: "Specifically, . . . , Symbolism is the name for a poetical movement that arose in France after the death of Baudelaire in 1867, and from that time on a powerful wave of French influence begins to affect English letters. Baudelaire's critical attitudes helped to shape those of Pater" (Warner and Hough, Vol. 2, 3). When Pater suggests the balance between form and content and the creation of poetic (musical) prose in "Style," and when he insists on the significance of our *critical* and *appreciative* attitude towards the work of art in the "Conclusion" to *The Renaissance*, he is supporting Symbolism as a practice of Aestheticism. In the same way, when Wilde maintains the superiority of Romanticism over Realism in theory and in practice in "The Decay of Lying" or in *The Importance of Being Earnest*, or when he stresses the importance of form and the delicate balance between form and content, and the cultural roles of committed criticism in "The Critic as Artist," he is defending Symbolism.⁸ Pater's and Wilde's aesthetics influenced T. S. Eliot, whose deep interest in French Symbolism was encouraged by Arthur Symons's *The Symbolist Movement in Literature* (1899); Eliot developed his poetics and coined the critical terms such as "objective correlative," "impersonality" and "dissociation of sensibility." And Mansfield,

Eliot's contemporary, was influenced by the aesthetics of Pater, Wilde and the French Symbolists. Her journal and letters show her interest in the German Romantics' aesthetics,⁹ French and European Romantic and Symbolist artists, and British Symbolists, notably, Pater and Wilde. "The Black Cap" is expressive of Wildean and Paterian aesthetics; her works are, as we examine further in the following chapters, Symbolist in her aesthetic and in her social consciousness. Her subjective, lyrical, rhythmical prose is Symbolist; her effort of creating sensuous literary effects by integrating painting, music, and literature reflects Wagner's "total art-work"(Styan 6); her use of leitmotifs, symbols, musical structure to produce an integrating impression is Symbolist; her social awareness and concerns belong to the tradition of Aestheticism and Symbolism.

(2) Mansfield and Symbolism

The analysis of Mansfield's works seems to tell us that Pater and, especially, Wilde, the dominant figures of the *fin de siècle* British Aesthetic movement and the early advocates of Symbolism, influenced Mansfield. Clare Hanson and Andrew Gurr, in their *Katherine Mansfield*, point out the relationship between Symbolism and Mansfield's short stories (especially her early writing), which her "critics and biographers have failed to resist" or "have dismissed" "as immature and, by implication, irrelevant, not seeing the intimate connection between this early work [in the Symbolist mode] and the particular nature and scope of her achievement" (Hanson and Gurr 21). Hanson and Gurr suggest that Mansfield established her characteristic techniques through Symbolist theories: she learned that "in literature an abstract state of mind or feeling should be conveyed not through descriptive analysis but through concrete images or symbols"; that "the organic unity of the perfect work of art" is achieved by "truly organic, uniting form and content indissolubly" (Hanson and Gurr 22).¹⁰ They, further, suggest that Mansfield's prose style is her practice of the Symbolist notion of "musical analogy for prose" (Hanson and Gurr 23)-- Mansfield's appreciation of this Symbolist notion never contradicts that of Pater's suggestion of musical prose (poetic prose) that appeals to the reader's senses. One of the French Symbolists' "influential innovations" is free verse and prose poem (Baldick 220); they tried to combine the merits of prose and poem. Similarly, Pater noted the creative possibility of merging two verbal styles: he maintains the virtue of poetic prose in his "Style." Hanson and Gurr suggest that "[f]rom Symbolist theory and practice came her interest in extending the boundaries of prose expression" (23): this view is, as I discuss in the following section, relevant to my own view on Pater's

influence on Mansfield's prose style.

The views of Hanson and Gurr are valid; however, they argue that it is Arthur Symons, not Pater or Wilde, who influenced Mansfield most:

The main influence on her in the period up to 1908 when she left New Zealand for the last time was that of Arthur Symons, who also influenced so many other early twentieth-century writers, notably Yeats and Eliot. Symons's role was as a communicator and purveyor of ideas. It was through his critical books that Katherine Mansfield was introduced to French Symbolist poetry and to other diverse, broadly Symbolist writers like the Belgian Maurice Maeterlinck and the Italian Gabriele D'Annunzio. She also absorbed very thoroughly the condensed version of Symbolist aesthetic theory which Symons presented in his books. Indeed, her early attempts to piece together an aesthetic rely *almost entirely on the writings of Symons, and to a lesser extent Wilde*. From these two, she took ideas which continually influenced her art. (Emphases added 21-2)

This conclusion is largely based on Mansfield's notebooks and journal: Hanson and Gurr note that "[i]n her early notebooks K.M. made extensive notes on two of Symons's books, *Studies in Prose and Verse* (London, Dent 1904) and *Plays, Acting and Music* (London, Constable 1909)"(136n14). Symons's role of a "midwife" of British Symbolism is widely acknowledged: Warner and Hough state:

For a time one of Yeats's closest friends, he [Symons] was an admitted influence on the theory and practice of the Irishman's poetry; similar tributes issued from T. S. Eliot and Ezra Pound, who claimed that the knowledge of contemporary French literature Symons provided had changed their verse. (Warner and Hough, Vol.2 210)

Mansfield's notes should not be neglected, and we should note the fact that Symons was an active, widely-read writer in her youth. It is most likely that Symons's writing on French Symbolism and his enthusiastic appraisal of his British mentors, Pater and Wilde, initiated Mansfield into Symbolism. However, the fact that Symons was a "midwife" of Mansfield's interest in Symbolism does not directly lead to the thesis that Symons chiefly *influenced* her aesthetic: it is more correct to say that Mansfield was influenced by Wilde, Pater and the French Symbolists via Symons's writing. Also, Hanson and Gurr seem to fail to see one crucial aspect of the two major 'movements' at the turn of the century, that is, the political potential of Aestheticism and Symbolism. The thesis of Symons's dominant influence on Mansfield's Symbolist aesthetic does not explain her keen social awareness.

Symons's understanding of Aestheticism and Symbolism may be somewhat superficial: he seems to have believed that the notion of the independence of art from other intellectual human activities automatically guarantees the artist's social indifference and irresponsibility. The only 'political' potential he found in the movements seems to be to become a rebellious, self-indulgent 'child'; but Aestheticism

did not advocate self-indulgence. It advocates full self-realization: the sublimation of our existence through a critical appreciation of art, that is, through breaking habit by the means of art. Self-indulgence is different from self-realization. Self-indulgence seems to be rebellious but never threatens the status-quo; it rather supports it since it never requires one any intense social confrontation as far as one's practice escapes the law. Self-realization, on the other hand, requires one constantly to confront and challenge the status-quo, for one's social conditions always hinder the full realization of one's self. "In some ways," says Roger Holdsworth in the "Introduction" to *Arthur Symons: Selected Writings*, "it is true, Symons is decadent rather than Decadent [an advocate of Aestheticism in the 1890s]. . . , his revolt against Victorian prudishness occasionally traps him into a strident celebration of vice *pour épater le bourgeois*, . . ." (23). Symons reminds us of Dorian Gray, Wilde's description of whom is ambivalent, or of Mr. and Mrs. Harry Kember in Mansfield's "At the Bay." Pater's distinction between Hedonism and Aestheticism (or Epicureanism), his argument about "great art" and "good art" in "Style," Wilde's comment on the educational and political potential of Aestheticism in "The Critic as Artist" or his social concerns in "The Soul of Man Under Socialism" -- all the statements might, for Symons, have seemed to be the Aesthete's political "pose" to evade the criticism of their moral decadence; if that was the case, he did not understand Aestheticism fully: his understanding was one-sided, for social and political awareness is a natural consequence of Aestheticism.

One of the tight links between Aestheticism and Symbolism is the vision of an ideal world (truth); Aesthetic or Symbolist rejection of the existing world is double-edged. The ideal vision of the world, on the one hand, makes the artist revolutionary; it enables him or her to question and challenge the status-quo. Yet, the artist's rejection of the existing world may, on the other hand, suggest his or her escape from social and political restrictions to his or her self-sufficient 'ivory tower' or to self-indulgence. Symbolist or Aesthetic ideals, in a way, have the limitation of Christianity Wilde observes in "The Soul of Man Under Socialism"; Wilde's valid realization is, however, "man is naturally social" (387); one cannot be entirely free from social and political influences. Aestheticism is bound to confront politics. The relationship between aesthetics and politics is never as simple as Symons might have thought. In fact, Baudelaire's attitude towards 'beauty' and morality was complex and the appraisal of his relationship with society requires consideration. Paul Bourget commented in "Baudelaire and the Decadent Movement" (1881):

He [Baudelaire] feels drawn by an invincible magnetism to the glow of what he has called, with justified outlandishness, "the phosphorescence of decay." At the same time, his intense disdain for the vulgar erupts in outrageous

paradoxes, laborious mystifications. . . . He treated with similarly painful ironic contempt both the foolishness, naïveté, and nonsense of innocent acts and the stupidity of sins. . . . Being what he is, notwithstanding the subtleties that put his works out of reach of the masses, Baudelaire remains one of the fertile educators of the rising generation. (Dorra 131)

Goldwater also notes, in *Symbolism*, the Symbolist artists' conscious effort of balancing aesthetic and political values: he notes the emergence of *l'art social* (one of the notable British Symbolist advocates in this stream was William Morris):

there was also a balancing strain, especially in the nineties. Unhappiness with the world as it was, its vulgarity and its injustice (some among them had known poverty), caused many of the symbolist writers to join forces, more often in print but occasionally in action, with political reformers and revolutionaries. (71)

Mansfield seems to have realized this complex relationship between art and society which is relevant to, and, therefore, as delicate as the relationship between form and content. As Hanson and Gurr suggest, Symons must have been a good guide to Aestheticism and Symbolism, that is, "a communicator and purveyor of ideas" for Mansfield. But a closer analysis tells us that it is, actually, Pater and Wilde, among British writers, who directly influenced the formation of her aesthetic.

(3) Pater, Wilde and Mansfield

Mansfield's critical comments and writings-- her book reviews, notes, journal and letters in Clare Hanson's anthology (*The Critical Writings of Katherine Mansfield*)-- hints at the connection between Katherine Mansfield and the Aesthetic, ~~and the~~ Symbolist Movement. Her early notebooks (the notebooks from 1906 to 1908) shows that Symons's writings introduced her not only to Pater and Wilde but also to Romanticist figures such as Chopin and De Quincey, and other dominant Aesthetic, and Symbolist figures such as Wagner, R. Strauss, Maeterlinck, Mérimée, and Mallarmé. Her scattered notes indicate her intellectual curiosity about Aestheticism and Symbolism.¹¹ The biographical fact that young Mansfield had great passion for literature *and* music-- she wanted to be either a professional classical musician or a writer-- explains her interest in Symbolism, too; Symbolism in theory and practice attempts to produce 'musical' effects in literature: it is what combines the two fields of her enthusiasm. It is natural that Mansfield was impressed by Pater's words: "Philosophy is a sympathetic appreciation of a kind of music in the very nature of things" (*Critical Writing of K. M.* 141), which she wrote down in her notebook. It is also easy to imagine that Wilde's emphasis, in "The Critic as Artist," on the tight link between perfect literature and music, and his conclusive argument

about the *eventual* superiority of literature over music must have been appealing to Mansfield who chose to be a writer.

Although the reader of Mansfield's writings might be able to point out her connection with many other Romantic, Aesthetic or Symbolist writers, the analysis of her texts seems to prove that the source of basic, crucial literary influence on her aesthetic could be found in Pater and Wilde. Both Wilde and Mansfield were Pater's disciples; and Mansfield is a 'disciple' of Wilde's. However, it is a truism that the disciple fully appreciates his or her master's art and attitude; but that all gifted disciples are not their masters' blind followers; that they, while grasping the masters' intellectual attitudes and styles, *modify* what they inherit and find *their own* voices.

(i) Pater and Wilde

Wilde's own understanding and interpretation of Pater's Aestheticism and Symbolism are expressed, for instance, in his "The Critic as Artist"; his artistic notion can be associated with that of Pater; however, Wilde's Aestheticism is more consciously social than Pater's: Wilde, in a way, developed Pater's Aestheticism and made it socially relevant. Pater's Aestheticism focuses on its values on Individualism; it stops at the threshold of Communalism. Wilde, on the other hand, attempted to bridge the gap between his Individualism and Communalism: he referred to the 'educational' (cultural) and the Pacifist (political) potential of Aestheticism.

Pater, in *The Renaissance*, maintains:

Philosophiren, says Novalis, ist dephlegmatisiren, vivificiren. The service of philosophy, of speculative culture, towards the human spirit, is to rouse, to startle it to a life of constant and eager observation. . . .

To burn always with this hard, gem-like flame, to maintain this ecstasy, is success in life. In a sense it might even be said that our failure is to form habits; for, after all, habit is relative to a stereotyped world, and meantime it is only the roughness of the eye that makes any two persons, things, situations, seem alike. . . . Some spend this interval [mortal life] in listlessness, some in high passions, the wisest, at least among "the children of this world," in art and song. For our one chance lies in expanding that interval, in getting as many pulsations as possible into the given time. . . . Only be sure it is passion-- that it does yield you this fruit of a quickened, multiplied consciousness. Of such wisdom, the poetic passion, the desire of beauty, the love of art for its own sake, has most. For art comes to you proposing frankly to give nothing but the highest quality to your moments as they pass, and simply for those moments' sake. (188-90)

Wilde grasped this disinterested, intense Epicurean attitude towards life and art and clarified the still vague, social possibility of Pater's notion. As for the cultural role that our critical, truly appreciative mind can perform, Wilde, with the same passion and

similar tone, advances Pater's idea:

It is Criticism, again, that, by concentration, makes culture possible. . . It is Criticism that makes us cosmopolitan. . . . It is only by the cultivation of the habit of intellectual criticism that we shall be able to rise superior to race-prejudice. Goethe-- you will not misunderstand what I say-- was a German of the Germans. He loved his country-- no man more so. Its people were dear to him: and he led them. Yet, when the iron hoof of Napoleon trampled upon vineyard and cornfield, his lips were silent. "How can one write songs of hatred without hating?" he said to Eckermann, "and how could I, to whom culture and barbarism are alone of importance, hate a nation which is among the most cultivated of the earth, and to which I owe so great part of my own cultivation?" This note, sounded in the modern world by Goethe first, will become, I think, the starting-point for the cosmopolitanism of the future. Criticism will annihilate race-prejudices, by insisting upon the unity of the human mind in the variety of its forms. ("The Critic as Artist" 63-4)

Wilde, in "The Soul of Man Under Socialism," turned his eyes to the social and political restrictions that hinder the fulfillment of the idealistic, Epicurean self-realization that Pater and he himself believed in: Wilde's critical, aesthetic mind, in practice, broke through habit; he challenged the existing social restrictions one tends to take for granted or conform to.

Wilde's prose style in "The Critic as Artist," here and there, reminds the reader of Pater's voice. Nevertheless, in the same essay, he established his own voice and rhythm; he found out his paradoxical, witty tone of intellectual conversation, and, also, applied the dramatic structure to his critical writings. Wilde made Gilbert defend this 'Hellenic' structure in his speech: "Dialogue, . . . , that wonderful literary form. . . never lose for the thinker its attraction as a mode of expression" (51). He made the most of his style in *The Importance of Being Earnest*.

(ii) Mansfield's Prose Style:
Pater and Mansfield / Wilde and Mansfield

The reader notices the echo of a Wildean voice not only in "The Black Cap" but also, for instance, in Linda's voice in "Prelude" when Linda's Aesthetic imagination tints the aloe:

. . . the high grassy bank on which the aloe rested rose up like a wave, and the aloe seemed to ride upon it like a ship with the oars lifted. Bright moonlight hung upon the lifted oars like water, and on the green wave glittered the dew. . . . She dreamed that she was caught up out of the cold water into the ship with the lifted oars and the budding mast. Now the oars fell striking quickly, quickly. They rowed far away over the top of the garden trees, the paddocks and the dark bush beyond. Ah, she heard herself cry: "Faster! Faster!" to those who were rowing. (52-3)

One could associate Linda's aloe with Pater's; Pater, in *The Renaissance*, says: "A certain

strangeness, something of the blossoming of the aloe, is indeed an element in all true works of art: that they shall excite or surprise us is indispensable" (57). And Linda herself refers to the singular, strange beauty of the aloe, and compares the blossoming of the aloe to the possibility of her self-realization; as I will discuss the point in the following chapter, the aloe is, in the story, just like the aloe in *The Renaissance*, a symbol of Aestheticism. As for the relationship between Wilde and Mansfield, the reader notices that Linda's aesthetic longing for the freedom from habit (her "deadener"), mythical vision and voice almost coincide with Gilbert's:

Sometimes, when I listen to the overture to *Tännhäuser*, I seem indeed to see that comely knight treading delicately on the flower-strewn grass, and to hear the voice of Venus calling to him from the caverned hill. But at other times it speaks to me of a thousand different things, of myself, it may be, and my own life, or of the lives of others whom one has loved and grown weary of loving, or of the passions that man has known or of the passion that man has not known, and so has sought for. Tonight it may fill one with. . . that *Amour de l'Impossible*, which falls like a madness on many who think they live securely and out of reach of harm. . . . Tomorrow, like the music of which Aristotle and Plato tell us, the noble Dorian music of the Greek, it may perform the office of a physician, and give us an anodyne against pain, and heal the spirit that is wounded, and "bring the soul into harmony with all right things." ("The Critic as Artist" 29)

The reader can identify the Wildean echo in Mansfield's writings: the quoted passage makes us remember that the protagonist of "The Black Cap" calls her 'Romantic' vision and attempt "mad" (649); Linda calls her Aesthetic dream "absurd" or "a mania" (53).

But Mansfield did not pursue the possibility of this mythic imagery and voice, just as she did not keep up the Wildean paradoxical voice of "The Black Cap" -- her voice is openly harsh when it attempts social satire as in "A Cup of Tea" (1922); it does not have Wildean twisted paradoxes or humour. The reader can taste her own rhythm and voice best in the perceptive, or rather, receptive tone, the tone particularly distinct in "Bliss" (1918), "The Wind Blows" (1915) and "The Garden Party" (1922). Mansfield's typical voice is audible, for example, in the description of Laura's state of mind in "The Garden-Party" :

The house was alive with soft, quick steps and running voices. The green baize door that led to the kitchen regions swung open and shut with a muffled thud. And now there came a long, chuckling absurd sound. It was the heavy piano being moved on its stiff casters. But the air! If you stopped to notice, was the air always like this? Little faint winds were playing chase in at the tops of the windows, out at the doors. And there were two tiny spots of sun, one on the inkpot, one on a silver photograph frame, playing too. Darling little spots. Especially the one on the inkpot lid. It was quite warm. A warm little silver star. She could have kissed it. (249)

This voice of Laura's is doubly functional: it does not only vividly convey the 'feels' of

what Laura perceives to the reader. The passage is not merely synaesthetic, either. It, as a whole, as Eliot's "objective correlative," also reveals Laura's heightened emotion and her Aesthetic values. The flickering spots and the restless winds, together with the *way* she perceives them, express her attentive, receptive attitude as well as her blissful feelings intensified by her expectation of the party. The voice (style of speech) Mansfield gave her protagonist is perfectly combined and in tune with what she is (content). Indeed, what Mansfield, still in her youth, termed the method of "the partisans of objectivity" (in her 1904 journal entry) sounds Symbolist: her concept is very close to Symbolist poetics and Eliot's objective correlative 'theory.' Mansfield notes:

The partisans of objectivity [as opposed to "[t]he partisans of analysis"] describe the state of the soul through the slightest gesture-- . . . --which is the artist's method for me-- in so much as art seems to me *pure vision*-- I am indeed a partisan of objectivity--. (Qtd. in "Introduction," *Critical Writings of K. M.* 9-10).¹²

The intense, restless, lyrical tone of Laura's narrative is the voice one might be able to acquire by fully appreciating what one's senses and intellect grasp; by identifying oneself with the objects of aesthetic appreciation. This prose style of Mansfield's is a heightened form of free indirect discourse; it could be, as Hanson and Gurr point out, her adaptation of French Symbolists' free verse or prose poem. Yet, her style is, it seems to me, more relevant to Pater's suggestion of poetic verse in "Style," where Pater's appreciation of Flaubert, whose work, *Madame Bovary*, is famous for the use of free indirect discourse, is made explicit. Mansfield's poetic, sensuous voice is a practice of Pater's Aestheticism which reminds the reader of Keats's negative capability: Pater, in *The Renaissance*, observes on this appreciative attitude:

While all melts under our feet, we may well grasp at any exquisite passion, or any contribution to knowledge that seems by a lifted horizon to set the spirit free for a moment, or any stirring of the senses, strange dyes, strange colours, and curious odours, or work of the artist's hands, or the face of one's friend. Not to discriminate every moment some passionate attitude in those about us, and in the very brilliancy of their gifts some tragic dividing of forces on their ways, is, on this short day of frost and sun, to sleep before evening. (189)

Mansfield's letter to her friend and painter, Dorothy Brett (1917) seems to support the claim for Pater's influence on Mansfield's unique poetic prose style: her appreciation of Paterian Aestheticism must have helped to develop her concept of "a partisan of objectivity":

It seems to me so extraordinarily right that you should be painting Still Lives just now. What can one do, faced with this wonderful tumble of round bright fruits, but gather them and play with them-- and *become them*, as it were. When I pass the apple stalls I cannot help stopping and staring until I feel that I, myself, am changing into an apple, too-- and at any moment I may produce an apple, miraculously, out of my own being like the conjurer

produces the egg. . . . There follows the moment when you are *more* duck, *more* apple or *more* Natasha [in *War and Peace*] than any of these objects could ever possibly be, and so you can *create* them anew. . . . (*Critical Writing of K.M.* 29)

Mansfield's theory of thorough 'identification' or "becoming" can be understood as her interpretation and adaptation of Paterian Aestheticism to her own writing; it also reminds the reader of Flaubert's famous remark that he was Madame Bovary. The narrator of "The-Garden Party" *becomes* Laura; and Laura's consciousness *becomes* what she perceives. Also, here, Mansfield is talking about the relationship between the subjective and the objective (the merging point of this binary notion rather than the distinction between them), and the vital importance of subjectivity in creating a work of art or, in a sense, the superiority of *subjective* reality over imitative reality (reproduction): she is, like Wilde in "The Decay of Lying," supporting Symbolist method. Mansfield's concept of "becoming" could be, in fact, interpreted as her interpretation of Wilde's view on the multiplicity of one's self, that is, Gilbert's stress on the importance of intensifying personality or his "becoming": one can note a Wildean hue in her notion of "hundreds of selves" (*Journal of K.M.* 205). Mansfield maintains that if there is a moment when one feels like believing "in a self which is continuous and permanent" at all, that is the moment of aesthetic realization of one's self: that is the rare, Paterian moment of "flowering"[or "becoming"] of one's self which is "the moment of direct feeling when we are most ourselves and *least personal* " (emphases added *Journal of K.M.* 205). Mansfield's practical "imaginative medium"-- her practical Symbolist method of transforming "Art's rough material" into "artistic conventions" ("The Decay of Lying" 98) -- is to identify herself with the object (or the character) she describes: to let the character speak, let his or her subjective relationship with the object speak, or even let the object itself speak. Mansfield's approach to her 'raw material' is *personal* (subjective); yet her subjective transformation of consciousness, that is, "becoming," enables her to acquire an *impersonal* voice and truth (objectivity); her way of Eliot's "escape from personality" is realized by her Paterian and Wildean "becoming." Mansfield's voice-- its musicality, its synaesthesia and its harmonious correspondence of form and content-- and her interpretation of artistic reality allow us to call her aesthetics Symbolist.

Notes

¹ Pater "Poems by William Morris" 28-9.

² Wilde 479.

³ Wilde 58.

⁴ Samuel Beckett 90-1.

⁵ Baudelaire's sonnet, "Correspondances," goes as follows:

La nature est un temple où de vivants pilliers
 Laissent parfois sortir de confuses paroles;
 L'homme y passe à travers des forêts de symboles
 Qui l'observent avec des regards familiers.

Comme de longs échos qui de loin se confondent
 Dans une ténébreuse et profonde unité,
 Vaste comme la nuit et comme la clarté,
 Les parfums, les couleurs et les sons se répondent.

Il est des parfums frais comme des chairs d'enfants,
 Doux comme les hautbois, verts comme les prairies,
 -- Et d'autres, corrompus, riches et triomphants,

Ayant l'expansion des choses infinies,
 Comme l'ambre, le musc, le benjoin et l'encens,
 Qui chantent les transports de l'esprit et des sens.
 (*Les Fleurs du Mal* 193)

⁶ As for Baudelaire's aesthetic contribution to Symbolism, see, Anna Balakian, *The Symbolist Movement: A Critical Appraisal* 29-53. Balakian points out that Baudelaire is a Symbolist prototype, that is, a 'leader' of the Symbolist Movement without any consciousness of initiating or leading the movement. Balakian notes Baudelaire's Symbolist characteristics: his connection with Romanticism (he praised Romanticism which was regarded generally old-fashioned in his time), his appreciation of Wagner and Swedenborg, his unconscious break with Romanticism (his intellectually controlled passion: his use of images subdues the openly passionate expression of Romanticism), his use of symbols which offers the reader free associations, and which should, therefore, be distinguished from allegories, the 'subjective' reality of his works, his idea of 'correspondence,' his synaesthesia, his Dandyism, and his Cosmopolitanism. But the social and political appraisal of Baudelaire and his works is missing in Balakian's analyses; for his political potential, perhaps one should consult Walter Benjamin's *Charles Baudelaire: A Lyric Poet in the Era of High Capitalism* (1969). As for Baudelaire's Symbolism, Henri Dorra suggests: "Baudelaire's sonnet ["Correspondances"] can be regarded as the preliminary manifesto of the French symbolist movement" (*Symbolist Art Theories* 10).

⁷ As for the relationship between French Symbolism and Poe, see, for example, Edmund Wilson's "Symbolism" in *Axel's Castle* 9-27.

⁸ One may point out a deeper influence of Baudelaire on Wilde: Wilde might have taken the title of his letter to Alfred Douglas (*De Profundis*) from Baudelaire's poem, "Des Profundis Clamavi" in *Les Fluers du Mal* which seems to correspond with Wilde's state of mind in *De Profundis*: the poem goes as follows:

I beg Your Mercy-- you, the One I Love!
 Out of the depths my heart has plumbed, I cry--
 the skies are lead, and no horizon pales:
 I share this night with blasphemy and dread.

A frozen sun hangs overhead six months;
the other six, the earth is in its shroud--
no trees, no water, not one creature here,
a wasteland naked as the polar north!

Of all the abominations none
is half so cruel as that sun of ice
and darkness worthy of old Chaos itself;

I envy the lot of the lowest animal
that can surrender to a stupid sleep--
so slowly does the skein of time unwind! (*Les Fluers du Mal* 36-7)

⁹ As for her interest in German Romantic aesthetics, see, for example, *Journal of K.M.* 272-3.

¹⁰ I disagree with Hanson and Gurr's introduction of the term "organic" for the description of Symbolist structure. As we saw in Chapter One, "organic" is more likely to be associated with Romantic aesthetic: Pater regards "organic" as opposed to 'self-conscious.' The grasp of art as self-conscious creative activity is one of the basic concepts of Symbolism.

¹¹ Clare Hanson, ed., *Critical Writings of K. M.* 140-7.

¹² Hanson, however, finds "a wide gap between" Eliot's objective correlative and Mansfield's method (Introduction to "Katherine Mansfield" in *The Gender of Modernism* 301): she suggests that Eliot's method is analytical and concerned with "metalanguage" while Mansfield's is much less so.

**Chapter 5 : "Prelude" and "At the Bay":
A Prelude to Katherine Mansfield's Recurring Themes**

1 "Prelude"

**1 The Technical and Thematic Connections between "Prelude"
and "At the Bay"**

Katherine Mansfield wrote several stories about the Burnells: the two sketchy, very short stories ("The Little Girl" [1912] and "About Pat" [1905]), the short 'novel' (*The Aloe* [written in 1915]) and the three short stories ("Prelude" [1918], "The Doll's House" [1922] and "At the Bay" [1922]).¹ They do not only share the same characters, but there are also thematic connections among all these stories. Apart from the apparent similarities between *The Aloe* and "Prelude," the reader notices the technical and thematic parallelism between "Prelude" and "At the Bay": they are twin stories. According to J. M. Murry, Mansfield originally planned to produce one novel called *Kaori* out of these two stories.² Leaving aside Mansfield's final intention, Murry's comment also suggests a close link between the two stories.

"Prelude" and "At the Bay" have an almost identical narrative style and structure. The two stories have both omniscient point of view and limited (multiple) points of view, and these limited points of view fully demonstrates Mansfield's intensified free indirect discourse. There are architectural similarities: both stories consist of semi-independent, sketch-like short sections, but these seemingly fragmented short sections are consciously juxtaposed and thematically closely related to one another. There is also chronological disorder, which results not only from the nature of the narrative (interior monologue which ignores linear time) but also from Mansfield's conscious arrangement of the parts and sections. "Prelude" and "At the Bay" have a thematic relevance: they are, respectively, located at the beginning of her two major anthologies: "Prelude" is a prelude to *Bliss and other stories* (1920) while "At the Bay" forms an overture to *The Garden Party and other stories* (1922): they seem, as 'preludes,' to contain the recurring major themes of Mansfield's stories.

The free narrative style, the introductory role,^{and} the transient, fragmentary structure of "Prelude" and "At the Bay" might remind the reader of the musical form of the prelude or the overture; at least to an amateur of music, the following definitions of the Classical and the Romantic overture sound suggestive of the similarities of these two stories to the musical form of the overture. The stories might resemble the Classical overture in terms of their themes. The Classical overture contains the themes (melodies) of the following main body of the text; it precedes the full

development of each theme:

This form [Classical form of the overture] is clearly that of the first movement of the symphony, either with or without the slow introduction, *the chief difference [between the overture and the first movement of the symphony] being that the overture often contains a dramatic episode unrelated to the strict design. The themes are usually melodies taken from the opera or incidental music and, as such, are related to the story.* (Emphases added Moore 146)

The even freer structure of the Romantic overture reminds us of that of Mansfield's two 'preludes'; Moore describes the Romantic overture as follows:

As the overture dissociates itself from the opera, so the latter, as if in retaliation, emancipates itself from the standard form of overture. Wagner wrote several overtures of classic design. . . but for his later works. . . he calls the introductory pieces a prelude, and writes more freely and often more briefly. . . . (Moore 183)

Although they do not have the typically Symbolist structure and theme which "Bliss" has,³ the techniques of "Prelude" and "At the Bay" could, as some critics point out, be defined as Symbolist: symbols and imagery, as I discuss in the following sections, play a significant role in expressing (or, from the reader's point of view, making us decipher) the characters' states of mind and the central themes of these stories. The seemingly fragmentary, but well-considered structures of the stories not only has an analogy with music; but these fragmentary structures (that is, the juxtaposed, interrelated short sections of the two stories), together with the abundant symbols and imagery, are, as Eliot's "objective correlative," expressive of the dominant moods and themes. Clare Hanson, in "Katherine Mansfield and Symbolism: the 'Artist's Method' in *Prelude*," points out the structural unity of "Prelude" and terms it Symbolist: Hanson's following critical comment is also applicable to "At the Bay."

The concept of the organic unity of *Prelude* may be an unfamiliar one, since critics usually discuss the story's 'random' organization. However, *Prelude* is in reality very tightly structured around principles of association by perception of similarity or contrast, so that each episode is played off against the next to form a complex metaphoric pattern. (30-1)

A careful study of the deliberate architecture of Mansfield's two 'preludes' helps us to reach and overview her major recurring themes: Symbolism, the moral and political potential of Aestheticism, the ephemerality of our revelation and the obstinacy of Habit. I would like to analyse "Prelude" and "At the Bay" as a prelude to my more through, deeper exploration of Mansfield's short stories.

2 *The Aloe* and "Prelude"

"Prelude," Mansfield's longest short story, is a revised version of *The Aloe* (which was posthumously published in 1930): Mansfield wrote *The Aloe* in 1915, but revised and improved it, and finally managed to get it published as *Prelude* (by Leonard and Virginia Woolf) in 1918. "Prelude" was reprinted in *Bliss and Other Stories* in 1920. Mansfield did little rewriting; her revision consisted mostly of cutting and reshaping of each section;⁴ yet the result is rather impressive. The reduction made the story less descriptive and, therefore, more impressionistic. Interior monologue comprises nearly half of the story; short sections appear to be a series of impressionistic shots: a cluster of seemingly disconnected, fragmentary but self-sufficient sketches.

Vincent O'Sullivan notes Mansfield's impressionistic, cinematic technique in *The Aloe*: he terms it Post-Impressionist:

As the painter's eye, at least after Impressionism, made painting actually *about* the act of perception itself, Mansfield's "special prose" helped to bring "voice," the way a story is being told, more to the reader's awareness. . . . She took shorter fiction towards far more lyrical and looser form. Hers was a method that admitted the flicker of moods and perceptions, the mere brushings of temperament, where they had not previously been thought appropriate. (xvi)

He, further, refers to Mansfield's cinematic method which is Modernist:

Yet there is something here in *The Aloe* and the story that derived from it ["Prelude"] that takes Mansfield beyond those links with Impressionism, and places her in quite another way at the headwaters of Modernism during the First World War. A fair claim can be made that she was among the earliest writers to understand how the methods of film might be applied to prose. (xvi)

The Post-Impressionists are often included in the Symbolist category because of their particular interest in the synthesis between subject-matter and style; Goldwater, for example, regards Post-Impressionism as a branch of Symbolism.⁵ Silent cinema, which was, according to O'Sullivan, an enthusiasm of Mansfield's shared with T. S. Eliot, cannot escape symbols, and is, indeed, a practice of "objective correlative." Clare Hanson's view on "Prelude," then, largely coincides with O'Sullivan's view on *The Aloe* although Hanson maintains that Mansfield's editing made "Prelude" more Symbolist than *The Aloe*:

All the revisions show the increasing indirection of the method of *Prelude* as Katherine Mansfield strove to achieve "revelation through the slightest gesture" and to avoid "minute analysis" [Alexander Turnbull Library Mansfield MS Papers, Notebook 2 58]. (30)

The "increasing indirection," or the story's lack of full description and "minute analysis," could stimulate the reader's intellect and encourage him or her to make

sense of that "indirection." It seems to me that Mansfield's editing intensified the fragmentary look of the original story, but, as an effect, gave it a tighter structure by suggesting the correlation between the segments. A closer examination reveals that the seemingly disintegrated sections of "Prelude" are not only relevant to one another, but that "Prelude" is given a focus. The removal of several episodes from the original story (*The Aloe*) makes Linda a central figure. The shortened last section allocated for Beryl makes her role diminish. The revised story's lack of the fuller description of the negotiation between the Burnell children (Kezia and Lottie) and the Samuel Josephs' children does not merely diminish Kezia's role; but it also intensifies Kezia's (and Lottie's) alienation from the Samuel Josephs: it makes the reader's attention return to Linda's unmotherly act of 'abandoning' her helpless younger children. The deletion of the scene of three Fairfield sisters' little gathering makes the section (Section X) Alice's section: it results in emphasizing not only Alice's frustration and repression as a servant but also the parallelism between Alice and Linda-- Alice's social and psychological situation is a parody of Linda's. The elimination of Mrs. Trout (Linda's older sister) from the story enables the reader to pay closer attention to the similarities and differences between the two sisters (Linda and Beryl); Beryl's psyche is another parody of Linda's. The deletion of the episodes between Linda and her father culminates in stressing on Linda's relationship with her mother (Mrs. Fairfield) and make the story more suggestive of women's issues. "Prelude" does not, however, stress a happy 'sisterhood.' The scene dedicated to the lively gathering of the three sisters in *The Aloe* hints at moral solidarity among them (with energetic Mrs. Trout as a leading figure of their 'movement'); "Prelude," on the other hand, without that little female group or Mrs. Trout, emphasizes Linda's repression and isolation. The fact that "Prelude" does not have the past episodes concerning young Stanley, young Linda, and her affectionate father makes the story focus on the present: this new focus seems to stress Linda's sense of ephemerality and disintegration.

Another obvious change is that of the title. The aloe in "Prelude," as in *The Aloe*, is a leitmotif of the story: it symbolizes not only a heightened hope for freedom and self-realization, that is, Paterian and Wildean Aestheticism, but also the tenacity and resilience required for "the flowering of the self" (*Journal of K.M.* 205);⁶ the title 'the Aloe' represents one of the major themes of the original and the revised story. Nevertheless, the title 'Prelude' is, perhaps, more sophisticated: it does not merely signify its 'status' or particular relation to Mansfield's other stories, and implies several other themes. But it also refers to the story's narrative and structural characteristics: the fragmented structure and the free indirect discourse of "Prelude" remind the reader of the impromptu, freer form of a prelude as a musical form. The

title 'Prelude,' further, refers to the story's dominant mood. It reflects, more than 'the Aloe,' a mood inspired by the move: not only the general mood of expectation that a move to a new place always involves; but, especially, Linda's heightened expectation that her move might 'prelude' some *rarest* thing like the flowering of the aloe (or the flowering of her repressed self).

2 The Structure and Technique of "Prelude"

The narrative style of "Prelude" is both 'objective' and 'subjective': it is rather conventional free indirect style where omniscient point of view and major characters' limited points of view (interior monologues) are mingled. Although the story is largely described from multiple point of view, it is not radically Modernist: the framework provided by the omniscient narrator prevents the reader from losing sight of who is talking about what. All the limited points of view in the story are, besides, not treated equally; the story has *a* centre, which offers another integrating element to this rather disjointed structure.

Linda and Kezia are the central figures; the focus of the story gradually shifts from Kezia to Linda: Linda's interior monologue becomes dominant as the story proceeds. But Kezia remains as a submerged central character since her point of view is often inseparable from the omniscient narrator's. All the characters of the story technically fall into four categories: the observed (the Samuel Josephs, the storeman, Lottie, Isabel, the Trout boys and Pat); the introverted observer often observed by another character (Alice, Beryl, Stanley and Mrs. Fairfield, who are observed because they are extroverts as well); the reflective, introverted observer (Linda); and a narrator-agent (Kezia). Linda is the most Modernist observer of the story; a Modernist story such as Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925) is carried on purely by the consciousness of introverted, reflective observers (interior monologue). Kezia's narrative is, on the other hand, closer to that of an early Modernist fiction such as James's *What Maisie Knew*. Kezia's point of view, like Maisie's, implies the author's view: she is an agent of the author: the disinterested observer whose consciousness chiefly records (but rarely analyses) what she sees. Since the narrator-agent usually represents (hidden) authorial views, she provides a moral criterion for the reader: the narrator-agent's seemingly neutral observation, speech and action produce subtle irony. Kezia's alienated existence reflects the ironical detachment of the implied author. The narrative structure of "Prelude," therefore, seems to stand somewhere between early Modernist and Modernist style. Two dominant contrasting points of view-- Linda's 'subjective' view and Kezia's 'objective' view-- enable "Prelude" to maintain the balance between

objectivity and subjectivity.

Although Kezia's point of view is a main objectifying device, multiple point of view also helps the story to maintain the balance between objectivity and subjectivity: each limited point of view is subjective; but the interplay of the juxtaposed multiple viewpoints produces an objectifying effect; it even gives the story another, more indirect moral criterion. Linda's consciousness raises the major issues of the story; both Beryl's and Alice's, as a parody of Linda's, illuminate and clarify the themes presented by Linda's. Stanley's consciousness objectifies and justifies Linda's view of and feelings towards him, and the psychological problems she is experiencing.

The omniscient narrator of the story is subdued: she is, though important for the story's clarity, no more than an inconspicuous editor: irony or moral appraisal results either from the structure (the juxtaposition of scenes, or the interplay of the multiple points of view) or from the narrator-agent (Kezia).

3 LINDA: Feminist and Aesthetic Themes

Sometimes, when I listen to the overture to Tannhäuser, I seem indeed to see that comely knight treading delicately on the flower-strewn grass, and to hear the voice of Venus calling to him from the caverned hill. But at other times it speaks to me of a thousand different things, of myself, it may be, and my own life, or of the lives of others whom one has loved and grown weary of loving, or of passions that man has known, or of the passions that man has not known, and so has sought for. ("The Critic as Artist")'

"Prelude" begins with the scene of Linda's 'abandonment' of her two little children (Lottie and Kezia); this first scene impresses the reader with Linda's total lack of motherly affection and parental responsibility:

There was not an inch of room for Lottie and Kezia in the buggy. When Pat swung them on top of the luggage they wobbled; the grandmother's lap was full and Linda Burnell could not possibly have held a lump of a child on hers for any distance. Isabel, very superior, was perched beside the new handy-man on the driver's seat. Holdalls, bags and boxes were piled upon the floor. "These are absolute necessities that I will not let out of my sight for one instant," said Linda Burnell, *her voice trembling with fatigue and excitement.*

Lottie and Kezia stood on the patch of lawn just inside the gate all ready for the fray in their coats with brass anchor buttons and little round caps with battleship ribbons. Hand in hand, they stared with round solemn eyes, first at the absolute necessities and then at their mother.

"We shall simply have to leave them. That's all. We shall simply have to cast them off," said Linda Burnell. *A strange little laugh flew from her lips; she leaned back against the buttoned leather cushions and shut her eyes, her lips trembling with laughter.* (Emphases added 11)

The scene is comical in a way: the children's child-like extreme worry about the situation which is not really serious from the adult's point of view gives the scene a

comic touch; their ordeal is exaggerated: they are described as soldiers ready to go to the front to fight a fierce, tough battle. The fact that they have to be left by themselves in the empty old house seems, naturally, dreadful for the children; but that does not, after all, mean that their family desert them. Yet, Linda's totally detached reaction, especially her laughter, shocks the reader: it is not merely cruel but hysterical and even grotesque. Linda, knowing her children's growing anxiety, seems to be amusing herself by spurring it as if a beast were playing with his prey. Invalid Linda must head for their new place first; her mother (Mrs. Fairfield) must accompany her to take care of her; Isabel, the oldest daughter (who is, according to Linda, "much more grown up" than any of the Burnells [32]), has already secured the place in the buggy, selfishly enjoying the sense of superiority. (She is obviously feeling as if she had graduated from childhood and now belonged to the adult's world.) It is, however, not really because there is no more space in the buggy that Lottie and Kezia have to be left behind; it is because Linda's mind has no room for her children. The "absolute necessities" Linda insists on carrying with her later turn out to be daily commodities such as Stanley's slippers; she absolutely rejects the idea of putting one of her little children on her lap; she is not only coolly indifferent to their 'fate' but is even fascinated about the idea of "cast[ing] them off." While Mrs. Fairfield and Mrs. Samuel Josephs are trying to settle the matter, Linda is thinking of something else: she is imagining that it would be "so exquisitely funny" if Lottie and Kezia waited for someone to pick them up, standing on their head just like the tables and chairs on the front lawn (12). The alienation and loneliness Kezia experiences at the Samuel Josephs' and in the deserted house in the following scene, and the care and responsibility Kezia shows for Lottie while they are heading for the new house in the dray--make the reader more critical about Linda's attitude and puzzled about its causes.

One of the themes that emerge from Linda's consciousness is feminist issues. The moon is the leitmotif of the theme. The moon represents Linda while the sun represents Stanley. Linda hates strong sunshine; she finds "a glare" "intolerable" especially "in the morning" (27), whereas Stanley likes pulling the blind "up to the very top" and doing his exercises "in the centre of a square of sunlight" (24, 25). The moon symbolizes her fertility and her sexual frigidity-- the moonlight is "cold" (39). It also represents her 'secondary sex': her social and economic dependence on Stanley; it is, however, the symbol of women's animistic, mystical power and 'sisterhood' as well: Linda and Mrs. Fairfield, "bathed in dazzling [moon]light," have a quiet talk "with the special voice that women use at night to each other as though they spoke in their sleep or from some hollow cave" (53). Mrs. Fairfield always wears a choker of "a silver

crescent moon with five little owls seated on it" (29)-- owls symbolize the old woman's wisdom: her tact, motherly affection and wisdom give Linda, Beryl and Kezia comfort and a sense of security, and integrate the Burnells. Beryl, "standing in a pool of moonlight"(22), undresses herself and narcissistically absorbs herself in her own feminine charms.

Linda's indolence, apathy and frigidity are obvious; Stanley (her husband), Beryl (her sister) and Mrs. Fairfield (her mother) seem to (or, want to) believe that her ill health has been affecting *her* state of mind; yet, the story implies, on the contrary, that her long-suppressed frustration has resulted in apathy which has been impinging on her health. She is healthy enough to get pregnant easily. (The reader knows that she is (going to be) pregnant again; she has a baby boy in "At the Bay.") In fact, her physical fertility makes an ironical contrast with her haunting sense of futility.

She cannot fit in with the conventional roles of a woman; unlike Mrs. Fairfield who is always happy to be everyone's mother and seems to have experienced no inner conflict with conventional values, Linda is not interested in playing the domestic roles of a wife, mother and house-maker; those roles have never brought her any sense of fulfillment. It appears to Linda that motherhood is nothing but a symbol of psychological oppression she is experiencing; motherhood "swells" (24) her emptiness; she feels that the burden of pregnancy, child-bearing and child-care is exploiting her remaining freedom, energy and strength:

"How loud the birds are," said Linda in her dream. She was walking with her father through a green paddock sprinkled with daisies. Suddenly he bent down and parted the grasses and showed her a tiny ball of fluff just at her feet. "Oh, papa, the darling." She made a cup of her hands and caught the tiny bird and stroked its head with her finger. It was quite tame. But a funny thing happened. As she stroked it began to swell, it ruffled and pouched, it grew bigger and bigger and its round eyes seemed to smile knowingly at her. Now her arms were hardly wide enough to hold it and she dropped it into her apron. It had become a baby with a big naked head and a gaping bird-mouth, opening and shutting. Her father broke into a loud clattering laugh and she awoke to see Stanley Burnell standing by the windows. . . .

.....
 "I dreamed about birds last night," thought Linda. What was it? She had forgotten. . . . They listened, they seemed to swell out with some mysterious important content, and when they were full she felt that they smiled. But it was not for her, only, their sly secret smile; they were members of a secret society and they smiled among themselves. Sometimes, when she had fallen asleep in the day-time, she woke and could not lift a finger, could not even turn her eyes to left or right because **THEY** were there; sometimes when she went out of a room and left it empty, she knew as she clicked the door to that **THEY** were filling it. And there were times in the evenings when she was upstairs, perhaps, and everybody else was down, when she could hardly escape from them. Then she could not hurry, she could not hum a tune; if she tried to say ever so carelessly--"Bother that

old thimble"--THEY were not deceived. THEY knew how frightened she was; THEY saw how she turned her head away as she passed the mirror. What Linda always felt was that THEY wanted something of her, and she knew that if she gave herself up and was quiet, silent, motionless, something would really happen. (24, 27-28)

Linda's dream of a swelling bird makes possible the figurative interpretation of the scene where Pat kills a bird (a duck), the most striking scene in the story: the reader might associate the scene with Linda's fear of pregnancy and the denial of motherhood which her dream makes explicit. The scene of slaughter may reflect Linda's hidden desire to kill her children or unborn baby (her [imaginary] foetus)-- for birds refer to children (a bird changes into a baby in her dream; and Lottie who staggers and falls at the step is described as "a bird fallen out of the nest"[18]); it may imply her anarchic urge to liberate herself from psychological suffocation.⁸ Her dream also suggests her sense of being trapped by a male conspiracy, and her vague accusation of male dominance. Her father cheats her and laughs at her naïveté of being taken in so easily in the dream-- she is as naive as Kezia who is fooled by the Josephs children. What Linda believes is her father's laughter turns out to be the rattling sound of the blind Stanley is trying to pull up; he lets sunshine in; the act seems to show his insouciant belief that she *naturally* loves what he loves. She sees her husband in place of her father: the overlapping image of her father with Stanley at least hints at Linda's suppressed grudge against her immediate moral oppressor. However, what makes her feel on edge, that is, what "THEY" are exactly, is never made clear; at least she seems to wish to run away from what she calls "THEY" without facing up to what "THEY" really are. The reader can see that "THEY" cannot refer to her children. The direct image of the quotation is that of pregnancy-- the empty room that "THEY" are filling refers to a growing foetus (or foetuses) in the womb; what oppresses Linda is, however, what pregnancy *represents* for her, that is, the woman's social and moral conditions, rather than pregnancy itself. Linda prefers to blame her children (and a baby) for her apathy; but blaming the helpless is always easy; her child-hate is the act of making her children the scapegoat of the real source of her frustration. "THEY" signify her growing anxiety and sense of insecurity that result from her deep dissatisfaction; and the cause of this dissatisfaction seems to be found in her renunciation of individualistic desires: her reluctant acceptance of conventional female roles. Vague but obsessive anxiety haunts her; she is so overwhelmed by it that the reader suspects that "something" she is waiting for so quietly and patiently might be death which will save her from this menacing fear.

The analysis of Beryl's situation seems to clarify Linda's: Beryl's inner struggle is a parody of Linda's:

How despicable! Despicable! Her heart was cold with rage. "It's marvelous how you keep it up," said she to the false self. But then it was only because she was so miserable--so miserable. If she had been happy and leading her own life, her false life would cease to be. She saw the real Beryl-- a shadow... a shadow. Faint and unsubstantial she shone. What was there of her except the radiance? And for what tiny moments she was really she. Beryl could almost remember every one of them. At those times she had felt: "Life is rich and mysterious and good, and I am rich and mysterious and good, too." Shall I ever be that Beryl for ever? Shall I? How can I? And was there ever a time when I did not have a false self?...
(59)

Beryl, in the moment of contemplation, despises her "flippant and silly" "false self" who plays the expected role of a young woman (57, 59); her "false" bourgeois, limited self is eager to please, flatter, and charm men; her ultimate goal is to find an eligible, prominent young man ("[a] young man, immensely rich" who "has just arrived from England," or the unmarried "new governor" [22], for example) and have a respectable marriage. Beryl's revelation is, nevertheless, momentary; the following scene makes clear that what she calls her "real" self is "unsubstantial," and "a shadow": as soon as Kezia notifies her that Stanley "is home with a man," Beryl returns to her "false" self: she "powder[s] her nose" to attract her possible suitor's attention. Kezia's act of intrusion upon Beryl's privacy (-- she innocently makes a mess of Beryl's toilet article) comically mocks Beryl's shallowness and limitations which are now the dominant part of her (real) self.

Linda is also stuck in bourgeois values: but her consciousness is that of 'a new woman'⁹ -- yet she does not know how to break away from the moral oppression. Her ill health gives her a good excuse to escape from parental responsibilities; she, however, still has to play the role of a good wife: she is at once a decorative mistress to satisfy Stanley's eyes and desire, and a faithful, patient, fecund wife: she gives Stanley moral support; she never rejects him; she keeps producing children for him.

Nevertheless, Linda's real, suppressed self loves freedom and independence; she is an Aesthetic Individualist: she is imaginative and perceptive; she has the craving for freedom and the aspiration for self-realization. The reader finds the similarities between Linda and Kezia. Kezia is a little Individualist and Aesthete; she loves freedom, and is perceptive and artistic. Kezia hates Isabel's 'tyranny'; she prefers to enjoy herself on her own; she is a careful observer of nature; she arranges flowers nicely in a match box for her grandmother. Both Linda and Kezia hate "things that rush at" them (54): they are afraid of what forcefully intrudes into their own private spheres. Kezia is frightened by her imaginary "IT" (15), just as Linda is obsessed and threatened by her imaginary "THEY." The scene where Kezia and Linda are

'surprised' at the sight of the aloe is suggestive of their related souls and of the symbolical meaning attached to the aloe:

. . . on her way back to the house she [Kezia] came to that island that lay in the middle of the drive. . . . Nothing grew on the top [of the island] 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. . . .

Linda looked up at the fat swelling plant with its cruel leaves and fleshy stem. High above them, as though becalmed in the air, and yet holding so fast to the earth it grew from, it might have had claws instead of roots. The curving leaves seemed to be hiding something; the blind stem cut into the air as if no wind could ever shake it. (34)

The aloe, like Pater's in *The Renaissance*, gives both Kezia and Linda an aesthetic 'shock.' The aloe's features, however, impress the two observers differently: Kezia's view of the plant is more objective while Linda's is subjective and interpretative. The aloe has such striking, peculiar features that it attracts Kezia's attention and makes her forget her original intention (her mind was occupied with the idea of making a miniature box of flowers for her grandmother); its strangeness only perplexes her still immature critical mind; Kezia's childlike mind is more interested in the obvious beauty of flowers. The aloe is not beautiful at all in a conventional sense; it has the singular, suggestive charm that a Symbolist work of art often has: the aloe, for Linda, represents Aesthetic aspirations (longing for freedom and self-realization), and the obsessive efforts and tenacity the fulfillment of the aspirations might require. Linda's description of the aloe reflects her sub-consciousness: her desire for strength to break through her bourgeois limitations and secure her individual autonomy. Linda's subjectivity 'distorts' the figure of the aloe: it overlooks its possible weakness and mortality-- Kezia's objective eyes registers some old leaves which "[curl] up in the air no longer" but "[turn] back" and are "split and broken," or that "[lie] flat and withered on the ground." But Linda only focuses on its militant aspect: she wishes to arm herself to protect her individuality. The aloe works on her imagination; the possibility of its bearing rare flowers stirs her fancy; the aloe seems to promise a new hope and magical healing; she feels like believing in the change their move to the new house might bring about: in the vision of a totally new, substantial life of her own.

The lack of mutual understanding and often unnegotiable difference between a married couple are recurring themes of Mansfield's stories such as "Marriage a la Mode" and "Mr. Reginald Peacock's Day"; these themes are often connected with the problem of negotiating Aesthetic values (art) and utilitarian values (life). "Prelude"

contains the tension between the two values: Linda stands for Aestheticism whereas Stanley stands for utilitarianism; Stanley cannot, despite his deep devotion to his wife, understand her.

Stanley is the best husband in a worldly sense: he is a successful businessman; he is faithful and devoted to his wife. However, his petit-bourgeois utilitarianism narrows his views: he believes that the rise of his social status and wealth serve the welfare of his wife and his family best; that a woman's happiness depends on her husband's worldly success; and that his wife should be Woolf's 'Angel in the House,' "[p]ure as a lily, joyous and free" (21). He never imagines that Linda's self is oppressed by his bourgeois, patriarchal expectations; or that she is suffering from repression and yearning for freedom and self-realization. Linda's feelings towards Stanley are ambivalent. She admires his sincerity, simplicity, diligence, amazing vigour and passion for worldly accomplishment, and his capability as a businessman; but she despises his lack of sophistication and petit-bourgeois utilitarianism, which tends to be intensified as his business flourishes. Linda finds it impossible to make him understand her own suppressed inner self and desires; Stanley would be either terrified of or laugh at her if he learned about the crazy trick that her wasted imaginative talent plays on her mind: her imagination makes things around her come alive:

How often she had seen the tassel fringe of her quilt change into a funny procession of dancers with priests attending.... . . . How often the medicine bottles had turned into a row of little men with brown top-hats on; and the washstand jug had a way of sitting in the basin like a fat bird in a round nest. (27)

The difference between Linda and Stanley (or rather, Stanley's limitations) makes her even more introverted; the gap between them only widens. The reader notices the parallelism between the situation of the servant girl, Alice and Linda's: Alice has to cope with her secret grudge against Beryl, one of her mistresses, to keep her present job:

. . . she had the most marvellous retorts ready for questions that she knew would never be put to her. The composing of them and the turning of them over and over in her mind comforted her just as much as if they'd been expressed. Really, they kept her alive in places where she'd been that chivvied she'd been afraid to go to bed at night with a box of matches on the chair in case she bit the tops off in her sleep, as you might say. (48-9)

Alice's repression reminds the reader of Linda's intensely introverted attitude; both Alice and Linda have learned to tame their wild selves. Alice does not have the guts to quit the job and find another (yet another post never promises her welfare as far as it is a domestic service): Linda is not tough enough to make Stanley understand her

feelings and desires, much less break with him; she does not, first of all, know how to support herself.

The vision of a new life the moon-lit aloe seems to reveal to Linda sheds the light on her relations with and mixed feelings towards her husband and her own limitations: the aloe is a Symbolist symbol that reveals to Linda her own hidden self, that is, her suppressed feelings and desire, and her weakness. The moon-lit aloe gives her the beautiful vision of freedom and independence; the vision does not only enable her to penetrate into the real cause of her frustration (what "THEY" are) and face up to her love *and* hate for her husband's demanding masculinity: her immediate enemy she would arm against with her aloe sward is her own husband. It also makes her face her own powerlessness to change her status-quo. Linda does not have the tenacity of the aloe; she says to herself:

"What am I guarding myself for so preciously? I shall go on having children and Stanley will 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." (54)

The sense of powerlessness and uselessness which women are, because of their secondary social status and economic dependence, more likely to experience prevents her from pursuing the vision; the sense of worthlessness disillusion her. Both the aloe and the moon suddenly lose their magical power; the 'sisterhood' she felt in the moonlight seems to be an illusion, too: old, traditional Mrs. Fairfield can obviously neither share nor understand Linda's feelings or frustration. Soon after this monologue, Linda turns to Mrs. Fairfield and asks her what she has been thinking about; Linda wants consolation: she wishes that her mother and herself could share the sense of worthlessness, powerlessness and disillusionment. Her expectation is betrayed; Mrs. Fairfield has been, on the contrary, deep in the happy, homely thought of making plenty of jam and filling their pantry shelves with it. As Linda awakens from the state of reverie, the meaning of the aloe becomes ambiguous: Linda's relation to the aloe reminds the reader of Bertha's to the pear tree in "Bliss." Linda's awakening throws a totally different light on the aloe; the shift of her consciousness changes the meaning of the aloe: the aloe does not represent her at all. It has no relevance to her life. Linda turns her attention to decorative camellia trees and verbena; "Linda pulled a piece of verbena and crumpled it, and held the hand to her mother" (55). Linda's action seems to suggest her reluctant realization that she is not the strong, fierce aloe, but, at best, those decorative plants that might be easily reached and exploited. Ironically enough, the aloe now seems to represent the aspect of Stanley she despises--for what do the aloe's almost clumsily unyielding passion and vigour that Kezia's eye seems to see ("one huge plant with thick, grey-green, thorny

leaves" and "a tall stout stem" [34]) signify but more of him?: it is at least far from Linda's sensitive fragility. The aloe fails to be hers: she has got the vision, but her weakness is fatal. Linda must resign herself: she must go back to her habitual indolence and apathy with new bitterness and loneliness.

4 KEZIA: Aestheticism and Implied Social Consciousness

Linda's interior monologue arouses the reader's sympathy towards her; but Kezia's view and existence counterbalance this one-way reaction: Kezia objectifies it. She enables the reader to see Linda critically from a broader perspective: Kezia's point of view illuminates the fact that Linda's suffering is not only personal but social. Kezia (as well as Mrs. Fairfield) is characterized ideally; she represents conscience and humanity in the story. Kezia is described as moral, Aesthetic, caring, sensitive but tough. She loves freedom and rejects power-relations; she hates Isabel's 'rule'; she keeps an eye on her older but helpless sister, Lottie; she is an explorer of the wild, strange garden; she is the only child who keeps sanity in the bloody scene of the slaughter of a bird (a duck) whereas the sight makes all the other children hysterical and crazy. Kezia provides an important criterion for the story: the scene where Kezia is handed a lamp by her grandmother just after her arrival to the new house is suggestive of her particular role in the story. The lamp in "Prelude" is given the same symbolical meaning as in "The Doll's House";¹⁰ it represents truth, beauty and morality.

"Ooh!" cried Kezia, flinging up her arms. The grandmother came out of the dark hall carrying a little lamp. She was smiling.

"You found your way in the dark?" said she.

"Perfectly well."

But Lottie staggered on the lowest veranda step like a bird fallen out of the nest. If she stood still for a moment she fell asleep; if she leaned against anything her eyes closed. She could not walk another step.

"Kezia," said the grandmother, "can I trust you to carry the lamp?"

"Yes, my granma."

The old woman bent down and gave the bright breathing thing into her hands and then she caught up drunken Lottie. "This way." (18)

Kezia is described as a careful, responsible, reliable child who deserves Mrs. Fairfield's trust. The scene has the air of a ritual: Kezia looks like a young maiden who is chosen to serve the gods and the people because of her special gifts, and succeed an old medicine woman (Mrs. Fairfield) to the sacred role: she is Rimbaud's "poet-seer" who can find her way even "in the dark." The first scene that Kezia with the lamp introduces is that of her well-off petit-bourgeois family in the dining-room, whose atmosphere makes a clear contrast with the working-class atmosphere of the Samuel

Josephs which Kezia left a few hours ago; Mrs. Samuel Josephs, whose placket is undone "with two long pink corset laces hanging out of it," provides for tea-time "the milk and water" from "two brown jugs," "bread and dripping" and *imaginary* "strawberries and cream" on the "immense" plates (13).

Linda Burnell, in a long cane chair, with her feet on a hassock and a plaid over her knees, lay before a crackling fire. Burnell and Beryl sat at the table in the middle of the room eating a dish of fried chops and drinking tea out of a brown china teapot. Over the back of her mother's chair leaned Isabel. She had a comb in her fingers and in a gentle absorbed fashion she was combing the curls from her mother's forehead. Outside the pool of lamp and firelight the room stretched dark and bare to the hollow windows. (19)

Lazy, delicate, detached Linda seems to represent bourgeois, leisured women while Mrs. Josephs represents clumsy but warm, tough, brisk and articulate working-class women. Kezia is ignored (-- "Linda did not even open her eyes to see" [19]) and forgotten until Isabel reports to Linda Kezia's bad manners (of drinking tea from Beryl's cup, not from her own). This innocent act of Kezia's is, just like her little mischief in the very last scene of the story, unintentionally satirical as well as comical; it, as an effect, mocks the Burnells' petit-bourgeois pretentiousness and affectation which are most characteristic of Beryl and Isabel.

The Burnells' move signifies the rise of their economic and social status in the community; to adapt themselves to a new house means to adopt bourgeois values and life-style. The Burnells will not mix with the Samuel Josephs anymore, for example; the two families now live in different spheres. Stanley is thinking of replacing their old familiar furniture with new, 'respectable' items; he has "set his heart on a Chesterfield and two decent chairs" (52) although Linda prefers the old one. Their adoption of and adaptation to a new life-style and manners are in progress: Stanley still keeps the habit of "picking his strong white teeth" after dinner and "lift[ing] up his coat tails" to warm himself at the fire (19, 20).

The confusion the Burnells' social transition involves is reflected by the children's game: their little "tea-party" is a caricature of the Burnells' life:

". . . How is your husband?"

"Oh, he is very well, thank you. At least he had an awful cold but Queen Victoria-- she's my godmother, you know--sent him a case of pine-apples and that cured it im--mediately. Is that your new servant?"

"Yes, her name's Gwen. I've only had her two days. Oh, Gwen, this is my friend, Mrs. Smith."

"Good morning, Mrs. Smith. Dinner won't be ready for about ten minutes."

"I don't think you ought to introduce me to the servant. I think I ought to just begin talking to her."

"Well, she's more of a lady-help than a servant and you do introduce lady-helps, I know, because Mrs. Samuel Josephs had one."

"Oh, well, it doesn't matter," said the servant carelessly, . . . (40)

Pat and Alice are the Burnells' servants; but the reader cannot see the clear social distinction between a master (or a mistress) and servants. Mrs. Fairfield, everyone's mother, is a housekeeper and nurse; she seems to be taking care of most of household chores with Beryl and Alice. Stanley regards Pat as "a first-rate chap" because "[t]here [is] nothing *servile* about him" (emphasis added 35); the idea of his being a servant does not seem to enter Stanley's consciousness: Stanley is so pleased with Pat that he almost shares his own cherries with him. The relationship between Pat and Stanley is that of an employer and an employee. Pat's manners are too casual and too free for a servant; Pat is not "servile" because he never regards himself as a servant, either: he is a handyman: 'first-rate' Pat would leave the Burnells if they treated him like a servant. In fact he does not stay long-- he is gone in "At the Bay." Alice is something between a 'lady-help' and a servant. Beryl at least is eager to play 'the bourgeois' and put her into a stereotyped mould of a maid; "Alice [is] dressed" like a typical maid for the little gathering of the Fairfields' three sisters; she has to wear "a black stuff dress," "a white apron like a large sheet of paper, and a lace bow pinned on to her hair with two jetty pins," and "a pair of black leather ones [slippers] that pinch[es] her corn on her little toe something dreadful" (47).

Kezia seems to be as alienated from her own family as from the Samuel Josephs; she fits in neither with the affected, petit-bourgeois air nor with the (though warm) rough, coarse working-class air. Kezia is endowed with the eye to distinguish Wilde's "real personality" (Wilde 360): the decent people who have their own sense of values and, regardless of their social status, natural dignity. While she loves and adores her grandmother as a 'mother,' Pat and the storeman are her idols: they are Individualists and Aesthetes. They seem to love to be on their own; they are hard-working, capable men but not interested in owning property; both of them are a little unapproachable but affectionate. Pat is wearing "little round gold ear-rings" which make Kezia stop crying(47). The storeman lives alone in the cottage with the self-built glasshouse:

All the glasshouse was spanned and arched over with one beautiful vine. He took her brown basket from her, lined it with three large leaves, and then he felt in his belt for a little horn knife, reached up and snapped off a big blue cluster and laid it on the leaves so tenderly that Kezia held her breath to watch. (16)

His glasshouse, his vine, his sharp, perhaps well-used horn knife, his precise movement of cutting grapes, and his love and care for his own products-- reflect his aesthetic sense. Pat and the storeman are unconventional-- Pat wears ear-rings; the storeman "never [wears] a collar, not even on Sunday" (16). The reader seems to see, through Kezia's point of view, Mansfield's unified sense of Aestheticism, morality and

social consciousness, which is shared by Oscar Wilde.

2 "At the Bay"

1 The Unity in the Structure and the Theme

Although the reader can point out many similarities between "Prelude" and "At the Bay," there are several differences as well. "At the Bay" has new characters: Jonathan Trout, Mr. and Mrs. Harry Kember, Mrs. Stubbs and the shepherd (-- but no Pat or the storeman). The setting is different: the location of "At the Bay" is Crescent Bay (where the Burnells' summer cottage is) while "Prelude" takes place chiefly in the country house in spring; the time span of "At the Bay" is one day whereas that of "Prelude" stretches for several days; there is a slight (about a year) interval between the two stories. "At the Bay" has no central figures: the role of Linda and especially the role of Kezia are diminished here¹¹ -- Kezia contributes a point of view to "At the Bay"; and she is described as ideally here as in "Prelude"; but Kezia is one of the minor characters and does not play the role of a narrator-agent. The adult figures are far more dominant; "At the Bay," in this sense, makes a contrast not only with "Prelude" but also with "The Doll's House," which was written at about the same time as "At the Bay," but is Kezia's story.

"At the Bay," too, strikes the reader as fragmentary; yet it, in fact, has a tighter structural and thematic "unity"; it may be called rather 'symphonic.' The unity of "Prelude" is achieved chiefly by the interplay of the two dominant points of view: the two major characters (Linda and Kezia), like the point (the top musical line) and the counterpoint (the submerged musical line), carry on the story. "At the Bay," however, has a rather closely-knit structural unity: it has the narrative and structural (architectural) devices to integrate each section; and the integrated form yields a coherent theme. The narrator's voice (the omniscient point of view) is rather dominant; it is at least as imperative as the direction of a demanding conductor, although it is as inconspicuous as the conductor should be. The omniscient voice not simply establishes the setting; but it, as it were, synthesizes each limited point of view, scene and event to produce the effective interplay. Also, the omniscient point of view occasionally provides symbolic descriptions suggestive of the main theme. The reader can distinguish the main plot and the sub-plot; and the interplay of the two plots produces an overall theme of the story: freedom. The leitmotifs of this theme are the sea and exploration, which represent breaking through limitations and crossing the borderline. There is the unity of time: the story covers only one day; it begins early in

the morning and ends late at night; time in the story is closely connected with the ebb and flow of the tide. Despite the story's fragmentary appearance, the story has a thematic and structural 'development.' Each section is architecturally connected.

2 Development

*Harmonious Overture [Stillness: Morning]-- [The Lowering Tide] --
Conflict: the Introduction of the Main Theme--
The Thematic Development through Parallelism [The Tide Out]--
[The Surging Tide]-- The Climax: the Intensified Conflict [The High Tide]--
The Anti-Climax: 'False' Harmony [Stillness: Night]²*

"At the Bay" has a harmonious opening; the first scene introduces an old shepherd, a Christ-like sage accompanied by his old sheep-dog which is like a faithful, devoted disciple. The shepherd is described as an ideal figure who can, like Kezia, Pat or the storeman in "Prelude," balance the two often antagonistic values: Aestheticism (art) and actual, daily living (life). The peaceful pastoral scene is immediately broken by the scene of the actual antagonism between art and life: the conflict between Jonathan, who represents Aestheticism and its free spirit, and Stanley, who represents materialism, utilitarianism, philistinism and conformism. Stanley is described as coarse, competitive, material, extremely energetic, but habitual and restless-- all these qualities of his seem to symbolize the blind drive of materialism destructive to humanity; Jonathan is, on the other hand, described as an unpractical, carefree, but rather frail and undisciplined Aesthete who might be eventually victimized and worn out by the force of life. The scene of this conflict is followed by that of another conflict: the conflict between man (patriarchal Stanley) and woman (especially Beryl); the scene raises feminist issues. The common metaphor of the following, juxtaposed sections-- the section of the children at the beach, the section of Beryl and Mrs. Kember, and the section for Linda's interior monologue-- is 'exploration' which signifies the free, Aesthetic spirit to go beyond geographical, and social boundaries. The children are fascinated by the idea of discovering the treasure of an ancient wreck; Mrs. Kember encourages Beryl to break the shell of a respectable middle-class girl (and, later, 'sends' her husband as her agent to lure her); Linda remembers her girlish dream of exploring the world with her father, and broods over her lack of self-realization. The subsequent section (the nap scene where Kezia and Mrs. Fairfield talk about death) throws a different light on the coherent theme of the story (freedom): it suggests our 'external' limitation: our innate, natural limitation which results from our mortality. The following, chronologically paralleled sections set late in the afternoon-- the section of Alice, of the children in the washhouse, and of Linda and Jonathan-- develop the theme of freedom; the common issue of these sections is our 'internal' limitations: our

already limited freedom is lessened by our lack of social and moral insight and our weakness, that is, our fear of freedom: we are likely to imprison ourselves. Alice, a working-class girl, tries to enjoy a little sense of privilege and freedom by pretending to be a middle-class girl; her pretence cannot liberate her; the middle-class affectation, on the contrary, suffocates her even more; besides, the idea of actual liberation which Mrs. Stubbs advocates causes her such an intense sense of insecurity that she misses her subordinate social status of a servant. The children shut themselves up in the washhouse so as to enjoy themselves fully; but as darkness falls they hate their lonely autonomy; their 'freedom' changes into alienation; they are willing to go back to their inferior status: the status ruled by the adult. The scene of Linda and Jonathan-- Jonathan's confession of his inability to break through his habitual existence-- intensifies the issue of voluntary imprisonment and forms a climax of the story. The section of Linda's 'reconciliation' with Stanley, that is, her compromise with 'life,' follows the climax; and the story, rather ambiguously, ends with Beryl's 'triumph over temptation,' which is, at the same time, interpreted as the act of imprisoning herself in the cell of the middle-class values. The 'false' harmony of the ending leaves the reader with uneasiness despite all the serene settings.¹³

3 The Theme

The main theme of "At the Bay" is freedom; it is, in the story, relevant to four themes: Aestheticism, our mortality (our ephemeral existence), feminist and class issues. Jonathan and Linda represent Aestheticism; the intensity of their Aesthetic longing for freedom is closely linked with their acute awareness of the ephemerality of their existence. The analyses of Linda, Beryl and Mrs. Kember illuminate the main theme (freedom) in connection with feminist and class issues. The juxtaposed sub-plots (that is, the children's and Alice's sections) and the parodic scenes clarify each major character's situation: one's freedom is restricted by one's conscious or unconscious act of imprisoning oneself as well as by one's mortality. The sea is a leitmotif of freedom: its expanse represents freedom; especially, the association of the sea with travelling (sailing) makes us notice that it represents the adventurer's longing for a strange land and his or her romantic, nomadic spirit.¹⁴

(1) Jonathan and Linda: Freedom and Aestheticism

Well! we are all condamnés, as Victor Hugo says: we are all under the sentence of death but with a sort of indefinite reprieve. . . : we have an interval, and then our place knows us no more. Some spend this interval in listlessness, some in high passions, the wisest, at least among "the children of this world," in art and song. For our one chance lies in expanding that interval, in getting as many pulsations as possible into the given time. . . . Only to be sure it is passion-- that it does yield you this fruit of a quickened, multiplied consciousness. Of such wisdom, the poetic passion, the desire of beauty, the love of art for its own sake, has most. (Pater The Renaissance)¹⁵

The ideals that we owe to Christ are the ideals of the man who abandons society entirely, or of the man who resists society absolutely. But man is naturally social. Even the Thebaid became peopled at last. And though the cenobite realizes his personality, it is often an impoverished personality that he so realizes. (Wilde "The Soul of Man Under Socialism")¹⁶

Stanley's materialism cannot appreciate Jonathan's Aesthetic attitude; Stanley, in the harshest moment, regards him as "an unpractical idiot"(209). Linda, who shares Aesthetic values, does justice to Jonathan; she finds his rejection of material values and his inclination to Aestheticism "attractive" (236):

It was strange to think that he was only an ordinary clerk, that Stanley earned twice as much money as he. What was the matter with Jonathan? He had no ambition; she supposed that was it. And yet one felt he was gifted, exceptional. He was passionately fond of music; every spare penny he had went on books. He was always full of new ideas, schemes, plans. But nothing came of it all. The new fire blazed in Jonathan; you almost heard it roaring softly as he explained, described and dilated on the new thing; but a moment later it had fallen in and there was nothing but ashes, and Jonathan went about with a look like hunger in his black eyes. At these times he exaggerated his absurd manner of speaking, and he sang in church-- he was the leader of the choir-- with such fearful dramatic intensity that the meanest hymn put on an unholy splendour. (236-7)

There is the parallelism between Jonathan and Linda: Jonathan is artistic; he is alienated from the dominant, material values of society, but he is not tough enough to revolt against these values and realize his Aesthetic vision. Art is, for him, double-edged. Jonathan's Aesthetic values give him a critical view of the accepted values and the status-quo; he does not, for example, approve of Stanley's voluntary conformity to materialism; he regards Stanley as its victim and even feels sorry for his self-torturing ambitions. Jonathan's Aestheticism is, however, like Linda's, introverted: artistic activities allow him to escape from the real confrontation with the grim, material force of 'life,' and relieve his bitter frustration temporarily; but they rather preserve his habitual existence than challenge it. His awareness of mortality (our ephemeral existence) intensifies his longing for the romantic and the aesthetic: his desire to explore his potential("To spend all the best years of one's life sitting on a stool from

nine to five, scratching in somebody's ledger! It's a queer use to make of one's...one and only life, isn't it?" [237]); his Aesthetic longing does not, however, give him any decisiveness to work for his aspirations: he is both attracted by and afraid of freedom.

The children's section juxtaposed with the section concerning Jonathan and Linda makes the reader notice the parallelism between the children, and Linda and Jonathan: the children's act of shutting themselves up in the washhouse is a comic parody of the introverted Aesthetic autonomy of Jonathan and Linda. Jonathan, for example, compares himself to "an insect that's flown into a room of its own accord" (237); and Kezia "want[s] to be a bee [a ninseck] frightfully"(232). The children imprison themselves in the dingy washhouse; they believe that their isolation will guarantee their freedom: the autonomy which, with no adult to interfere with them, enables them to "make as much noise as they [like]" (231). They enjoy aloneness and isolation just as Linda often wishes to be "alone" (221), until darkness reveals the real nature of their 'freedom': the freedom their isolation (their voluntary imprisonment) creates turns out to be alienation, that is, false freedom. Nightfall gives the children such an intense sense of insecurity that they do not care about freedom; they want adults to depend on; they even begin to blame the adults for letting them alone for so long: "Why doesn't somebody come and call us?" (235). Freedom is, in fact, demanding: no freedom is guaranteed without the actual confrontation and negotiation with the oppressor; one must risk one's security and comfort. The children give up their little revolt and return to the ruled status; they now *prefer* the original form of imprisonment to freedom. Alice's situation parallels the children's; her section juxtaposed with the children's section provides another parody of the situation of Jonathan and Linda. The role-playing of a respectable middle-class girl, that is, her 'acting' of "keeping up her 'manners,'" wears her out (229): it, far from liberating her, limits her; it only gives her another moral imprisonment. Mrs. Stubbs's expression ("Freedom is best!"), as if it were the political call for revolution, makes her feel so insecure and helpless that she feels like giving up her 'adventure,' that is, her timid attempt of crossing the social border, and returning to her habitual, subordinate existence: "Her mind flew back to her own kitching. Ever so queer! She wanted to be back in it again" (231).

Jonathan is aware of his weakness; but the force of 'life' seems to overwhelm him and rob him of spirit. His confession makes his dilemma explicit:

He rolled over on the grass and looked up Linda. ". . . I'm like an insect that's flown into a room of its own accord. I dash against the walls, dash against the windows, flop against the ceiling, do everything on God's earth, in fact, except fly out again. And all the while I'm thinking, like that moth, or that butterfly, or whatever it is, 'The shortness of life! The shortness of life! I've only one night or one day, and there's this vast dangerous garden,

waiting out there, undiscovered, unexplored." " Why don't I leave the office? Why don't I seriously consider, this moment, for instance, what it is that prevents me leaving? It's not as though I'm tremendously tied. I've two boys to provide for, but, after all, they're boys. I could cut off to sea, or get a job up-country, or--" Suddenly he smiled at Linda and said in a changed voice, as if he were confiding a secret, "Weak... weak. No stamina. No anchor. No guiding principle, let us call it." (237-8)

Jonathan's resignation and lack of moral strength to break himself away from his stable, yet habitual way of living make a clear contrast with the firm decisiveness of Linda's baby-boy and Kezia-- Jonathan's movement of "roll[ing] over the grass" and "look[ing] up Linda"(he is behaving like Linda's little boy) is a parody of the baby's and Kezia's. The boy and Kezia show their high spirit and unyielding determination:

He [the baby-boy] was serious again. Something pink, something soft waved in front of him. He made a grab at it and it immediately disappeared. But when he lay back, another, like first, appeared. *This time he determined to catch it. He made a tremendous effort and rolled right over.*

.....
 "We are not asked, Kezia," she [Mrs. Fairfield] sadly. "It [death] happened to all of us sooner or later."

Kezia lay still thinking this over. She didn't want to die. It meant she would have to leave here, leave everywhere, for ever, leave-- leave her grandma. *She rolled over quickly.*

"Grandma," she said in a startled voice.

"What, my pet!"

"*You're not to die.*" *Kezia was very decided.* (Emphases added except for "You're," 224, 226-7)

The baby's act of trying to reach something "imaginary" and perhaps unattainable ("something soft, something pink waved in front of him") symbolizes Aestheticism-- the reader notices that this scene and Jonathan's scene share the same imagery: the boy's passion for butterfly-like "something pink, something soft [falling petals]" could be associated with Jonathan's reference to a "butterfly" or a "moth" (237). Kezia's "Australian Uncle William" was an explorer whose dream was interrupted by his premature, unexpected death (226); he, in Kezia's section, represents a romantic longing for freedom and self-realization, adventurous spirit and our *limited* freedom resulting from our mortality. Kezia's vision of his death-- "A little man fallen over like a tin soldier by the side of a big black hole" of the mine-- seems to emphasize our ephemeral existence (226): human beings are like tin soldiers from God's or omniscient point of view. Although it is their childlike innocence and lack of experience that make them believe that nothing is impossible, the high spirit of the baby-boy and Kezia is a revelation: it seems to challenge the adult's easy, yet reluctant resignation. The baby-boy's firm determination and Kezia's spirited, bold attitude (she even challenges death) throw a critical light on Jonathan's essentially dilettantish introversion.

Jonathan is, like Linda, wasting his artistic talent and, perhaps, his life-- his frustration makes him speak in an "exaggerated," "absurd" manner and sing in church in a Wagnerian manner, that is, "with such fearful dramatic intensity that the meanest hymn put[s] on an unholy splendour" (237). His indecisiveness and lack of tenacity parallel Lottie's dependent, cowardly attitude. she longs to swim but is too afraid of the overwhelming expanse of the sea; the dynamic, often unpredictable, free movement of the waves scares her: Lottie "[sits] down at the edge of the water" and "make[s] vague motions with her arms as if she expected to be wafted out to sea"; nevertheless, "when a bigger wave than usual, an old whiskery one, [comes] lolloping along in her direction, she scramble[s] to her feet with a face of horror and [flies] up the beach again" (217).

Jonathan is immensely attracted to the sea; it calls for freedom and Aesthetic Epicureanism he longs for; waves, at the beginning of the story, seem to assure his belief that one should live "carelessly, recklessly, spending oneself"; that one should "take things easy," "not to fight against the ebb and flow of life" but "give way to it" (209). Yet the following description seems to suggest the limitations of Jonathan's self-indulgent Aestheticism:

But now he was out of the water Jonathan turned blue with cold. He ached all over; *it was as though someone was wringing the blood out of him.* And stalking up the beach, shivering, all his muscles, he too [like Stanley] felt his bathe was spoilt. *He'd stayed in too long.* (Emphases added 209)

The sea of freedom contains the danger of aimless self-indulgence: self-indulgence may distract his attention from personal and social restrictions temporarily but in fact perpetuates his repression and frustration. His confession to Linda seems to make him realize the fact that there is no self-realization or freedom without confrontation: Aestheticism, in fact, especially in a society where material values are dominant, requires enormous strength. Aestheticism is different from self-indulgence; it is also different from introverted Aesthetic autonomy: Aestheticism requires one to be radical *and* tough; one needs to challenge social and moral limitations in order to realize one's Aesthetic desire.

(2) The Freedom in Relation to Feminism and Class:
Linda, Mrs. Harry Kember and Beryl

The issue of the woman's liberation is raised at the early stage of the story (at the third section); the section begins with Beryl's little rebellion against Stanley, the patriarch of the family: she refuses to serve him. As soon as Stanley, a helpless king, finally leaves for his office after his great clamour and fuss about such a trivial matter

as finding his stick, the air of freedom pervades the house: all the female characters-- Beryl, Linda, Mrs. Fairfield, the children (the litter girls) and Alice-- are all "thankful" and "glad to be rid of him" (212); the tense, stifling household changes into the women's little, cosy community:

Oh, the relief, the difference it made to have the man out of the house. Their very voices were changed as they called to one another; they sounded warm and loving and as if they shared a secret. . . . There was no man to disturb them; the whole perfect day was theirs. . . . The little girls ran into the paddock like chickens let out of a coop. . . .

"Oh, these men!" said she [Alice], and she plunged the teapot into the bowl and held it under the water even after it had stopped bubbling, as if it too was a man and drowning was too good for them. (213)

The reader associates some major symbols of the story with feminist and class issues. The sea represents woman; the tide and flow of the sea are affected not only by the sun but also by the moon: another metaphor of woman-- the name of the bay where the Burnells stay during summer is *Crescent Bay*; it is doubly suggestive of the feminist theme of the story. The sea, the origin of life, may be associated with the womb, especially amniotic fluid. Beryl, as a noun, refers to a precious stone (emerald); Beryl has an emerald ring; its blue-green colour is that of the sea. The sea may refer to the woman's liberation; the woman does not have to wear 'stays' and tight clothes in the sea.

The cat is a symbol of the carefree, leisured middle-class; the movements of Beryl, Alice and Mrs. Stubbs (the two working-class women play the middle-class), and Harry Kember, a handsome young gigolo, are compared to the cat's; especially, the personified cat Florrie (the Burnells' cat) represents Beryl's middle-class prejudices and materialism-- the cat has the "greengage" (beryl) eyes (239); Florrie's pretentious, haughty attitude towards the working-class (the sheep dog) coincides with Beryl's:

When she saw the old sheep-dog she sprang up quickly, arched her back, drew in her tabby head, and seemed to give a little fastidious shiver. "Ugh! What a coarse, revolting creature!" said Florrie. But the old sheep-dog, not looking up, waggled past, flinging out his legs from side to side. Only one of his ears twitched to prove that he saw, and thought her a silly young female. (207)

Florrie does not feed herself; all she does is wait idly for the milk-girl to feed her. Despite her material dependence, Florrie ridicules the hard-working sheep-dog who does not, ironically enough, even take trouble to look at her-- the cat's conceit and arrogance *are* mocked. Her class prejudice forms the exact parallel of Beryl's overt prejudice against the working-class girl (as well as her racial prejudice):

Beryl, sitting in the window, fanning her freshly washed hair, thought she had never seen such a guy [Alice who is dressed in rather a tasteless way]. If Alice had only blacked her face with a piece of cork before she started out

the picture would have been complete. And where did a girl like that go to in a place like this? The heart-shaped Fijian fan beat scornfully at that lovely bright mane. She supposed Alice had picked up some horrible common larrikin and they'd go off into the bush together. Pity to make herself so conspicuous; they'd have hard work to hide with Alice in that rig-out. (228)

The description of Beryl as well as the description of Florrie seems to reveal the exploitative psychology of the privileged: Beryl and Florrie can ignore the fact that their leisured existence depends on others' servitude; they can take their exploitation for granted. Beryl's 'exotic' Fijian fan seems to symbolize the middle-class luxury and matter-of-fact exploitation.

The cat represents Beryl's longing for freedom, too: her love of night and love of being on her own parallel Beryl's love of night and love of freedom. Florrie: "Thank goodness, the long day is over.' Her greengage eyes opened" (239). Beryl: "Why does one feel so different at night? . . . Late-- it is very late! And yet every moment you feel more and more wakeful, as though you were slowly, almost with every breath, waking up into a new, wonderful, far more thrilling and exciting world than the daylight one"(241).

"At the Bay" makes the reader view the issues of freedom from a feminist and class perspective as well as from an Aesthetic perspective; the reader notices, besides the parallelism between Linda and Jonathan, several other parallel relationships among the characters. There is the parallelism between Linda and Beryl: they long for freedom and independence, but neither of them can go beyond the limitations of the middle-class values. Beryl is even more conventional than Linda-- Linda, as a mature, married woman, questions the conventional views of the woman, while Beryl, as a young girl, dreams that marriage will liberate her materially and morally; she overlooks the fact that 'respectable' marriage imprisons women; that she has to *serve* her husband. Also, Beryl's character contains contradictory values: she is, although romantic and imaginative, very practical, material and tough; the reader, here, notices the parallelism between Beryl and Stanley. The relationship between Alice and Mrs. Stubbs is a parody of Beryl and Mrs. Harry Kember; both Mrs. Stubbs and Mrs. Harry Kember play the role of the feminist agitator; Alice shrinks away from freedom; Beryl feels bold but eventually shrinks from it. The reader might see the parallelism between Linda and Mrs. Kember: Mrs. Kember appears to be liberated from conventions; but she is, like Linda, frustrated and lacks spirit.

[i] Linda

Linda's frustration revealed by her interior monologue in "At the Bay" is as intense

as in "Prelude"; but the reader notes the difference between Linda in "Prelude" and Linda in "At the Bay": she now seems to attempt to 'reconcile' her Aesthetic, feminist urges with 'life'; she tries to adjust herself to the status-quo.

Although her deep "grudge" against the conventional 'responsibilities' of the woman (222), especially, child-bearing and parental responsibilities, prevents her from loving her children, her baby-boy's innocence touches her; she feels like reconciling herself with the role of a mother; she seems to expect that her new affection for the baby-boy will fill her hollowness:

"I'm here!" that happy smile [of the baby] seemed to say. "Why don't you like me?"

There was something so quaint, so unexpected about that smile that Linda smiled herself. But she checked herself and said to the boy coldly, "I don't like babies."

"Don't like babies?" The boy couldn't believe her. "Don't like *me*?" He waved his arms foolishly at his mother.

Linda dropped off her chair on to the grass.

"Why do you keep on smiling?" she said severely. "If you knew what I am thinking about, you wouldn't."

But he only squeezed up his eyes, slyly, and rolled his head on the pillow. He didn't believe a word she said.

"We know all about that!" smiled the boy.

Linda was so astonished at the confidence of this little creature.... Ah, no, be sincere. That was not what she felt; it was something far different, it was something so new, so... The tears danced in her eyes; she breathed in a small whisper to the boy,

"Hallo, my funny!" (223)

The scene, however, ends with irony; the ending gives the reader the impression that Linda's awakened love is, as it were, nipped in the bud: by the time when Linda's motherly affection awakes and responds to his innocent trust in her, he has "forgotten his mother" and has been absorbed in his own business (224): their interaction is not successful. If Linda attempts to substitute him for her self-realization; if she tries to fulfill herself through her motherly devotion to the boy, her attempt is bound to end in failure: the baby-boy is, after all, an independent creature; she has to face the fact that he is not born to please her (or others).

Jonathan's confession works as a mirror that reflects her own situation: it makes her confirm the fact that she herself is, in spite of her Aesthetic desire for freedom and self-realization, as "weak" as Jonathan, and has "no stamina," "no anchor" or "no guiding principle" (238); and she will never change just as he will "never change" (239)-- the brief silence after Jonathan's speech is their silent communion: Jonathan and Linda become aware of their common soul and weakness. This awareness brings a state of reconciliation to her; she goes back under Stanley's wings without bitterness: witnessing Jonathan's weakness seems to lead her to a conclusion that it is no use

longing for freedom if one does not have the strength freedom requires. Her restlessness is gone; she feels serene; the tide is full: "now no sound came from the sea. It breathed softly as if it would draw that tender, joyful beauty into its own bosom" (239). The section of Linda and Jonathan shifts to that of reconciliation between Stanley and Linda; the shift suggests not only her emotional shift from Jonathan to Stanley but her moral shift from 'art' to 'life.'

The last scene of the section (of Stanley and Linda), however, makes the reader suspect that this seemingly perfect reconciliation is only a 'mood'; that Linda's temporarily subdued suffering *will* come back to her just like the tide of the sea. Stanley in this section is "*her* Stanley," "a timid, sensitive, innocent Stanley" who cannot be "disloyal," and who "long[s] to be good" (222): the Stanley Linda fell in love with. Stanley is affectionate, very much repentant of his "punishment" to Linda which Linda herself did not even notice or cannot remember (212). (The lost stick made him feel so cross that he left home without saying "Good-bye" to her.) The "punishment" punishes him, not Linda; his repentance of the childish act suffers him all day. The section, nevertheless, ends with 'hard' Stanley:

Stanley wanted to say, "I was thinking of you the whole time I bought them [the gloves]." It was true, but for some reason he couldn't say it. "Let's go in," said he. (241)

His reaction seems to prove the accuracy of Linda's comment that she now "[sees] *her* Stanley so seldom"(222). Hectic, workaholic, restless Stanley who demands Linda's constant, full devotion and servitude is prevailing against 'soft' Stanley. The ending of the section clouds Linda's serenity and reveals the ephemeral quality of her reconciliation.

[ii] Mrs. Harry Kamber

Beryl is attracted to Mrs. Harry Kember whose unconventionality Mrs. Fairfield disapproves of; what attracts Beryl most is Mrs. Kember's decadent, rebellious pose of 'a new woman.'¹⁷ Mrs. Kember does not care about playing the role of the 'respectable' middle-class woman: she smokes; she uses "slang"; she does not "care two pence about her house"; she has no children; she treats her servant as if she were a friend; she regards men as her equals; she is rich and feeding her "so incredibly handsome," "at least ten years younger" husband (218); and she does not care about her husband's practice of free love.

The reader notices a parallelism between Mrs. Kember and Linda. Although there are differences between the two characters, they have something in common. Both of them question the socially imposed female roles, although Mrs. Kember looks far more

advanced. Mrs. Kember is assertive of her frustration, whereas Linda is introverted and repressive: she overtly challenges Victorian conventionality and conformism while Linda still keeps the 'respectable' appearance of a traditional married woman. Mrs. Kember is, nevertheless, still suffering from the lack of self-realization. Linda feels that her life is being wasted; Mrs. Kember appears to be wasting herself aimlessly. Mrs. Kember, like Linda, feels "cold": "She could stand any amount of it [sunshine]; she never had enough" (218). Mrs. Kember seems to be revolting against the conventionality for the sake of revolt; her rebellion is like a childish act of perversity: she takes rebellious attitude and almost bullies herself in order to get rid of her deeper frustration. She strikes Beryl as "exhausted-looking," "burnt out" and "withered" (218). She smokes "incessantly"; she kills her time either by playing bridge "everyday of her life," or by "lying in the full glare of the sun" like "a piece of tossed-up driftwood" (218). Her material independence might have given her the nerve to break through the conventions, but material freedom does not necessarily promise moral freedom. Despite her radical pose, she is another, middle-class, leisured woman; she has nothing to do but killing her time; she has no aspirations or vision. The lack of aspirations prevents her from breaking away from the habitual existence; it, as it were, imprisons her-- here, her situation makes a contrast with Linda's. Linda has Aesthetic aspirations but has no strength or spirit or economic means to realize her potential. Mrs. Kember's indolent self-indulgence drains her energy away; she is like a "driftwood" or a wrecked boat in the sea of freedom.

[iii] Beryl

Beryl's interior monologue shows that she is the mixture of the genuine and the material-- the reader can see the parallelism between Beryl and Stanley. Her girlish vision and idea of marriage reveal her young romanticism as well as her middle-class materialism:

It is lonely living by oneself. . . . She wants someone who will find the Beryl they none of them [friends and relations] know, who will expect her to be that Beryl always. She wants a lover. (242)

.
 You see, it's so frightfully difficult when you are nobody [not to be a prude]. You're so at the mercy of things. You can't just be rude. And you've always this horror of seeming inexperienced and stuffy like the other ninnies at the Bay. And-- and it's fascinating to know you've power over people. Yes, that is fascinating.... (242-3)

Marriage means to Beryl the freedom from loneliness (the girlish dream of meeting someone who appreciates who she is), the liberation from economic dependence, at least her independence from the Burnells, and the realization of her material pursuit,

that is, the rise of social and economic status through 'respectable' marriage.

Mrs. Harry Kember shakes Beryl's conventional values; she is like Lord Henry (another 'Harry') who spoils Dorian Gray and encourages him in self-indulgence. Mrs. Kember urges her not to be "a prude": "I believe in pretty girls having a good time. . . . Why not? Don't you make a mistake, my dear. Enjoy yourself" (220). Mrs. Kember's 'liberal' influence does not, nevertheless, affect the depth of Beryl's soul; for Beryl is, as the latter half of quotation shows, realistic and practical: she is aware of the fact that material means will give her the basis for moral freedom; and that Mrs. Kember's social privilege (wealth) allows her to rebel against social conventions: bad reputation does not damage Mrs. Kember's independence while it can be fatal to the independence of Beryl, a girl without means whose economic 'dependence' entirely relies on 'good' marriage. It is, therefore, the natural flow of Beryl's logic to reject the seduction of the man who cannot be her Prince Charming.

However, when Harry Kember, as if he were his wife's agent, tries to lure her, she becomes ambivalent.¹⁸ She is tempted; the conversation between Harry Kember and Beryl sounds like the conflict between her two different inner voices-- the scene is described as such: the narrator does not introduce Harry Kember immediately; she introduces only his 'voice' at first; Harry Kember is rather a symbolical character than a substantial one. The young girl's romanticism is two-fold: it contains her genuine, platonic longing for her 'half' and her physical desire (the liberation of sexual urge); 'Romance' is a sexual love sublimated by the genuine, platonic aspirations. Her romanticism intensified both by Mrs. Kember's influence and by the bewitching mood of the still, moonlit night makes her feel adventurous and reckless; it encourages the liberation of her sexual urge. Yet the scene is ambiguous. Beryl's inner struggle is not simply the conflict between her materialism and her romanticism-- her sexual urge tries to conquer her material pursuit. It also represents the conflict between middle-class conventions (the Victorian social restrictions of the young woman) and the urge for freedom (especially, sexual liberation), the conflict between her sexual urge and her platonic longing, the power struggle between men and women, and the conflict between self-indulgence and freedom:

His smile was something she'd never seen before. Was he drunk? That bright, blind, terrifying smile froze her with horror. What was she doing? How had she got here? The stern garden asked her as the gate pushed open, and quick as a cat Harry Kember came through and snatched her to him.

"Cold little devil! Cold little devil!" said the hateful voice.

But Beryl was strong. She slipped, ducked, wrenched free.

"You are vile, vile," said she.

"Then why in God's name did you come?" stammered Harry Kember.

Nobody answered him. (244-5)

The quotation reveals both Beryl's merits and limitations. The moonlit garden, at first, embodies the vision of adventure and freedom, that is, Jonathan's "this vast dangerous garden, waiting out there, undiscovered and unexplored" (237); its dark side ("a little pit of darkness beneath the fuchsia bush" [244]) seems to symbolize sexual temptation. Beryl's dominant feeling in the scene is fear: she is not only afraid of her unknown sexual experience, but of breaking the Victorian moral code of sexuality. The garden reflects her conventional self as well: her consciousness transforms it into "the stern garden" which represents suffocating conventional morality: "Thou shalt not" of Blake's "The Garden of Love." The garden accuses her of her bold conduct. Beryl's escape from Harry Kember, in a sense, signifies her moral limitations: her refusal signifies her act of moral imprisonment. However, she is "strong," too: she refuses to yield to blind sexual urge and Harry Kember's male power; she outsmarts him and maintains her 'freedom' (at least she does not become an easy victim of this womanizer); her refusal proves that she has the spirit and resilient will which freedom requires. The situation is still ambiguous: her strength is perhaps reinforced by her romanticism *and* materialism; she rejects Harry Kember because he is neither her platonic 'half' nor her Prince Charming who offers her a privileged status. The last scene of the section (and of the story) following this scene is symbolical; it seems to suggest to the reader the distinction between freedom and self-indulgence.

A cloud, small, serene, floated across the moon. In that moment of darkness the sea sounded deep, troubled. Then the cloud sailed away, and the sound of the sea was a vague murmur, as though it waked out of a dark dream. All was still. (245)

The scene seems to retell Beryl's little adventure symbolically and offer the reader an interpretation of the incident. A "small," "serene" cloud seems to symbolizes the handsome seducer (Harry Kember); or, even more figuratively, Beryl's "dark" side of romanticism that responds to sexual temptation. The moon symbolizes woman (Beryl); the sea symbolizes the woman's freedom. The woman's sexual liberation is closely connected with her freedom; but "blind" submission to sexual desire is self-indulgence, that is, the slavery of desire(-- note that Harry Kember's seductive smile is "bright," "blind" and "terrifying"); it jeopardizes freedom. The danger of self-indulgence makes the sea "[sound] deep, troubled" and when the danger is gone, "the sound of the sea" is "a vague murmur, as though it waked out of a dark dream." Beryl keeps her conventionality; but at least she seems to break Mrs. Kember's dazzling, misguiding spell.

(3) Materialism vs. Aestheticism

. . . the recognition of private property has really harmed Individualism, and obscured it, by confusing a man with what he possesses. It has led Individualism entirely astray. It has made gain, not growth, its aim. So that man thought that the important thing was to have, and did not know that the important thing is to be. The true perfection of man lies, not in what man has, but in what man is. Private property has crushed true Individualism, and set up an Individualism that is false. . . .

With the abolition of private property, then, we shall have true, beautiful, healthy Individualism. Nobody will waste his life in accumulating things, and the symbols for things. One will live. To live is the rarest thing in the world. Most people exist, that is all. ("The Soul of Man Under Socialism")¹⁹

The broken green glass ("a nermal") Pip finds in the sand of the beach is the symbol of Aestheticism (216): the children, the little "explorers"(214), believe that it is from the treasure box of an ancient wreck. Kezia observes:

The lovely green thing seemed to dance in Pip's fingers. Aunt Beryl had a nermal in a ring, but it was a very small one. This one was as big as a star and far more beautiful. (216)

From material point of view, Beryl's emerald is, though small, far more precious because it is a *real* thing; the children's "nermal" is, on the other hand, worthless because it is a false, *imaginary* emerald: a mere broken bottle glass fantasized by their imagination. Kezia, however, believes that their "nermal" is more real: it is "as big as a star and far more beautiful" than Beryl's: Aesthetic values surpass material values. Beryl's emerald is materialistically valid but still limited since it has the price; the children's "nermal" is priceless: it is the "one and only" thing one *cannot* sell(237); it is as unlimited as one's imagination can be.

Materialism is represented by Stanley; he may be viewed as an oppressor; yet, the oppressor is not free, either. All the major characters of the story imprison themselves voluntarily; Stanley is no exception. His own interior monologue, Jonathan's observation and Linda's view of Stanley tell the reader that his materialism-- his carving for worldly success; or his enormous passion for owning things and "the symbols for things" (Wilde 363)-- is victimizing his being. Stanley's patriarchal existence is a nuisance for the female members of the family, whereas he feels they are unfair: that they do not serve him enough while he, like a ~~worker bee~~, sacrifices himself for them enormously: "The heartlessness of women! The way they took it for granted it was your job to slave away for them" (212). Jonathan comments on Stanley's workaholic attitude: "There was something pathetic in his determination to make a job of everything. You couldn't help feeling he'd be caught out one day, and then what an almighty cropper he'd come!" (209) Stanley's ambition throws him "in the thick of the danger"; he is helpless without Linda, who must spend "her whole time" in "rescuing," "restoring," "calming him down" and "listening to his story"(222).

Materialism is destructive; it mars humanity. It impairs the 'soft,' tender nature of Stanley and Beryl; it hinders Jonathan and Linda from realizing Aestheticism by wearing down their energy and spirit; it expels Jonathan, Linda and Mrs. Kember to introverted Aesthetic alienation or to the barren cell of self-indulgence. The shepherd is the only character who is perfectly free from this dominant, grim force; he is more a symbolic character than a realistic one: he symbolizes the utopian harmony of Aestheticism (art) and actual living (life). The shepherd in the first scene of the story, like the storeman and Pat in "Prelude," represents a Christ-like sage and Wildean Aesthete; he has no coarseness of Stanley, Mrs. Stubbs or the Samuel Josephs; he does not care about luxury or owning private property, but appreciates beauty; he is a hard-working, independent man who loves his job:

He was a lean, upright old man, in a frieze coat that was covered with a web of tiny drops, velvet trousers tied under the knee, and a wideawake with a folded blue handkerchief round the brim. One hand was crammed into his belt, the other grasped a beautifully smooth yellow stick. And as he walked, taking his time, he kept up a very soft light whistling, an airy, far-away fluting that sounded mournful and tender. . . . The shepherd drew a pipe, the bowl as small as an acorn, out of his breast-pocket, fumbled for a chunk of speckled tobacco, pared off a few shavings and stuffed the bowl. He was a grave, fine-looking, old man. As he lit up and the blue smoke wreathed his head, the dog, watching, looked proud of him. (207)

His "lean, upright" posture has a natural dignity; everything about him is described as both practical *and* beautiful-- the two values are well-balanced, not antagonistic. His "velvet trousers" perhaps neatly "tied under the knee," his "wideawake with a folded blue handkerchief round the brim" and his well-used "beautifully smooth yellow stick" show no luxury but how he appreciates and cherishes the beauty of his few old belongings and how much care he takes of them. His "soft," "tender" whistle shows his appreciation of music. His slow but steady way of walking and the easy but precise movement of stuffing the bowl of the pipe shows the serenity of his mind and adds beauty to his being. He has an aura of Aestheticism which makes his faithful sheep-dog feel "proud of him": "the blue smoke wreathed his head" is almost like his natural halo. He seems to belong to the 'Nowhere' materialism cannot reach. The contrast and the gap between the ideal character embodied by the shepherd and the other major characters who are more or less trapped and crushed by the material force seem to reveal Mansfield's social awareness; the story, as an effect, illuminates the extent of materialism: how far the existing values and system affect our being; how much they restrict our moral faculties and limit our potential.

Notes

¹ Ian A. Gordon regards many other stories as relevant to the Burnells. See his classification of Mansfield's stories in *Undiscovered Country*.

² See Murry's editorial comment, *Journal of K.M.* 262.

³ I will discuss the Symbolist themes and structure of "Bliss" in Chapter Six.

⁴ See Vincent O'Sullivan, ed., *The Aloe: With Prelude*. The book enables the reader to trace Mansfield's editorial hand.

⁵ Goldwater 72-114.

⁶ There are several interpretations as for what the aloe symbolizes: Clare Hanson and Andrew Gurr comment: "That its exact 'meaning' has never been agreed on is evidence of its continuing power to stir and disturb the imagination of the reader." They introduce one dominant, psychoanalytical interpretation that "the aloe is either a 'phallic tree of knowledge,' or an image of female sexuality, especially attractive to Linda because of its infrequency of bearing." Their "more inclusive and flexible reading" is that the aloe symbolizes "the fundamental life-force itself, including sexual force," more precisely, "the essential will or energy" represented by Kezia and Linda who "are capable of penetrating to the deeper issues of life." This interpretation is close to mine; but I disagree with their view that Linda has the "essential will or energy" to realize herself: my interpretation is that Linda is "capable of penetrating to the deeper issues" but not capable of "flowering" herself. See Hanson and Gurr 51-2.

⁷ Wilde 29

⁸ Hanson and Gurr, and Sydney Janet Kaplan suggest different views on this scene of slaughtering the bird. Hanson and Gurr interpret the bird as a symbol of Linda's freedom; therefore, the slaughter of the bird signifies the merciless deprivation of her freedom by Pat, Stanley's "surrogate." They at the same time point out that the scene is given a counter-image: that the bird represents Stanley (-- Linda calls him 'a big fat turkey'): that the act of killing the bird is "an objectified expression of a repressed desire of hers": the "castration" of Stanley. See Hanson and Gurr 53-4. Kaplan interprets the bird as a symbol of a woman (Linda); the fact that Pat cuts off the head of the bird means to cut off Linda's head; that male dominance plots the annihilation of female intellect: "To lose the head-- mind, intellect, consciousness-- is to participate in women's fate as contracted in masculine definitions of women's position in relation to civilization "(117).

⁹ I will discuss Linda's 'new-womanness' later in the following section (on "At the Bay") in connection with Mrs. Kember.

¹⁰ Hanson and Gurr calls the lamp in "Prelude" "spiritual light"; they also refer to the recurrence of the image in "The Doll's House." As for the symbolic function of the lamp in "The Doll's House," see Hanson and Gurr 128; also Kinoshita 10.

¹¹ My view of Kezia's diminished role in "At the Bay" coincides with that of Clare Hanson and Andrew Gurr: they point out: "The balance of attention has shifted from young Kezia's expanding world to the strained experience of the adults. This shift is reflected in the structure: in "At the Bay" only two episodes are given to the children, as opposed to five in *Prelude*." See Clare Hanson and Andrew Gurr 100.

¹² Hanson and Gurr point out the Biblical allusion and structure: they maintain:

"the passage from dawn to dusk suggests in "At the Bay" man's journey from prelapsarian innocence (the first person to appear on the scene at dawn is, we note, the shepherd); to the fall, with the introduction of sexual difference and conflict. . .; to intimations of redemption in the scene between Linda and Jonathan. . .; then back to a major source of discord in the sexual encounter between Beryl and Harry Kember." See Hanson and Gurr 101.

¹³ Hanson's and Gurr's argument shows that they, on the whole, disapprove of the Aesthetic (or romantic) longing Linda and Jonathan represent; but Hanson and Gurr, in a way, refer to the story's 'false' harmony in ~~the~~ book; they equate its hidden disharmony with that of "The Garden-Party"; they maintain: "Both stories seek, largely through the harmony which they themselves create, to overcome a deeply divisive sense of conflict and discord. The effort to 'see through' discontinuity is one which author and reader (and the characters) undertake alike in these stories." See Hanson and Gurr 105-6.

¹⁴ Hanson and Gurr present a different interpretation on what the sea signifies: they interpret the sea as the symbol of self-indulgence, and the land as the symbol of self-discipline: "The land represents control over one's life; the sea represents a yielding to mystery and incalculability which can lead to an undesirable loss of self-determination." See Hanson and Gurr 100-1.

¹⁵ Pater *The Renaissance* 190.

¹⁶ Wilde 387.

¹⁷ The definition of 'a new woman' might vary; but the common characteristic of the 'new' woman must be her unconventionality: her anti-Victorian attitude. According to Juliet Gardiner, "the representation of the 'New Woman,' in life and literature with her demands for education, economic independence and sexual equality-- and soon for the vote-- offered a challenge and a threat to the established order. She threw certainties into dispute, threatened to disrupt family life as the Victorians liked to believe they had known it, and played the lord of misrule in a world turned upside-down by her demands." See Gardiner 6-7. Mrs. Kember does not seem to be interested in women's suffrage; but her anti-Victorian attitude and consciousness is the new woman's.

¹⁸ Hanson and Gurr point out that Harry Kember is "a kind of double of his wife." See Hanson and Gurr 105.

¹⁹ Wilde 362-3.

Chapter 6: Symbolist Theme and Structure in "Bliss"

"Bliss" is Katherine Mansfield's "most ambiguous," "most controversial" story (Neaman 117; Dunbar 128). Clare Hanson and Andrew Gurr, in *Katherine Mansfield* (1981), summarize the critical trends in analyses of "Bliss" :

"Bliss" has been much commented on, and its sexual theme in particular much debated by critics. There are two kinds of reservation about the story. Some readers have found it "disagreeable" or "cruel" [Bowen 17; Drabble 135], while others have found it shallow, most notably Virginia Woolf who described the story as "not the vision of an interesting mind" [*The Diaries of Virginia Woolf*, vol. 1,179]. (59)

As for 'cruelty,' a negative response comes from Elaine Showalter as well: Showalter somewhat distorts Drabble's not entirely disapproving remark on the cruelty characteristic of Mansfield's fiction. (Drabble concludes: "Some of her [Mansfield's] stories, and *this is no mean tribute*, one never forgets. And it is no accident that her most memorable are her most cruel. . . . There are . . . Miss Brill and the Kelvey girls, portrayed from *a mixture of cruelty and pity which preserved them for all time. It is a lasting achievement* [emphases added 135].) Showalter maintains that Mansfield's harsh treatment (or 'punishment') of the female protagonist reflects her yielding to dominant male values (her self-hatred and anxieties): a collective psychological tendency typical of "the last generation of Victorian women novelists" (240). Showalter claims:

The female aesthetic was to become another form of self-annihilation for women writers, rather than a way of self-realization. . . . One feels overwhelmingly that the women are punished. . . , punished for their innocence, for their self-betrayal, for their willingness to become victims. . . . In the short stories of Katherine Mansfield, the moment of self-awareness is also the moment of self-betrayal. Typically, a woman in her fiction who steps across the threshold into a new understanding of womanhood is humiliated, or destroyed. . . . In "Bliss," for example, Bertha's recognition that the feeling she calls "bliss," the "fire in her bosom," is sexual ardor, is quickly followed by her discovery of her husband's adultery. (240, 246)

Showalter's feminist 'aesthetic' and politics focus on the full depiction of a flawless feminist female protagonist; that is, the fictional female figure should be a role model of the female audience; any negative description should be judged as the author's moral and aesthetic limitations. However, to view the woman writer's literary works simply as a projection of her psychology or her practical negotiation (or compromise) with her political and social restrictions seems to be one-sided; to regard the protagonist as the author's spokesperson is too naïve and uncritical; to judge the literary value chiefly by the degree of the female character's liberation is dogmatic. Showalter's "aesthetic" and reading sound flat: the literary criteria expressed in *A Literature of their Own* make, it

seems to me, the ambiguity of literary text somewhat simplistic, and interpretation rigid. Also, her yardstick for the evaluation of the political potential of literary writing must be re-examined.

As for the charge of the 'shallowness' of "Bliss," T. S. Eliot more or less shares Woolf's view that "her [Mansfield's] mind [manifest in "Bliss"] is a very thin soil, laid an inch or two deep upon very barren rock" (179). While Eliot evaluates its "poetic quality" highly, he judges the story as morally "limited" (36):

In *Bliss*, I should say, the moral implication is negligible: . . . We are given neither comment nor suggestion of any moral issue of good and evil, and within the setting this is quite right. The story is limited to this sudden change of feeling, and the moral and social ramifications are outside of the terms of reference. (35-6)

It seems that these two eminent Modernist writers, as far as the reading of "Bliss" is concerned, fail to be good Modernist readers. That the protagonist's narrative is full of emotion and impressions does not mean that the story does not contain moral issues: the protagonist's views do not always represent the author's, for there is always the moral 'distance' between the narrator (the narrator-agent) and the author. Woolf's and Eliot's criticism of "Bliss" ~~are~~ the criticism of the narrator-agent (Bertha), not that of the whole story.

Hanson and Gurr attribute the charge of 'shallowness' to critics' lack of appreciation of the Symbolist narrative of 'Bliss': especially in response to Woolf's comment, "[t]he appeal of "Bliss" is precisely not to or from 'the mind.' . . . meaning is disclosed in 'Bliss' entirely through the disposition of language and image in a highly organized, tangibly affective text" (59).¹ The two negative responses ('shallowness' and 'cruelty') are also due to the absence of the authorial voice and the apparent absence of any guiding morality in the story: Hanson and Gurr suggest:

Katherine Mansfield effaces the narrator-figure as nearly as possible, leaving the text and its network of images to "speak for itself." The absence of a controlling 'metalanguage' to direct our responses may consequently create a sense of moral or ethical vacuum. Again, close reading is necessary *for the appreciation of the technique of muted direction which gives the story its very definite moral edge.* (Emphases added 59).

I basically agree with them: the negative responses to the story result from rather a naïve reading of the story; critics fail to understand the nature of the third-person limited point of view which Mansfield employed for the story. The highly subjective tone of the story hides its authorial manipulation; the third-person narrative, however, lets the reader notice the hidden hand and eye of 'the author'; the 'cruelty' of the ending, more than anything else, reveals to the reader the *distance* between the author and the narrator-agent (the protagonist). The ingeniously "muted" but still present director

gives a twist to the 'shallow' narrative, and depth to the story.

The critical situation of the story does not seem to have changed very much ^{for the} last ten years. The discussions tend to focus on Bertha's sexuality and sexual awakening (especially on whether she is homosexual [or bisexual] or not) or on the symbols and imagery of the story especially in connection with the major question of what the pear tree symbolizes.² Yet few criticisms pay attention to Symbolist qualities of the story; no criticism has, so far, dealt with the story's thematic possibility of Symbolism. Hanson and Gurr most accurately point out that " 'Bliss' is the first symbolist story in which the symbolist method of *Prelude* was employed in condensed form, in a story with a single main action and character" (58); and, as for the Symbolist nature of its narrative, "the analogy with the operation of a lyric poem is pertinent"(59). However, even their analysis of the story from a Symbolist perspective does not show any full development;³ besides, they do not refer to the Symbolist theme of the story. My suggestion is that Symbolism is highly relevant not only to the techniques but to the main theme of "Bliss."

There are at least two thematic layers in "Bliss." One layer deals with the protagonist's sexual awakening (self-discovery) and the unveiled reality (frail human relationships) which her discovery of her husband's infidelity forces her to confront. The other layer deals with Symbolism which is closely linked with her self-discovery and Aesthetic vision. These two major themes of the story-- Bertha's moral 'growth' and the Symbolist theme-- are interwoven.

1 What Bertha Knew: her Immaturity and Awakening

Berth Young, the protagonist, *is* 'young': her youthfulness and naïveté are, though lovable, a sign of immaturity. The opening scene makes her 'youth' clear:

Although Bertha Young was thirty she still had moments like this when she wanted to run instead of walk, to take dancing steps on and off the pavement, 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. (91)

The description gives the reader the impression that Bertha, a physically fully-matured thirty-year-old woman (and mother), is psychologically still in adolescence. The reader cannot help loving her carefree light-heartedness, yet suspects that her occasional girlish state of mind might suggest her ignorance as well as innocence.

The development of the story, in fact, reveals that this sweet characteristic of hers *is* accompanied by her moral and sexual immaturity. She is careless: she always forgets to carry the key. She is rather irresponsible as a mother: she would rather play with her daughter just like a girl who loves to play with her doll, than nurture her.⁴ Bertha

describes the scene of a little confrontation between herself who enters the nursery "at another wrong moment" but still wants to spoil her baby, and the nurse who believes in discipline: Bertha is "like the poor little girl in front of the rich little girl [the nurse] with the doll [her baby]" (93). She is actually worse than her consciousness believes she is. The negotiation between the two women is more like that between a mother [the nurse] and her spoiled daughter [Bertha] than that between two girls: all Bertha does is beg and insist while the nurse at least gives her the reasons why she cannot 'have' the baby now. The way Bertha cares for her child is not very different from the way a little girl cares for her pet: she, most of all, loves her baby's prettiness, "her neck as she bent[s] forward, her exquisite toes as they [shine] transparent in the fire light" (94)-- Little B is no more than an object of aesthetic appreciation.

Bertha's attitude towards her baby seems to hint at her attitude towards life: she wants to skim the cream of it. Her social status as a bourgeois woman allows her to be innocently irresponsible and superficial; although Bertha is not criticized harshly (as we discuss later, the nature of the story's narrative prevents an openly critical presentation of Bertha), the reader might associate her childishness with Rosemary, the protagonist of "A Cup of Tea," whose bourgeois femininity and irresponsibility are described sarcastically.⁶ Bertha tells the reader that she is fully pleased with her present life: she believes that she owns everything she desires. Her measure of happiness sounds petit-bourgeois: 'having' forms her chief concern, and she never doubts her "proprietorship" (99):

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 absolutely satisfactory house and garden. And friends -- modern, thrilling friends, writers and painters and poets or people keen on social questions-- just the kind of friends they wanted. And then there were books, and there was music, and she had found a wonderful little dressmaker, and they were going abroad in the summer, and their new cook made the most superb omelettes.... (96)

She fails to notice the fact that her 'happiness' (or her proprietorship) entirely relies on her husband's material success. The relationship between Bertha and her friends strikes the reader as superficial and material: her intellectual, artistic friends are flocking about her just because of her (or, to be exact, her husband's) money; just as she finds their gifts and reputation "decorative" for her salon (100), and, therefore, useful, so her 'friends' perhaps find her money handy. Whether she 'owns' her baby or not is questionable, too, since, as we have seen, the nurse seems to be the baby's 'mother,' not Bertha. Material comfort and luxury do not belong to her: marriage makes her economic dependence on her husband possible; once her emotional tie with him breaks, she will

lose "everything"; her "adorable" baby will become a burden. The ending of the story reveals that her relationship with her husband is vulnerable, and that so is her happiness.

Bertha is still sexually immature: she is "cold" (104). Her frigidity reminds the reader of that of Linda in "Prelude." But Bertha's coldness is chiefly due to her delayed sexual awakening whereas Linda's is a result of her circumscribed self-realization and fear of pregnancy: "being" is not yet a conscious issue for Bertha. Bertha is not, at the beginning of the story, psychologically ready to enjoy sex; the Victorian 'moral' education she must have received might be responsible for her sexual reserve or repression. Lesbianism might, as some critics suggest, explain Bertha's sexual indifference to Harry, her husband: she comically exaggerates the fact that she likes enigmatic, beautiful women: "she always [does] fall in love with" them (95). The touch of Miss Fulton's cool arm thrills her. The communion which Bertha believes she and Miss Fulton experience in front of the pear tree seems to suggest Bertha's homosexual love for her. Indeed, Bertha's description:

Both, as it were, caught in that circle of unearthly light, . . . 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? (102)

reminds the reader of the ending scene of Oscar Wilde's "The Selfish Giant" :

And the child smiled on the Giant, and said to him, "You let me play in your garden, to-day you shall come with me to my garden, which is Paradise." And when the children ran in that afternoon, they found the Giant lying dead under the tree, all covered with white blossoms. (*Complete Shorter Fiction* 114)

The reader might see an analogy between Bertha- Miss Fulton and the Giant- the little boy. Wilde's story has rather an obvious homosexual connotation: the Giant's death under the blooming peach tree suggests not only the fulfillment of his life in this world and his acquisition of eternity (in another world), but also the fulfillment of his (homosexual) love for the boy. Although the Giant's erotic love is sublimated into agape since the boy is Christ, his homosexuality still attracts the reader's attention. Bertha's homosexual tendency does not escape our attention, either. However, it seems too rash to conclude that Bertha *is* homosexual; she must be at least conscious or subconscious of her *sexual* urge for women in order to give her that 'title.' Bertha's possible lesbian *tendency* strikes the reader as quite innocent-- as innocent as the girl's intimacy with or pseudo-love for her female friend: it is not something that prevents her heterosexual development. Bertha's feeling towards Miss Fulton is a mediator of her sexual awakening, that is, a stimulus that shakes her sleeping or subconsciously repressed

sexual desire. Bertha could be potentially bisexual: the text never denies the possibility; but the point is that her bisexuality does not provide any reason for her frigidity, for, in that case, she should have sexual desire for both sexes: Bertha's bisexuality does not prevent her desire for Harry, or for anybody. Bertha's definite lesbian orientation does not, on the other hand, explain the intense desire for Harry which she, later, becomes aware of. At least her confession of her desire for Harry does not sound self-deceptive: it does not make the reader doubt its genuineness.⁶ Bertha, through her narrative, emerges as a still asexual, adolescent figure like a twelve-year-old Matilda in "The Wind Blows" whose sexuality as well as aspiration is awakening-- the wind (gale) represents the adolescent's anarchic passions and restlessness. Bertha is "cold" because her sexuality is not fully awakened.⁷

Bertha's narrative hints that, because of her sexual reticence, her relationship with Harry has become asexual: she repeatedly tells the reader that she and her husband are "good pals" (96, 104). When she realizes that her sense of bliss comes from her sexual desire, she confesses:

For the first time in her life Bertha Young desired her husband.

Oh, she'd love him-- she'd been in love with him, of course, in every other way, but just not in that way. And equally, of course, she'd understood that he was different. They'd discussed it so often. It had worried her dreadfully at first to find that she was so cold, but after a time it had not seemed to matter. They were so frank with each other-- such good pals. That was the best of being modern. (Emphases added 103-4)

The fact that Harry wanted to discuss the matter with her "so often" shows that asexuality in their married life matters-- Harry seems to have dropped the issue because their "frank" talk did not change Bertha's sexual response but depressed her. Bertha herself is evasive about this problem. While she is vaguely aware of the gravity of the matter, she avoids facing up to it: she would rather believe that he is "different"; that, unlike ordinary relationships between couples, the lack of sexual fulfillment does not affect theirs. This sounds green, and so, false. Bertha introduces Harry as a particularly energetic, 'masculine' man: Harry reminds the reader of Stanley although Harry is more refined and tactful. She describes him as follows: "Harry had such a zest for life. Oh, how she appreciated it in him. And his passion for fighting-- for seeking in everything that comes up against him another test of his power and of his courage-- that, too, she understood" (99). He has the "shameless passion for the white flesh of the lobster" and "green of pistachio ices-- green and cold like the eyelids of Egyptian dancers" (100); Harry's sensual expression as well as his healthy appetite, as many critics point out, fully suggests his lust. Despite her full 'understanding' and appreciation, she does not connect, or avoid connecting, his "zest" and "passion" with the possible intensity of

his sexual desire. It is hard to believe that Harry should be rather dry about sex-- the development of the story attests to this suspicion: Harry is having a love affair with Miss Fulton.

Bertha vaguely seeks for the source of her aching sense of bliss, and she, towards the end of the story, finds out that it has something to do with her late sexual awakening; once she becomes conscious of it, she begins to feel an "ardent" desire for sexual fulfillment (104). The reader realizes that the recurring metaphor of an unused musical instrument-- "a rare, rare fiddle" shut up in a case (92, 94),⁸ or the piano no one plays (103)-- refers to Bertha's own unused, wasted youthful body that does not know sexual joy. Her repeated 'outcry' against civilization ("How idiotic civilization is!" [92]) could be understood as an expression of her subconscious longing for something instinctive, primitive and free: her nature's revolt against her sexual reserve. She cannot bear "the tight clasp" of the coat and enjoys the 'touch' of the cold air on her arms (92). *Indeed*, any physical touch stimulates her-- the warmth and softness of little B's smooth, baby-like skin make "all her bliss [come] back again" (94); "the touch of that cool arm" of Miss Fulton's makes it "start blazing-- blazing the fire of bliss that Bertha [does] not know what to do with" (99). Bertha experiences "hysterical" euphoria all day (93).⁹ Her aversion ~~to~~ the mated cats signifies her aversion to sex; yet this aversion of hers reminds the reader of an adolescent girl's puritanical aversion. Just as the girl's virginal aversion to sex hides her curiosity towards and fear of the unknown adult world, so Bertha's reflects her awakening sexual urge-- the sight of the cats gives her "a *curious* shiver": a shiver she cannot exactly define (emphasis added 96). She regards the pear tree as "a symbol of her own life" ; the "tall, slender pear tree in fullest, richest bloom" is, to be more exact, a symbol of her sexual fulfillment (96).¹⁰ The secret, euphoric communion which she and Miss Fulton experience at the sight of the pear tree could be a mystical communion which "does happen very, very rarely between women" (101);¹¹ but it *is* a communion between two women who secretly share the intense desire for the same man. The pear tree, which each of the two women interprets as a symbol of the fulfillment of her own love, gives the similar psychological effect upon their shared state of mind.

2 Bertha's Limited View

Bertha's amicable naïveté and light-heartedness are related to her shallow grasp of life: she is not trained to see people and their situations from multiple points of view. She, so easily, "understands" or "know" people and their states of mind. Bertha's

'subjectivity' fails to 'observe' people and things from a viewpoint other than her own: her perspective gives her a childish illusion that the world turns around her and is made for her; it prevents her from penetrating the multiple layers of life. Even Miss Fulton is not enigmatic enough for Bertha's simplicity:

The provoking thing was that, though they [Bertha and Miss Fulton] had been about together and met a number of times and really talked, Bertha couldn't make her out. Up to a certain point Miss Fulton was rarely, wonderfully frank, but the certain point was there, and beyond that she would not go.

Was there anything beyond it? Harry said "No." Voted her dullish, and "cold like blonde women, with a touch, perhaps, of anaemia of the brain."

But Bertha wouldn't agree with him; not yet, at any rate. (95)

Harry makes an excessively indifferent, insensitive comment on Miss Fulton; the very excessiveness of his detachment is his 'pose'; it hides his keen interests in Miss Fulton, just as the 'extravagance' of his calmness, as Bertha admits, is a camouflage of his inner tension and uneasiness. Bertha treats Harry like a child and believes that she is always in control; but, in fact, it is Bertha who is controlled and fooled. Harry is clever enough to keep Bertha from suspecting his curiosity in and romantic relationship with Miss Fulton: he flatters Bertha's feminine pride by deliberately showing childish insensitivity towards this mysterious female friend. He knows the effect of his witty, rude comment on the beautiful, attractive woman: it not only entertains Bertha, but gives her a sense of superiority over Miss Fulton and makes her feel sure of his affection towards herself: Bertha confesses: "For some strange reason [she] liked this and almost admired it in him very much" (95). Miss Fulton's unfathomableness, together with her beauty, makes her feel uneasy and insecure; it makes her declare: "I must find out what that something [enigmatic about Miss Fulton] is" (95). A little deeper speculation would lead her to the 'discovery' of her husband's betrayal; but Harry ingeniously persuades her feeble inner protest against his judgment, and makes her believe in Miss Fulton's 'harmlessness'; for Bertha's "not yet, at any rate" suggests that she, while enjoying his wit, basically agrees with him.

3 Symbolist Structure and Theme

Gradually the word [symbol] extended its meaning, until it came to denote every conventional representation of idea by form, of the unseen by the visible. "In a Symbol," says Carlyle, "there is concealment and yet revelation: . . ." (Arthur Symons The Symbolist Movement in Literature)¹²

The words symbol and sign are commonly interchangeable, yet at times some of us mean one thing by sign and another by symbol . . . If we define a sign as an

exact reference, it must include symbol because a symbol is an exact reference too. The difference seems to be that a sign is an exact reference to something definite and a symbol an exact reference to something indefinite. Less of a paradox than they appear, exact and indefinite will get along more comfortably together if we consider the senses of exact, one of which is suitable. (William York Tindall "Excellent Dumb Discourse")¹⁹

The issue of Bertha's subjectivity leads the reader to the other layer of the story: "Bliss" is a Symbolist tragicomedy. Bertha's "growth" or her revelation consists not only in her self-discovery (sexual awakening) but in her discovery of multiple layers of life, that is, her consciousness's shift from the one-to-one grasp to the one-to-multiple grasp of signifier-signified relations. Bertha's awareness of multiple viewpoints might be paraphrased as Symbolist consciousness.

Bertha is, from the beginning of the story, described as artistic (her taste for visual art is Post-Impressionist; her literary taste is Symbolist/ Imagist); but her Aestheticism is no more than dilettantism, that is, Aestheticism as an ornament for life. Her narrative shows her Symbolist inclination from the first scene: she prefers to grasp and express her state of mind and feelings by analogical images, that is, by comparing her psyche to something concrete and visual. She loves to use metaphors and conceits:

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 in your bosom, sending out a little shower of sparks into every particle, into every finger and toe? . . .

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?

"No, that about the fiddle is not quite what I mean," she thought, . . .
(91-2)

Bertha is, as if she were a Modernist poet herself, fastidious about finding the exact metaphor for her present feeling: her aesthetic belief in conceit reminds the reader of that of the 'metaphysical poets' whose 'modern' aesthetic T. S. Eliot praises: the poets who "engaged in the task of trying to find the verbal equivalent for states of mind and feelings" (Eliot 275). Her description is picturesque and vivid; her poetic attempt is, therefore, fairly successful. Her poetic attitude, however, reflects her amateurish immaturity as a Symbolist: she is still superficially Symbolist-- she is only keen on visualizing her state of mind precisely and has not yet noticed a deeper Symbolist faculty of revealing what is concealed. Bertha is not a self-conscious, careful Symbolist poet and critic who regards art as an act of revelation.

Similarly, one of the first verbal 'pictures' which Bertha's narrative 'paints' seems to reflect her moral limitations. Her depiction of the arranged fruits--which is like a still

life painting of a Matisse-- is one of her Post-Impressionist verbal pictures: her eyes are careful about "a synthesis of form and colour" (Goldwater 72), that is, about patterns, the combination of colours, composition and the total 'effect' of the whole picture:

There were tangerines and apples strained 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 bought to tone in with the new dining-room carpet. . . .

When she had finished with them [colourful, fresh fruits] and made two pyramids of these bright round shapes, she stood away from the table to get the effect-- and it really was most curious. For the dark table seemed to melt into the dusky light and the glass dish and the blue bowl to float in the air. This, of course, in her present mood, was so incredibly beautiful.... (92-3)

Her depiction is beautiful: yet her single interest in surface (colours and patterns) could be related to the Symbolist's criticism of Post-Impressionist synthetism:

There is here [in their simple emphasis on a synthesis of form and colour that does not suggest a deeper synthesis of form and subject-matter] apparently no reference to the transcendental, nothing, in Aurier's terms, that is '*idéiste*,' nothing that will lead us from the perceptual simplifications on the canvas, through emotion, finally to an unseen world of ideas.(Goldwater 77-8)

Bertha's 'picture' may, at best, reflect her sense of beauty and superficial mood; but it does not, unlike the pear tree, really *illuminate* her state of mind (consciousness and subconsciousness). This depiction of hers, indeed, seems to illuminate her immaturity.

However, as Hanson and Gurr point out, "of all characters it is Bertha who has the most capacity for growth and maturity" (62): the story begins with superficial, carefree dilettantism, but its ending suggests the possibility of Bertha's acquisition of Aestheticism as an attitude towards life and Symbolism as a viewpoint. The discovery of Harry's infidelity abruptly alternates her 'bliss' with bitter disillusionment: life ceases to be simple, for the smooth surface might hide a coarse layer; one symbol does not correspond to one meaning. Nothing is so sure; nothing is eternal-- Eddie's voice; "Why Must it Always be Tomato Soup? It's so *deeply* true, don't you feel? Tomato soup is so *dreadfully* eternal" (105) is nothing but a harsh irony to Bertha's ears. The pear tree which appears to be a symbol of Bertha's life at the beginning reappears as an enigma; her pear-tree costume becomes ridiculous. All Bertha can do at the end of the story is turn to the pear tree and articulate a desperate question: "Oh, what is going to happen now?" (105). The pear tree does not respond; it does not look even sympathetic; on the contrary, its full beauty is almost ironical to Bertha's present bitterness: its radiance and detachment seem to disdain her simplicity: "the pear tree [is] as lovely as ever and as full of flower and as still" (105).

1) The Pear Tree as a Symbolist Symbol¹⁴

It is, indeed, the pear tree that Bertha's narrative impresses upon the reader's mind. The shifting meaning of the pear tree represents Bertha's Symbolist revelation most: she learns, at the end of the story, that it signifies at once 'anything' and 'nothing'; the signified is different from person to person, from one state of mind to another, for the tree, an object, has no meaning as it is. The deconstructive relationship between the pear tree and one's subjectivity represents a Symbolist theme of the story.

There are many interpretive possibilities of what the pear tree symbolizes. It might represent Bertha's-- now attainable-- vision of the fullness of her married life; the only thing that threatens the perfect picture of happiness is "a grey cat" with its black mate ("a grey cat, dragging its belly, crept across the lawn, and a black one, its shadow, tailed after" [96]). The "creepy" cat (96), in Bertha's consciousness, turns out to be Miss Fulton: Bertha, at the end of the story, compares Miss Fulton dressed in silver with Eddie (dressed in black and white) following behind to "the grey cat" followed by "the black cat" (105). The pear tree might represent Bertha's sexual awakening and fulfillment, that is, her flowering as a woman. But it could symbolize Miss Fulton and the fullness of her life. The white pear tree "against the jade-green sky" looks like Bertha in "[a] white dress, a string of jade beads, green shoes and stockings" (96, 97); but the moon-lit pear tree looks more like a beautiful, pale, slender woman (Miss Fulton) "all in silver, with a silver fillet binding her pale blonde hair" (99). Bertha herself reflects that "[i]t [the pear tree] would be silver now, in the light of poor Eddie's moon, silver as Miss Fulton" (101). The moon-lit pear tree could represent a vision of female comradeship or a mythical and mystical communion between women. It might symbolize eternity, at least, our glimpse of eternity or unearthly sublimity. The pear tree could, however, be a memento mori, a symbol of mortality, as well: its peak is the beginning of its decline; the fact that the pear tree is incapable of self-pollination (that it will not bear fruit) intensifies its ephemerality-- in this sense, it could refer to Bertha again: the climax of Bertha's bliss coincides with its anti-climax (her disillusionment); her story ends without any 'fruit,' that is, without the fulfillment of her awakened sexual desire.¹⁵

The meaning of the pear tree differs from one viewer to another; it also changes according to the spectator's state of mind. The three descriptions of the pear tree that Bertha's eyes paint reflect her subjectivity: her changing consciousness and state of mind. The role and the effects of the pear tree in "Bliss" correspond to those of the aloe in "Prelude." This cannot be a mere coincidence: the two stories were completed at about the same time (*Prelude* was first published in July, 1918; "Bliss," in August, 1918); they may reflect Mansfield's coherent technical and thematic interests.¹⁶ Bertha's depiction of

the pear tree, just like Linda's description of the aloe, varies according to the meaning she reads into it and the psychological distance between the tree and herself. The act of 'seeing' ('appreciating') is inseparable from the act of 'reading'; for 'beauty' appeals to the viewer's subjectivity; the intensity of beauty depends on the viewer's subjective commitment to (that is, her interpretation of) the beautiful object.

(1) 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.* (Emphases added 96)

Like Linda's aloe, the pear tree draws Bertha's particular attention; as soon as she is attracted by its charm, Bertha's subjectivity begins to attach a particular colour and a special meaning to it. The tree must be extremely beautiful; but it is her subjectivity that makes it appear "perfect" without "a single bud or a faded petal."

(2) And the two women [Bertha and Miss Fulton] 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 gazed-- almost to touch the rim of the round, silver moon.* (Emphases added 102)

The meaning Bertha has read into the tree intensifies its beauty; her ecstatic sense of bliss stimulates her imagination, which 'deforms' the pear tree and makes it look "unearthly" and mystical (102); it, like the tree of wisdom,¹⁷ gives her the vision of eternity. She is no longer looking at the tree as an 'object': her subjectivity identifies it with herself; the pear tree is her extended self.

The deformed tree reflects not only Bertha's consciousness but her subconsciousness as well: the pear tree that grows till it touches the moon, that momentary vision of eternity, seems to reveal what is concealed in Bertha's mind: her desire for self-realization. The reader should note that a candle light is often a symbol of Aestheticism in Mansfield's stories (as in "Prelude" and "The Doll's House"). Bertha's imagination ~~transforms~~ the pear tree into "the flame of a candle"-- this suggests that her desire is linked with Aesthetic sublimity. (The fact that 'Bertha' means "bright or shining one" is suggestive [Nebeker 549].) The symbol is, as Carlyle says, concealment and yet revelation. Bertha's 'discovery' that her feeling of bliss perhaps comes from her sexual awakening, naturally, somewhat disappoints her: her imagination has expected something "unearthly" (sublime) to happen. Although sexual awakening is wonderful as it is (after all, it is one of the few things that she does not 'have'), she cannot hide her disappointment: she murmurs: "Was this [her sexual desire for Harry] what that feeling of bliss had been leading up to? Then, then--" (104).

(3) [T]he pear tree was as lovely as ever and as full of flower and as still. (105)

Once Bertha is disillusioned, the subjective meaning she has attached to the tree disappears: it stands beautiful, but the sight is neither deformed nor exaggerated. Although the loss of the subjective meaning does not change or mar its appearance radically, the pear tree does not simply appeal to Bertha any more. She is, like Linda, alienated from it; it is not *hers*. Miss Fulton's words, "*Your lovely pear tree!*" mock Bertha's naïve interpretation (emphasis added 105).

2) The Drama and the Nature of the Narrative

*A wounded deer leaps highest,
I've heard the hunter tell.
'Tis but the ecstasy of death,
And then the brake is still.*

*The smitten rock that gushes,
The trampled steel that springs!
A cheek is always redder
Just where the hectic stings.*

*Mirth is the mail of anguish,
In which it cautious arm
Lest anybody spy the blood
And 'You're hurt' exclaim. (Emily Dickinson)¹⁸*

"Bliss" is perhaps Mansfield's most dramatic story: its drama lies not only in the plot but also in the narrative. It is when Bertha's sense of bliss reaches its climax that she makes the catastrophic discovery; when she recognizes her own intense sexual desire for the first time in her life, she has to witness the scene of her husband's betrayal. This juxtaposition of the climax and the anti-climax has as ironical but still as dramatic an effect as Emily Dickinson's grasp of "mirth" or "ecstasy" as "the mail of anguish" or a memento mori. The light comic tone of the story is abruptly cut off; the unexpected blow shatters the protagonist's intensified bliss; her "mirth" turns out to be "the mail of anguish"; the story ends, leaving the disillusioned protagonist in confusion. This psychological fall of Bertha is shocking to the reader not merely because of the unexpectedness of the plot and the height of her fall, but because of the nature of the narrative Mansfield introduced; indeed, the drama of the story would not be successfully achieved without Bertha's narrative: her subjective narrative intensifies the effect of the plot.

The narrative from the narrator-agent's (Bertha's) limited point of view and her naïveté make the plot of "Bliss" fully dramatic. Bertha is an intent viewer and aesthetic spectator of the surface of life, but a careless interpreter; this narrator-agent's lack of

insight and her inexperienced, naïve view of life prevent the reader from inferring what is happening behind her back. The distance between the reader and Bertha (that is, the reader's status as a spectator of the narrator-agent) enables the reader to be critical of her and careful in reading between the lines of her narrative; yet the ending is still a radical betrayal of the reader's expectation. In fact, the nature of Bertha's subjective third-person narrative and her innocence make this distance between the reader and the protagonist closer; the reader tends to be more sympathetic to Bertha than critical. Although the third-person narrative maintains a certain distance between the narrator and the author, and between the narrator and the reader, this third-person narrative, that is, this intensified free indirect discourse, is intimate: 'she' (the third-person narrative) is replaceable with 'I' (the first-person narrative). The story flows with Bertha's consciousness; it registers what Bertha sees, hears, feels, thinks *with her own tone of voice*. (James's *What Maisie Knew*, for example, registers the consciousness of Maisie, his narrator-agent, *with the authorial voice*.)¹⁹

The intense subjectivity and the perceptive but non-explanatory nature of Bertha's narrative could be termed Symbolist. For the introduction of the narrator-agent's single, limited point of view with her highly subjective tone is, technically, a "revolt against exteriority" (Symons *The Symbolist Movement in Literature* 10). Also, the chief role of this narrative is to 'show'; it is the reader's role to analyse and interpret what the centre of consciousness presents. Besides, the dramatic effect of the story has much to do with its Symbolist theme: the dramatized ending intensifies the dichotomy between the protagonist's state of mind and the pear tree; it keeps the reader from fixing what the pear tree symbolizes-- the pear tree, at best, represents the one-to-multiple relations between the symbol and the symbolized.

3) 'Symbolist' Setting

"Bliss," despite its concentrated Symbolist qualities, could represent the 'age.' It could be interpreted as a covert satire of the dilettantism and artistic pretentiousness of early twentieth-century bourgeois intellectuals. The story has 'Decadent' characters and settings. The characters are Modernist writers and artists who, like those of Bloomsbury Group, love to have artistic and intellectual gatherings in a salon. Bertha is playing the role of a patroness such as Lady Ottoline Morrell; her main 'job' is to run a fashionable salon. Bertha collects promising artists, famous or notorious intellectuals or attractive people who will "decorate" the gatherings: she has a lot of "finds" (95). Mysterious, inactive, pale Miss Fulton, Bertha's find, is a typical 'fatal woman' figure, a favoured *fin de siècle* female type which particularly stirred Symbolists' artistic imagination.²⁰

(Wilde's *Salomé* is, of course, one of the best examples of *femme fatale* literature.) Miss Fulton beautifully plays the role of a fatal woman in the story: she is a beautiful enigma who seduces Harry and Bertha; her morally free new-womanness responds to Harry's desire. She is Bertha's 'Muse': she, as well as the pear tree, stimulates Bertha's poetic sensibility and inspires her Aesthetic vision. Almost all the characters of the story are tinted by dandyism, which is another *fin de siècle* 'tradition':²¹ they are very conscious of what they wear: clothes are, for them, an important means of self-expression. Bertha's eyes never miss their fashion show. Mrs. Norman Knight's eccentric coat-- "the most amusing orange coat with a procession of black monkeys round the hem and up the fronts" (97)-- is a typical example of their dandyism. The way they talk is affected, eccentric, but stylish and witty; the topics of ~~the~~ conversation are literature, art or the gossip about people of artistic circles:

"I met her at the Alpha show-- the weirdest little person. She'd not only cut off her hair, but she seemed to have take a dreadfully good snip off her legs and arms and her neck and her poor little nose as well."

"Isn't she very *liée* with Michael Oat?"

"The man who wrote *Love in False Teeth*?"

"He wants to write a play for me. One act. One man. Decides to commit suicide. Gives all the reasons why he should and why he shouldn't. And just as he has made up his mind either to do it or not to do-- curtain. Not half a bad idea."

"What's he going to call it-- Stomach Trouble ?"

"I *think* I've come across the *same* idea in a *lit-tle* French review, *quite* unknown in England." (100)

Their superficial intellectuality and literary affectation are brilliant enough for Bertha; their conversation makes her tempted to "tell them how delightful they [are], and what a decorative group they [make], how they [seem] to set one another off and how they [remind] her of a play by Tchekof!" (100) Which particular play of Chekhov's Bertha is thinking of is not made clear; but the general tone of her guests' talk is, perhaps, more Wildean than Chekhovian, although the shallowness of their talk must be differentiated from Wilde's seeming flippancy. Bertha's guests are simply enjoying conversation for the sake of conversation whereas the speeches of Chekhov's characters are usually pensive and self-mocking. The reader cannot help suspecting that Bertha's Chekhov might be another Modernist decoration: that Bertha is, without understanding Chekhov very much, referring to his plays because Chekhov is fashionable among her contemporary intellectuals. Ibsen and Chekhov were popular and highly valued by the *fin de siècle* and early twentieth-century Modernists:²² the reference to these two writers might have been regarded as a proof of keen artistic interests and intellectual accomplishment.

(4) "Bliss": An Extended Metaphor

Clare Hanson, in "Katherine Mansfield and Symbolism: the 'Artist's Method' in *Prelude*, succinctly states Mansfield's Symbolist concept:

The most important idea that she took from Symbolist theory was the belief that in literature an abstract state of mind or feeling should be conveyed through concrete images rather than through analytic description. . . . Thus ideally in Katherine Mansfield's view the details of character, setting and scene which go to make up a fiction should be considered, not primarily as *representative* of a wider reality in some measure agreed between reader and writer (that is, as synecdochic, contributing to a realistic illusion), but more importantly as working in concert to be *analogous* to a state of mind or feeling (that is, the fiction is in this sense an extended metaphor). (26-7)

This concept is applicable to "Bliss"; "Bliss" is, in my opinion, the story where Mansfield's Symbolist aesthetic is most successfully realized; its narrative conveys "an abstract state of mind or feeling" through "concrete images"; the narrative's subjectivity tends to make "the details of character, setting and scene" "analogous" to her state of mind and feeling. Besides, the story has Symbolist structure and theme.

"Bliss" emerges as an ambiguous story especially when the reader tries to figure out the concrete coherent meaning of the central symbol (the pear tree); to see the interpretive possibilities of what the pear tree signifies is interesting and challenging in itself, but the reader has, in that case, more or less to experience Bertha's dilemma and confusion; the reader will be trapped by and stuck in the multiple layers of the symbol. Besides too much attention to the pear tree (that is, our attempt to give the pear tree one definite, exact meaning) seems to prevent the reader from getting at the main theme of the story. Once the reader views the story as "an extended metaphor" of Symbolism, its ambiguity seems to dissolve; the story reappears as a well-organized and fully calculated one.

Notes

¹ Woolf basically appreciated Mansfield's prose style and Symbolist narrative: one must remember that it was Woolf and her husband, Leonard, who appreciated *Prelude* and published it. Also, as Showalter points out, Woolf herself later applied Mansfield's subjective narrative to her own works (see Showalter 247). Woolf might have considered the rather obvious sexual theme and bisexual connotation of the story as vulgar; or she might have disapproved of Mansfield's introduction of the *single*, limited point of view to the story: she might have found the effect of this narrative shallow-- in that case, Woolf somehow failed to appreciate the 'unreliable' narrator of "Bliss" while she seemed to understand fully the function of the unreliable narrator in James's *The Turn of the Screw*. Woolf might have appreciated multiple limited point of view far more than single limited point of view when the nature of narrative is 'subjective.' For multiple limited points of view provide the reader with an 'objective' point of view: a moral criterion which is acquired by comparing one subjective narration with another. Single limited point of view, on the other hand, provides no *apparent* instrument for moral judgment.

² For more information, see Neaman 117 and 125-6; also, see Dunbar 128 and 138-9. Neaman's essay is unique; she points out the analogy between "Bliss," and Genesis and Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*.

³ Clare Hanson discusses Mansfield's Symbolism more concretely in "Katherine Mansfield and Symbolism: the 'Artist's Method' in *Prelude*."

⁴ Nebeker, too, points out Bertha's childishness in "The Pear Tree: Sexual Implications in Katherine Mansfield's 'Bliss.'" She connects her moral immaturity with her 'sterility':

She [Bertha], a thirty-year old matron, makes little effort to assert her authority. Rather she begs, as would a child or an immature young person in the face of authority, . . . The point here is that Bertha does not see Little B (note the indication that the baby is only a reflection of herself) in any normal terms of mother love. The child is not her care, her creation, the fruit of her womb; rather she is a "doll," an exquisite art treasure to be appreciated aesthetically much as the fruit arranged in a glass bowl on a blue dish has been admired in the previous scene. Bertha, in a very real sense, has not produced fruit, only a flower. (546-7)

⁵ Rosemary and Bertha play the same role in their little 'society'; they are both hostesses of their arty salons. As for Mansfield's generally negative description of artistic salons, Kaplan guesses that this attitude of Mansfield's might have something to do with her sense of alienation from London's literary circles: she comments:

She was attracted to the sense of security she noted in the lives of Virginia Woolf and other members of Bloomsbury, but she remained always an outsider to a considerable extent. Her satirical portraits of well-to-do pseudo-bohemians (such as Bertha and her friends in "Bliss," the group of artist-parasites around Isabel in "Marriage à la Mode," the parents and party guests in "Sun and Moon," and the "literary gentleman" in "Life of Ma Parker") all reflect her persistent awareness of exclusion.

Her own back ground-- an upwardly mobile, newly rich colonial family-- gave her no prestige among the English intellectuals. She could not claim connections with the comfortable world of the academic and artistic establishment; neither could she gain admiring, if condescending, praise from the left-wing bourgeoisie, who might have adored her if she had risen from the working class. . . . Mansfield's background was thus trained with "money" and "trade," while her revolt against it left her without money and without "connections." (12-3)

⁶ Nebeker suggests that Bertha is *unconsciously* homosexual although I cannot help wondering if an *unconscious* (not subconscious) homosexual could be homosexual at all. Nebeker maintains that Bertha's subconscious homophobia prevents her self-discovery, and makes her substitute her false, heterosexual desire for Harry for her real, homosexual desire for Miss Fulton. Nebeker says:

Bertha herself is, of course, totally unaware of these [homosexual] undercurrents within and; at least for a time, quite honestly believes that her growing desire is for Harry. . . . Conventional Bertha Young, cold, innocent wife, cannot possibly comprehend the forces tearing at her in the shape of Pearl. (548-9)

Her interpretation is interesting, but still lacks sufficient textual support.

⁷ Hanson and Gurr suggest that Harry is responsible for Bertha's frigidity: his

oppressive, coarse masculinity keeps her from sexual joy. Their sexual relationship might, in this case, be associated with that between Linda and Stanley. Their suggestion is valid but not very persuasive, for Bertha's relationship with Harry which emerges from Bertha's narrative does not really attest to it. Hanson and Gurr, however, conclude:

It was the young and immature Bertha who chose the husband who now constrains and defines her. His coarseness not only checks the birth of her desire for him very obviously in the course of the story but also by implication through their married life. (63)

⁸ Neaman points out the shape of a violin is that of a female body. See Neaman 121.

⁹ Dunbar introduces Freud's interpretation of hysteria: "hysterical symptoms are the expression of [the patients'] most secret and repressed wishes (qtd. in Dumber 137)."

¹⁰ Nebeker maintains that the pear tree is "phallic" (546). She, further, points out that the pear tree that touches the rim of the round moon is a typical womb-phallus symbol. See Nebeker 546-7.

¹¹ As for the sexual implication of the scene, see Nebeker 547.

¹² Symons 4.

¹³ Tindall 337.

¹⁴ Although some parts strike me as somewhat arbitrary, the most interesting and most coherent interpretation of the pear tree as a symbol is, so far, Nebeker's. Nebeker interprets the pear tree as the symbol of Bertha's sexuality.

¹⁵ As for Bertha's unfulfilled desire and the sterility of the pear tree, see Dunbar 134, and Nebeker 546.

¹⁶ Hanson concludes that it is around 1917 that Mansfield became conscious of Symbolist method: ". . . she [Mansfield] found the method of her later work by returning for the form of the story to her artistic roots in Symbolism. This movement back towards a symbolist mode of presentation can be seen in action as a conscious artistic policy in the changes which were made as *The Aloe* was revised into *Prelude* in 1917" ("Katherine Mansfield and Symbolism" 30).

¹⁷ As for the analogy between "Bliss" and Genesis, see Neaman 117-21.

¹⁸ Dickinson 10-11.

¹⁹ My understanding of point of view and 'distance' largely depends on Wayne C. Booth's "Distance and Point-of-View: An Essay in Classification."

²⁰ Murray H. G. Pittock defines the *fin de siècle* "fatal woman" as follows:

Perhaps the most striking parallel between Pater and the other artists of the late nineteenth century is the icon of the Fatal Woman, so tellingly outlined in Pater's famous Gioconda passage. Though for Pater the power of such beauty was largely sexless, it was not to be so in painting like Kupka's *Black Idol* and Moreau's *Les Prétendants*. Both the painting and interiors of fin-de-siècle design reek of seductive metaphor: the expression of the fatal woman as the image both of desire and everyday life. Sumptuousness, draperies and defiance of classical

regularity each pay their homage to this icon: dark, faithless, reproductive and indefinite. Everything, in other words, that male science was not. . . . Certainly the fatal woman is not always evil: sometimes she is a heroine. In her more sexless manifestations she is connected with art and the pursuit of beauty. Even in sensual guise, as in Swinburn's 'Dolores' and *Mary Stuart*, she can represent a positive, liberating force from the tyranny of (male?) materialism. . . . (29-30)

²¹ Dandyism is a Modernist phenomenon. According to Pittock, it is a by-product of Aestheticism: a cultural phenomenon produced by mixing Aestheticism and bourgeois (popular) culture; it also represented a rebellious temperament of Aestheticism:

Dress was also an appropriate meeting-place for the democratic and elitist elements in Aestheticism. It was open to anyone to dress individually; but the purpose of dressing individually was to stand out from the crowd. . . . The cult of beauty in dress was a democratic choice but an elitist option.

The cult of beauty in dress led to a revival of Dandyism, that famous Regency habit exemplified by Beau Brummell. In the later nineteenth century, Dandyism was praised by both Baudelaire and Barbey d'Aurevilly, who was an old disciple of Brummell. To d'Aurevilly, Dandyism was a kind of sartorial natural selection: . . . Brummell . . . represents the apogee of this colourful Darwinism, and at the same time is described in the same kind of terms applied to Axël, as personifying art itself, being a living symbol. To d'Aurevilly, dandies are Paterian heroes, practising self-exploration in pursuit of the sense of beauty: . . . Yet they are also ironic commentators on the concerns of their wider society: the fears of degenerationists and social Darwinians being mocked by the idea of a process of sartorial evolution. . . like Aesthetic concepts of dress and decoration, to which it [Dandyism] was closely related, it made a considerable impact on some of the period's [*fin de siècle*] artists. (60-61)

²² See West 3.

Chapter 7: The Menacing Phantom of the Father: Patriarchal Oppression in "The Daughters of the Late Colonel"

1 The Narrative Style and the Structure

The narrative of "The Daughters of the Late Colonel" (first published in 1921), like many other works of Katherine Mansfield's, consists of intensified free indirect discourse. There is no distinct authorial voice: the story is told chiefly from the subjective points of view of 'the daughters of the late colonel,' the two unmarried, middle-aged women, Josephine (Jug) and Constantia (Con). "The Daughters of the Late Colonel" is primarily a story of Jug's and Con's stream of consciousness: their reflections and flashbacks-- their "tangents" or "bypath[es]" (274, 280)-- form the story. The sisters' subjective narratives, like Linda's in "Prelude," illuminate the theme of the story, that is, their moral repression under a patriarchal system. Chronological disorder is a natural outcome of such a divergent narrative; the story needs rereading so as to make sense of some of the particularly subjective accounts of their narratives, that is, to relocate them in a chronological sequence.

The stream-of-consciousness style of the narrative might be, as some critics such as Don W. Kleine and Tanya Grenfell-Williams note, relevant to the sisters' sense of time; their apparently fluid (circulating) yet clogged consciousness of time is a reflection of their socially forced inertia. Kleine, in "Mansfield and the Orphans of Time," terms their "anti-temporal" narrative "the story's poetic of waste" (424); he notices the close link between the nature of the narrative and the theme, that is, the relationship between the sisters' stagnantly fluid, cyclical narratives and their moral repression (or rather, in his thesis, their halted moral growth). Kleine hints that their "poetic of waste" results from the fact that "[o]utwardly middle-aged women, Constantia and Josephine are secretly childlike: the Colonel's emotionally retarded 'late' daughters whose growth was aborted by his angry, thumping cane" (426-7). Grenfell-Williams applies a theoretical approach derived from Julia Kristeva's "Women's Time" to the reading of this story: she suggests that the story could be read as a struggle between linear ("masculine") time and cyclical ("feminine") time-- the former (the colonel's linear time) dominates the latter (the sisters' cyclical time) chiefly because the unmarried and childless sisters are "outside 'monumental time [eternity]' " (78); the sisters' cyclical time is as limited as their father's linear time since it is not connected with "reproduction, gestation, biological rhythms and repetition" (71).

"The Daughters of the Late Colonel" might not be as well-known as "Bliss" or "The Garden-Party"; yet it has been enjoying critics' high regard. David Daiches, notably, in

New Literary Values (1936), views this story as “a landmark in the history of the English short story” (105) since “English literature in general is characterised by a love for the loosely knit and a lack of sense of form which are not faults of Katherine Mansfield. . . .” (112). “The Daughters of the Late Colonel,” on the contrary, shows “a sense of the organic nature of the relations of the parts of a story to the whole” (112):

Everything has reference to the *mood* of the story, everything is organized so as to bring “the deepest truth out of the idea.” It is largely a matter of selection and method of presentation. That so much should be achieved by such an economy of means is the greatest tribute to Katherine Mansfield’s technique. (105)

Few writings would receive so perfect a praise as this: his comment hints that Mansfield, in “The Daughters of the Late Colonel,” fully realized her Symbolist aesthetic: “every” description is, as objective correlative, effectively related to one dominant “mood” or theme. Mansfield would never have expected any better critical comment than this. Daiches’s praise is, however, somewhat irresponsible and frustrating to critics, for he neither refers to what kind of “mood” the story conjures up, nor clarifies what is “the deepest truth of the idea” which this “mood,” as an extended metaphor, reveals. Critics’ emphasis on time as the story’s technique (style) and theme (content) seems to be their conscious response to Daiches’s somewhat irresponsible claim. However, this attention to the story’s time must not, as Clare A. Hankin points out,¹ let the reader disregard other technical and thematic dimensions of the story. “The Daughters of the Late Colonel” contains not only psychologically and socially intriguing issues concerning the two oppressed sisters, but also other narrative and structural devices to reinforce those themes.

Section VIII and IX have, for example, Cyril’s point of view. The point of view of Cyril, the sisters’ only nephew, emphasizes the monotony of their lives and their ridiculously limited interest in and close attention to the triviality of life: it does not only make the sections highly comical; but it also throws a critical light on their eternally inert lives.

The title (“the daughters of the late colonel”) is suggestive of its feminist theme: it refers to the fact that Jug and Con, the middle-aged, unmarried, bourgeois women, socially *belong to* their father; they are ‘nobodies’ as they are and are forced to be economically and morally dependent upon their (deceased) father. As conventional middle-class women, they have no social status of their own. The ‘respectable’ education for leisured ladies seems to have made the sisters uncritical of their lack of social and economic independence; and their long-established dependence seems to have deprived them of their free spirits and perpetuated their moral ‘slavery’-- their father, the

patriarch of the family, *even after his death*, determines what they are and governs their minds: they *are* the daughters of the *late* colonel. The fact that they failed to get married makes these two conventional women even more socially worthless and their middle-class life more limited.

The sisters' obsession-- the menacing phantom of Father-- could work as a leitmotif. The symbols which might counteract this oppressive image are the barrel-organ's music, Con's Buddha, the full moon and the sea which represent her suppressed, yet ardent longing for "something" (282), and Jug's sunlight and Mother (the symbols of love and affection) which suggest the possibility of an alternative, different life. The counter symbols of Father could be associated with Aestheticism: the story, like Mansfield's other stories, hints at the political potential of Aestheticism-- Aesthetic self-realization is, as we shall see, opposed to the sisters' habitual, repressed being. These images cannot, however, overpower the shadow of Father.

Father is a metaphor as well as a recurrent image, rather than a substantial character. Father is a merciless, demanding master and oppressor who is symbolized by the colonel's thumping cane and menacing one-eyed glare at his death bed: the image of "the Cyclops who kept his victims imprisoned in a dark cave while he waited to devour them" (Hankin 201). Father, in Jug's and Con's mind, also represents conventional authorities that restrict their being; it could refer to everything that affects their being in society and requires them to make a practical arrangement: it signifies their father (the patriarch of the family), the Church, social conventions and propriety. Father symbolizes the established power that intimidates and imprisons the sisters' spirits. They are afraid of their father as a perverse patriarch whom they needed to look after and at the same time "try not to annoy" (284). Their elder brother (the future patriarch), Benny, used to be a little tyrant for them; Con 'revenged' him only once in her life. The Church simply frightens them; it is, for them, nothing but an authoritarian social institution and a symbol of social conventions: Mr. Farolles, vicar of the district church ^(a 'father') and an old friend of their father's, is simply another oppressive 'patriarch'; his well-intentioned suggestion of giving them "[a] little Communion" "terrifie[s] them" rather than consoles them (267). Little social arrangements such as inviting people, letter-writing, giving away their father's belongings, dyeing their dresses black-- constantly occupy and worry their minds.

"The Daughter of the Late Colonel" can be read not only as a social critique but also as a good comedy: the sisters' absurd manner of taking enormous care of trivial matters is, though often pathetic, funny. Con's infectious absent-mindedness and Jug's forced effort to be practical to make up for it produce a comical effect. C. A. Hankin comments:

“The Daughters of the Late Colonel’ is Katherine Mansfield’s funniest story at the same time as it is thematically one of her most serious” (205).²

2 Jug and Con: The Intensity of Their Repression

Although the two main characters have different natures-- Jug is generally more active and practical whereas Con is dreamy and evasive-- both of them yield to patriarchal power and are repressed. Their repression is described as intense from the beginning of the story: even a week after their father’s death, they are not quite free from their habitual self-restraint and repression:

Constantia lay [on the bed] like a statue, her hands by her sides, her feet just overlapping each other, the sheet up to her chin. She stared at the ceiling.
“Do you think father would mind if we gave his top-hat to the porter?” (262)

Con’s posture is unnatural: it is stiff and mechanical, and shows no sense of relaxation which one normally has in bed.³ Her posture suggests her inner, subconscious tension. Her way of bringing up the issue of what to do with their father’s hat is peculiar as well: she speaks as if their father were still alive or, at least, his ‘will’-- which they never know now-- mattered most in deciding what to do with his belongings. The thing in question is nothing expensive, but the act of giving their father’s top hat (something that represents his ‘head,’ therefore, his social status and authority) to the porter (a servant) could be an insult to his title, and, therefore, somewhat tinted with the colour of revenge on their father. Con’s hesitation shows that she is aware of this impropriety which her suggestion involves. Her inner grudge against their father underlies her seemingly innocent proposal; but the proposal is fully justifiable. Jug and Con, as his daughters, have the full right to settle this matter; they are, indeed, even free to take their revenge on him, for their act of revenge could only be symbolic: it does not harm him at all now that he is gone. Although whether their decision would please their deceased father or not is not a practical issue at all, they never seem to feel quite free to decide for themselves: they are his self-appointed, faithful agents. They later have a long discussion on who should have their father’s old broken gold watch; but who really wants a broken (therefore, useless) watch even if it is made of gold? The question of whom to give it to is not a big issue but it never occurs to them.

Jug, who can be aggressive when she must, is also powerless and senseless about issues concerning their father. Jug does not only accept Con’s rather self-degrading, docile manner uncritically; but her reaction is, indeed, as repressive as Con’s: Con’s reference to their father’s hat reminds Jug of the strange shape of his head, which makes

her, despite herself, feel like laughing; yet she tries hard to suppress it. Alone with her sister, she does not have to worry about the impropriety of laughing at someone 'close' who passed away only a week ago. Yet, to laugh at something about their father in an offhand manner was and still is a taboo:

"But," cried Josephine, flouncing on her pillow and staring across the dark at Constantia, "father's head!" And suddenly, for one awful moment, she nearly giggled. Not, of course, that she felt in the least like giggling. It must have been habit. Years ago, when they had stayed awake at night talking, their beds had simply heaved. And now the porter's head, disappearing, popped out, like a candle, under father's hat. . . . The giggle mounted, mounted; she clenched her hands; she fought it down; she frowned fiercely at the dark and said "Remember" terribly sternly.

"We can decide [about his hat] to-morrow," she said. (262)

Jug denies the fact that she finds the father's head so funny that she wants to burst into laughter: she immediately makes an excuse that "[n]ot, of course, that she felt in the least like giggling" (but her tremendous hassle and effort to check her giggle make the reader giggle). Jug's giggle gives vent to her still suppressed sense of freedom (their liberation from their father), and might be, like Con's proposal, her restrained act of revenge on their father. Jug's narrative ("It must have been habit. Years ago, when they had stayed awake at night talking, their beds had simply heaved") suggests that it has been their "habit" of suppressing natural feelings, particularly, towards their father; it seems to hint that, although they could not be open 'accomplices,' they did, both as emotional ventilation and as a sort of 'revenge,' giggle at him with unspoken mutual understanding: to 'insult' him privately and inconspicuously is acceptable while to do so consciously and openly is a rebellion.

The story makes it explicit that they did not love their father just as he did not care for them: Jug, for example, genuinely wonders why she could cry "twenty-three times" in answering twenty-three condolence letters and why, "[e]ven now, . . . , when she [says] over to herself sadly 'We miss our dear father so much,' " she [could cry] if she [wanted] to" (263). It is her sentimental *mood*, not her affection for their father, that makes her cry. Even after his death, the sisters' grudge against their father is suppressed: Jug and Con seem to feel that it must remain subconscious. Their intense fear of Father might be pregnant with the imprisoned, deep grudge against him: their fear of Father could be the fear of their own explosive, potential aggressiveness. If so, they will be released from the fear of their father by recognizing and accepting their negative feelings towards their father. Yet their habitual self-restraint and their sense of propriety (filial duty) prevent them from facing up to their real feelings and keep them haunted by their father.

Everything authoritarian intimidates the sisters. It is their fear of violating social conventions, neither their love for their father nor their piety, that makes Jug and Con

wonder if they should have all their dresses including their dressing-gowns dyed black. Jug and Con are very reluctant to have their daily clothes dyed, but they are afraid that Kate, their servant, and the postman might see them not wearing black clothes at home. The family 'friends' and their neighbours would eventually learn about their deed; and they might 'condemn' the sisters for their religious negligence and lack of filial love-- this is very unlikely although their neighbours *might*, if interested in the sisters' lives at all, gossip a little behind the sisters' back. No one but themselves (their obsessive fear of 'violation') seems to force them to obey social conventions strictly. Jug's love of beautiful clothes temporarily dominates her fear of disregarding social propriety ("Josephine thought of her dark-red slippers, which matched her dressing-gown, and of Constantia's favourite indefinite green ones which went with hers" [263]). Her 'aestheticism' temporarily prevents her from conforming to conventions; and they leave the matter undecided. The reader, however, infers that the issue will be raised again soon and that they will eventually submit themselves to conventions.

3 Moral Slavery

The reader might associate the relationship between the colonel and his two daughters with that between the master and the slave. Jug's and Con's moral slavery to patriarchy is a persistent habit: it is so intense that they behave as if they were the slaves who are suddenly deprived of their fierce master, 'physically' liberated, but (prefer to) remain 'slaves' psychologically. It seems as if they were so accustomed to suppressing their own selves and desires that they can now hardly recover their forgotten selves or recollect their long-buried desires. The two daughters' reaction to their dead father reflects the intensity of their moral slavery: their fear makes their father 'immortal': they feel that he is "the very last person for such a thing [as death] to happen to" (269). They allow their father's phantom to restrict their moral freedom.

Jug's submission leads her to a neurotic obsession that they might have had their father buried alive: she suggests to Con that they should have kept his body in their flat "just for a time at least" to "make perfectly sure" that he was really dead. Jug concludes that "father will never forgive us for this [letting him bury]-- never!" (269).⁴

Stepping into their father's room, naturally, requires enormous courage of them: the two women's imaginary phantom of their father threatens them immensely; they feel as if they were, like disloyal slaves, violating their master's domain and property. The intensity of their imaginary, subjective fear strikes the reader as not only absurd but neurotic.

It had been a rule for years never to disturb father in the morning, whatever happened. And now they were going to open the door without knocking even.... Constantia's eyes were enormous at the idea; Josephine felt weak in the knees. . . .

. . . . Then the door was shut behind them, but-- but they weren't in father's room at all. They might have suddenly walked through the wall by mistake into a different flat altogether. Was the door just behind them? They were too frightened to look. Josephine knew that if it was it was holding itself tight shut; Constantia felt that, like the doors in dreams, it hadn't any handle at all. (270)

Their oppressed mind mystifies their father and makes not only his being but his room ('domain') supernatural. The surrealistic picture of his room mirrors their neurosis. Their terror gives this scene of 'violation' a manic, occult colour: they, as it were, play hide-and-seek with the phantom; their neurotic fear of the phantom reminds the reader of Linda's "THEY" which reflects her intense repression in "Prelude." Jug's fairly rebellious spirit makes her feel ashamed of her weakness and charge at his chest of drawers: they have, after all, a duty to "go through father's things and settle about them" (170); yet her spirit immediately fails her. She almost touches the drawers and then gives up opening it:

Josephine could only glare. She had the most extraordinary feeling that she had just escaped something simply awful. But how could she explain to Constantia that father was in the chest of drawers? He was in the top drawer with his handkerchiefs and neckties, or in the next with his shirts and pyjamas, or in the lowest of all with his suits. He was watching there, hidden away-- just behind the door-handle-- ready to spring. (271)

Constantia decides, instead of touching his belongings, to imprison him: she 'senses' that the phantom is lurking "among his overcoats" in the wardrobe (272), and locks him up. This 'bold' act of usually meek Con horrifies Jug:

If the huge wardrobe had lurched forward, had crashed down on Constantia, Josephine wouldn't have been surprised. On the contrary, she would have thought it the only suitable thing to happen. But nothing happened. Only the room seemed quieter than ever, and bigger flakes of cold air fell on Josephine's shoulders and knees. She began to shiver. (272)

If Jug and Con had the courage to open the wardrobe, they would learn that nothing can happen; that nothing 'springs' out of it. A little objective view would release them from their obsession; a little 'rebellion' or moral strength would set them free from the moral slavery to their father. The imprisonment of the object of their fear leads to their own moral imprisonment. Yet Con and Jug choose to be "weak" ("Let's be weak-- be weak, Jug. It's much nicer to be weak than to be strong" [272]) and their compromise perpetuates their slavery. Their father's room will never be reentered, his belongings in his room will never be touched, and his phantom remains a threat to them, perhaps until

both of the sisters themselves die.

4 Nonentity and Economic and Social Dependence

The two sisters' fear of their father and their total powerlessness are pathetically but comically exaggerated in the story; but the extremity of their bewilderment is rather puzzling: it tempts the reader to wonder what makes their fear so intense and persistent. The story seems to suggest that their complete moral submission to "Father" (power) could be closely related to the lack of their economic and social independence. The daughters' economic dependence on their father encourages their wholesale social dependence by making their dependence habitual; this habitual dependence seems, in turn, to perpetuate their lack of self-confidence and incapability as a social being by intensifying their sense of uselessness and worthlessness: it determines their slavish nature.

The sisters' helplessness and lack of 'will' make Kate, their servant, look down on them; their slavish subordinate selves, instead of firing Kate, make them afraid of her. The reader notices a reversal of their social roles: "proud young Kate" is, according to them, "the enchanted princess" (265), that is, a legendary princess whose fate temporarily forces her to bear a low social status. Kate takes care of their household, but she always behaves like a rude waitress in a cheap restaurant: she enters the room without knocking (she "burst[s] through the door" [278]), talks to them and serves them in the most rough manner, and "stark[s] off" (266), or "bounce[s] back, leaving their [her mistresses'] door open and slamming the door of her kitchen" (279). Jug and Con are careful not to offend or disturb another tyrant of theirs:⁵ they talk to her "gently" and try to give her "labour-saving" orders hesitantly (275, 273).

Kate's impertinence is, however, often unbearable: Jug and Con retreat into the drawing room and discuss the issue of whether they should fire her or not; their indecisiveness leaves the matter perpetually pending. Their lack of determination makes even Con comment self-mockingly: "Isn't it curious, Jug, . . . , that just on this one subject I've never been able to quite make up my mind?" (280). Indeed, their carefulness and deliberateness are absurd; at least Con's general inability to settle even trivial matters (such as choosing fried fish or boiled fish) strikes the reader as neurotic. Con observes:

The whole difficulty was to prove anything. how did one prove things, how could one? Suppose Kate had stood in front of her and deliberately made a face. Mightn't she very well have been in pain? Wasn't it impossible, at any rate, to ask Kate if she was making a face at her? If Kate answered "No"-- and, of course, she would say "No"-- what a position! How undignified! (280-

1)

Con's difficulty in finding a right, definite proof may propose an interesting philosophical question about the definition of objectivity-- to a highly skeptical mind, there might be no such thing as *pure* objectivity in one's perception or interpretation: a closer observation tends to make the line between the objective and the arbitrary (the subjective) blurred rather than distinct. Nevertheless, our daily living rarely demands perfectly objective proofs: objective proofs, in our practical situations, parallel 'reasonably' objective proofs. The inability to decide the range which "reasonably" covers, and a persistent obsession with preciseness could be a sign of neurosis. Such a practical question as firing or hiring a servant does not require any deep, thorough consideration by a bourgeois mistress; the issue could be even subjectively dealt with: one instance of the servant's 'negligence' (an act which the employer finds unpleasant) would rationalize the act of firing her.

Apart from Con's neurotic tendencies, Jug seems to be practical enough to cope with Kate. Then why cannot Jug decide to replace her with someone else?-- the story hints that the imbalance between their fairly high social status and their modest means for that status complicates this trivial matter. The family's tight budget to keep up a respectable middle-class life is rather emphasized in the story. Even entertaining common guests puts pressure *on* their humble economy: Nurse Andrews's healthy appetite terrifies the sisters: she is "simply fearful about butter" (265); they have no jam to offer her for blancmange. Jug cannot help thinking that "the rich dark cake" which she "cut[s] recklessly" for Cryil, their favorite nephew, "[stands] for her winter gloves or the soling and healing of Constantia's only respectable shoes" (275). Jug has the habit of keeping everything (even a cardboard corset-box) in case it "come[s] in for something" (274). Going home by cab is a luxury: Jug could hear their father "absolutely roaring": "And do you expect me to pay this gimcrack excursion of yours?" (269).

The reader notices that Kate's haughtiness and the sisters' hesitation about firing her probably result from this 'poverty' of theirs: the sisters can pay Kate only poorly; finding a replacement for Kate would never be easy: firing her means their taking care of themselves, that is, all necessary household chores. The sisters' social status relieves them of those chores and allows ~~them to be~~ "dependent on" servants (279). The conventional bourgeois education they received-- the only purpose of which is to produce leisured women, decorative, docile, reasonably intelligent wives and mothers-- and their habitual economic and social dependence ~~have~~ made them incapable of dealing with cooking, washing and cleaning. Here, the reader might note the parallelism in relation between Kate and the sisters, and between the sisters and the colonel. The story hints that social privilege means not only the social exploitation of the oppressed but also,

ironically enough, the social dependence on the oppressed and the incompetence of the privileged: just as Jug and Con have to depend on Kate, so the colonel's old age and ill health force him to rely on Jug and Con (and Kate): his thumping, as Kleine hints,⁶ represents not only his patriarchal power but his irritation and outrage about his own helplessness.

The idea of cooking for themselves simply excites Jug and Con just like little girls who first try cooking:

"What it comes to is, if we did"-- and this she barely breathed, glancing at the door-- "give Kate notice"-- she raised her voice again-- "we could manage our own food."

"Why not?" cried Constantia. She couldn't help smiling. The idea was so exciting. "What should we live on, Jug?"

"Oh, eggs in various forms!" said Jug, lofty again. "And, besides, there are all the cooked foods."

"But I've always heard," said Constantia, "they are considered so very expensive."

"Not if one buys them in moderation," said Josephine. (280)

Their innocent, child-like hilarity which the mere idea of cooking brings them is lovable, yet comical and pathetic. Jug and Con are literally helpless (and even useless) aging middle-aged women with very limited means. The lack of enough means, conventionality and spinsterhood are a very unfortunate combination which keeps them socially and economically stuck: 'good' marriage might at least have guaranteed the daughters economic security and brought to their life some stimulation; radicalism might have made them independent, professional 'new women'; wealth might have allowed them to enjoy a carefree bourgeois life. The sisters' rather dead-end situation intensifies their indecisiveness about Kate; Kate is, knowing this situation, free to be impertinent to them; she can take her revenge on them for her low wage.

5 A Petty Life

In a sense it might even be said that our failure is to form habits: for, after all, habit is relative to a stereotyped world, and meantime it is only the roughness of the eye that makes any two persons, things, situations, seem alike. (Pater The Renaissance)⁷

Section VIII and IX, where Jug and Con have Cyril, their nephew, as their guest, emphasize the monotony and pettiness of the sisters' daily life in a comical way. These two sections show the mutual affection between Cyril and his aunts, which is contrasted with the psychological distance between Cyril and the old colonel as well as that between his aunts and his grandfather. Cyril appreciates his aunts' hospitality and tries not to

hurt their feelings: he is willing to act out the part of their dear little boy. The sisters, on the other hand, do their best to entertain their favorite only nephew: "Cyril to tea" [is] one of their rare treats" (275). The sections, at the same time, throw a critical light upon the sisters' 'dead' life or habit, that is, their closed society, their limited interest, and their inert being. Cyril's point of view objectifies their situation.

The fact that having their nephew as a guest is a "rare treat" alone shows their limited society; that they have few guests, to say nothing of their intimate friends-- the sisters are very close to each other but they do not seem to have any friends. Even their tea with Cyril is, for a "rare" treat, neither particularly lively nor exciting; at least it is pretty boring for Cyril. The reader can see that Cyril's 'filial' love makes him pay a courtesy visit to his aunts; and, as for his grandfather, Cyril's hesitation and excuse (his limited time because of his another appointment) show that he would like to avoid meeting him if possible at all. The only chief topic of these sections is meringues, almost as general a topic as weather.

"But you'll have a meringue, won't you Cyril?" said Aunt Josephine. "These meringues were bought specially for you. Your dear father was so fond of them. We are sure you are, too."

"I *am*, Aunt Josephine," cried Cyril ardently. "Do you mind if I take half to begin with?"

"Not at all, dear boy; but we mustn't let you off with that."

"Is your dear father still so fond of meringues?" asked Auntie Con gently. . . .

"Well, I don't quite know, Auntie Con," said Cyril breezily.

At that they both looked up.

"Don't know?" almost snapped Josephine. "Don't know a thing like that about your own father, Cyril?"

"Surely," said Auntie Con softly.

Cyril tried to laugh it off. "Oh, well," he said, "it's such a long time since--" He faltered. He stopped. Their faces were too much for him.

"Even so," said Josephine.

And Auntie Con looked.

Cyril put down his teacup. "Wait a bit," he cried. "Wait a bit, Aunt Josephine. What am I thinking of?"

He looked up. They were beginning to brighten. Cyril slapped his knees.

"Of course," he said, "it was meringues. How could I have forgotten? Yes, Aunt Josephine, you are perfectly right. Father's most frightfully keen on meringues."

They didn't only beam. Aunt Josephine went scarlet with pleasure; Auntie Con gave a deep, deep sigh. (Section VIII 275-6)

"Meringues" are, as a comic device, as effective in this and the following section as Algy's cucumber sandwiches or muffins in *The Importance of Being Earnest*: the two sections concerning Cyril and meringues are, indeed, some of the most comical scenes in the story. More significantly, "meringues" play a symbolic role in Section VIII and IX. Meringues, in Section VIII, might signify both the psychological distance and the mutual

affection between the sisters and Cyril: they represent the sisters' interest in and affection for their nephew (and their brother) and their effort to fill the gap between him and themselves, and Cyril's consideration for his aunts and his own effort to fill the gap. Also meringues might symbolize the sisters' static time as well. The yawning monotony of their life seems to stop the flow of time: for Jug and Con, their brother's love of meringues is an old, familiar knowledge; but it does not belong to the 'past,' for they, as it were, live on the past. Their routine life has brought them few new experiences to add to their memory: today and tomorrow are as changeable as yesterday; daily stagnation tends to rob the sisters of the sense of time. Their life is soaked in habit; they are inhabitants of "a stereotyped world" (*The Renaissance* 189). Con's inability to decide whether their clock is ahead or behind at the end of Section VIII is symbolic: "She couldn't make up her mind if it was fast or slow. It was one or the other, she felt almost certain of that. At any rate, it had been" (276). Their psychological time has ceased to keep pace with their biological time: just as they could, psychologically, remain 'girls,' Benny, her brother as well as Cyril, could remain a boy in their mind. Their static sense of time is reflected by their general attitude towards Cyril; they (at least Jug) treat him like a little school boy; in the following scene, Jug takes Cyril's hand-- which Cyril, feeling ashamed, tries to take out of hers-- and introduces him to his grandfather. Cyril's sense of time is different from theirs: time flows rapidly for the young man: a new day brings a new experience to him, quickly carrying off an old day to the past: his childhood and boyhood memory belongs to the almost buried past which seems scarcely relevant, at least, to his present being. The sluggish time symbolized by meringues represents the sisters' inertia.

The comic effect of "meringues" in the next section is even greater than in Section VIII. Also, meringues, as a motif, stress the emotional gap and shallow relationships between Cyril and his grandfather, and between the daughters and their father; they especially emphasize the colonel's lack of humane concerns and interests.

"Well," said Grandfather Pinner, beginning to thump, "what have you got to tell me?"

What had he, what had he got to tell him? Cyril felt himself smiling like a perfect imbecile. The room was stifling, too.

But Aunt Josephine came to his rescue. She cried brightly, "Cyril says his father is still very fond of meringues, father dear."

"Eh?" said Grandfather Pinner, curving his hand like a purple meringue-shell over one ear.

Josephine repeated, "Cyril says his father is still very fond of meringues."

"Can't hear," said old Colonel Pinner. And he waved Josephine away with his stick, then pointed with his stick to Cyril. "Tell me what she's trying to say," he said.

(My God!) "Must I?" said Cyril, blushing and staring at Aunt Josephine.

"Do, dear," she smiled. "It will please him so much."

"Come on, out with it!" cried Colonel Pinner testily, beginning to thump again.

And Cyril leaned forward and yelled, "Father's still very fond of meringues."

"Don't shout!" he cried. "What's the matter with the boy? *Meringues!* What about 'em?"

"Oh, Aunt Josephine, must we go on?" groaned Cyril desperately.

"It's quite all right, dear boy," as though he and she were at the dentist's together. "He'll understand in a minute." And she whispered to Cyril, "He's getting a bit deaf, you know." Then she leaned forward and really bawled at Grandfather Pinner, "Cyril only wanted to tell you, father dear, that *his* father is still very fond of meringues."

Colonel Pinner heard that time, heard and brooded, looking Cyril up and down.

"What an extraordinary thing!" said old Grandfather Pinner. "What an extraordinary thing to come all this way here to tell me!"

And Cyril felt it *was*. (Section IX 277-8)

"Meringues" form the only impetus for their 'conversation'; and the dialogue between the colonel and other characters shows no development beyond "Cyril's father still loves meringues." The forced repetition emphasizes the absurdity of the topic, which makes Cyril feel like giving up. The ridiculously enormous effort and time simply to make the colonel understand this insignificant message only yield his dry response; the colonel's sharp, yet very natural response betrays the sisters' (and Cyril's) silly expectation: the sisters overestimate the colonel's affection for his only grandson and underestimate the intellectual faculty of his mind. The episode is comical but illuminates the old man's impatience, bigotry, selfishness and coldness. The colonel's military manner of waving "Josephine away with his stick" and pointing it to Cyril to speak is callous: his cane symbolizes not merely his patriarchal authority (Kleine calls it a "phallic stick"[435]), but the lack of his humanity: his unspontaneousness and unwillingness to communicate-- his thumping, waving and pointing with the stick substitutes for his speech. The emphasis on the colonel's lack of humane affection, as well as the very fact that the sisters never notice the absurdity of the topic, stresses the dreariness of the sisters' (and the colonel's) life: their "habits"-- their habitual fear, repression, monotony, confinement, loss of sense of time-- keep them even unaware of the fact that they have been dead, and that their life is a "failure" (*The Renaissance* 189).

6 An Unfulfilled Life

... what man has sought for is, indeed, neither pain or pleasure, but simply Life. Man has sought to live intensely, fully, perfectly. When he can do so without exercising restraint on others, or suffering it ever, and his activities are all pleasurable to him, he will be saner, healthier, more civilized, more himself. (Wilde "The Soul of Man Under Socialism")⁸

. . . the moment I looked deeper (let me be quite frank) I bowed down to the beauty that was hidden in their [Josephine's and Constantia's] lives and to discover that was all my desire.... All was meant, of course, to lead up to that last paragraph, when my two flowerless ones turned with that timid gesture, to the sun. "Perhaps now...." And after that, it seemed to me, they died as surely as Father was dead. (Katherine Mansfield Letters of K.M.)⁹

Jug and Con never seemed to realize their repressed, habitual life until their father passed away. His existence demanded their full attention and devotion; these two 'tamed' bourgeois women were never allowed to live their own lives: they were too intimidated to contemplate their own lives. The patriarchal system has "exercis[ed] restraint on" them and prevented them from being themselves ("The Soul of Man" 388-9). They had to, according to Con, spend their entire lives on "running out [on errands for their father], bringing things home in bags, getting things on approval, discussing them . . ., and taking them back to get more things on approval, and arranging father's trays and trying not to annoy father" (284). The two sisters, however, towards the end of the story, as they get used to the idea of their father's death, gradually begin to taste a sense of liberation, and notice the emptiness and triviality of their past lives which were hardly their own. Both Jug and Con speculate on their unfulfilled lives and the possibilities of a new life or Wilde's "Life." The barrel-organ's music-- which they never really listened to while their philistine father was alive: he hated that "noise" (281)-- awakens and sets their long-suppressed emotions and thoughts free. Their lost desires and longings seem to come back to them. The longings of Con, a dreamy introvert, are represented by the images of the moonlight, her Buddha, and the sea; her vision of a fulfilled life is vague but Aesthetic. Those of Jug, a practical extrovert, are, on the other hand, represented by sunlight and 'Mother'; she can envisage her 'new' life only within social conventions.¹⁰

Jug imagines an alternative life which might have been possible if their mother had been alive till they grew up: she dreams of a married life which Con and herself missed but other women of their class appear to enjoy. Sunlight illuminates the portrait of their mother; Jug wonders if 'mother' might have brought 'light' and warmth to their lives: "If mother had lived, might they have married?" (283). Since they did not have a caring, attentive, tactful mother who might have found right suitors and arranged marriage, they, the daughters without substantial means or beauty, perhaps, needed to be 'bold' or unconventional: Jug observes: "How did one meet men? Or even if they'd met them, how could they have got to know men well enough to be more than strangers? One read of people having adventures, being followed, and so on" (283). They were too timid to disregard Victorian sexual morality: Jug's "*Extra Firm Bunks*" represents her

conventionality and sexual reserve (274). Yet the “gentle beams” and her liberation from their father seem to suggest to her some possibility of a new, fulfilled life (283).

Con’s vision is, unlike Jug’s, vague, but could be radical:¹¹ her attitude towards life is more Aesthetic.¹² Her Buddha is a symbol of her suppressed and unfulfilled dream of self-realization:

Constantia lifted her big, cold hands as if to catch them [the “round, bright notes” from the barrel-organ], and then her hands fell again. She walked over to the mantelpiece to her favorite Buddha. And the stone and gilt image, whose smile always give her such a queer feeling, almost a pain and yet a pleasant pain, seemed to-day to be more smiling. He knew something; . . . Oh, what was it, what could it be? And yet she had always felt there was... something. (282)

The reader might associate Con’s desire for “something” perhaps unattainable with Linda’s “something”; the association leads the reader to a conclusion that Con’s dull

absent-mindedness *is* a neurosis; her slow reaction results from her sub-conscious repression of vague, yet intense desires. Her dreamy slowness is, in fact, her “shell” to protect her sensitive, fragile inner self (275). Her new sense of ‘liberation’ which the barrel-organ’s music has awoken makes her sensibilities keener: her Buddha seems to convey more things than usual:

This time her wonder was like longing. She remembered the times she had come in here, crept out of bed in her night-gown when the moon was full, and lain on the floor with her arms outstretched, as though she was crucified. Why? The big, pale moon had made her do it. The horrible dancing figures on the carved screen had leered at her and she hadn’t minded. She remembered too how, whenever they were at the seaside, she had gone off by herself and got as close to the sea as she could, and sung something, something she had made up, while she gazed all over that restless water. . . . But it [her past life devoted to their father] all seemed to have happened in a kind of tunnel. It wasn’t real. It was only when she came out of the tunnel into the moonlight or by the sea or into a thunderstorm that she really felt herself. What did it mean? What was it she was always wanting? What did it all lead to? Now? Now? (284)

Con’s Buddha does not only represent her Aestheticism, but is a Symbolist symbol: it is, for Con, just like the aloe for Linda and the pear tree for Bertha, a beauty which unveils hidden truth. Buddha’s enigmatic beauty brings to her self-discovery and a vision of a new, beautiful, and, therefore, truer life. It “shocks” her and makes her reflective; it makes her not only discover her suppressed desires but also envisage a life beyond the dark “tunnel”: Life she desires to live. Like Linda’s aloe, Con’s description of Buddha’s beauty (the peculiar beauty which brings “such a *queer feeling, almost a pain and yet a pleasant pain*”) reminds the reader of Pater’s description of a Symbolist beauty: beauty in strangeness:

A certain strangeness, something of the blossoming of the aloe, is indeed

an element in all true works of art: that they shall excite or surprise us is indispensable. But that they shall give pleasure and exert a charm over us is indispensable too; and this strangeness must be sweet also-- a lovely strangeness. (*The Renaissance* 57)

The full moon and the restless water of the sea, as in "Prelude" and "At the Bay," also represent Aesthetic desires, that is, something ideal and unattainable she does not hesitate even to "crucify" herself.¹³ Her "thunderstorm," however, seems to suggest something more impulsive, more forceful to break through established social and moral boundaries. The reader, indeed, might see the parallelism between Con and Bertha, and Con and Beryl as well as the analogy between Con and Linda. Her longing could be a longing for romance, that is, a sublimated sexual urge-- Jug's desire for marriage might, in Con's light, be interpreted as an expression of her own unfulfilled sexual desire. C. A. Hankin defines this last section as that of "the sexual fantasies of the two women" (202); she suggests that the Indian mail (errand) men Jug and Con imagine in Section VII also reflect the sisters' subconscious desire for sexual fulfillment. At least Con's Indian man is 'masculine': his "something blind and tireless" reminds the reader of Stanley or Harry whose lust is contrasted with the frigidity of their wives (Linda and Bertha) (273). Con decides that her man is "a very unpleasant ^{person} indeed" (273); but her aversion may reflect her subconscious sexual attraction to men just as Bertha's puritanical repulsion against the pregnant cat with its mate shows her repressed sexual desire.

The reader should, nevertheless, note the fact that Con's desire is, like those of Mansfield's other protagonists, not merely sexual but Aesthetic: their awakened sexual desire, though important, forms only part of their deeper desire for spiritual self-fulfillment, that is, Paterian or Wildean desire "to live intensely, fully, perfectly" (Wilde 388). Con's "real" life and false life (her life in a tunnel) also remind the reader of Beryl's "real self" and "false self." The irony is that just as Beryl's conventionality seems to make her choose her "false self," so Con's weakness and conventionality, despite the genuineness and intensity of her longing, make her choose to live a 'false' life, and here the reader sees, again, the analogy between Con and Linda:

She went over to where Josephine was standing. She wanted to say something to Josephine, something frightfully important, about-- about the future and what...

"Don't you think perhaps--" she began.

But Josephine interrupted her. "I was wondering if now--" she murmured. They stopped; they waited for each other.

"Go on, Con," said Josephine.

"No, no, Jug; after you," said Constantia.

"No, say what you were going to say. You began," said Josephine.

"I... I'd rather hear what you were going to say first," said Constantia.

"Don't be absurd, Con."

"Really, Jug."

“Connie!”

“Oh, Jug!”

A pause. Then Constantia said faintly, “I can’t say what I was going to say, Jug, because I’ve forgotten what it was... that I was going to say.”

Josephine was silent for a moment. She stared at a big cloud where the sun had been. Then she replied shortly, “I’ve forgotten too.” (285)

The ending of the story suggests that, in spite of their unspoken but shared revelation, the sisters will never change: they will continue to live on the same, monotonous life and allow the phantom of Father to oppress them. They are, like Jonathan and Linda, too weak to realize their ^{visions of} fulfilled lives: they will never be able to break through their bourgeois mould. Con and Jug have, at least, been neither taught to criticize the established values, nor encouraged to realize their own Life. The patriarchal authority, their immediate oppressor, has, on the contrary, trained them to be submissive. It seems too late to break the conventional mould (or habit) which their weakness has allowed to constitute the substantial part of their nature. Jug and Con end up believing: “It’s much nicer to be weak than to be strong” (272): it would be ‘wiser’ to give up one’s self than to fight a fierce fight that does not promise victory. They have subconsciously chosen their way and there seems to be no going back: they, like Linda, seem to be feeling that they had better forget their dreams if they are weak: all Jug can see now is “a big cloud”; their dreams are bound to end as an ephemeral vision.

Notes

¹ C. A. Hankin is, for example, rather critical about the critics’ *excessive* attention to the story’s time; she maintains in her *Katherine Mansfield and Her Confessional Stories*:

As the title of ‘Daughters of the Late Colonel’ suggests, the relationship between father and daughters is crucial in the story. And yet most commentators have chosen to emphasise the author’s thematic and technical handling of time. (200)

² C.A. Hankin’s approach is both biographical and psychological. I believe in the contribution of biographical studies to the interpretation of literary writings; but I am inclined to believe that biographical approach to fictional writings is rather limiting unless the aim of the research is to produce an objective, informative biography: biographical approach as a critical literary method tends to divert the reader’s attention from the full appreciation of literary text and its value, and its broader concerns for humanity to the somewhat narrow curiosity in a particular personality (the author): it seems to me that, as Wilde in his critical writings, Eliot in “Tradition and the Individual Talent,” Auden in his review on Wilde’s letters (“An Improbable Life”), and Mansfield herself in her journal suggest, the literary value of the work of art consists in its “impersonality” (the imaginative transformation of the “personal”), not its “personality.” Apart from my disagreement with her biographical method, I find Hankin’s psychological analysis of “The Daughters of the Late Colonel” effective and persuasive.

⁴ Kleine points out that Constantia’s posture has “an image of living death” (433).

⁴ Hankin points out that Jug's intense guilty conscience reflects her hidden desire to kill their father. See Hankin 201.

⁵ Kleine regards Kate as the colonel's "proxy" (430).

⁶ Kleine points out the ironical analogy between the colonel and the daughters: he suggests that the colonel, who has hindered the daughters' moral growth, is childish as well:

A roaring boy, he was also a small one who howled and gibbered with inarticulate rage; he bluffed out the world and then, lest it discover the hollowness of his walking-stick, immured himself in the timeless refuge of his chambers: (436)

⁷ Pater 189.

⁸ Wilde 388-9.

⁹ *The Letters of Katherine Mansfield* 120.

¹⁰ Clare Hanson and Andrew Gurr point out:

The trap, the predetermined fate of the Daughters, is suggested through Katherine Mansfield's stock symbol of life, the sun. Josephine, the more 'practical and sensible' of the sisters, is sun and Constantia is moon. (92)

¹¹ Hankin seems to hint at Constantia's innate strength and her unconventionality when she refers to Constantia's ambivalent feelings towards men:

It was Constantia who as a child pushed Benny into the pond; she who, in 'one of those amazingly bold things that she'd done about twice before in their lives,' symbolically got rid of father by firmly locking his wardrobe door; and she whose fantasised black man was 'a very unpleasant indeed.' (203)

¹² Although Kleine does not distinguish the two characters, he notes the 'romantic' element of the sisters' longings for the unfulfilled life. He maintains that "the unlived life" described in the story is "a concern of her [Mansfield's] generation, but also for the Victorians" (423). See Kleine 436-7.

¹³ As for the symbolic meanings of the moon, Hankin's view is similar to mine; she also associates Linda, Beryl and Bertha with Constantia:

While the sun is traditionally a male symbol, that of the moon is female; and it is the influence of the moon on Constantia which makes her fantasy sexually ambiguous. In 'Prelude' Linda Burnell's longing for escape with her mother in the aloe-become-boat takes place in 'bright moonlight'; and Beryl Fairfield, in the same story, has an ambivalent fantasy about a young man as she undresses 'in a pool of moonlight'; and Bertha Young's moment of fantasised union with Pearl Fulton occurs when both women are 'caught in that circle of unearthly light.' (203)

Chapter 8: Aestheticism and Women's Freedom in "Marriage à la Mode"

The thematic relationship between Aestheticism and Feminism is suggested in "The Daughters of the Late Colonel" (May 1921) as well as in "Prelude" (1918) and "The Black Cap" (1917); this theme is more consciously dealt with in "Marriage à la Mode" (December 1921). A discussion of the political potential of Aestheticism would involve or, rather, require a distinction between Aestheticism and dilettantism: another related thematic focus of "Marriage à la Mode" is on the relationship between Aestheticism and dilettantism-- this latter theme also forms one of Mansfield's chief concerns. It is repeatedly dealt with or implied in "Mr. Reginald Peacock's Day" (1917), "Bliss" (1918) and "At the Bay" (1922). "Marriage à la Mode" hints that the protagonist's 'Aestheticism' intensifies her desire for freedom and self-realization, but that the nature of her 'Aestheticism' defines *her* vision of self-realization, and the nature of the freedom that she desires to acquire. Despite this critically significant theme which is relevant to the discussion on the conflict between aesthetics and politics, the story has not been analyzed closely enough. Although many critics refer to some analogies in theme, setting and characterization between "Bliss" and "Marriage à la Mode," their treatment of the two stories has been rather unfair. While the 'ambiguity' (or Symbolism) of "Bliss" has invited a lot of committed discussions and analyses, the seeming clarity of "Marriage à la Mode" appears to have made critics far less enthusiastic: they fail to read the story ^{as} more than a representation of the Modernist artistic circle of Mansfield's time. Sylvia Berkman briefly argues that "Marriage à la Mode" (as well as "Bliss") is a critical presentation of "the bohemian literary circle which frequented Dan Rider's bookshop," that is, the group which Murry introduced to Mansfield in the early 1910s (Berkman 51); Berkman also claims that the story proves that Mansfield "had no affection for the modern metropolitan young women" (Berkman 180). C. A. Hankin regards the story as "Katherine Mansfield's caricature of the arty set" (Hankin 152), and concludes that the 'source' of the story is Lady Ottoline's artistic circle in Garsington (Hankin 152-3). Some critics such as Don W. Kleine and Ronald Sutherland, as I will discuss later in this chapter, are interested in Chekhov's 'influence' on Mansfield, or critics' charge of plagiarism against Mansfield: they compare "Marriage à la Mode" with Chekhov's stories. Both Kleine and Sutherland (especially Sutherland) succeed in claiming the aesthetic independence of Mansfield's work from Chekhov's; but their analyses of the story are, since their focus is on the comparison between Mansfield's and Chekhov's, far from sufficient. This satirical tragicomedy, however, needs a more careful critical attention; particularly the modern significance of the story's main themes

makes it deserve a committed analysis.

1 The Narrative Structure and the Theme

“Marriage à la Mode” consists of three sections: the first two sections are described from the point of view of William; and the final section, from the point of view of Isabel, his wife. The story's narrative has a free indirect style without any obvious authorial intervention except its very last line.

William's narrative introduces and illuminates his involuntary ‘marriage à la mode,’ that is, his ‘modern’ relationship with Isabel. Isabel was not happy with their conventional married life, and the couple have recently adopted a ‘new’ lifestyle-- William is a weekend husband: he lives in London on weekdays while Isabel and their children (and her friends) live in the country. William's narrative reveals that, for Isabel, he and their past married life represent suffocating bourgeois conventionality and philistinism. His reflective point of view, further, reveals not only Isabel's morally and politically limited new-womanness, but also the shallow, dilettantish nature of her (and her friends) ‘Aestheticism.’ The last section hints at Isabel's moral potential and the possibility of her real (that is, radical) change: Isabel's view suggests that she is not entirely uncritical about her friends' amorality, insensitivity and dilettantism. Yet the last section also shows that she perhaps needs some more time to become fully aware of her friends' limitations, or, in the worst case, that their influence eventually overwhelms her Aesthetic potential and transforms her into a decadent dilettante: the last line of the story, the satirical authorial voice, seems to hint at the latter possibility.¹

William's view throws a critical light on Isabel's limited ‘independence,’ her failure to achieve self-realization, and the dilettantism of Isabel and her friends; and Isabel's point of view indirectly criticizes her friends' (and her own) moral shallowness. The two points of view echo the authorial point of view: they illuminate the two interrelated themes of the story: Aesthetic and feminist themes. Mansfield's criticism of dilettantism expressed in “Marriage à la Mode” is fairly explicit and harsh: the story seems to imply that William's philistine-looking professionalism and morality surpass Isabel's artistic pretentiousness and amateurism. The reader might associate William with Linda's ‘soft’ Stanley: perhaps the reader should remember, here, that Linda's ‘choice’ of Stanley over Jonathan in “At the Bay” could mean her appreciation of Stanley's solid practicality and disciplined professionalism over Jonathan's dilettantish amateurism.

2 Isabel

(1) The 'Old' Isabel and the 'New' Isabel

Both William's and Isabel's narrative describe Isabel rather than William. William's chief concern is Isabel and his relationship with her: he tries to understand the 'new' Isabel and her demands. The focus of Isabel's narrative is on herself, that is, her relationship with her husband and her friends: she tries to see where she morally stands.

William's narrative shows that the 'old' Isabel was secretly but deeply dissatisfied with her married life: their old "little white house with blue curtains and a window-box of petunia" which William was so proud of as his 'castle,' was a symbol of conventional petit bourgeois well-being which Isabel found "poky" and stifling (313, 312). William's "blindness" (313), that is, his uncritical acceptance of conventional gender roles and family values, made him an unconscious exploiter of Isabel's love, devotion and secondary status as a woman: he neither realized that he had 'imprisoned' her in a conventional petit bourgeois female mould where women are expected to play no 'social' roles but domestic roles as a wife, mother and house-maker; nor did he recognize his wife's desire for self-realization. William recalls:

Every morning when he came back from chambers it was to find the babies with Isabel in the back drawing-room. They were having rides on the leopard skin thrown over the sofa back, or they were playing shops with Isabel's desk for a counter, or Pad was sitting on the hearthrug rowing away for dear life with a little brass fire-shovel, while Johnny shot at pirates with tongs. Every evening they each had a pick-a-back up the narrow stairs to their fat old Nanny. (312-3)

The general atmosphere William describes is free, cosy and warm for their children, yet it could be suffocating for Isabel. The description suggests that, despite the 'help' of motherly, yet old-fashioned and rather useless "fat old Nanny," Isabel's life was quite disorganized; and that she had scarcely any time for herself. The fact that Isabel has her own desk seems to show her aspiration to be a writer (or a poet); yet her desk, which was occupied and turned into part of the 'playground' by their children, signifies that her private sphere as well as her time had to be sacrificed for her domestic duties. Isabel's repression was, in fact, intense enough to "kill" her love for William (312). William's narrative hints that the sexual relationship between Isabel and himself has ceased or nearly ceased. It emphasizes the lack of time for the couple to be alone. As for the weekend described in the story, for example, "[i]t was not until William was waiting for his taxi the next [Sunday] afternoon that he found himself alone with Isabel" (317): after their meeting at the station Saturday evening (they are alone for only a minute or so), the couple have a brief time together for the second (and the last) time while they wait

for his taxi. His narrative indirectly suggests Isabel's frigidity. He stresses her "cool" beauty and freshness (311, 314); her beauty, which he compares to the "rosebush, petal-soft, sparkling and cool" in his boyhood memory, is a virginal beauty. His reference suggests his asexual ('pure') relationship with his wife; that is, his hesitation to touch an awesome, delicate beauty for fear of destroying it, and his desire to touch that "exquisite freshness"(311). William's narrative also shows that, although he is a successful lawyer and a responsible, affectionate family man, he is, despite his full devotion to his family, appreciated only as a feeder, or a worker-bee. Isabel seems to 'encourage' this tendency: William's nominal status serves the newly-adopted lifestyle best. It is a material tie, rather than mutual affection, that unites him with his family-- the children's reaction to William, a weekend 'guest,' seems to reveal the fact: "[t]heir first words always were as they ran to greet him, 'What have you got for me, daddy?' " (309).

William's narrative reflects his mixed feelings: it reflects his still fresh confusion about Isabel's revealed dissatisfaction and 'change' as well as his genuine repentance for his unintended insensitivity to Isabel's needs. His conventional mind does not wish to face the real cause of Isabel's past unhappiness or accept her change: William still cannot help longing for the old state although he is aware that his longing is nothing but his "sentimentality" (313). He prefers to accept Isabel's excuses as her cause; he wishes to reduce Isabel's inner needs to her 'material' needs:

God, what blindness! He hadn't the remotest notion in those days that she really hated that inconvenient little house, that she thought the fat Nanny was ruining the babies, that she was desperately lonely, pining for new people and new music and pictures and so on. (313)

William's naïveté wants to believe that the 'new' (better) house, the 'new' (younger and more educated) nurse, 'new' house-maids, 'new' (more) leisure and the 'new' friends will guarantee Isabel's welfare. The chief source of her dissatisfaction is, however, her lack of freedom, that is, her own time and space to fulfill her desires: she wishes to be free from the conventional roles of a married woman. To admit Isabel's real needs is to trespass the framework of 'respectable' marriage; it could mean the rejection of their marriage. Isabel's freedom ("one bird drifted high") is, to William's sincere but still conventional mind, "a dark fleck in a jewel" (311), a flaw that mars his conventional vision of happiness. Isabel is aware of his feelings: she does not make it explicit that her real needs are her freedom from marriage: she not only avoids hurting him, but she must also maintain her social status. Divorce would be her last resort: she needs economic and social stability as well as moral freedom. Isabel's new arrangement (their new lifestyle) reflects her practical settlement between her material and moral needs.

William is, however, no fool: he is vaguely aware of Isabel's desire for freedom; his

recurrent “dull, persistent gnawing” in his breast reflects his awareness that Isabel has ceased to love him and that their relationship is ending (310, 311, 318). Isabel’s indirect rejection has already hurt him; and her indifference to him leads him, at the end of the story, to say to her, in the letter, that he “should be a drag on [her] happiness” (319). Yet his narrative shows that he cannot give up a forlorn hope. His generous concession to Isabel’s proposal seems to result from his slim hope that she might, after some break, come back to him. William never blames her for her change: he blames his own past “blindness” and her friends who have been influencing her. Clinging to the forlorn hope is, nevertheless, clinging to his much-shaken conventional belief, that is, clinging to the notion that it is Isabel’s material needs and bad association, not her inner needs, that have changed Isabel. “[A] silky yellow flower with coarse leaves which sprawled over a bank of rock” (313), which William sees from the window of the train, might reflect his grasp of Isabel’s situation. Isabel is a delicate, sophisticated “silky yellow flower” surrounded by her indecent friends (“coarse leaves”)-- the solid “bank of rock” over which the vine “sprawl[s]” might refer to William, who gives his wife and her friends material support. The irony of the picture is, though, the delicate flower cannot be innocent: it cannot survive without its coarse leaves, and the vine always needs something to lean against.

(2) Isabel’s Modernity: The Radicalism and Limitations of Her Newness

The leitmotif of “*Marriage à la Mode*” is, as the title might suggest, modernity: ‘modern’ marriage, a ‘modern’ (new) woman,² ‘modern’ lifestyle, ‘modern’ friends, ‘modern’ art, and ‘modern’ child-raising. The focus of the story is on Isabel’s ‘change’ from her conventional female figure to ‘a new woman’: William’s narrative emphasizes Isabel’s ‘newness.’ Isabel’s new-womanness is, in a way, ‘radical’ but limited: her ‘radicalism’ and limitations seem to be closely related to her ‘Aestheticism.’ Isabel’s love of art encourages her aspiration for freedom; it is her ‘artistic’ friends who are either anti-conventional or anarchic enough to believe in women’s freedom and offer her moral support; yet the nature of her (or their) ‘Aestheticism’ (her or their notion of art) qualifies the nature of her new-womanness. Isabel’s (and her friends’) dilettantism makes her ‘newness’ apparently rebellious but innately reactionary.

Isabel regards herself as artistic; as a would-be writer or literary manqué, she loves fine art, music and literature. Isabel’s and her friends’ grasp of art is, however, shallow. Their understanding of the significance of art is not much different from Peacock’s in “*Mr. Reginald Peacock’s Day*”; the chief role of art is, at best, to provide a vehicle to

“escape from life” (“Mr. Reginald Peacock’s Day” 148, 152). Isabel is, indeed, escaping from ‘life’ (or reality) which is represented by William, and seeking an easy anodyne in ‘art’ which is represented by her flippant ‘artistic’ friends. Isabel’s craving for freedom and the indirect denial of ‘old’ values are threatening to William’s conventionality: they shake his “blind” confidence in established values. Isabel’s ‘change’ might strike William as ‘radical’ enough; but it is, in fact, superficial, and its superficiality is relevant to her superficial grasp of art. Female ‘solidarity’ (Moira Morrison’s moral and practical support) and her urban environment (where ‘newness’ tends to be appreciated) have made possible the change which ‘isolated’ Linda in a still provincial New Zealand town fails to realize: fashionable Moira has helped Isabel to articulate her dissatisfaction and carry out the plan to set her ‘free.’ Isabel’s change, however, requires no real confrontation: it indeed consists of minor arrangements such as the change of a place, a house, a nurse, servants, the couple’s lifestyle. The most drastic change among these is that of their lifestyle: the new arrangement-- Isabel and their children live in the country while William lives in London and joins them only on the weekend-- has made their marriage nominal, by reducing William to an unwelcome weekend visitor. Yet even this change is not really radical as it does not intend to challenge or change her social status, still less the status-quo of society: it does not affect their social contract (their institutional marriage); Isabel remains an economically dependent wife. If William’s ‘privileged’ social status as a bourgeois male and his conventionality, in the past, made him unintentionally exploit Isabel, that is, restrict her freedom and hinder her self-realization, Isabel is now, in turn, consciously exploiting William’s love for and devotion to her. The daily enjoyment and extravagance of Isabel as well as Moira Morrison and her gang practically depend on William’s earning: if William was unconsciously “selfish” in the past (313), Isabel is now intentionally being selfish. Isabel’s (and Moira’s) logic could be that she, as a woman as well as an ex-sufferer, has the ‘legitimate’ right to positively exploit her husband because men are given the social advantage to exploit women: her selfishness is permissible and negligible compared with men’s commonly-observed wholesale selfishness. This old, familiar logic sounds morally cheap; and if this is Isabel’s, it is degrading her: her selfishness perpetuates her dependent, secondary status; it keeps her uncritical of the lack of economic independence; and economic dependence can mar and endanger moral independence, that is, freedom.

William’s alienation contrasting Isabel’s complaisance in the second section makes the reader critical of Isabel’s friends and her (and their) present life and attitude:

After tea the others went off to bathe, while William stayed and made his peace with the kiddies. But Johnny and Paddy were asleep, the rose-red glow had paled, bats were flying, and still the bathers had not returned. . . . He

thought of the wad of papers in his pocket, but he was too hungry and tired to read. The door was open; sounds came from the kitchen. The servants were talking as if they were alone in the house. Suddenly there came a loud screech of laughter and an equally loud "Sh!" They remembered him. . . .

"We ought to have a gramophone for the week-ends that played 'The Maid of the Mountains,' "

"Oh no! Oh no!" cried Isabel's voice. "That's not fair to William. Be nice to him, my children! He's only staying until to-morrow evening."

"Leave him to me," cried Bobby Kane. "I'm awfully good at looking after people." . . . "Hallo, William!" And Bobby Kane, flapping his towel, began to leap and pirouette on the parched lawn. "Pity you didn't come, William! The water was divine. And we all went to a little pub afterwards and had sloe gin."

The others had reached the house. "I say, Isabel," called Bobby, "would you like me to wear my Nijinsky dress to-night?"

"No," said Isabel, "nobody's going to dress. We're all starving. William's starving, too. Come along, *mes amis*, let's begin with sardines."

"I've found the sardines," said Moira, and she ran into the hall, holding a box high in the air. . . .

"Well, William, and how's London?" asked Bill Hunt, drawing the cork out of a bottle of whisky.

"Oh, London's not much changed," answered William.

"Good old London," said Bobby, very hearty, spearing a sardine.

But a moment later William was forgotten. . . .

Bill and Dennis ate enormously. And Isabel filled glasses, and changed plates, and found matches, smiling blissfully. (315-7)

William's isolation is stressed in the quoted scene (and the reader cannot help wondering if William is not really starving): he *is* an unwelcome 'guest'-- his guests freely "help themselves" as if *they* were (though reluctantly) treating him (310). Isabel's friends show no good manners to their host or patron. They even look down on William: they regard him as a helpless grown-up child who needs Mother's (Isabel's) constant care. Bobby Kane volunteers for the post of William's nanny: "Leave him to me, . . . , I'm awfully good at looking after people." William, as a conventional husband, would not deny the fact that he expects Isabel to 'serve' him, or at least to be 'nice' to him while at home; yet, apart from his patriarchal 'right,' it is quite natural for him to expect his wife to care for him. Isabel is, however, always too busy entertaining her own guests (and herself) to please him: he is practically "forgotten." William, on the other hand, seems to be (now) used to being neglected (even the servants forget his presence and engage in active conversation). He has learned to take care of himself: he makes it a rule to spend weekend with their children, not with constantly-engaged Isabel, although, this time, he is unable to do even that, for the nurse ignores him as well: she has put the children to bed regardless of their father's convenience or feelings.

William's observation shows that it is Isabel's friends who are childish: they are behaving like children with no discipline-- Isabel, in fact, calls them "my children": Bobby

Kane acts like an active little boy who "leap[s] and pirouette[s] on the parched lawn" and asks 'Mother' (Isabel) to let him "wear [his] Nijinsky dress"; Moira Morrison finds the sardine and Bill Hunt "draw[s] the cork out of a bottle of whisky" before waiting for 'Mother's' orders. Generous 'Mother' busies herself with her spoiled children: "Isabel fill[s] glasses, and change[s] plates, and [finds] matches, smiling blissfully." It is quite ironical that Isabel who has denied the conventional female roles is, here, willing to put herself in that mould.

Although Isabel is, as William's wife, trying to be considerate to him, her general indifference to him is responsible for or, at least, encourages her friends' (and their servants') impertinence to him. Her attitude makes it obvious that, although she does not hate William, she does not love him, either: she prefers to be his nominal wife. It is Isabel's guilty conscience-- her consciousness that she is not only sacrificing him for her 'freedom' but positively taking advantage of him-- that makes her nice to him. She shows some consideration for William on the evening of his departure: she "[leaves] the others and [goes] over to him" and volunteers to carry his heavy luggage (317). Isabel, nevertheless, hardly sees him off: when the taxi comes, "she [gives] him a little hurried kiss: she [is] gone" (318).

(3) Isabel's Modernity: Dilettantism

Isabel is "keen on" art (312); the lack of the opportunities to appreciate art is one of her main excuses for the newly-arranged lifestyle: she has been "pining for" "new music and pictures and so on" (313). The "new" Isabel's 'aestheticism' is stressed from the beginning of the story:

It was over a year since Isabel had scrapped the old donkeys and engines and so on because they were so "dreadfully sentimental" and "so appallingly bad for the babies' sense of form."

"It's so important," the new Isabel had explained, "that they should like the right things from the very beginning. It saves so much time later on. Really, if the poor pets have to spend their infant years staring at these horrors, one can imagine them growing up and asking to be taken to the Royal Academy."

And she spoke as though a visit to the Royal Academy was certain immediate death to anyone....

"Well, I don't know," said William slowly. "When I was their age I used to go to bed hugging an old towel with a knot in it."

The new Isabel looked at him, her eyes narrowed, her lips apart.

"Dear William! I'm sure you did!" She laughed in the new way. (309-10)

The new Isabel, a modern 'new woman,' is aesthetically conscious. She believes in the importance of art education; and her artistic pose is fashionably anti-Establishment. She disdains William's old-fashioned, rather philistine inclination: she seems to believe that

his lack of enthusiasm towards art or sophisticated taste is a natural product of the philistine education he has got as a child. Isabel's taste might be refined, but the reader wonders if she has a specific artistic inclination of her own besides her 'modernity': she seems to be following fashion blindly. This is quite ironical: William notes Isabel's individualistic tendency, that is, her conscious detachment from 'mass': she has a habit of "standing a little apart from everybody else" while waiting for him at the station (311). She shows, however, no Individualism in her artistic taste: the reader is tempted to suspect that her 'Individualism' could be another arty pretence of hers and her friends'. The art which she and her friends value highly is affected and pretentious, yet its quality, in fact, seems to be closer to pop art: it pretends to be avant-garde, but it shows no mature technique or theory to challenge that of traditional art. William's artless observation betrays the fakery of their fashionable ('modern') 'art' that Isabel and her friends worship. William's new house is richly decorated by their art *à la mode*, which intensifies his sense of alienation:

As William wandered downstairs, the maid crossed the hall carrying a lamp. He followed her into the sitting-room. It was a long room, coloured yellow. On the wall opposite William someone had painted a young man, over life-size, with very wobbly legs, offering a wide-eyed daisy to a young woman who had ~~one~~ very short arm and one very long, thin one. Over the chairs and sofa there hung strips of black material, covered with big splashes like broken eggs, and everywhere one looked there seemed to be an ash-tray full of cigarette ends. William sat down in one of the arm-chairs. Nowadays, when one felt with one hand down the sides, it wasn't to come upon a sheep with three legs or a cow that had lost one horn, or a very fat dove out of the Noah's Ark. One fished up yet another little paper-covered book of smudged-looking poems.... (315-6)

William's eye seems to penetrate the quality of their art and the nature of their attitude towards art. The sofa cloth might strike a fashionable mind as interesting; but it seems to be basically cheap and vulgar in taste. The picture on the wall strikes the reader as simply amateurish. The subject (the scene of courtly love) seems to be too commonplace and too conventional. Something 'new' about the painting is its deformation. It makes the viewer *wonder if* there is any particular intention or meaning in the ugly distortion of the bodies at all-- or does the artist naively think that he can make the viewer believe that this distortion or imbalance is 'intentional,' not the result of his technical immaturity and whim? Might he say that it is the viewer's full responsibility, not his, to find any meaning there; that if the viewer cannot find any, it is the viewer's fault, not his? If a careful viewer cannot find any consistent meaning in the painting, it does not only fail as a 'serious' art; but it is a failure as decorative art: for it is simply ugly to see. Isabel seems to believe in its artistic value: she urges Bill Hunt (who seems to be the

painter of this picture) to paint another in the following scene; and she comments: "It would be so fascinating in twenty years' time" (317). As "an ash-tray full of cigarette ends" seems to imply, their 'art' lacks seriousness: it is a luxurious pastime. The technical amateurishness and artistic pretentiousness of the wall painting not only lack the power to appeal to the viewer but its obvious self-complaisance could be even sickening to him or her.

Indeed, ironically enough, William's artless, unaffected sense of beauty seems to surpass that of Isabel and her friends. William's narrative voice, on the whole, reflects his fertile perceptiveness, sensibilities, shrewd observation and full descriptive power:

The exquisite freshness of Isabel! When he had been a little boy, it was his delight to run into the garden after a shower of rain and shake the rose-bush over him. Isabel was that rosebush, petal-soft, sparkling and cool. And he was still that little boy. But there was no running into the garden now, no laughing and shaking. (311)

The late afternoon sun shone on women in cotton frocks and little sunburnt, barefoot children. It blazed on a silky yellow flower with coarse leaves which sprawled over a bank of rock. The air ruffling through the window smelled of the sea. (313)

These depictions by William (his narrative voice) are lyrical and richly sensuous: they are, for example, far more poetic, genuine, and, therefore, appealing to the reader than Isabel's affected, empty conceit: "Simply everything is running down the steep cliffs into the sea, beginning with the butter" (314), or Dennis's boring, clichéd expression: "A Lady in Love with a Pine-apple" (315), "A Lady with a Box of Sardines" (317) and "A Lady Reading a Letter" (317).

The artistic taste of Isabel and her friends reflects their shallow grasp of art: art has either a merely decorative function in their daily living (as we have seen, though, their art might have very little value as decorative art); or it is an intellectual distraction. Their view of art is identical to Reginald Peacock's self-indulgent view of art: art is a handy means to "escape from life." Isabel's and her friends' superficial attitude towards art may remind the reader of that of Bertha, another literary manqué and hostess of a 'salon,' and her friends. There is, indeed, the parallelism between Isabel and Bertha: just as Bertha is the only character who shows the potential of moral growth, so Isabel has the same potential while her friends do not. William's subconscious comparison (metaphor) is, in this sense, right: Isabel is innately "a silky yellow flower," a delicate and sensitive one.

(4) William's Challenge and Isabel's Potential

Algernon. Well, one must be serious about something, if one wants to have any amusement in life. I happen to be serious about Bunburying. What on earth you are serious about I haven't got the remotest idea. About everything, I should fancy. You have such an absolutely trivial nature. (The Importance of Being Earnest)

William's critical eye notes the boredom and inertia of Isabel and her dilettantish friends, that is, their "ash-tray full of cigarette ends" (316) and the fact that "after supper they were all so tired they could do nothing but yawn until it was late enough to go to bed" (317). Isabel's point of view in the last section seems to justify William's view of her and her friends' lives.

Isabel found her past life dull and stifling: the aim of her new arrangements was to live her own life; to live a new, full life. She once said to William that she is "frightfully keen on-- on everything" (312). Yet Isabel's own observation suggests that, despite the free atmosphere and all the merrymaking, her new life could be as "dull" and "stifling" as the old one(318); self-indulgence and the lack of serious commitment seem to be eventually making their lives empty and boring. William, in fact, terms their new town an "empty, blind-looking little town" (318): he seems to have perceived the hollowness and suffocation which self-indulgence ultimately leads Isabel and her friends to. Isabel's point of view observes:

The post was late as usual. They sat outside the house in long chairs under coloured parasols. Only Bobby Kane lay on the turf at Isabel's feet. It was dull, stifling; the day drooped like a flag.

"Do you think there will be Mondays in heaven?" asked Bobby childishly. And Dennis murmured, "Heaven will be one long Monday."

But Isabel couldn't help wondering what had happened to the salmon they had for supper last night. She had meant to have fish mayonnaise for lunch, and now...

Moira was asleep. Sleeping was her latest discovery. "It's so wonderful. One simply shuts one's eyes, that's all. It's so delicious." (318)

The infectious boredom and sense of purposelessness are as paralyzing as the old suffocating repression: "blind" self-indulgence could numb one's spirit as much as the deprivation of freedom. The "childish" irresponsibility and laziness of Isabel's friends finally seem to nag her sensible mind: her friends swarm around her and do nothing but wait to be fed and entertained indolently, yet greedily.

William's letter, as it were, challenges this lack of seriousness that Isabel's friends represent: his sincerity and genuineness are contrasted with the callousness and insensitivity of Isabel's friends. William's truthfulness becomes, regardless of his intention, a severe criticism of her friends' attitude towards life and what she herself is

gradually becoming:

My darling, precious Isabel. Pages and pages there were. As Isabel read on her feeling of astonishment changed to a stifled feeling. What on earth had induced William...? How extraordinary it was.... What could have made him...? She felt confused, more and more excited, even frightened. It was just like William. Was it? It was absurd, of course, it must be absurd, ridiculous. "Ha, ha, ha! Oh, dear!" What was she to do? Isabel flung back in her chair and laughed till she couldn't stop laughing. (319)

William's letter makes her "excited," but "stifled," "confused" and "frightened." His feeling towards her moves her, even flatters her; but his sincerity is too heavy and grave for her present flippancy: it becomes not only a criticism of and a warning against her own superficiality and self-indulgence, but also, a reminder of the falsehood of her present life, that is, her still unfulfilled life. Isabel wishes to trivialize 'life' and escape from its depth and complication if she can: she is afraid of confronting the lack of self-realization. To take his tone seriously and respond to it means to criticize her 'modern' yet superficial present self. She prefers to treat his sincerity as an "absurd" folly or a ridiculous excessiveness; or, rather, "it *must* be absurd, ridiculous" (emphasis added), for, otherwise, she will be forced to face up to 'life.' That is why she commits a cruel act of reading his letter to her friends whose callousness and moral shallowness can never appreciate William's genuine tone.

The expected, insensitive reaction of Isabel's friends induces her to respond to William's sincerity, for it mirrors her own "vile, odious, abominable, vulgar" life and "shallow, tinkling, vain" self (320). Her friends' superficiality makes her feel even "exhausted" (320). The moment of revelation is, nevertheless, followed by anti-climax: Isabel's revelation is short-lived: she, after a moment's hesitation, yields to her friends' call of temptation. Isabel's flippant, self-indulgent "new" self seems to have eroded her too deeply to go back to William or to explore the path to a fulfilled life. Even going back to William might have been better than responding to her friends' call, for it does not mean going back to the same old conventional life: William's attitude hints at his moral and intellectual capacity of change and growth; her choice of William might have prepared for her real change. The "new" Isabel, however, finds it "too difficult" not to succumb to the temptation of self-indulgence: she, "laughing in the new way," allows herself to be trapped by superficiality *à la mode* (321).

3 "Marriage à la Mode" and Chekhov's "The Butterfly"

The reader who is familiar with Chekhov's writings might see some analogies between "Marriage à la mode" and Chekhov's short stories which deal with the tense

relationship between the couple which represents the conflict between art and life. Chekhov's "The Butterfly" (1892) and "My Wife" (1892) falls into this category. "The Butterfly" describes the relationship between the estranged couple, the wife's flippancy contrasted with the husband's innocence and solidity, and the implied conflict between what the wife represents (dilettantism and self-indulgence) and what the husband represents (disciplined professionalism, science, and morality). Chekhov's treatment of the conflict between art and life reminds the reader of that of Mansfield's in "Marriage à la Mode." Ronald Sutherland points out, in his "Katherine Mansfield: Plagiarist, Disciple, or Ardent Admirer?," a similarity in plot between Mansfield's story and Chekhov's "Not Wanted"; Don W. Kleine, indeed, pays a particular attention to the parallelism between the plot of Chekhov's "The Grasshopper" ("The Butterfly") and that of Mansfield's story. While emphasizing the point that the Chekhovian influence observed in "Marriage à la Mode" is different in nature from the controversial Chekhovian 'influence' on one of her early works, "The-Child-Who-Was-Tired,"⁵ Kleine concludes that:

In short, indications seem strong that Miss Mansfield's mordant little comedy was drawn partly from the masterpiece of her Russian predecessor. It should be stressed, however, that "Marriage à la Mode" is original in its revealed intentions, and far different in its overall artistic effect. Chekhov's lengthy work is a complex character study. A vicious caricature of the creative process, Olga's egotism makes of real life a romantic novel, in which the flattery of a parasite becomes a tribute to artistic genius, a squalid infidelity becomes an act of poignant courage, and a generous man's affection becomes touching obeisance of the lowly to the Free Spirit. Compared with such a grasshopper, silly Isabel is hardly a villainess at all.

Indeed, to expose character in its complexity is no more Miss Mansfield's aim here than in any other of her short pieces. Rather she seeks, unlike Chekhov, piercing satire of the vagrant wife's artistic friends, and sweet pathos (she shifts narrative point of view from the offending wife to the suffering husband). (287)

I generally agree with his view about Chekhov's literary influence on Mansfield; I recognize some similarities in plot and theme between Chekhov's "The Butterfly" ("The Grasshopper") and Mansfield's "Marriage à la Mode." However, I disagree with him about the extent of Chekhov's influence on this particular story of Mansfield's. Also, my interpretation of "The Butterfly" is not only different from Kleine's; but my grasp of Mansfield's stories also disagrees with his.

I have reservations about Kleine's hint of Mansfield's 'plagiarism,' that is, a literary misconduct that goes beyond T. S. Eliot's full appreciation (or absorption) of "the dead poets": while Kleine stresses Mansfield's adaptation of Chekhov's story as artistically acceptable 'imitation,' he insists that "here [in "Marriage a la Mode"] too our author,

never elsewhere in her mature work a literalist, *does* appear to have 'made free with' Chekhovian matter, if not Chekhovian manner" (288). Kleine indeed, by saying so, nearly equates the degree of Mansfield's 'imitation' of Chekhov's story in "Marriage à la Mode" with that of "The-Child-Who-Is-Tired": despite his previous positive comment that Mansfield's story "is original in its revealed intentions, and far different in its overall artistic effect," this conclusive comment degrades the story to a work by a follower of Chekhov. "The-Child-Who-Is-Tired" could be termed Mansfield's apprentice work; she was being merely 'a follower of the great master.' She did make a free use of "Chekhovian matter, if not Chekhovian manner." Yet, while the thematic and structural similarities between "Let-Me-Sleep" ("Sleepy") and her early story are obvious, those between "The Butterfly" and "Marriage à la Mode" are not explicit. To emphasize the similarities of the two stories is to take the subtle similarities as obvious. The reader might associate, for example, "Bliss" 's pear tree with the cherry tree of *The Cherry Orchard* ; he or she might see a certain analogy between the protagonists' inertia of "The Daughters of the Late Colonel" and that of *The Three Sisters*, or between the daughters' perpetual dependence and Olga's in "Angel" ("The Darling"). Yet if a critic stressed the similarities between these texts of the two authors without any in-depth analysis, most readers would dismiss his argument as his excessive 'stock response' or mere overemphasis. "Marriage à la mode" should be treated as an independent piece of work: Chekhov's influence on this particular work *is* subtle: it requires the critic's very careful analysis, that is, a real study of influence and intertextuality. Comparing the plots and settings of the two stories and pointing out some similarities is far from sufficient in order to stress the great indebtedness of one story to the other; suggesting one author's direct influence on the other would require even greater critical deliberation and demonstration.

I also have reservations about Kleine's interpretation of "Marriage à la Mode" and "The Butterfly" and his general comment on Mansfield's stories. His comment on Mansfield's and Chekhov's story suggests that he regards Mansfield's story as a 'pure' satire (and, therefore, as somewhat secondary by implication) while he believes that the focus of Chekhov's "lengthy work" is something more than a caricature of dilettantism. My view is almost opposite: both stories are, as an effect, more than a social satire; yet while Chekhov's aim and method belong to the traditional genre of satire, Mansfield's aim and method go beyond it. Kleine maintains that "to expose character in its complexity is no more Miss Mansfield's aim here than in any other of her short stories." It seems to me, however, that Mansfield's short stories challenge our fixed notion that the full illumination of a character requires a "lengthy work," say, a long novel with rich,

detailed description and the full development of the plot. Mansfield's technically achieved works (her 'slice of life'), especially their intensified moments and moods, appeal to the reader's imagination and experiences, and, despite their shortness, fully reveal the protagonists' personalities--just as, in our actual life, concentrated moments could be far more revealing, and, therefore, significant, than the merely extended length of time. In fact, if the length did count in understanding the complexity of life, not only art would be bound to be a failure; but life would be rather dull and meaningless; and life would also be bound to be a failure because of our mortality. Mansfield's focus on 'the moment' and her technical 'break' with Chekhov might represent the Modernist's break with the nineteenth-century Realist method.

Chekhov's successful satirical comedies such as "The Butterfly" and "The Angel," and Mansfield's fully attained satirical comedies such as "Bliss," "The Daughters of the Late Colonel" and "Marriage à la Mode" are different in characterization. Chekhov's "The Angel" or "The Butterfly" tends to win the reader's sympathy towards the protagonist by emphasizing her innocent naïveté (which leads, despite her lovable good-naturedness, each Olga to a succession of follies); the protagonist's total incapability of moral growth rather vexes us, yet *her* 'innocence' is likely to make us love her or at least accept her as she is. Indeed, the naïveté of Olga in "The Angel" makes critics including V. S. Pritchett overlook Chekhov's subtle irony towards the protagonist, misinterpret the story, and regard lovable, yet conventional, intellectually boring, perpetually dependent Olga as Chekhov's female ideal figure.⁶ Despite the story's shorter length and the greater lack of events (or a plot-like plot) than Chekhov's, Mansfield's characterization of her female protagonists, on the other hand, tends to strike the reader as more complex. Her protagonists are perceived as less innocent, or slyer (therefore, more responsible for and guilty of her follies) than Chekhov's: their naïveté hides self-deception and they are, towards the end of the stories, forced to confront it. If the reader focuses on the naïveté of the protagonists, the most Chekhovian character among Mansfield's three stories would be Jug in "The Daughters of the Late Colonel."

This general difference in characterization between Chekhov's and Mansfield's satirical comedies could be perceived as the difference in the tone of narrative voice. What makes the two authors' narrative voices sound different is the difference in the narrative strategy between their stories: their different narrative strategies produce the different protagonist- reader and text- reader relations. Mansfield's highly subjective narrative voice (her intensified free *indirect* discourse) does not allow her satirical stories to produce Chekhov's self-composed, ironical detachment. The detachment provided by Chekhov's omniscient narrative maintains the moral detachment between

the protagonist and the reader: this detachment could help to make the reader more tolerant to the protagonist's limitations. Mansfield's 'subjective' narrative does not guarantee Chekhov's (consistent) detachment. The reader's emotional and moral responses to Mansfield's protagonist (the 'distance' between them) are more likely to vary. The reader's 'judgment' of the protagonist is far more dependent (than in Chekhov's text) on the balance between how much the reader objectifies the narrator-protagonist and how much he or she identifies himself or herself with the narrator-protagonist. Mansfield's free indirect style requires the reader to, as it were, alertly move in and out of the story: the balance between the subjective and the objective effect-- the effect of making the reader identify himself or herself with the protagonist, and arousing his or her sympathy; and the effect of emotionally detaching the reader from the protagonist and enabling him or her to view the protagonist critically-- becomes delicate. The reader needs to be critically conscious; for he or she is nearly as responsible for moral judgment as the ^{implied} author.

As we have seen in "Bliss," the 'distance' between the reader and the protagonist in Mansfield's text will sway. The subjective tone of her satirical comedies, on the one hand, tends to "involve" the reader; this involvement makes the satirical effect likely to be perceived both as comical and 'bitter': the psychological blow Mansfield sets in the end is felt 'cruel.' The effect is more tragicomical than comical. The reader's involvement could make the story lyrical: it gives the reader a lingering bitter or bitter-sweet aftertaste. The interplay between the subjective effect (involvement) and the objective effect (detachment) could, on the other hand, be more complicated: it sounds paradoxical but the subjective style produces the objective effect on the reader. The subjective narrative of Mansfield's stories urges the reader to acquire an objective view of the story; it requires him or her constantly to examine the validity and propriety of the subjective view of the narrator-agent. Also, the story's subjective tone helps to produce an alienation effect on the reader. The subjective tone, as we saw, intensifies the 'cruelty' of the story's plot. The story's 'cruelty' (or the story's 'shock' effect) results from the reader's betrayed expectation; and it results in the reader's sudden estrangement first from a fictional world (of poetic justice), and then from his or her reading habit: it disorients the reader and helps him or her to re-examine the relationship between the text and himself or herself, and between fictional world (art) and his or her life: How cruel! Yet is it real or unreal? Isn't this kind of cruelty, after all, fairly commonly observed and experienced in our life? Mansfield's subjective method and its effect ('cruelty') are, as I will discuss in the Conclusion, close to Brecht's A-effect.

The narrative of Chekhov's satirical comedies could be termed more traditional since

the relationship between the reader and the text is less complicated: the indirect, yet audible authorial voice of "The Angel" or "The Butterfly" allows the reader to secure a higher moral status than the criticized protagonist's. While the distance between the reader and the protagonist is maintained in Chekhov's stories, Mansfield's narrative interplay of detachment (a vehicle for comedy) and involvement (a vehicle for tragedy) disturbs the distance and blurs the genre. It is curious that the effect of Mansfield's satirical comedies could strike one as closer to that of Chekhov's plays than of his short stories. It may be not only due to the fact that the theatrical effect is largely dependent on the interplay of the audience's detachment and involvement, but it also results from the fact that Chekhov's plays have their own alienation effect: they betray the audience's expectation. The protagonist's dreary situation such as Vanya's is directed to be observed 'comically' but the controlled sentimentalism in effect allows the audience to be sympathetic towards his misery as well as to objectify it; yet the fact that Chekhov makes "nothing happen" (the new people come and go; the old, familiar members remain as stuck as ever) estranges the audience. The aftertaste is bitter sweet, even cruel.

No critic of Katherine Mansfield could deny a certain influence of Chekhov on Mansfield, which would surely offer the Mansfield critic a significant, demanding theme of research. The "outright plot plagiarism" observed in her early work (Kleine 284), most likely, resulted from her casual encounter with some of Chekhov's earliest stories through her Polish lover, Floryan Sobieniowski, who met her in Germany around 1910 and introduced to her the short stories of Chekhov who was, then, still an obscure literary figure in Western Europe.⁷ Nevertheless, once having appreciated a substantial number of Chekhov's works later in her life and acknowledged his remarkable talent, Mansfield was fairly open about her admiration of and absorption in Chekhov's works: B. J. Kirkpatrick's close bibliographical study shows that not only Murry, her husband, translated some of Chekhov's works; but she herself assisted Murry, Leonard Woolf and S. S. Kotliansky. Mansfield did, with them, an extensive translation work of Chekhov's writings as well as those of Gorky, his contemporary writer and close friend, and Tolstoy, his senior and writer of his great admiration: Mansfield co-translated and published two books of Gorky (*Reminiscences of Leonard Andreyev* and *Reminiscences of Tolstoy, Chekhov and Andreev*).⁸

It seems to me that Mansfield's enthusiasm for Chekhov is relevant to the earlier influence of Wilde and Pater on her. It might be even possible to say that Mansfield's passion for Chekhov came via Pater and Wilde; and that it reflects her consistent interests in Aestheticism and Symbolism. Mansfield's absorption in Pater and, especially, Wilde is observed in her apprentice period (between 1907 and 1909),⁹ whereas

her first reference to Chekhov appears in her *Scrapbook* entry dated January, 1914. Her enthusiasm for the Russian writer became more intense between 1917 and 1922 as her tuberculosis developed and her health deteriorated: it is not hard to imagine that Mansfield saw some analogy between Chekhov and herself.¹⁰ Even though she did not see much new to learn from Chekhov's style, Mansfield seems to have responded not only to his life but also to his Aestheticism and Symbolism, and to his political views which were similar to Wilde's. For Chekhov, too, seemed to be under the influence of Aestheticism and Symbolism: he was Aesthetic in a Wildean and Paterian sense. His notion on culture and the relationship between art and society shows a striking similarity to that of Wilde. He once said, according to Ronald Hingley, that "People's Theatre, People's Literature: that's all rubbish, it's so much People's fudge. We shouldn't degrade Gogol to the People, we should raise the People to Gogol" (Hingley 311). This remark would remind the reader of Wilde's critical comment on journalism and public tyranny over art and artists in "The Soul of Man Under Socialism." Also Chekhov's grasp of the relationship between art and society shows a clear analogy with Wilde's and William Morris's: Chekhov makes the artist (his protagonist) in "The Artist's Story" (1896) express his mixed feelings towards the bourgeoisie's philanthropic activities: Chekhov's artist regards them as reactionary: 'charity' perpetuates the misery of the poor, rather than sets them free from it: "As things are, clinics, schools, and all those cosy little libraries and dispensaries only help to enslave people. Our peasants are in heavy chains, but you don't break their chains. You just add new links" (106). The artist is also aware of the limited political potential of art under the status-quo, and his intense vexation implies the necessity of revolution, not superficial social reforms: "An artist's life means nothing at all in these conditions. The more gifted he is, the more strange and baffling is the part he plays, since it comes down to this-- he works to amuse a dirty, greedy animal and maintain the *status quo*. So I don't want to work and I'm not going to. . . . We don't need anything. The world can go to hell!" (108). Yet the protagonist's view shows a mixture of pessimism and optimism: Chekhov, at the same time, makes the artist envisage an Aesthetic, Utopian world:

"Free them[peasants] from heavy manual work, Lighten their load. Give them a breathing space, so that they don't spend their whole lives at the stove and wash-tub, or in the fields, but also have time to think about their souls, about God, and to develop the life of the spirit. The spiritual life, the constant search for truth and the meaning of existence-- these are man's real calling. So save them from this rough work that makes them like brutes, and let them feel free-- and then you'll see what a farce these books and dispensaries really are. Once a man knows his true vocation, only religion, science and the arts will satisfy him-- not all that rubbish. . . . Real science and real art don't have short-term, particular aims. They seek the eternal and the universal-- truth and the meaning of life, God and the soul. . . ." (107-8)

Although I am not sufficiently familiar with the Aesthetic and Symbolist Movement (and the intelligentsia's interests and involvement in Marxism) in *fin de siècle* Russia, the similarities between Wilde's and Chekhov's notion of art and society are, perhaps, not so surprising-- the Aesthetic and Symbolist Movement was a pan-European, cosmopolitan movement just as the influence of Marxism was 'international.' (Chagall, one of the most unique, accomplished Symbolist painters was, for example, Russian.) Indeed, Betsy F. Moeller-Sally's study ("Oscar Wilde and the Culture of Russian Modernism") seems to suggest the possible link between Wilde and Chekhov. Oscar Wilde and his writings, according to Moeller-Sally, were a cultural and social phenomenon in *fin de siècle* and early twentieth century Russia. She maintains:

. . . by the early 1890s, Wilde was not only a well-known author, playwright and dandy, but also a major critic whose works, especially the collection of essays, *Intentions* (London, 1891), were known on the Continent and in the United States as well as in Britain. Indeed, in a letter written in 1900, Valerij Brjusov defined the times as "the age of Ibsen and Wilde". . . .

What seems to have been most important for the Russians in Wilde's criticism was his insistence on the interdependence between the development of the individual and that of culture as a whole. The central argument in his famous essay, "The Soul of Man under Socialism," was indeed that a complete reorganization of society is required for there to be true individualism. . . . (460-1)

Moeller-Sally's conclusion that "Wilde's creed of aestheticism and creative individualism" was even more influential for Russian intellectuals and artists than Wilde's Decadent pose associated with Dorian Gray ("kind of 'demonic' decadence") (466)-- is suggestive: the similarities in the view of art, life and society between Wilde and Chekhov cannot be a mere coincidence.

Chekhov could not escape the turn-of-the-century aesthetic and political atmosphere and movements. Although Chekhov was not openly political, Hingley's *A Life of Anton Chekhov* tells us that he was constantly harassed by the government's literary censorship of his writings; and it is a well-known story that when Gorky, a committed political activist and writer, was expelled from the Academy because of his radicalism, Chekhov protested against the decision of the Academy which had yielded to the government's pressure, and eventually resigned from it himself.¹¹ Chekhov knew, as a son of a poor family and a grandson of a serf, the devastating effects of poverty and hard labour on humanity, and he dealt with not only the bourgeois and the intellectual but also peasants in his short stories. One may point out that a Chekhovian influence is most dominantly observed in the Naturalistic subjects of Mansfield's short stories: subjects which Wilde never, in spite of his radical political views, explored.

Notes

¹ Saralyn Daly is negative about Isabel's potential: she briefly concludes that "Isabel--even recognizing that the incident [her friends' mockery of William's letter] was "vile, odious, abominable, vulgar"-- cannot reform" (Daly 73).

² As for the study of 'the new woman' who 'emerged' between the two World Wars, see June West's "The 'New Woman' ": she traces "various qualities" of the new woman who "appeared in the literature between the wars" (West 55).

³ Mansfield terms Bertha "artistic manqué" (*Letters to John Middleton Murry* 211).

⁴ Wilde 493.

⁵ For the defence of Mansfield against the charge of plagiarism, see Sutherland's careful argument in "Katherine Mansfield: Plagiarist, Disciple, or Ardent Admirer?"; also, see Carol Franklin's "Katherine Mansfield and the Charge of Plagiarism."

⁶ Pritchett 171-2.

⁷ My 'conclusion' on the issue of Mansfield's 'plagiarism,' is largely based on the information which Clare Tomalin's *Katherine Mansfield* provides. Although Franklin regards Tomalin's description as unfair to Mansfield, I believe that Tomalin does her justice by providing the reader with as much information as possible: I find the book's appendix particularly helpful: it shows us the whole picture of the controversy over the case in *The Times Literary Supplement*, which allows us to see the matter from various viewpoints. See Tomalin, 71-3, 208-11, and 261-72 ("Appendix 2").

⁸ Kirkpatrick 84-92.

⁹ See *The Critical Writings of K.M.* 141-2. And as for Mansfield's reference to Wilde, *Journal of K.M.* 14, 16, and 22; also vol. 1 of *The Collected Letters of K.M.*, 11, 26, 43, and 89-90. As for her reference to Pater, see vol. 1 of *The Collected Letters of K.M.* 46.

¹⁰ As for Mansfield's passion for Chekhov and his writings, Sutherland's research and analysis are very helpful: see Sutherland 60-6.

¹¹ As for Chekhov's political view, Hingley provides us with a careful analysis: see Hingley 305-11.

Chapter 9: Katherine Mansfield's Social Awareness in "Life of Ma Parker"

"Life of Ma Parker" (first published in February, 1921) is one of Mansfield's most Naturalistic stories. As we have seen so far, Mansfield's stories are far from asocial: her presentation of the protagonists' situation and consciousness makes the reader aware of her subtle, yet acute criticism of the status-quo. Yet some of Mansfield's stories are more Naturalistic or more openly politically conscious in subject than others. The stories such as "The Child-Who-Was-Tired"(February, 1910), "The Lady's Maid"(December, 1920), and "Life of Ma Parker," for example, strike the reader as Naturalistic, if not Naturalist. It is because the protagonists are socially and morally oppressed working-class women (or a girl) and the settings and plots of these stories are rather Naturalist. Mansfield's working-class protagonists are good-natured and hard-working, yet the social system seems simply to exploit their morality and work ethic: the stories seem to suggest that external forces-- the status-quo of society, their social status, their particular circumstance and, perhaps, their ill fate-- are largely responsible for their sufferings. The protagonists' miseries are emphasized by the dreary endings, the endings where Mansfield chooses to leave them in their original situations without giving them any easy solution to their problems.

However, Mansfield's Naturalistic stories are, in technique, more Symbolist than Naturalist. They rely neither on 'scientific' observation and analysis nor on minute, objective description of the protagonist's moral and social situation (or the 'external' forces). Her method for the exploration of the social and political themes is, as well as for her other, seemingly apolitical stories, highly subjective. Mansfield's focus is on their state of mind (or the 'internal' forces) and the 'moment' of their revelation. "The Child-Who-Was-Tired" is written from the servant girl's point of view; her subjective, imaginary vision of freedom is the story's focus. "The Lady's Maid" has the form of a one-act, one-character play: it consists of the protagonist's interior monologue. No obvious omniscient voice is found in "Life of Ma Parker," either; the story chiefly depends on Ma Parker's reflection and flashbacks. Besides, unlike typical Naturalist stories, Mansfield's Naturalistic stories hint that her innocent protagonists *are* partly, if not fully, responsible for their sufferings. Ronald Sutherland, for example, compares Mansfield's stories with Chekhov's, and does not only suggest that Chekhov's method of story-telling belongs to the nineteenth-century Realism while Mansfield's is Modernist; but also that Chekhov's stories are more Naturalistic than Mansfield's:

... wherein [in Chekhov's work] the traditional methods of one-character focus, conversation, monologue and external description prevail. In general Katherine Mansfield followed the modern literary policy of the unobtrusive

author;

There is one more way in which the stories of Katherine Mansfield stand conspicuously independent of the works of the Russian master, and it is perhaps the most significant way. The reader receives a strong impression from almost every one of Chekhov's stories that arbitrary and uncontrollable forces have shaped the lives of the characters. . . . None of this utter futility of human endeavor found its way into Miss Mansfield's stories. Many of her characters, truly enough, find themselves in impossible situations, but they have always been at least partly responsible-- they have conditioned their own lives. . . . Even *The-Child-Who-Was-Tired*, because of her complete dependence upon a dream is partially at fault. Bertha Young in *Bliss*, Stanley Burnell in *Prelude*, the heroine of *Psychology*-- each has warped life by clinging to false values. (74)

Sutherland's view that Chekhov's protagonists are perfectly innocent of the consequences they face could be an overgeneralization-- for most of Chekhov's stories, too, imply that the protagonists are more or less responsible for their sufferings and stases-- yet his point is largely right. At least, Chekhov's working-class protagonists in "Sleepy" and "Misery" are not responsible for their miseries, and are described as innocent even when they commit a crime (Varka kills the baby), whereas in Mansfield's "The Child-Who-Was-Tired" and "Life of Ma Parker"-- the two Naturalistic stories of which critics note the similarities with Chekhov's¹-- her protagonists are, as we will see, described as partially responsible for their fates.

"Life of Ma Parker" has a subjective narrative style characteristic of Mansfield: intensified free indirect style without any obvious authorial voice. The story is written from two points of view, that is, the point of view of Ma Parker, the protagonist, and the point of view of "the literary gentleman," her 'employer.' The two subjective narratives, as we will examine later, chiefly carve Ma Parker's suffering and repression. Ma Parker's subjective interior monologue and flashbacks convey her past and present hardship and forced self-control. The gentleman's observation of and attitude towards Ma Parker objectify her 'personal' suffering; for his lack of full sympathy towards Ma Parker, as an effect, illuminates and criticizes the intensity of her repression; and it, further, suggests that her suffering is not simply personal but due to the existing social system under which her hard work is made never really paid.

The two points of view of the story are interactive. The two characters illuminate each other: one character observes and is observed by the other. The point of view of "the literary gentleman" does not merely help the reader to grasp Ma Parker's situation; but Ma Parker's observation of and attitude towards the gentleman, together with his brief, scattered interior monologue, illuminate and criticize the nature and quality of the gentleman's 'literary' study. The interaction between the two points of view, as we shall see, gives the story two major, related themes: the social and the aesthetic. The story

contains both a critical presentation of the socially forced repression of a working-class woman, and Mansfield's criticism of the dilettantism of a middle-class intellectual and the suggestion of the link between the social and the aesthetic.²

1 Ma Parker's Lack of Self-Respect and Internalization

No: a poor man who is ungrateful, unthrifty, discontented, and rebellious, is probably a real personality, and has much in him. He is at any rate a healthy protest. As for the virtuous poor, one can pity them, of course, but one cannot possibly admire them. They have made private terms with the enemy, and sold their birthright for very bad pottage. They must also be extraordinarily stupid.

I can quite understand a man accepting laws that protect private property, and admit of its accumulation, as long as he himself is able under those conditions to realize some form of beautiful and intellectual life. But it is almost incredible to me how a man whose life is marred and made hideous by such laws can possibly acquiesce in their continuance.

However, the explanation is not really difficult to find. It is simply this. Misery and poverty are so absolutely degrading, and exercise such a paralysing effect over the nature of men, that no class is ever really conscious of its own suffering. They have to be told of it by other people, and they often entirely disbelieve them. (Wilde "The Soul of Man Under Socialism" 360-1)³

Wilde is right about the numbing effect of intense misery and the daily struggle for life upon our spirit. At least, his words seem to succinctly paraphrase Ma Parker's situation, that is, how her persistent poverty and never-ending toils have beaten her, paralysed and tamed her spirit, and made her one of "the virtuous poor" who resignedly "acquiesce" in the continuance of the existing social system (Wilde 360). The reader might think that Ma Parker is at least different from those who are not "ever really conscious of" her own suffering, and, therefore, "have to be told of it by other people," yet "often entirely disbelieve them" (Wilde 361); for Ma Parker admits the fact that she has "had a hard life" (303). Nevertheless, her acceptance is her resignation: she has learned to accept her "hard life" as her "share" ("what with one thing and another I've had my share. I've had a hard life" [303]), that is, as her 'fate' which God has allocated for her and she cannot escape. The reader notes that Ma Parker's "hard life," the expression which she as well as her neighbours repeats, becomes nothing more than a cliché: it has lost its signifying power as it has become part of her habitual thinking. Her acceptance is, therefore, not much different from "disbeliev[ing]" her suffering, for what Wilde means by being "really conscious" of suffering is to feel the very pain and face up to its real cause which is social, not personal. Ma Parker prefers to repress herself: her life (or, rather, society) has never paid her enough for her high work ethic, hard work and perseverance; yet she has taken it as her misfortune, "[kept] herself to herself" (305, 307,

308), and made her repression her second-nature-- at least until her Lennie, the only gift and treasure she has gained from her life, passes away. She has kept her eyes closed to the fact that her "proud" self-control is merely socially forced self-repression(307). Although Ma Parker believes that she has "kept a proud face always" (307), her way of expressing her pride and self-respect is to trivialize her misery. To trivialize her suffering is to trivialize her own existence in society, which leads to allowing people to exploit her social station.

Ma Parker's repression might be explained by her internalization of middle-class values, which is synonymous with Wilde's "[selling her] birthright for very bad pottage" (360). She has been a 'respectable' model worker from her employers' point of view: she has never complained about or criticized her conditions. But this repressive attitude, that is, Ma Parker's habit of keeping herself to herself is, indeed, the habit of refraining from challenging her exploited situation: it indicates her rationalized subservience and lack of real self-respect.

What she wears might reflect her 'respectability': she dresses somewhat like a middle-class woman: she wears a toque secured with two hairpins and tight boots. Neither her toque nor her boots make her comfortable: on the contrary, the "jetty spears" of the toque seem to be hurting her; her tight boots give her a sharp pain (303). Both her toque and boots represent her internalized bourgeois morality which only oppresses her. The relationship between Ma Parker and her boots is described symbolically:

To take off her boots or to put them on was an agony to her, but it had been an agony for years. In fact, she was so accustomed to the pain that her face was drawn and screwed up ready for the twinge before she'd so much as untied the laces. (302)

The boots that she has been wearing for years despite great pain signify not only her poverty--she cannot afford a new pair-- but also her moral and social habit of submitting to her 'enemy' by slighting her "agony." Ma Parker could have thrown away her boots; but she has forced herself to get "accustomed" to the pain: she prefers yielding to the cause of the pain 'virtuously' to daring to challenge it. Ma Parker's docile attitude reminds the reader of the moral slavery of Ellen in "The Lady's Maid."⁴ It also makes a contrast with the free-spiritedness of Pat in "Prelude," who never dresses himself conventionally.

The point of view of "the literary gentleman" also sheds light on Ma Parker's repression. The gentleman has no real respect or sympathy towards her. Although he is not particularly privileged himself, he, as it were, exploits her class and work ethic in his own modest way: he demands a lot of her labour for nothing--he pays her only half a crown for each cleaning:

It would take a whole book to describe the state of that kitchen. During the week the literary gentleman "did" for himself. That is to say, he emptied the tea-leaves now and again into a jam jar aside for that purpose, and if he ran out of clean forks he wiped over one or two on the roller towel. Otherwise, as he explained to his friends, his "system" was quite simple, and he couldn't understand why people made all this fuss about housekeeping.

"You simply dirty everything you've got, get a hag in once a week to clean up, and the thing's done."

The result looked like a gigantic dustbin. Even the floor was littered with toast crusts, envelopes, cigarette ends. (303)

The gentleman's system is, in other words, to exploit Ma Parker as a cheap hand. His superficial politeness to Ma Parker, in fact, manifests his indifference to her: he calls her "a hag," a poor ugly old woman of no importance, behind her back. The gentleman's room shows no trace of his guilty conscience for giving extra toil to her; the room ("a gigantic dustbin") looks as if claiming, on behalf of its owner, that, as far as he is paying her for cleaning at all, he has the 'right' to mess his room as much as he wants and that Ma Parker has the 'obligation' to clean up the mess. The gentleman takes her subservience for granted; he even seems to love the idea of treating her like his servant; he behaves as if he were her real 'master'. He, like a "vigilant" mistress, tries to give her a 'discipline' (306). He blames Ma Parker for her having thrown away "a teaspoonful of cocoa in the tin," a charge which she is innocent of; he demands rather arrogantly: "You'll always tell me when you throw things away-- won't you, Mrs. Parker?" (306) Despite the gentleman's unfairness, Ma Parker neither protests, nor criticizes, nor bears him any grudge; she rather "piti[es] the poor young gentleman" for not yet having a wife to look after him (303). Her pity for him indicates her capacity for perseverance and self-control; yet her 'virtuous' attitude rationalizes her victimized state and lack of spirit. The life-long struggle for life and well-trained self-restraint colour her life: her hard, submissive life is symbolized by "an immense expanse of sad-looking sky" with "very worn-looking, old clouds, frayed at the edges, with holes in them, or dark stains like tea" (303).

2 Ma Parker's Failed Attempt and Internalization

"Life of Ma Parker" focuses not only on Ma Parker's state of repression but also on her failed attempt; her attempt hints at her psychological shift from Wilde's "virtuous poor" to the "ungrateful, discontented, disobedient, and rebellious" poor (Wilde 360). The death of Lennie, her grandson, makes her "really conscious of" her suffering (Wilde 361). Her piercing sense of loss stings her numbed, habitual consciousness of pain-- her having had a hard life has been a mere fact; the fact as familiar to her consciousness as the bleak

fact that "she live[s] in the basement-back at Number 27" (303). The loss of her life's only treasure and gift breaks her habitual, servile acceptance of hardship: she cannot possibly rationalize Lennie's death. The acute pain awakens her spirit-- the suffering and death of her little, beautiful, innocent Lennie are the last straw; the hard psychological blow triggers off her suppressed memory of bitter experiences; she feels, for the first time, that life is unfair. The surging sense of injustice makes her search for the cause of Lennie's and her own suffering: "Why must it all happened to me? she wondered. 'What have I done?' said old Ma Parker. 'What have I done?' " (307)

Ma Parker's awakening--" 'She's had a hard life, has Ma Parker.' Yes, a hard life indeed!" (308)-- urges her to challenge her social and moral habit, that is, to do what she has never allowed herself to do. She abandons her work in the middle and leaves the gentleman's flat; it is as if she, now, could not see the point of being an obedient, conscientious hard worker. She is also willing to give up her usual repressive self; she admits that she has been and is suffering acutely; she decides to let her feelings go; she wanders out, looking for the place where she can "cry for a long time, over everything, beginning with her first place and the cruel cook, going on to the doctor's, and then the seven little ones, death of her husband, the children's leaving her, and all the years of misery that led up to Lennie" (308).

If the story ended with the scene of Ma Parker's fulfilled 'revolt,' it would be an openly political propaganda work like, say, Brecht's "Mother." However, the ending of Mansfield's story is not straightforward: Mansfield does not offer the protagonist any easy solution. Her story emphasizes the intensity of the protagonist's internalization, which is an ingenious trap that hinders her liberation. Mansfield's 'strategy' and its effect might, then, be closer to Brecht's later work, *Mother Courage and Her Children*, which stresses Mother Courage's unconsciously victimized state and incapability of learning, not her growth or radical change. Ma Parker's 'revolt' largely ends in failure: her persistent habit of self-control and self-sacrifice, and her sense of 'respectability' prevent her from carrying out her most modest attempt of relieving her long-suppressed emotions, much less becoming one of Shaw's "undeserving poor."

Ma Parker cannot help being worried about the social 'offense' she might be accused of, and about her possible social disgrace: "Even if she broke down [in the street], . . . she'd find herself in the lock-up as like as not" (308). She cannot entirely free herself from her repressive habit: she cannot help giving top priority to "keep[ing] herself to herself," that is, "not disturbing anybody" (308). Her habitual repression and internalized middle-class morality order her to find a "proper" place for her to cry (308):

She couldn't go home; Ethel was there. It would frighten Ethel out of her life. She couldn't sit on a bench anywhere; people would come arsking her

questions. She couldn't possibly go back to the gentleman's flat; she had no right to cry in strangers' houses. If she sat on some steps a policeman would speak to her. (308)

She can, naturally, find no right place; she cannot, therefore, let herself cry: "Ma Parker stood, looking up and down. The icy wind blew out her apron into a balloon. And now it began to rain. There was nowhere" (309). She, indeed, has to worry neither about 'propriety' nor social order nor others; for her crying cannot affect or disturb others, still less society so much as she might speculate. The last scene is symbolical: the story ends with the climax of her repression. The scene suggests that repression or middle-class values will never offer her any 'exit': she will be as stuck as ever as long as she remains within her present moral and social domain. Ma Parker's professional 'training' as a domestic servant, her struggle for life, and, perhaps, the lack of "agitators" or solidarity (Wilde 361), shrink her suffering into a merely 'personal,' not social, issue, and, by doing so, prevent her from grasping a larger framework of society. The notion that a different, fairer social system would have paid her hard work; and that better education and better economic condition might have taken care of most of her misfortunes and lessened her suffering radically-- is still beyond her imagination.

3 Art and Society: The Literary Gentleman

The reader of "Life of Ma Parker" might have rather a naïve question: why must Ma Parker's employer be a *literary* gentleman? To answer this question is, however, important to clarify one of the themes of the story, which is one of the coherent themes of Mansfield's works: the relationship between art and society. The choice of the character and the way he is referred to and treated in the story-- he is called "the literary gentleman" or merely "the gentleman" and treated comically and ironically-- might reflect Mansfield's concern over the conflict between aesthetics (art) and politics (life and society). The story illustrates Mansfield's criticism of the dilettantish literary people who are neither interested nor find any significance in connecting their intellectual and artistic being with their social and moral being; it might even suggest that artistic intellectuals' lack of social awareness keeps them from aesthetic as well as moral growth, for the two qualities are interactive.

The gentleman's moral limitations are made clear from the first scene. "The literary gentleman," who is supposed to be 'literary,' that is, not only intelligent but also humane and responsive to suffering, is described as too dull and insensitive to penetrate the depth of Ma Parker's grief:

When the literary gentleman. . . opened the door to her that morning, he

asked after her grandson. Ma Parker stood on the doormat inside the dark little hall, and she stretched out her hand to help her gentleman shut the door before she replied. "We buried 'im yesterday, sir," she said quietly.

"Oh, dear me! I'm sorry to hear that," said the literary gentleman in a shocked tone. He was in the middle of his breakfast. He wore a very shabby dressing-gown and carried a crumpled newspaper in one hand. But he felt awkward. He could hardly go back to the warm sitting-room without saying something-- something more. Then *because these people set such store by funerals* he said kindly, "I hope the funeral went off all right."

"Beg parding, sir?" said old Ma Parker huskily.

Poor old Bird! She did look dashed. "I hope the funeral was a-- a-- success," said he. Ma Parker gave no answer. She bent her head and hobbled off to the kitchen, clasping the old fish bag that held her cleaning things and an apron and a pair of felt shoes. The literary gentleman raised his eyebrows and went back to his breakfast.

"Overcome, I suppose," he said aloud, helping himself to the marmalade. (Emphases added 301-2)

"The literary gentleman" is, in a way, sensitive enough to note Ma Parker's obvious psychological blow and feel sorry for her: the news of the death of her grandson "shock[s]" him. He also feels "awkward" and somewhat guilty about his relative well-being-- he is rather poor for a middle-class gentleman, but he still has the means to *rent a* reasonably respectable flat, hire a cleaner and have a modest luxury of enjoying his morning "in his shabby dressing-gown" with "a crumpled newspaper" "in the warm sitting room." The quoted scene, however, stresses the gentleman's moral shallowness rather than his humanity. "The literary gentleman" looks down on Ma Parker: he regards her as an ignorant, coarse working-class woman ("a hag" [303]) whose sensibilities are 'different' from his. His guilty conscience resulting from his sense of 'privilege,' rather than his genuine compassion for Ma Parker, urges him to express some words of consolation for her; yet his choice of the words reveals his prejudice and lack of sense of equality as well as his callous sensitivity. The gentleman judges the topic of the funeral as a right one because he believes that "these people set such store by funerals": he considers a rather business-like inquiry ("I hope the funeral went off all right?") as a proper expression of condolence. These surely indelicate, therefore, improper words of condolence for his fellow middle-class friends could be passed off as proper for a working-class woman-- the gentleman's judgment manifests his prejudice that people of Ma Parker's social station have inferior sensitivity and deserve no particular deliberation. Ma Parker's response (or her lack of response) shows that his condolence is obviously out of place: his remark fails to produce the effect he expects. Ma Parker is unable to grasp his intention, much less appreciate his 'sympathy.' The gentleman's response to Ma Parker's lack of appreciation of his 'condolence' emphasizes his limitations: his supposedly 'refined' sensitivity is incapable of fathoming her grief: his

limited imagination fails to see that Ma Parker's inattentiveness, more than anything else, discloses the acuteness of her psychological wound. Ma Parker's lack of proper response simply offends him. His shallowness reminds the reader of Wilde's "sentimentalist" who is "impertinent" enough to attempt to "tyrannise over their [the poor's] private lives": the arrogant philanthropist who believes that the poor should be "grateful for the crumbs that fall from the rich man's table" (Wilde 360).

The insensitivity of "the literary gentleman" is made even clearer as the story proceeds. The gentleman's simple, efficient "system" of housekeeping is, as we saw, the "system" of his exploitation of Ma Parker(303): the extreme untidiness of his kitchen on the first working day after her grandson's funeral shows no respect or consideration of the occupant for the cleaner; it expresses the fact that he does not care about her affairs.

The gentleman's messy kitchen, that is, the fact that he cannot take care of himself properly, might also mirror his childishness as well as his moral shallowness. Ma Parker's point of view emphasizes the immaturity of "the literary gentleman": her observation shows that the literary gentleman, whose literary interests, supposedly, lead to his deeper understanding of life, is neither interested in nor knows hardly anything about it. Ma Parker recollects her conversation with the gentleman:

"A baker, Mrs. Parker!" the literary gentleman would say. For occasionally he laid aside his tomes and lent an ear, at least, to this product called Life. "It must be rather nice to be married to a baker!"

Mrs. Parker didn't look so sure.

"Such a clean trade," said the gentleman.

Mrs. Parker didn't look convinced.

"And didn't you like handing the new loaves to the customers?"

"Well, sir," said Mrs. Parker, "I wasn't in the shop above a great deal. We had thirteen little ones and buried seven of them. If it wasn't the 'ospital it was the infirmary, you might say!"

"You might, *indeed*, Mrs. Parker!" said, shuddering, and taking up his pen again. (304-5)

The gentleman's light surprise about Ma Parker's 'lucky' past and his innocent comment on the baker might, again, betray his prejudice against Ma Parker, that is, his subconscious idea that "a clean trade" such as bakery is too good for a woman of her class, particularly, the one who is now a cleaner. The gentleman's happy idea of being a baker and his wife also seems to suggest his inexperience in life: his idea that to be a baker's wife would be nice and comfortable is as naive as a whimsical idea of a child who wants to be a baker just because he loves nice-smelling bread but does not know much about the job itself. The gentleman is not only unaware of his ignorance but seems to be even afraid of learning the facts of life: Ma Parker's brief summary of part of her life is more than enough for him. He does not show any further interest in her history but regards her hard life as some contaminated object: Ma Parker's hardship

makes him "shudder" and shrink back from the topic. The gentleman's response justifies Ma Parker's observation of his attitude: her critical comment ("occasionally he laid aside his tomes and lent an ear, at least, to this product called Life") suggests that the gentleman's bookish learning does not lead to a keener interest in ~~or~~ a deeper understanding of life and society. Ma Parker's artless response to the gentleman's callow comments produces irony: it, as an effect, criticizes the dilettantish quality of the gentleman's literary study. His attitude could indicate that his aesthetic and intellectual interests lack serious commitment. His learning might offer him knowledge but his withdrawal from life and society, that is, his lack of any spontaneous, yet conscious effort of connecting his knowledge with life, prevents knowledge from being sublimated into experience. The gentleman's attitude would make a contrast with the spontaneity of Laura and Laurie in "The Garden Party" whose intelligence and sophistication encourage them to believe that "one must go everywhere; one must know everything" (254).

4 Art and Society: A Working-Class Woman

In Mansfield's stories, the protagonists' craving for social and moral freedom is often linked with their aesthetic longing: Mansfield's female protagonists such as the lady in "The Black Cap," Linda in "Prelude," Constantia in "The Daughters of the Late Colonel," and Bertha in "Bliss" are, as we have seen, some of the protagonists whose Aestheticism not only intensifies their desire for self-realization but also makes them question their conventional being and aware of the social and moral restrictions that hinder their fulfillment of the primary and ultimate desire.

Mansfield's working-class protagonists are no exception. Ellen's liberty in "The Lady's Maid" could, for instance, be associated with the little bouquets of lilies-of-the-valley which her florist fiancé brings her. The bouquet of lilies-of-the-valley, the traditional bouquet for courtship, is not only a symbol of Ellen's longing for middle-class luxury and the conditional freedom which her marriage to the florist would guarantee-- the 'status' of the florist's wife allows her to leave her mistress. Her appreciation of the flower could also reflect her sense of beauty as well as her love for her fiancé: "Flowers! You wouldn't believe it, madam, the flowers he [her fiancé] used to bring me. He'd stop at nothing. It was lilies-of-the-valley more than once, and I'm not exaggerating!" (379) The reader might also note that Ellen has a gift for flower arrangement: she has got her own idea how the arrangement should be done, for she and her florist "got to quarrelling about how things ought to be arranged-- and that began it [their relationship]" (379).

Ellen's intense desire for a donkey-ride, another motif of her liberty, represents both her desire for social liberty and her appreciation of beauty. Riding on the donkeys symbolizes the social privilege which little Ellen was, as a house-maid, never allowed to enjoy. Yet it was Ellen, not her "two young ladies" of her age (378), who appreciated the beauty of the donkeys: the "lovely silver-grey" ones "with little red saddles and blue bridles and bells jing-a-jingling on their ears," their "so gentle" eyes, "soft ears" and "the way the little feet [goes]" (378); her vivid description as well as her excited tone seems to convey the reader not only the feel of the donkeys but also her aesthetic responsiveness.

The Child's desire for freedom from hard domestic labour in "The Child-Who-Was-Tired" is represented by the obsessive image in the her mind-- "a little white road with tall black tree on either side, a little road that [leads] to nowhere, and where nobody walk[s] at all" (743). The little road mirrors her sub-conscious longing for physical and social liberty; it is the road that leads to her utopia (her "nowhere"): a legendary magical meadow where she can play "for a whole day" "with real sausages and beer for her dinner-- and not a little of tiredness" (749). Her imaginary road ("a little white road, with oh! such great big black trees on either side" [751]) might also represent her adventurous spirit and longing for the unknown and beautiful, that is, some strange place which two cheerful travelling girls are merrily heading for, "laughing and holding each other by the hand" (749); where "the sun push[es] by a heavy fold of grey cloud and spread[s] a warm yellow light over everything" (749). The child's desperate longing for her utopia, rather than her intense tiredness, encourages her to 'revolt,' that is, to remove the immediate obstacle that blocks her white road: she kills the baby more consciously than Chekhov's Varka in "Let Me Sleep," the original story of Mansfield's adapted version: "In her [the-Child-Who-Was-Tired's] mind, killing the baby was a positive action to realize her desires, to reach the dream road" (Sutherland 69). The ending of Mansfield's story is tinted with the child's subjective sense of triumph and mirth: "She heaved a long sigh, then fell back on to the floor, and was walking along a little white road with tall black trees on either side, a little road that led to nowhere, and where nobody walked at all-- nobody at all" (752). This tone of Mansfield's story makes a contrast with the rather Naturalist, doomed tone of the voice of Chekhov's omniscient narrator: "Having smothered it [the baby], she lies down quickly on the floor, laughs with joy that now she can sleep, and a minute later is sleeping the sleep of the dead..." (Chekhov 196). The highly symbolic image of the white road is characteristic of Mansfield; and chiefly due to this Symbolist leitmotif, her story must be distinguished as an independent work from Chekhov's "Let Me Sleep" despite the distinctive similarities in plot and setting between the two stories. Mansfield's "little road" symbolizes the

protagonist's social *and* aesthetic longing for freedom: the typically Mansfieldian theme which the reader cannot find at least in Chekhov's "Let Me Sleep." The leitmotif of Chekhov's story is, not "the highway" (Chekhov 193), but "the green patch and the shadows from the [master's] trousers and baby-clothes" (Chekhov 193) which symbolize the child's immediate oppressor and social slavery. The "highway, swimming in mud" in Varka's dream never leads to utopia (Chekhov 193): it only leads to undisturbed deadly sleep, that is, her urgent and intense desire for eternal rest or death; or it is a reminder of the existing places of her memory which represent her past hardship that would, without her family, have been no less tough than the present one. Mansfield's early Naturalistic story is already tinted by a conscious Symbolist colour: the quality which the reader cannot recognize in Chekhov's Naturalistic early masterpiece.⁵

The aesthetic theme and social theme are also combined in Mansfield's more mature, Naturalistic Symbolist story, "Life of Ma Parker." Ma Parker's suppressed desire for freedom could be associated with her sensuous memory of beauty: a sweet fragrance of the bush of her old house in Stratford-- this association of aesthetic sense with the place of childhood memory might remind the reader of Pater's notion that the place which is inseparable from one's childhood experiences forms the basis of one's aesthetic sense, perception and insight: Florian in Pater's "The Child in the House" reflects: "he owed to the place [the house he spent his childhood] many tones of sentiment afterwards customary with him, certain inward lights under which things most naturally presented themselves to him" (Pater 150).⁶ Ma Parker's sense of beauty is described as an indicator of her free, lively spirit. Her once responsive aesthetic perception has been hardened and blunted by incessant daily toils and worries; her dulling sense of beauty indicates her gradual loss of resisting, rebellious, active spirit. As hardship wears out Ma Parker physically and mentally, "the memory of the bush" that "smelt ever so nice" becomes "very vague" (304); she "only remembered it once or twice in the hospital," the only place where she can really rest, "when she [was] taken bad" (304). Lennie, with his angelic "silvery fair curls," "blue eyes" and "a little freckle like a diamond on one side of his nose" (305), has been Ma Parker's only beauty in her recent life; now that he is gone, her life is left ragged and worn-out like the "old clouds" she sees from the gentleman's flat (303); the loss of her only 'gem' makes the last flame of her spirit flare up.

Mansfield's Naturalistic stories, in a way, suggest that one's Aesthetic growth encourages one to break with one's social and political stasis by making one envisage a freer, more harmonious "nowhere." But they also seem to hint that this Aesthetic growth is, as Wilde notes in "The Soul of Man Under Socialism," most likely to be hindered by one's external (social and political) conditions: the existing system restricts one's full

Aesthetic growth. Mansfield would, here, agree not only with Wilde but also with Brecht, who maintained that the oppressed classes are not merely socially and politically oppressed but that "their taste and their instincts are oppressed as well" (*Brecht on Theatre* 160). And this latter, aesthetic oppression must be relevant to their numbed sense of pain and deprived spirit to rebel. It seems to explain why and how "[m]isery and poverty" can "exercise such a paralysing effect over the nature of men, that no class is ever really conscious of its own suffering" (Wilde 360-1)-- material oppression results in aesthetic oppression, which encourages moral oppression (moral slavery); aesthetic oppression perpetuates moral slavery by paralysing senses and imagination, and moral slavery perpetuates material oppression. (Then the chance to break this vicious cycle and escape from moral and material oppression lies in activating aesthetic perception.) Little Ellen's longing for a donkey-ride is, for example, class-coloured: her imagination can never dream of a pony-ride. The Child-Who-Was-Tired's "nowhere" is class-coloured as well: she can never imagine eating something better than "real sausages and beer for her dinner." Ma Parker's hard life leaves her no time or energy to envisage "nowhere": she has biologically lived; yet she does not realize that she has failed to 'live,' that is, to fulfill her desires which she has suppressed for so long that she is not even sure whether she has at all: it takes the death of her beloved grandson to make her aware of the basic desire (or need) to cry; and she cannot even fulfill it. Ma Parker has had a life or the sordid, self-sacrificing (or severely exploited) daily life, but not Life-- the fullness of life. The title "Life of Ma Parker," not '*The* Life of Ma Parker,' is, in this sense, very suggestive: for Mansfield's focus is on Ma Parker's failure to Live, not on her particular, oppressed life; it is on her extremely limited vision (or, rather, *no* vision) of Life, not on the minute description of her "hard life."

Aestheticism and social awareness are interlocked and interacting in Mansfield's stories; to maintain the sense of beauty is to maintain the desire for social and moral freedom and rebellious, resisting spirit-- Mansfield's stories seem to interpret Pater's Aestheticism politically: the desire to "burn always with this hard, gem-like flame, to maintain this ecstasy" (*The Renaissance* 189) leads to the awareness that "Man has sought to live intensely, fully, perfectly" (Wilde 388), and links up with a keen awareness of social injustice. The suggested theme seems to be explored further in one of Mansfield's last completed works, "The Garden Party," which I am going to examine in the following chapter.

Notes

¹ Saralyn R. Daly, for example, sees the connection between Mansfield's "Life of Ma

Parker" and Chekhov's "Misery": "In September 1921 Mansfield copied into a notebook the final passages of Chekhov's story 'Misery'. . . . She had written one of very similar approach in 'The Life of Ma Parker' [sic]" (83). But the similarity which I can recognize between the two stories is the respective protagonists' situation: Chekhov's protagonist, a cab-driver, is beaten by his son's unexpected death just as Ma Parker is shaken by her grandson's death.

² Kate Fullbrook and Sydney Janet Kaplan also recognize Mansfield's political consciousness in "Life of Ma Parker." Fullbrook suggests that "The Garden-Party," "The Daughters of the Late Colonel," and "Life of Ma Parker" are "the stories about mortality, particularly women's consciousness of mortality" (Fullbrook 117): the chief subject in Mansfield's writing of 1921 which "adds another dimension to her consistent portraiture of women's isolation and exclusion" (Fullbrook 118). Kaplan points out the shift of Mansfield's major concern: Kaplan maintains: "During the last months of the war, but especially during the first years after its conclusion, Mansfield's long-standing emphasis on women's victimization was subsumed into a larger concern with oppression and victimization on a global scale" (Kaplan 191). As for Mansfield's clear 'shift,' I do not quite agree with Kaplan: it seems that Mansfield's protagonists, from the early stage, ranges from an ex-criminal ("Ole Underwood") as well as a working-class woman ("Millie") to an middle/upper-class lady (*In a German Pension*).

³ Wilde 360-1.

⁴ As for the analysis of Ellen's moral slavery, see Kinoshita 10-2.

⁵ As for the differences between Chekhov's "Let Me Sleep" and Mansfield's version, Sutherland's analysis is insightful; see Sutherland 67- 70: he concludes: "*The Child* is a characteristic work of Katherine Mansfield's modern manner, and *Spat* ["Let Me Sleep"] is a characteristic Chekhov accomplishment in the more traditional manner" (69).

Also, the analysis of Hanson and Gurr is helpful. They point out that "The-Child-Who-Was-Tired" contains the "undercurrent" theme which is coherent in Mansfield's works, but which the reader cannot find in Chekhov's: "the theme of revulsion from sexuality and childbirth" (Hanson and Gurr 33). They also refer to Mansfield's Symbolism in "The Child-Who-Was-Tired" and concludes that "Katherine Mansfield did not absorb Chekhov's manner and approach in the same way in which she had earlier absorbed that of Pater and Wilde" (Hanson and Gurr 32):

"The-Child-Who-Was-Tired" is more inward than "Sleepy" ["Let Me Sleep"], less concerned with external and social forces. . . . Katherine Mansfield's story is to a far greater degree structured according to perceptions of metaphoric

similarity and contrast. . . . In its thematic patterning, Katherine Mansfield's story is to a much greater degree than Chekhov's a symbolist composition. As in the stories of Joyce's *Dubliners*, the movement forward of the narrative is 'retarded' or subverted by the introduction of symbolist techniques of parallelism and leitmotif. (Hanson and Gurr 33-34)

⁶ The connection between Ma Parker's aesthetic perception and Pater's "The Child in the House" might not be so far-fetched as it might seem, for Mansfield seemed to be familiar with Pater's story: she referred to the story in her journal (21 December 1908): "I should like to write a life much in the style of Walter Pater's *Child in the House*. . . ." (*Journal of K.M.* 37)

Chapter 10: Aesthetics and Politics in "The Garden-Party"

"The Garden-Party" (first published 4 February 1922) has been much praised as a masterpiece. Warren S. Walker comments: "The most frequently anthologized of Katherine Mansfield's works, 'The Garden Party,' has long enjoyed a reputation for near-perfection in the art of the short story" (Walker 354). Don W. Kleine also acclaims it: "Young Laura Sheridan's discovery of death in life is itself discovered with poetic truth and technical purity, and Miss Mansfield's work deserves the small, enduring place it has won in the history of modern fiction" (360). Despite the high critical evaluation the story has enjoyed, the terms of these critical readings are rather frustrating. Although critics regard "The Garden-Party" as an accomplished story of the adolescent girl's growth and her initiation into a new world, they tend to be rather vague and evasive about what Laura actually learns. Walker, for instance, pays attention to Laura's spiritual and social growth: he maintains that "The Garden-Party" involves Laura's "struggles"; he argues that at the climax, that is, at "a decisive stage" for "the respective struggles between two sets of opposing forces: 1) youthful fear of death vs. some kind of acceptance of death, and 2) Laura's social attitude vs. her mother's," the latter theme (the social theme) "is suddenly dropped" (Walker 357):

There is no doubt about the resolution of the first issue: . . . About the second part of the conflict, however, there is considerable doubt, for the problem is suddenly dropped, and no further reference is made to it. Does Laura now switch to her mother's view of the matter [the "leisure," "conspicuous consumption," and "caste distinctions" of "the whole social milieu of the Sheridan class" (356)], and does she now feel that her previous concern about the cotter's family was as unwarranted as the fear of death that accompanied it? Or has her plea "Forgive my hat" indicated her irrevocable commitment to a position opposed to that of Mrs. Sheridan? If so, will she not now have to reorient her feelings towards her family? We never find out, for no hint of an answer to this dilemma is to be found in the conclusion. (Walker 357)

But the reader has to examine whether "we *never* find out," or whether "no hint of an answer to this dilemma is to be found in the conclusion", for to leave the latter conflict "unresolved" does not seem to be the intention of the story: what makes the latter theme "suddenly dropped" seems to be Walker's understanding of the two "respective" conflicts (Laura's spiritual [or even aesthetic] conflict, and moral and social conflict) as two *separate* issues. This is somewhat self-contradictory: for one of Walker's questions-- "Does she now feel that her previous concern about the cotter's family was ^{as}unwarranted as the fear of death that accompanied it?"-- implies that he admits an interrelation between his two 'separate' issues. It does not seem to be a proper approach to disconnect one from the other 'forcefully': it seems more productive to see how Laura's spiritual and

social growth are related to each other. Besides, Laura's "some kind of acceptance of death" Walker claims needs more clarification.

Critics such as Donald S. Taylor, Daniel A. Weiss, Robert Murray Davis, and Don W. Kleine respectively attempt to answer the question Walker has raised; but the focus of their argument tends to be on whether the story's social theme is subordinate to the aesthetic and spiritual theme or not, and the main question of what Laura learns or what Laura's growth consists in seems to be left unanswered. All the four critics conclude (or, at least, are inclined to conclude) that the social theme is subordinate; yet they do not qualify Laura's spiritual growth sufficiently, either.

Kleine, for example, observes that the focus of the story is on Laura: she is, as the story's narrator-agent, a technically and thematically central figure; and her growth, thus, forms the major theme of the story. Kleine notes Laura's moral and social growth, but he believes that her aesthetic growth, that is, her awakening as a Romantic artist, dominates her moral and social growth; and yet what he means by Laura's aesthetic awareness is never made clear. As for Laura's moral and social growth, Kleine's argument is clear:

When she figuratively exorcises childhood by apologizing to the dead man for her festive party hat, the act is intrinsically moral, not only as an assertion of human solidarity, but also because it projects her beyond her mother's way of life. . . . To exist in it one must deny death and, in denying death, Laura's mother denies life, experience, to her young daughters. . . . An aspect of Mrs. Sheridan's life-denying immorality is her cultivated indifference to the savage social basis on which her world rests. . . ; indeed, the adulthood which Laura earns is partly identified with transcending class barriers, and the childhood she escapes is partly identified with staying inside them [the group of people whom Mrs. Sheridan represents]. (Kleine 363)

I can, up to this point, follow Kleine's argument perfectly. He, nevertheless, continues:

To arraign social differences is not Katherine Mansfield's primary intention, however. . . . Rather, the story's focus-- and central dramatic impulse-- is the young girl's secret struggle to grow up. (363)

He seems to suggest that Laura's growth lies in her growth as "a sensitive young romantic" visionary (Kleine 371). I do not disagree, but he does not really clarify his terms. Kleine does not say more than: "[at the sight of the dead man] Laura, at last fully awake, can abandon herself to a dream of her own, *the dream death makes of life*" (emphases added 371). This sounds as if he is referring to Laura's romanticization of death and that he regards it as a sign of Laura's aesthetic growth as a Romantic. His argument is, then, far from persuasive; for I cannot see any substantial significance in her growth as a Romantic visionary if romanticization or "abandon[ing] herself to a dream of her own" is her chief learning: one cannot possibly view her romanticization of

this kind as a sign of her spiritual or aesthetic growth since Laura is, if we accept Kleine's logic, simply being 'sentimental' as Jose, her "anti-type" (Kleine 367), criticizes. In order to make his argument valid, Kleine needs to clarify, for example, what "a sensitive young romantic" signifies in this particular text of Mansfield's. I do not see any necessity of slighting Laura's moral and social growth and regarding it as a secondary theme especially when his argument of this 'less important' theme is more clearly stated. Kleine's view that the story's moral and social themes are subordinate to its aesthetic and spiritual themes partly results from his insufficient grasp of its structure. He argues: "It is appropriate, then [if the focus of the story is on Laura's aesthetic growth], that the story's events should be conveyed *exclusively* through Laura's own naive impressions, since only thus can Miss Mansfield objectify her character's movement towards self-fulfillment [as a romantic visionary]" (emphasis added 364). Kleine is simply wrong because the story's narrative consists not only of Laura's free indirect discourse but also of omniscient narrative and Mrs. Sheridan's brief interior monologue; and the story's omniscient narrative, indeed, plays a significant role in clarifying its moral and political themes. It seems to me that the fact that Kleine's argument about the story's moral and social themes is fairly clear while that about the aesthetic theme is poorly demonstrated, alone, shows that the moral and social themes are not as feeble as Kleine believes.

Slighting the story's social and political themes, or missing the link between the aesthetic, the moral and the political leads to slighting Laura's experience at the climax. Critics' failure to fully grasp the themes of "The Garden-Party" seems to result from the fact that they fail to note Mansfield's Aestheticism where politics and aesthetics are interrelated: without connecting the story's aesthetic, moral, and social themes, no satisfactory answer would not be given to Walker's question or to the crucial question of what Laura learns. Kleine would not entirely disagree with my suggestion, for he observes: "The imaginative insight is simultaneously a moral one" (Kleine 368). Davis concludes that Laura's aesthetic grasp of (her aesthetic discourse on) death signifies her retreat "from the real world," and is her childish romanticization of life's grave matter (Davis 64): although her sob and articulated forgiveness for her improper attire show that she has become morally "more mature than her mother and Jose ever can be" (Davis 65), she is, basically, still unable to grow out of the bourgeois world which Mrs. Sheridan represents. Clare Hanson and Andrew Gurr also tend to emphasize the incompleteness of Laura's growth: they term Laura's response to death "her desperate romanticising of the corpse" (Hanson and Gurr 121): "Death is still more melodramatic to her than real" (Hanson and Gurr 122). Carole Froude Durix, too, concludes that Laura's "encounter

with death is romanticized but remains unassimilated; doubtlessly this is because the dead man is unknown to her and so she feels little emotional loss" (Durix 184). I do not entirely deny Laura's inclination to romanticize death; but I believe that there is much more than naïve romanticization in her reaction and attitude towards death. The critical tendency to underestimate Laura's experience prevents a full understanding of what Laura learns, and of the story's themes.

The 'direct' purpose of this chapter is, therefore, to solve Walker's "dilemma," that is, to clarify and qualify Laura's growth; and this effort leads to my chief attempt to illuminate Katherine Mansfield's Aestheticism and its political potential. It seems to me that the development of the story shows Laura's aesthetic, moral and social growth; the essence of Laura's growth and her possibility of further growth lie in her Aestheticism: her keen, spontaneous Symbolist practice of connecting the aesthetic, the moral and the political. Taylor concludes: "When she[Laura] sobs, 'Forgive my hat,' she rejects at last the meaningless dream of the garden party and stands now on the threshold of the real world, sinister at first, but now transmuted into beauty by the dream of death" (Taylor 362). Although Taylor's expression "the real world. . . transmuted into beauty by the dream of death" strikes me as rather unclear (somehow he prefers to leave it unclarified), it seems to hint that the dead man's tranquility is, for Laura, a Symbolist symbol or beauty in strangeness, which leads to her confrontation (unveiling) of a veiled reality and her discovery of Aesthetic values as opposed to material values. My analysis of the story will, then, reinterpret and throw a political light on Taylor's 'transmutation' of the real world "into beauty by dream of death." My view could be close to Taylor's, but I will suggest that this transmutation does not mean Mansfield's 'subordination' of social issues. Taylor, like Kleine, insists that the story's social issue is a "subordinate part" of Laura's "larger" conflict: her "awaking" from the Sheridans' dream world to "the real dream [death]" "which gives beauty and significance to man's real life on earth" (Taylor 362). Taylor's terms, again, strike me as still vague, but his exposition sounds as if he is hinting at the political potential of Aestheticism: it seems that he is, despite himself, implying that Laura's awakening *is* at once moral, social and aesthetic. For what is unveiled 'reality' in "The Garden-Party"? : Laura's awakening from the Sheridans' dream world-- or her discovery of "the real world"-- involves, as Kleine notes, her moral break with what the Sheridans represent, that is, her criticism of the Sheridans' materialism, social privilege and exploitation. Also, her discovery of beauty in death (or her 'transmutation') involves her 'rejection' of material beauty which the Sheridans enjoy. And this rejection, that is, her affinity to humanity determines her political affiliation to equality.

Weiss regards the story as a parody of the Greek myth of Proserpina and Pluto. Fred C. Robinson points out the parallelism between Daphne's metamorphosis into a laurel and a 'metamorphosis' of Laura ('laurel') into canna lilies. Both Weiss's and Robinson's mythic interpretation will never contradict my suggestion of a Symbolist amalgamation of the aesthetic, the moral and the political: they will rather reinforce my thesis on Mansfield and Symbolism by connecting pagan mythology with her story.

I The Narrative Structure of "The Garden-Party"

"The Garden-Party" is, except for one scene (the scene just after the party) where Mrs. Sheridan's free indirect discourse is briefly inserted, largely written from the point of view of the adolescent protagonist, Laura. Although the story's narrative strikes the reader as generally subjective, that is, focused on Laura's psychology, the story has three parts of fairly distinctive omniscient narrative. Two, categorically, omniscient narrations (the first and ^{the} third narration)-- the introductory narration (ll.1-15, 245) and the description of the poverty-stricken district (ll.3-21, 254)-- are not simply descriptive or informative. They do not merely supply the reader with sufficient information to situate the story socially; but they are also given a highly subjective tone. These two narrations could, therefore, be interpreted, loosely, as Laura's extended free indirect discourse.¹ The second omniscient narration-- the description of Jose's singing (ll.11-29, 250)-- must, on the other hand, be distinguished from Laura's, and interpreted as omniscient, for Laura is not, at first, present in the scene.

The omniscient discourse of "The Garden-Party" does not, due to its small share and its basically subjective tone, mar the 'life' of Laura's narrative; it does not halt the speedy tempo, lively rhythm and excited breath that Laura's free indirect discourse conjures. However, this rather inconspicuous omniscient discourse seems to play a significant role in the story: it adds a larger, social framework to the otherwise single-framed story of Laura's subjective psychological discourse. It is true that Laura's alienation from her family which the development of the story reveals to the reader (as well as Laura), alone, raises moral and social issues; it objectifies the bourgeois values which the Sheridans represent and the social structure which makes their garden-party (and their social privileges in general) possible. But, as I discuss later in this chapter, the story's omniscient discourse intensifies its political themes: it justifies Laura's moral perception and makes the political themes more intentional and distinct.

"The Garden-Party" deals with two themes: aesthetics and politics. Laura is described as both aesthetic and morally and politically responsive; her aesthetic sense,

morality and political consciousness are suggested to be shared with Laurie, her brother, and are contrasted with those of the other female members of the family. (Mr. Sheridan's part is small and his character is described as rather neutral: his lack of tact and straightforwardness, though, seem to suggest his humanity. Meg, one of Laura's two sisters, is also an obscure figure; yet the first scene of the story hints at her irresponsibility and, thus, the fact that that she belongs to Mrs. Sheridan's group.) Mansfield emphasizes the differences between Laura (and Laurie) and the other female Sheridans by the effective use of parodies and juxtapositions. The analyses of the Sheridans, especially, a close examination of Laura's aesthetic quality and her growing moral and political awareness, seem to shed light on Mansfield's chief concern: the interrelationship between Aestheticism (art) and moral and political responsiveness (life and society). A careful analysis of the omniscient narrative will also help to clarify Mansfield's shrewd insight into and acute criticism of the existing political structure which does not only conserve but also encourages social inequality; and it, as I will discuss later in this chapter, enables the reader to see the link between Mansfield's Aestheticism and Wilde's politicized Aestheticism. Mansfield's positive introduction of omniscient point of view for "The Garden-Party" reminds the reader of her technical device for "At the Bay" (January, 1922) which plays the role of a 'prelude' to her third anthology *The Garden-Party and other stories* (22 February, 1922): also "At the Bay" has, as we have seen, omniscient point of view. The narrative structure of "The Garden-Party" is basically different from that of "At the Bay"-- the structural unity of the latter is looser due to Mansfield's introduction of multiple point of view and the juxtaposition of seemingly unrelated sections. The reader can, however, still point out another structural similarity: the two stories have a chronological unity (though, again, with a difference: time in "The Garden-Party" is linear while time in "At the Bay" is not). Each story begins in the morning and ends in the evening. The similarity in the narrative structure (the presence of omniscient point of view) might reflect Mansfield's growing political consciousness, especially her awareness of the political potential of Aestheticism, whereas the similarity in time structure might be relevant to Mansfield's sense of ending and her Aesthetic attempt to capture intensified moments: her consciousness that "we are all *condamnés*, . . . we have an interval, and then our place knows us no more. Some spend this interval in listlessness, some in high passions, the wisest, at least among 'the children of this world,' in art and song" (*The Renaissance* 190).

II Laura: Aestheticism, Morality and Social Awareness

Towards the end of the story, Laura becomes aware of the fact that she does not share the other female Sheridans' (bourgeois) values: "how curious, she seemed to be different from them all" (258). The differences between them are, however, made clear from the beginning and emphasized throughout the story: only Laura's realization takes place nearly at the end of the story. The reader cannot help noting Laura's aesthetic and moral perception which distinguishes her from the other female Sheridans:

"Where do you want the marquee put, mother?"

"My dear child, it's no use asking me. I'm determined to leave everything to you children this year. Forget I am your mother. Treat me as an honoured guest."

But Meg could not possibly go and supervise the men. She had washed her hair before breakfast, and she sat drinking her coffee in a green turban, with a dark wet curl stamped on each cheek. Jose, the butterfly, always came down in a silk petticoat and a kimono jacket.

"You'll have to go, Laura; you're the artistic one."

Away Laura flew, still holding her piece of bread-and-butter. It's so delicious to have an excuse for eating out of doors and, besides, she loved having to arrange things; she always felt she could do it so much better than anybody else. (245-6)

Although the story does not signify who the first speaker (who raises the subject of the marquee) is, the reader can guess it must be either Laura or Meg. It could be Laura. For the lively, alert tone of the omniscient narrator's voice which precedes this quoted scene, coincides with that of Laura's discourse so much that the reader could identify the omniscient narrative with hers: the story, in a way, opens with the tone of voice which reflects Laura's heightened consciousness; and the omniscient voice (already tinted by Laura's colour) gradually merges into Laura's consciousness; the opening speech of the quoted scene-- the question concerning the marquee-- could be understood at once as the omniscient narrator's extended consciousness and Laura's articulated consciousness. Also, the development of the Sheridans' conversation makes clear that there is, in fact, no one but Laura who would worry about, or, rather, feel interested in a perhaps 'inartistic,' tiresome, inconspicuous, yet still necessary chore like directing workmen to put up the marquee. The reader cannot, on the other hand, deny the possibility that the first speaker could be Meg. The line just after the first dialogue: "*But* Meg could not possibly go and supervise the men" (emphasis added) could suggest that it is Meg who raises the issue. It is likely that she brings it, unlike Laura, to evade this boring 'duty.' In either case, the other Sheridans' reluctance of taking charge of the business is obvious: each makes her own plausible excuse. Mrs. Sheridan declares most beautifully and sweetly that she has handed over her responsibilities for the party to her children; she manages to escape the chore by assuming a new liberalism of transferring her parental power and authority to them-- yet it is later revealed that this policy of Mrs.

Sheridan's is never consistent. Meg's hair is wet; Jose is not yet properly dressed. Jose flatters Laura-- Jose would never be willing to term others "artistic" without specific reasons: the story suggests that not only she but also her family and friends regard her, not Laura, as the most artistic member.

The Sheridans' casual conversation displays the evasiveness and irresponsibility of Mrs. Sheridan, Meg, and Jose-- their selfishness is sugared with their sophisticated tactfulness-- and Laura's contrasting artless naïveté and sense of responsibility. Laura would have her own excuse of not undertaking the chore-- she is in the middle of breakfast; but her spontaneity is stressed: she is ready to take part in the setting-up of the marquee when she (or Meg) brings the issue up. Laura's consciousness ("It's so delicious to have an excuse for eating out of doors and, besides, she loved having to arrange things; she always felt she could do it so much better than anybody else") expresses her sense of responsibility and her (secret) confidence in her own aesthetic sense, and her love of freedom and unconventionality. Her rejection of formality and genteel tradition is made more explicit in the following scene where Laura negotiates with the workmen: she is charmed by their warm friendliness and unaffected, casual manner; she feels like fully despising "absurd class distinctions" or "stupid conventions" (247, 248), and being a "work-girl" herself (248).

1 The Canna Lilies, the Hat and the Garden-Party

Christ Carrying the Cross. Execution as a popular festivity. The Spanish horsemen in red tunics as FOREIGN TROOPS: a thread of scarlet to indicate direction and movement and distract us from the execution. On the extreme left, the common people at work, the least interested. In the left background, people running, frightened of arriving too late. On the right they are already waiting in a circle round the place of execution. The scene in the left foreground-- somebody being arrested-- excites more attention than does Christ's collapse. Mary less concerned with Jesus than her own sorrow. Note the woman on her left, the mourner in the rich and carefully-draped dress. The world is beautiful and seductive. (Emphases added, Bertolt Brecht "Alienation Effects in the Narrative Picture of the Elder Brueghel")²

Laura's moral sense is 'challenged' and distracted on two occasions: first, by the canna lilies, and, second, by the hat. The breath-taking beauty of the lilies which Mrs. Sheridan has secretly ordered for the party enthralls Laura; yet her moral sense which her negotiation with the workmen has made keener prevents her from accepting such luxury. Mrs. Sheridan, however, interferes: she rationalizes this extravagance. Laura's moral conflict over the brilliant lilies predicts another far more intense conflict-- her first conflict is a parody of her major conflict; the episode concerning the lilies is a parody of

the main plot. Laura's mind sways between the much-expected garden-party and the due respect one should pay to the dead 'neighbour' and his family. When Laura's mind judges their garden-party as "extravagant" and proposes the postponement (253), Jose opposes it; Mrs. Sheridan positively interferes: her "topping" black hat succeeds in distracting Laura's already feeble moral protest (256).

"The Garden-Party" might, therefore, be allegorically paraphrased as follows: "The world," for Laura, emerges as "beautiful and seductive" (Brecht 158). Beauty, or, rather, material luxury which the Sheridans' economic and social privileges allow them to enjoy-- beauty costs us dearly in our Capitalist society-- appeals to her aesthetic sensibilities and urges her to yield to its charm and comfort. The canna lilies and the gorgeous hat which represent 'the garden-party' work on her aesthetic perception and enchant her: they seduce her to stay within her own class, close her eyes to injustice, and enjoy carefree "happiness" of being "with people who all are happy" (257). The moral conflict which Laura experiences over the lilies and the hat (or 'the garden-party') might, on a superficial level, appear to represent the conflict between aesthetics and morality (or politics): the canna lilies, the hat and the garden-party symbolize material, therefore, ephemeral, mortal beauty built on the sacrifice (or exploitation) of the invisible, oppressed majority. Laura's conflict, indeed, represents that between materialism and morality. The world or, more precisely, Laura's bourgeois world which is represented by the garden-party "distract[s]" her (Brecht 158); the extent of this distraction is such that it overwhelms her imagination; it makes the reality of society, that is, the existence of her poor neighbours, blur. Materialism, by appealing to her aesthetic perception, seduces her. Her confrontation with the solemnity of death, however, intensifies her moral perception; the intensified moral perception elevates her aesthetic quality. The awe of the unknown combines her moral and aesthetic quality: it allows her to glimpse the vision of spiritual beauty which transcends material beauty and the superficial conflict between the aesthetic and the moral: the beauty which exists only in the equilibrium of the two qualities. Laura's 'pilgrimage' to the dead man is her exploration and discovery of Symbolist beauty.

(i) Laura and the Canna Lilies

For the recognition of private property has really harmed Individualism, and obscured it, by confusing a man with what he possesses. . . It has made gain, not growth, its aim. So that man thought that the important thing was to have, and did not know that the important thing is to be. (Wilde "The Soul of Man Under Socialism")³

"What is it, Sadie?" Laura came into the hall.

"It's the florist, Miss Laura."

It was, indeed. There, just inside the door, stood a wide, shallow tray full of pots of pink lilies. No other kind. Nothing but lilies-- canna lilies, big pink flowers, wide open, radiant, almost frighteningly alive on bright crimson stems.

"O-oh, Sadie!" said Laura, and the sound was like a little moan. She crouched down as if to warm herself at that blaze of lilies; she felt they were in her fingers, on her lips, growing in her breast.

"It's some mistake," she said faintly. "Nobody ever ordered so many. Sadie, go and find mother."

But at that moment Mrs. Sheridan joined them.

"It's quite right," she said calmly. "Yes, I ordered them. Aren't they lovely?"

She pressed Laura's arm. "I was passing the shop yesterday, and I saw them in the window. And I suddenly thought for once in my life I shall have enough canna lilies. The garden-party will be a good excuse."

"But I thought you said you didn't mean to interfere," said Laura. Sadie had gone. The florist's man was still outside at his van. She put her arm round her mother's neck and gently, very gently, she bit her mother's ear.

"My darling child, you wouldn't like a logical mother, would you? Don't do that. Here's the man."

He carried more lilies still, another whole tray.

"Bank them up, just inside the door, on both sides of the porch, please," said Mrs. Sheridan. "Don't you agree, Laura?"

"Oh, I *do*, mother." (249-50)

A number of fresh, beautiful lilies simply overwhelm Laura. All her senses are stirred and concentrated on the lilies: she identifies herself with them; she "becomes" lilies.⁴ This intensely subjective way of appreciating beauty-- this Aesthetic attitude towards an object of beauty-- is consistent in Laura. Laura's full absorption of all her being in the object of beauty to grasp its essence might be associated with Pater's "gathering all we are into one desperate effort to see and touch" (Pater 189), or with Rimbaud's "acquir[ing] a kind of hypersensitivity" though "derangement of the senses" (Chadwick *Symbolism* 30).

Despite her full appreciation, Laura refuses to accept those lilies. She finds them too luxurious to possess: "Nobody ever ordered so many." Her negotiation with the workmen in the previous scene intensifies her moral sensitivity. The fact that the Sheridans are having a band impresses a "pale" workman with "a haggard look" (247); his reaction makes Laura newly aware of her family's privilege, and this consciousness makes her awkward and guilty. Mrs. Sheridan's 'interference' resolves Laura's moral conflict: Mrs. Sheridan rationalizes her extravagance ("for once in my life I shall have enough canna lilies. The garden-party will be a good excuse") although the reader guesses that she would and will often use this once-in-my-life logic. Laura at first disapproves of her mother's inconsistency: Mrs. Sheridan has promised that her children, not she, take full

charge of the party; but Laura is not reluctant to accept this now 'justified' extravagance: the beauty of the lilies has already conquered her. Laura's reaction or 'punishment'-- her sensual act of biting her mother's ear softly-- reflects her mixed feelings: her appreciation of the lilies and accusation of her mother's capriciousness and extravagance.

Laura, in her childlike naïveté, might rather believe that her mother appreciates the lilies as much as she does; but the reader cannot help comparing Mrs. Sheridan's appreciation with Laura's. Mrs. Sheridan's appreciation is no more than a whimsical consumer's: she finds the lilies "lovely"; but their loveliness is, for her, that of nice commodities. She is, like Jose but unlike Laura, never enthralled by it: " 'It's quite right,' she said *calmly*. 'Yes, I ordered them. Aren't they lovely?' " (emphasis added) Once she possesses the lilies, she seems to lose most of her interest in them. She does not even look at them appreciatively; she treats them somewhat carelessly: she orders the florist to "[b]ank them up." Mrs. Sheridan's guilty conscience at purchasing so many lilies is, again, no more than a consumer's: she only worries whether she might use up her allowance (her husband's money). The reader suspects that her inability to possess the lilies would give her a consumer's frustration; but the absence (or even the presence) of the lilies would not affect her emotional life deeply, for she does not really know the aesthetic (as opposed to the commercial) value of the lilies. Laura would love to possess the object of beauty; yet her chief concern is, unlike Mrs. Sheridan, to feel the essence of its beauty (or Wilde's "to be" or even "to become"), not to possess the material object (or Wilde's "to have"). Yet, it is rather ironical that material beauty ("the world") can be grasped as more "seductive" and "beautiful" for Laura than for Mrs. Sheridan because of Laura's susceptibility to beauty: the canna lilies "distract" and disturb Laura all the more because her sensibilities are responsive to beauty (Brecht 158). Material beauty is most likely to give Laura an intense moral conflict; but she does not yet know how to resolve this conflict between aesthetics, morality and social awareness.

Laura's moral sense and aesthetic perception are emphasized in the scenes that follow this canna lily scene: the inserted or juxtaposed episodes concerning Mrs. Sheridan and Jose make the differences between Laura and the two characters more explicit. Laura's sense of responsibility makes a clear contrast with Mrs. Sheridan's carelessness in the sandwich-flag scene. Mrs. Sheridan does not only forget to make sandwich flags; she has lost the memo (a used envelope on which she has scribbled down the names of sandwiches). When she finally finds it out, "how it [has] got there Mrs. Sheridan could not imagine" (251); she, though jokingly, begins to blame her children for the missing envelope. Mrs. Sheridan misreads her own hasty handwriting-- she takes 'Mice' for 'Olive'; it is Laura who corrects it and carefully writes out all the names on the flags.

Mrs. Sheridan's irresponsibility is contrasted not only with Laura's sense of responsibility and efficiency but with the workmen's: the sandwich-flag scene is a parody of the marquee scene. The workman also draws "something on the back of an envelope" to set up the marquee properly. The episodes hint at Laura's moral and even aesthetic affinity with the workmen: Laura shares with them a sense of responsibility, a non-material aesthetic sense (the workman's appreciation of the fragrance of "a sprig of lavender" will be associated with Laura's appreciation of the canna lilies [247]), and a casual, friendly manner which might be contrasted with Mrs. Sheridan's class-conscious frigidity and emotional reserve. Mrs. Sheridan does not seem to love to be touched especially in front of the lower class: she checks her daughter's 'free manner'--she says to Laura who is caressing her: "Don't do that. Here is the man" (250).

Laura's aesthetic sensibilities are compared with Jose's: Jose's singing scene is juxtaposed with Laura's scenes concerning her "[d]arling little spots" of sunlight and the canna lilies (249). Jose's affected artiness, or pretentious artistry is stressed in the following scene:

She [Jose] turned to Meg. "I want to hear what the piano sounds like, just in case I'm asked to sing this afternoon. Let's try over 'This Life is Weary.'" *Pom!* Ta-ta-ta *Tee-ta!* The piano burst out so passionately that Jose's face changed. She clasped her hands. She looked mournfully and enigmatically at her mother and Laura as they came in.

This Life is *Wee*-ary,
A Tear-- a Sigh.
A Love that *Chan*-ges,
This Life is *Wee*-ary,
A Tear-- a Sigh.
A Love that *Chan*-ges,
And then... Good-bye!

But at the word "Good-bye," and although the piano sounded more desperate than ever, her face broke into a brilliant, dreadfully unsympathetic smile.

"Aren't I in good voice, mummy?" she beamed.

This Life is *Wee*-ary,
Hope comes to Die,
A Dream-- a *Wa*-kening. (250-1)

It is obvious that Jose, "the butterfly" (246), regards herself as artistic; she loves to be dramatic-- she "always [makes] them[their servants] feel they were taking part in some drama" (250); she is musical and regarded as such--she might be "asked to sing" at the garden-party. Jose's artistic affectation reminds the reader of Peacock, a popular, arty, yet probably artistically second-rate singer in "Mr. Reginald Peacock's Day." Jose's total lack of interest in the meaning of the song, and the resultant lack of sympathy must make her tragic tone and gesture appear simply exaggerated, and her voice, despite its innately good quality, sound too artificial and false: "practical" Jose, who "never like[s] to

be carried back" (252), does not know aesthetic ecstasy which Laura is familiar with; she does not know how to 'appreciate' art. Art for Jose is art as a means to "escape from life" ("Mr. Reginald Peacock's Day" 148). Jose's artiness widens the gap between art and life: art is, for her, a practical ornament or what she *has*, which does not really affect what she *is*. Her conceit, that is, her self-absorption must be distinguished from Laura's full absorption in an object of beauty: the performer's lack of interpretation and sympathy, and her snobbish affectation distract the listener and prevent ^{him or} her from appreciating the song and music. The story's indirect criticism of Jose's 'utilitarian' attitude towards art (which is contrasted with Laura's 'disinterested' attitude) seems to illuminate the unexpectedly tight link between the aesthetic and the moral: the amalgamation of the two qualities makes art purify; it makes Aestheticism possible.

The words of Jose's song-- especially the last three lines-- predict the coming incident, the young man's death.⁵ None of the Sheridans are aware of life's weariness or ephemerality; their social privilege, on the contrary, seems to make them enjoy its nectar. Perhaps it is the dead young man or the "pale" young workman who is forced to become aware of life's weariness: life seems to have been wearing out their spirit. Only Laura and Laurie are, among the Sheridans, somewhat familiar with the grim life of the invisible people; and, as I will examine later, it is only Laura who is, through her pilgrimage to the dead man's place, capable of reaching a deeper, aesthetic as well as moral grasp of (or at least, glimpse into) life's ephemerality: Laura's consciousness, at the sight of the dead man, echoes and repeats these last three lines of Jose's song: Laura feels that his dead face looks like "sleeping so soundly, so deeply" and "dreaming" (261): she is the only person who is able to interpret the lines. The song belongs to Laura, not Jose.

(ii) The Hat and the Garden-Party

Art is Individualism, and Individualism is a disturbing and disintegrating force. Therein lies its immense value. For what it seeks to disturb is monotony of type, slavery of custom, tyranny of habit, and the reduction of man to the level of a machine. (Wilde "The Soul of Man Under Socialism")⁶

When Laura, hearing the news of the young carter's death, suggests the postponement of their garden-party, Jose makes an outright objection: Jose regards the cancellation of the party for those poor 'illegitimate' neighbours as "extravagant," for they never "expect" the Sheridans or the bourgeois to do so (253); Jose judges Laura's attitude as "sentimental" (254). Laura disagrees: she turns to their mother; yet Mrs. Sheridan's views are, "to her astonishment" (255), exactly as the same as, or even more

excessive than Jose's: Mrs. Sheridan argues: "People like that don't expect sacrifices from us. And it's not very sympathetic to spoil everybody's [that is, *her*] enjoyment as you're doing now" (256-7).

What is clear about Jose's and Mrs. Sheridan's argument is their "common sense" (255), their double-standard based on their class prejudice: they accept social injustice and inequality as society's necessary evil. There is, in their mind, a clear social division between the middle and upper classes (those who have means) and the lower classes (those who do not have means); those who *have* are given a 'natural' right to be served by, that is, exploit those who *do not have*; the privileged can always "expect sacrifices" from the oppressed (255).⁷ The Sheridans' sympathy is extended to their fellow middle and upper classes, yet not to the lower classes. Jose's and Mrs. Sheridan's moral sense is nothing more than social propriety, and is material: materialism is their measure of judgment.

Laura judges people by what they *are*, not what they *have*: her humanity does not approve of a double-standard. She regards "class distinctions" as "absurd" (247); the Sheridans' privilege is a burden for her: it makes her feel guilty. Her view of and attitude towards the working-class are, however, still limited: they are "unconsciously patronising" (Hanson and Gurr 117).⁸ Her guilty conscience encourages her to idealize them: her moral sense tries to get rid of any possible remains of her class prejudice which her bourgeois upbringing and education are most likely to have 'nurtured.' Every time she notices the workmen's merit, she cannot help exclaiming: "How very nice workmen were!" (246). Her exclamation reflects more than her innocent wonder at the unknown (for she does not have many chances of contact with the working-class except servants): it reflects her sub-conscious effort to free herself from "absurd class distinctions" and "stupid conventions" (247, 248).

It, therefore, seems natural to Laura that the Sheridans should pay due respect to the dead man and his family living in their neighbouring district. If it were a funeral of one of the Sheridans' middle- and upper-class neighbours, they would have to postpone the party: social propriety as well as moral sense would require them to consider the feelings of the family of the deceased. Laura's moral delicacy judges that they "can't possibly have a garden-party with a man dead just outside the front gate" (254). According to Laura's moral logic, it is the Sheridans who are being "extravagant" because they are demanding the sacrifice of the already oppressed, now beaten family for their luxurious pastime (253): there is nothing more extravagant and selfish than Mrs. Sheridan's material logic: "it's not very sympathetic to spoil everybody's enjoyment" (255-6).

Laura is "a disturbing and disintegrating force" to the Sheridans' "monotony of type,

slavery of custom, tyranny of habit, and the reduction of man to the level of machine" (Wilde 373). And yet "the world is beautiful and seductive" (Brecht 158): the black hat which Mrs. Sheridan gives Laura to make her refrain from insisting the postponement of the party seduces her successfully:⁹

"I don't understand," said Laura, and she walked quickly out of the room into her own bedroom. There, quite by chance, the first thing she saw was this charming girl in the mirror, in her black hat trimmed with gold daisies and a long black velvet ribbon. Never had she imagined she could look like that. Is mother right? she thought. And now she hoped her mother was right. Am I being extravagant? Perhaps it was extravagant. Just for a moment she had another glimpse of that poor woman and those little children and the body being carried into the house. But it all seemed blurred, unreal, like a picture into the newspaper. I'll remember it again after the party's over, she decided. And somehow that seemed quite the best plan.... (256)

Laura's love of beauty responds to Mrs. Sheridan's marvelous hat: this little luxury becomes a reminder of and a trigger for all the material comforts and pleasure which the garden-party promises: all her excitement and joy of the much expected party surge into Laura's mind. The hat makes the focus of her imagination shift from the dead man and his family to the party; the distracted and changed focus blurs and weakens her moral sense; it urges her to suspend her moral judgment, not the garden-party. Even the sight of Laurie, Laura's reminder of moral sense, fails to revive her blunted conscience: Laurie's innocent, light-hearted praise of her hat, on the contrary, discourages her from bringing up any grave moral question. The carefree absorption in well-being-- "Oh, what happiness it is to be with people who all are happy" (257)-- checks her imagination and paralyzes her moral sense. The seducing and distracting effect of material comfort and luxury on Laura's mind is emphasized in the scene where she heads for the dead man's place with her charity basket: her lingering feeling of festivity limits her usually keen faculty of imagination: "Here she was going down the hill to somewhere where a man lay dead, and she couldn't realise it. Why couldn't she? She stopped a minute. . . . How strange! She looked up at the pale sky, and all she thought was, 'Yes, it was the most successful party'" (259).

However, Laura's suppressed morality is still a fairly strong undercurrent of the festive scene. Kitty's flippant comment on the band's features-- "aren't they [the green-coated band] too like frogs for words? You ought to have arranged them round the pond with the conductor in the middle of a leaf" (256)-- is, for instance, contrasted with Laura's respect and consideration for them: "Daddy darling, can't the band have something to drink?" (257).¹⁰ Laura's consciousness, while fully enjoying the blissful mood of the party, seems to note the purposelessness and inherent boredom of the privileged participants which the party's festive, luxurious surface is hiding: "Wherever you looked there were

couples strolling, bending to the flowers, greeting, moving on over the lawn. They were like bright birds that had alighted in the Sheridans' garden for this one afternoon, on their way to-- where?" (256-7). The ephemerality of seemingly "perfect" material comfort and pleasure which the garden-party represents is also suggested: "And the perfect afternoon slowly ripened, slowly faded, slowly its petals closed" (257): the sense of ending or the image of death seems to gradually, secretly shadow and dominate the jubilant scene; the mood of vivacity for the first half of the story is slowly alternated with that of stillness.¹¹

2 Laura's Pilgrimage and Learning

Laura set off to the dead man's cottage in her party dress and the gorgeous hat; she is still so absorbed in the festive mood of the garden-party that she does not notice her improper attire; her mother does not basically care about what the poor young man's family ("[p]eople of that class" [258]) might feel. Mrs. Sheridan does not, as we saw, have any reservations about "tak[ing] scraps from their party" to the dead man's family (258); what is offensive for the fellow middle-class passes as a deed of sympathy and charity for the poor. As soon as she sets foot in the poor district, the unsuitable dress and hat make Laura extremely embarrassed and nervous: "How her frock shone! And the big hat with the velvet streamer-- if only it was another hat! Were the people looking at her? They must be. It was a mistake to have come" (259). The image of pilgrimage is, however, given to this painful little journey: it is, for Laura, a journey to a new, deeper moral and aesthetic awareness.

Laura's little journey is tinted with a mystic colour.¹² The dead man's neighbours look as if they had long "expected" her (259); her intense embarrassment makes her feel like escaping from the spot, and she does attempt to get away; but she, despite her own will, finds herself face to face with the dead man as if a divine will or unknown power ~~dragged~~ her there: the sister-in-law of the dead man who introduces Laura to his place appears "fond" and "sly" (260); she seems to be revealing to Laura the secret truth which she already knows but Laura does not. The surrogate of a divine will could be felt "sly" or malicious, for learning usually involves pain. Although Laura's passage to the destination is an 'ordeal,' the moment of her revelation turns out to be that of ecstasy:

There lay a young man, fast asleep-- sleeping so soundly, so deeply, that he was far, far away from them both. Oh, so remote, so peaceful. He was dreaming. Never wake him up again. His head was sunk in the pillow, his eyes were closed; they were blind under the closed eyelids. He was given up to his dream. What did garden-parties and baskets and lace frocks matter to him? He was far from all those things. He was wonderful and beautiful.

While they were laughing and while the band was playing, this marvel had come to the lane. Happy... happy.... All is well, said that sleeping face. This is just as it should be. I am content. (261)

The tranquil expression of the dead man spellbinds Laura; she is completely entranced by transcendental beauty in his remoteness, that is, his total detachment from worldly affairs and interests: Laura recognizes eternal, spiritual beauty which is totally different from the ephemeral, material beauty which the Sheridans' garden-party represents. Material beauty (the canna lilies, the hat and the garden-party) which has seduced her is inferior to spiritual beauty ("this marvel") not only because the former is discriminating--whether one has the chance to appreciate it or not largely depends on one's material conditions; but also because it is ephemeral. The young man's beauty appeals to Laura's aesthetic *and* moral perception. Laura is Rimbaud's "poet-seer": a Symbolist who penetrates, in the dead man's tranquillity, the sign of sublime beauty which transcends the superficial conflict between the aesthetic and the moral: the beauty which amalgamates the aesthetic and the moral. Laura is "the poet who see through to another world beyond reality [the existing, material world]" by "subjecting himself to every form of sensual experience" (Chadwick *Symbolism* 30). Laura's understanding of death does not simply consists in the equalizing effect of death, that is, the common moral awareness that death comes to everyone regardless of what he or she is or has; it rather consists in her aesthetic interpretation of death.

Laura's discovery of Symbolist beauty releases her from moral conflict over material beauty. Her new, profound grasp of equality which results from her understanding of the dead man's aesthetic superiority over the Sheridans' garden-party sets her free from her sub-conscious superiority complex over the working-class which has had to be checked and suppressed by moral sense, that is, from her self-consciousness that she *must*, as the privileged, treat the unprivileged equally. Her amalgamation of the aesthetic and the moral makes human equality unquestionable truth. Laura's natural, self-composed manner towards the sister-in-law reflects her growth: her self-consciousness vanishes; she no longer feels awkward with the poor neighbours: on her way back home, "she didn't wait for Em's sister. She found her way out of the door, down the path past all those dark people" (261).

Despite Laura's recognition of the dead man's serene, transcendent beauty, death's worldly aspect--death is a loss to the living and its solemnity requires the living's proper respect-- makes her cry and apologize to him for her hat, which represents the Sheridan's material values and arrogance towards the working-class:

But all the same you had to cry, and she couldn't go out of the room without saying something to him. Laura gave a loud childish sob.

"Forgive my hat," she said. (261)

Laura's 'choice' of the hat (neither her party dress nor their garden-party) for her apology is symbolical: the hat represents not merely the Sheridans' bourgeois values and attitude, but also Laura's own moral limitation, that is, her sentimentalism. Mrs. Sheridan's black hat becomes, at the dead man's bedside, a symbol of mock mourning (or false sympathy): the hat is a symbol of Laura's patronizing attitude towards the working-class, which is perhaps not very different from Mrs. Sheridan's cheap sympathy represented by the charity basket. The hat is *shiny* black: although it *is* black and signifies the wearer's mourning, the signifier falls short. It also has a gorgeous, long velvet streamer, and is trimmed with conspicuous "gold" daisies. Daisy plants, as we will see in the following section, symbolize the oppressed; yet these loud, golden ~~daisies~~ seem to represent Laura's mock sympathy: they are 'blue-blooded' daisies, not white, inconspicuous, common daisy plants (weeds). The hat could be all the more offensive because of its sympathetic pretence. Laura's apology for the hat, therefore, seems to imply that this pilgrimage makes her realize her own past sentimentalism, or her subconscious prejudice against the working-class. It shows Laura's deepened sense of equality: it could be another sign of Laura's learning and growth.

This scene might suggest another symbolical meaning: Laura's discovery of eternal beauty in death never prevents her from dealing with 'life': she must, on the contrary, be still responsible for herself, her life and society: her discovery rather prohibits her from escaping from them. Her act of apologizing for her hat shows her ability to negotiate with life and society: she does not, childishly, run away from the scene; she, by apologizing, shows not only her responsibility (she tries to be responsible for her deed, and her life) but also pays due respect to the deceased which her family fails to do (by demonstrating human decency, she tries to be responsible for her family, and, by implication, society in general).

Laura's learning about death does not automatically clarify the meaning of life. Laura's grasp of life is, at best, that life has various facets-- life is not simply "weary"; it is not "simply marvellous" (261), either. Laura cannot describe what life is; yet, it is, perhaps, Laura's responsibility to find out what it is; and it is all up to her spontaneity whether she will be able to find out its full meaning or not: she "must go everywhere"; she "must see everything" (254). Laurie's response "*Isn't* it, darling?" to his stammering sister ("*Isn't* life, . . . *isn't* life--" [261]) seems to affirm both the complexity which life, our "sentence of death but with a sort of indefinite reprieve," involves (*The Renaissance* 190), and our responsibility to "live intensely, fully, perfectly" Wilde 388) to make our eternal rest "wonderful" and "beautiful" (261).

III The Structure of Sacrifice: The Omniscient Narrative and Social Structure

The omniscient narrative of "The Garden-Party" helps to make its political theme explicit. Each of the three omniscient narrations, especially, the first, introductory narration, encourages the reader to pay a closer attention to the story's social framework: it illuminates the title's 'political' meaning.

The second omniscient narration (Jose's singing scene: ll.11-29, 250), as we have seen, stresses Jose's lack of understanding of and sympathy towards human suffering, and implicitly criticizes the Sheridans' generally dilettantish attitude (or bourgeois attitude) towards art; art is, in Jose's dilettantish notion, a mere refined distraction, or Reginald Peacock's escape from life; dilettantish art consequently conflicts with society and life. Jose's amoral, asocial, apolitical attitude (or the Sheridans' bourgeois attitude) towards art is, by juxtaposition, contrasted with Laura's (and Laurie's) Aestheticism, that is, the grasp of art as the chief (and only) means for the fullness of life, or for her moral and intellectual, and even political awareness and growth.

The third narration-- the description of the poverty-stricken neighbourhood (ll.3-21, 254)-- not only makes the story's social setting more concrete, but Laura's and Laurie's political awareness and commitment explicit; also, it never fails to note the interaction between their political sense and Aestheticism-- the narration suggests that their political awareness results from their longing for exploration and adventure, that is, from Aesthetic belief in living "intensely, fully, perfectly" (Wilde 388): ". . . Laura and Laurie *on their prowls* sometimes walked through [the poverty-stricken neighbouring district]. It was disgusting and sordid. They came out with a shudder. *But still one must go everywhere; one must see everything.* So through they went" (emphases added 254).

The first, opening omniscient narration plays the most significant role in providing a larger, political framework for the story:

And after all the weather was ideal. They could not have had a more perfect day for a garden-party if they had ordered it. Windless, warm, the sky without a cloud. Only the blue was veiled with a haze of light gold, as it is sometimes in early summer. The gardener had been up since dawn, mowing the lawns and sweeping them, until the grass and dark flat rosettes where the daisy plants had been seemed to shine. As for the roses, you could not help feeling they understood that roses are the only flowers that impress people at garden-parties; the only flowers that everybody is certain of knowing. Hundreds, yes, literally hundreds, had come out in a single night; the green bushes bowed down as though they had been visited by archangels. (245)

This opening narration does not only serve prelude the festive mood of the Sheridans,

who are suggested to have been anxious about the weather till the very day ("And *after all* the weather was ideal") and who are, now, relieved, actively and lively preparing for the much expected garden-party. The narrator also gives the scene a class colour: the second sentence goes: "they could not have had a more perfect day for a garden party *if they had ordered it.*" The garden-party itself has a class colour: it is a social event which belongs to middle and upper classes-- this means that the story's title "The Garden-Party" implies its intentional social and political themes. The bourgeois colour is intensified by the narrator's use of the word, "order," which implies the Sheridans' social privilege, that is, their economic power and higher social status.¹³

The narrative also hints at the social structure which makes the Sheridans' well-being-- which is represented by the garden-party-- possible: the relationship between the roses and the daisy plants refers to the power structure or the structure of 'sacrifice' or exploitation. The structure is that of sacrifice from the point of view of the privileged whereas it *is* the structure of exploitation if viewed from the oppressed (or the 'sacrificed'). Or, more precisely, any social structure that encourages inequality is exploitative: the moral term 'sacrifice' is the middle/upper classes' euphemism that covers up and justifies their crude materialism and unfair social and political practices. The nameless, inconspicuous weeds (the narrator says *daisy plants*, not 'daisies') symbolize the oppressed whereas the conspicuous, impressive roses symbolize the privileged; the daisy plants have to be sacrificed for the garden-party: they must be mowed and swept. The reader will associate this description with the main plot of the story: the Sheridans' "nearly neighbors" are the invisible working-class (255); if they are visible at all, they are "the greatest possible eyesore" who has "no right to be in that neighbourhood" (254): they are the people whom the Sheridans would like to "sweep" away if possible. They are, in fact, like the daisy plants, sacrificed for the garden-party or the Sheridan's luxurious pastime: the Sheridans refuse to pay respect to the deprived family; for, according to Mrs. Sheridan, "[p]eople like that don't expect sacrifices from [them]" (255); that is, people like the Sheridans are socially *entitled* to the 'right' to expect sacrifices from "people like that." The "roses" are "the only flowers" while the "daisy plants" are not regarded as such; the daisy plants must be removed to make the roses look more neat and impressive. Likewise, the Sheridans (middle and upper classes) are, from material point of view, the only human beings who deserve respect while the poverty-stricken bottom class ~~are~~ not regarded as such. The Sheridans' arrogance might even expect the lower classes to "[bow] down" respectfully. Yet the working-class *are* human beings and wish to be "conspicuous" (245); the inconspicuousness of the daisy plants is immediately associated with the workmen for the marquee: the workmen want

to put the marquee in a "conspicuous" place; they wish to make their 'invisible' existence (or at least their inconspicuous work) visible-- the idea and the image of sacrifice is repeated in Laura's consciousness as well: the "proud, solitary" karaka trees which Laura loves must be hidden, that is, sacrificed ~~for~~ the marquee (247). The subtle irony towards the Sheridans which the narrator implies is that the development of the story reveals that it is the poor neighbours, not the Sheridans (or people of their class), who are blessed and, like "archangels," treated with awe: for Laura, at the sight of the dead young man, observes: "While they[the Sheridans and their friends] were laughing and while the band was playing, *this marvel had come to the lane*" (emphases added 261). The bourgeois arrogance and material values are criticized not only from Laura's point of view but also, subtly, yet acutely from the omniscient point of view.

Laura, in the midst of the festivity of the garden-party, feels: "Ah, what happiness it is to be with people who all are happy" (257): this consciousness of hers might contain radical political potential: this grasp of "happiness" might lead to Wilde's Communist Individualism or Individualistic Communism-- the belief that one can be truly happy (or can live fully) only when all people are happy (can live fully): Laura's idea is not far away from the idea that:

The chief advantage that would result from the establishment of Socialism is, undoubtedly, the fact that Socialism would relieve us from that sordid necessity of living for others which, in the present condition of things, presses so hardly upon almost everybody. In fact, scarcely any one at all escapes. (357)

One must live for one's self: to be relieved from "that sordid necessity of living for others," one must live for all; and all must live for one.

Notes

¹ Kleine, for example, regards the introductory narrative as Laura's free indirect discourse: "As Laura gazes out the window during the breakfast, her ecstatic view of the garden, the unclouded sky, is also, implicitly, a perception of life's wondrous possibilities. . . ." (Kleine 365)

² Brecht *Brecht on Theatre* 158.

³ Wilde 362

⁴ As we have seen in the Intersection (Chapter Four), Mansfield's Symbolist theory of becoming is expressed in her letter to Dorothy Brett: see *Critical Writings of K.M.* 29.

⁵ Hanson and Gurr, and Sorkin notice the presaging effect of Jose's song: see Hanson and Gurr 120-1; also, Sorkin 448.

⁶ Wilde 373.

⁷ As for the Victorian and Edwardian influence on New Zealand's colonial culture and the cultural air where Katherine Mansfield grew up, see Clare Tomalin 8-17: Tomalin refers to the strong British influence that governed the cultural air of the turn-of-the-century New Zealand: "Anthony Trollope, visiting New Zealand in the 1870s when Katherine's father, Harold Beauchamp, was a lad, noticed that the New Zealander's 'confidence that England is the best place in the world and he is more English than any Englishman' " (Tomalin 8). This seems to imply that the late nineteenth-century middle- and upper-class New Zealanders were at least as class-conscious as (or even more so than) their British peers.

⁸ Hanson and Gurr term Laura's attitude towards the workmen as "an unconsciously patronising manner which is only a small shift away from her mother's aloofness" (Hanson and Gurr 117-8).

⁹ A lot of critics refer to the symbolic meanings of Mrs. Sheridan's black hat. Storkin, for example, regards the hat both as a symbol of Laura's maturity ("her soon-to-be-gained perception of life and death commingled" [Storkin 447])and as a symbol of her bourgeois status ("her social heritage. . . from her mother" [Storkin 447]). Hanson and Gurr regard the hat as a symbol of "the central subject, the encounter with death" (Hanson and Gurr, 119). Davis argues that the blackness of the hat symbolizes "the fact of death and suffering and division of humanity"; that its gold represents the beauty of life, light and the garden-party; and that the flowers (daises) signify "necessary and instinctive maturing" (Davis 65). Walker argues that the hats in the story (Mr. Sheridan's, Laurie's, Kitty's and Mrs. Sheridan's) represent "the whole social milieu of the Sheridan class with its leisure, its conspicuous consumption, and its caste distinctions" (Walker 356).

¹⁰ Kleine notes the same point: see Kleine 369.

¹¹ Most critics never fail to note the light/ life imagery for the first half of the story and the darkness/ death imagery for the latter half. See, for example, Sorkin 447; Hanson and Gurr 119; Durix 183.

¹² Weiss points out "the element of election" of the story; he regards Laura as "a novice" and the story as that of "the initiation of a novice into mysteries" (Weiss 363). He paraphrases the scene that leads to Laura's revelation as follows:

At the door of the dead man's house Laura breathes a prayer, "Help me, God," and enters. And at last, by a second judicious error, a wrong turning, she is face to face with the mystery. (Weiss 364)

¹ Sorkin points out the class-colour of the word "order" as well: see Sorkin 445.

**Conclusion: The Political Potential of Aestheticism and Symbolism:
Strangeness in Beauty and Breaking Habit**

I would like to begin my conclusion with two quotations from Pater's "Postscript to *Appreciations*" (or "Romanticism") and *The Renaissance*:

It is the addition of *strangeness* to beauty, that constitutes the romantic character in art; and the desire of beauty being a fixed element in every artistic organisation, it is the addition of curiosity to this desire of beauty, that constitutes the romantic temper. (Emphasis added "Postscript to *Appreciations*" 57)

A certain *strangeness*, something of the blossoming of the aloe, is indeed an element in all true works of art: that they shall *excite or surprise* us is indispensable. But that they shall give pleasure and exert a charm over us is indispensable too; and this strangeness must be sweet also-- a lovely strangeness. (Emphases added *The Renaissance* 57)

Eric Warner and Graham Hough adapted the first line of the first quotation for the epigram of their critical anthology, *Strangeness and Beauty*, which traces the British tradition of aesthetic (or loosely 'Romantic') criticism that stretches from Ruskin to Arthur Symons: one of their chief aims is to confirm "a truism" that "modernist culture [they restrict, in this passage, "modernist culture" to that of the early twentieth century] owes a large debt to the aesthetic debates of the previous century" (Warner and Hough Vol. 1, 1). This title (*Strangeness and Beauty*) which is inspired by Pater's characterization of Romanticism is particularly revealing. Although the grasp and exposition of aesthetic strangeness vary from one period (for instance, the early Romantic period represented by Coleridge, Wordsworth and Blake) to the other (the late Romantic or Symbolist/Modernist period represented by Symons and Yeats), from one artist and critic (say, Pater) to the other (Beckett), "strangeness" seems to be the key term not only of British 'Romanticism' but also, more largely, of early and avant-garde Modernism in general. The 'discovery' of strangeness in beauty or beauty in strangeness forms what Raymond Williams calls a "modern absolute"-- "the defined universality of a human condition which is effectively permanent" (*Politics* 38); or Medvedev's and Bakhtin's "eternal contemporaneity": "that apprehension of the 'moment' which overrides and excludes, practically and theoretically, the material realities of change, until all consciousness and practice are 'now'" (*Politics* 76)

As Pater suggests in "Romanticism," the romantic mind finds beauty in strangeness; and perhaps, in the history of literature and art, it is the Romantic movement that gave strangeness a legitimate status in aesthetics and added it to beauty. But it is the early Modernists (or the Symbolists) such as Pater who became *conscious* of the effects of strangeness in beauty on our being: Pater must be one of the first Symbolist critics who

noted the magnetism and shock effect of strangeness (the enigma) in beauty and gave a conscious critical evaluation to it. This “addition of strangeness to beauty” offered to the early and avant-garde Modernists a new, conscious definition and interpretation of beauty, and suggested for them a new aesthetic style. Strangeness in art also suggested to the Modernists the political potential of art: it suggested a style which would resolve the conflict between the aesthetic (art) and the political (life/ society). Strangeness produces a shock effect-- it began with Pater’s ‘discovery’ of disturbing, yet “sweet” shock, led to Wilde’s practice of dangerous, disturbing strangeness in *Salomé* and the anarchic disturbance of paradoxical reversal in *The Importance of Being Earnest*, was transformed into Mansfield’s ‘cruel,’ alienating strangeness and developed into Brecht’s A-effect and Beckett’s Absurdist shock effect.

Pater might have seen the imbalance between strangeness and beauty in the works of Brecht and Beckett as well as Wilde: deliberate strangeness in some works by Wilde and Mansfield, and most works by Brecht and Beckett could have been regarded as too excessive, for they, especially Brecht and Beckett, aimed at disturbing the audience, rather than charming them. Pater maintains:

when one’s curiosity is in excess, when it overbalance the desire of beauty, then one is liable to value in works of art what is inartistic in them; to be satisfied with what is exaggerated in art, with productions like some of those of the romantic school in Germany;

He concludes:

the legitimate contention is, not of one age or school of literary art against another [the classical against the romantic, for example], but of all successive schools alike, against the stupidity which is dead to the substance, and the vulgarity which is dead to form. (“Postscript to *Appreciations*” 57, 65-6).

However, as Pater himself suggests in the “Preface” to *The Renaissance*, beauty (or vulgarity) is a vague term: “the definition of it [beauty] becomes unmeaning and useless in proportion to its abstractness” (xix). Apart from the obvious vulgarity of the easy shock effect of, say, cheap horror, porno or violent films, the inartistic excessiveness of strangeness (vulgarity caused by the imbalance between strangeness and beauty) is hard to define. Pater must have been rather unsure of the definition of excessive strangeness, for Warner and Hough suggest: “While Pater is here [in “Romanticism”] careful to argue for a balance, other essays (such as those on Botticelli and Leonardo in *The Renaissance*) make clear that the desire for exotic strangeness in beauty was already exerting the more forceful appeal” (Warner and Hough Vol.2, 278n5).

Pater also suggests in *The Renaissance* : “ ‘The ages are equal,’ says William Blake, ‘but genius is always above its age’ ” (xxi). Some might understand that Pater is, here, maintaining that the age does not affect art; but he is not insisting art’s perfect

independence from the age; he is rather referring to a “modern absolute” which is found in an accomplished work of art. Pater would not have denied the fact that the age influences the artist’s aesthetic; that, as Eliot hints in “Tradition and the Individual Talent,” aesthetic style and content are the amalgamation of cultural tradition, the artist’s personality, and the particular cultural, social and political conditions which he or she belongs to.

The age is, indeed, relevant to the creative process of a “modern absolute” which is both particular and, chiefly because of its particularity (or ‘discovery’), transcends the age and the sphere. The Modernists’ growing emphasis on strangeness in aesthetic style could, therefore, reflect the growing intensity of his or her sense of alienation (disorientation) and anxiety which was shared by his or her contemporaries. The artist tends to feel alienation and anxiety more acutely: he or she often prefers to stand in the social and moral border (Wilde, Mansfield, Eliot, Brecht, Beckett were all émigrés or exiles; Pater was a psychological ‘émigré’ since he was alienated from the Oxford academia and was a homosexual); he or she is often a confirmed stranger whose view throws a new, critical light on aesthetic, moral and social stases. The Modernists’ sense of, and intensified expression of alienation and anxiety reflected their contemporaries’ still sub- or unconscious, vague anxiety and repression: Modernist writings attempted to force them to face up to the submerging, yet critical issues of the age by means of ‘strangeness in beauty’; and yet they are still a challenge to the consciousness of today’s readers and audience. Raymond Williams deepens “decisive links between the practices and ideas of the avant-garde movements of the twentieth century and the specific conditions and relationship of the twentieth-century metropolis” in his “Metropolitan Perceptions and the Emergence of Modernism” (*Politics* 37). Williams’s argument in this essay would give a cultural and social explanation to the Modernists’ emphasis on strangeness in beauty and their technique of estrangement:

The most important general element of the innovations in form is the fact of immigration to the metropolis, and it cannot too often be emphasized how many of the major innovators were, in this precise sense, immigrants. At the level of theme, this underlies, in an obvious way, the elements of strangeness and distance, indeed of alienation, which so regularly form part of the repertory. (*Politics* 45)

Williams further suggests that the Modernists’ radical techniques and styles have much to do with the vigorous fluidity of the city: the Modernists’ actual encounter with various forms of strangeness inspired them and allowed them to be bold and experimental:

[A] new consciousness of conventions and thus of changeable, because now open, conventions. . . . The preoccupying visual images and styles of particular cultures did not disappear, any more than the native languages, native tales, the native styles of music and dance, but all were now passed

through this crucible of the metropolis, which was in the important cases no mere melting pot but an intense and visually and linguistically exciting process in its own right, from which remarkable new forms emerged. (46)

Strangeness is style and consciousness in the works of Wilde, Mansfield, and the avant-garde Modernists like Brecht and Beckett; although their practical styles vary, their awareness of strangeness has something in common. Strangeness is, in their work, thematically and technically important: it is an effective means to express their political concerns and to achieve intended aesthetic and political effects. Strangeness in beauty, by giving the audience or the reader a moral as well as aesthetic 'shock,' makes them realize the engulfing current of habit, and attempts to offer them a chance to break with their moral and political stases, that is, their safe, instinctive love of stability and uncritical acceptance of the status-quo.

1 Strangeness and Breaking Habit: Pater and Wilde

Pater defines habit-- a moral and intellectual stasis-- as an opposing state to the ecstasy gained through genuine aesthetic appreciation: his well-known passage in the "Conclusion" to *The Renaissance* goes:

To burn always with this hard, gem-like flame, to maintain this ecstasy, is success in life. In a sense, it might even be said that our failure is to form habits: for, after all, habit is relative to a stereotyped world, and meantime it is only the roughness of the eye that makes any two persons, things, situations, seem alike. . . . Not to discriminate every moment some passionate attitude in those about us, and in the very brilliancy of their gifts some tragic dividing of forces on their ways, is, on this short day of frost and sun, to sleep before evening. . . . Only be sure it is passion-- that it does yield you this fruit of a quickened, multiplied consciousness. Of such wisdom, the poetic passion, the desire of beauty, the love of art for its own sake, has most. For art comes to you proposing frankly to give nothing but the highest quality to your moments as they pass, and simply for those moments' sake. (189-90)

Although Pater's grasp of habit is not as full or intense as that of Beckett, it predicts the avant-garde consciousness: Pater shares with Beckett the view of habit as life's "deadener" (*Waiting for Godot* 91): in our shortness of life ("this short day of frost and sun"), to form habit is "to sleep before evening" or to cease to live before natural death: habit is a premature death of our spirit. To multiply our life by keeping our consciousness fully alert and alive is the only 'weapon' we are given to fight against the numbing force of habit (our boredom or spiritual death) and our mortality (our "sentence of death but with a sort of infinite reprieve" [190]). The fullness of life consists in our constant change through our aesthetic "passion" for strangeness and beauty: in "that strange, perpetual weaving and unweaving of ourselves" by "gathering all we are into

one desperate effort to see and touch" (188, 189). Pater's aesthetic "passion" requires the full commitment of all our senses and intellect: it is the "hard, gem-like flame," that is, intellectually purified, serene fire of self-burning, intense passion. The ecstasy through this passion is, therefore, a hard-earned, rare ecstasy which one can only experience through the perfect unity of shrewd, responsive sense and sensibility. Paterian ecstasy is very likely to be an ecstasy found at the merging point of pleasure and suffering: Emily Dickinson's mirth in anguish.

Pater seems to be consciously avoiding the use of moral terms in order to stress art's innate value and distinguish it from the utilitarian, didactic value of art, or art as an agent for the Victorian bourgeois's moral hegemony. Pater's fullness of life through "that strange, perpetual, weaving and unweaving of ourselves" is, therefore, innately moral: this constant change, as Wilde noted, refers to constant moral (spiritual) growth. Wilde suggests, in "The Critic as Artist," that Paterian passion for strangeness in beauty contains a political agenda: it challenges one's habitual perception and preconceptions, and nurtures one's critical spirit; it, thus, leads to the intensification of one's personality, that is, Wildean Individualism. Wilde's Individualism, as we saw, turns to Socialism or Communism since he regarded social inequality and materialism perpetuated by the system of private property as a chief distraction and obstacle to one's full growth. Wilde's interpretation of Pater's Aestheticism is correct, for Pater himself states clearly that one's full commitment to the object of appreciation requires one's supreme effort of *connecting* it to one's being (life): Pater maintains in *The Renaissance* :

"To see the object as in itself it really is," has been justly said to be the aim of all true criticism whatever; and in aesthetic criticism the first step towards seeing one's object as it really is, to discriminate it, to realise it distinctly. The objects with which aesthetic criticism deals-- music, poetry, artistic and accomplished forms of human life-- are indeed receptacles of so many powers or forces: they possess, like the products of nature, so many virtues or qualities. What is this song or picture, this engaging personality presented in life or in a book to *me*? What effect does it really produce on me? Does it give me pleasure? and if so, what sort or degree of pleasure? How is my nature modified by its presence, and under its influence? The answers to these questions are the *original facts* with which the aesthetic critic has to do; and, as in the study of light, of morals, of number, one must realise such primary data for one's self, or not at all. (xix-xx)

Wilde gave Pater's Aestheticism a clear, Individualist and political mark: Wilde, more consciously, saw the relevance of art to society as well as to life. Although Pater and Wilde shared the similar views on art and its relationship with life and society, they chose different 'strategies' to express their concepts. Wilde's strategy (style) is, reflecting his publicity and keener political awareness, provocative: he was more explicit about his (and his mentor's) radical interpretation of the relationship between art, life and society.

Whereas Pater intentionally avoided using moral terms in his writing, Wilde positively overused them. Wilde's paradoxical reversal and overuse of moral words abuse conventional morality; they undermine the accepted meanings and challenge its rigidity and shallowness.

Wilde recommends, in "The Critic as Artist" (1890) and "The Soul of Man Under Socialism" (1891), a new, higher morality and social order inspired by Aestheticism: Wilde intended to combine aesthetics, morality and politics. The reader can find an example of his challenge in Gilbert's remark in "The Critic as Artist":

A little sincerity is a dangerous thing, and a great deal of it is absolutely fatal. The true critic will, indeed, always be sincere in his devotion to the principle of beauty, but he will seek for beauty in every age and in each school, and will never suffer himself to be limited to any settled custom of thought, or stereotyped mode of looking at things. He will realize himself in many forms, and by a thousand different ways, and will ever be curious of new sensations and fresh points of view. (53)

Gilbert argues that if the conventional sense of sincerity means consistency, it is superficial; that sincerity, in his sense, means an uncompromising critical attitude: a determined attitude not to accept stereotyped ideas, easy preconceptions, or any established notions or interpretations. Gilbert's view echoes Pater's view expressed in *The Renaissance*: "our failure is to form habits: for, after all, habit is relative to a stereotyped world, . . ." (189) But Gilbert tends to emphasize the moral and political faculties of Aesthetic experience, that is, Aesthetic experience as a power that shakes and breaks one's habitual being; and his openly satirical tone and iconoclasm intensify his political tendency. Gilbert's 'abuse' of moral words-- namely, his deliberate adaptation of strong moral terms (such as 'sincerity') ~~for~~ a seemingly amoral situation-- mocks the cultural and moral hegemony of the Victorians Establishment.

Wilde's view of the relationship between strangeness in beauty and breaking habit (art's linkage with life and society) is expressed in the following quotation: Gilbert speaks of Aesthetic experience:

Sometimes, when I listen to the overture to *Tannhäuser*, I seem indeed to see that comely knight treading delicately on the flower-strewn grass, and to hear the voice of Venus calling to him from the caverned hill. But at other times it speaks to me of a thousand different things, of myself, it may be, and my own life, or of the lives of others whom one has loved and grown weary of loving, or of the passions that man has known, or of the passions that man has not known, and so has sought for. Tonight it may fill one with. . . , that *Amour de l'Impossible*, which falls like a madness on many who think they live securely and out of reach of harm, so that they sicken suddenly with the poison of unlimited desire, and, in the infinite pursuit of what they may not obtain, grow faint and swoon or stumble. To-morrow, like the music of which Aristotle and Plato tell us, the noble Dorian music of the Greek, it may perform the office of a physician, and give us an anodyne against pain, and

heal the spirit that is wounded, and “bring the soul into harmony with all right things.” (29)

Gilbert points out art’s two aspects-- strangeness and sweetness-- and their effects on his mind: the healing effect and the disturbing (shock) effect. The exquisite work of art (here, Wagner’s *Tannhäuser*) gives him a beautiful, harmonious vision, which offers him “an anodyne against pain” by entrancing him and enhancing his “wounded” spirit to that imaginary, ideal state. The vision which the work of art makes him envisage might, however, disturb his being; it might force him to face up to reality. The vision (an ideal state of being suggested by art) might make him confront his stasis and imperfection (habit), and arouse his desire for self-realization or “the infinite pursuit of what [he] may not obtain.” The latter, ‘shock’ effect of art might be a deeper effect, since, as Pater suggests in the “Preface” to *The Renaissance*, only committed appreciation-- the appreciator’s conscious effort of connecting art with his or her own being-- makes the shock effect most successful, that is, makes art meaningful to him or her. This shock effect connects art and society as well as art and life, tightly. Gilbert seems to be more interested in this shock effect of strangeness in beauty. He calls our disturbed state (aesthetic experience) “madness” or “divine madness”: “Art, . . . , creates in listener and spectator a form of divine madness” (52). Wilde termed Aesthetic experience ‘pleasure’; but his ‘pleasure’ is, in fact, a serious, ~~thorough~~ commitment. His disapproval of moralizing, utilitarian attitude made him choose this light term deliberately. Wilde’s pleasure is opposed to inertia and habit. It is the passion for the impossible (madness); it involves the constant intensification of one’s personality. Wilde’s Aestheticism is, like Pater’s, demanding, and quite far from diletantism or self-indulgence which is relevant to boredom and habit.

Wilde, however, seems to have been well aware not only of the immensely seductive power of ‘bad habits’ or Hedonism, but also of his own susceptibility to them. Hedonism’s stress on sensual and sensuous ephemeral pleasure and self-absorptive indulgence, and its seemingly anti-Victorian (yet innately reactionary and authority-serving) pose seems **to have appealed** to Wilde’s own rebellious nature and artistic temperament. His susceptibility to Hedonistic strangeness in beauty is expressed in his portrayal of Dorian Gray, in the exotic setting and enigmatic characterization of *Salomé*, and in his intense attraction to the life of Thomas Griffiths Wainwright (whose extreme amorality or, rather, immorality, as well as Hedonism reminds the reader of Dorian Gray) in “Pen, Pencil and Poison” (1889). Despite this susceptibility, Wilde’s discipline as an artist seems to have guided him: he preferred to be a master, not a slave, of strangeness in beauty-- at least while he was active as a writer. He was, as an artist and critic, more interested in the

political and aesthetic possibilities of strangeness. His aesthetic consciousness of strangeness in beauty and his political consciousness of habit were amalgamated; he achieved his own aesthetic style: the Wildean 'A-effect'-- the method of paradoxical reversal which characterizes his masterpiece, *The Importance of Being Earnest*. The extensive paradoxical reversal which covers almost the whole range of dramatic elements-- characterization, speech, social relations, plot, theme-- shakes and challenges the audience's habitual thinking and being. While sweeping the audience away with anarchic laughter, it makes them, though momentarily, halt their habitual thinking and feel disoriented. Wilde's style and effect achieved in his last play could be associated with Brecht's dramatic theory.

Wilde, in "The Soul of Man Under Socialism," speculates on the relationship between strangeness ("novelty" in Wilde's term) and habit: Wilde's reflections on public censorship, the possibility of new drama and its effects on the audience's response predict his acquisition of his style realized in his last play. He argues in the essay:

Delightful work may be produced under burlesque and farcical conditions, and in work of this kind the artist in England is allowed very great freedom. [And he made the most of this freedom in *The Importance of Being Earnest*.] It is when one comes to the higher forms of the drama that the result of popular control is seen. [His *Salomé* was too disturbing to the Victorian audience and the production was banned in England.] The one thing that the public dislike is *novelty*. Any attempt to extend the subject-matter of art is extremely distasteful to the public; and yet the vitality and progress of art depend in a large measure on the continual extension of subject matter. *The public dislike novelty because they are afraid of it*. It represents to them a mode of Individualism, an assertion on the part of the artist that he selects his own subject, and treats it as he chooses. The public are quite right in their attitude. *Art is Individualism, and Individualism is a disturbing and disintegrating force. Therein lies its immense value. For it seeks to disturb its monotony of type, slavery of custom, tyranny of habit, and the reduction of man to the level of a machine*. In art, the public accept what has been, because they cannot alter it, not because they appreciate it. They swallow their classics whole, and never taste them. They endure them as the inevitable, and as they cannot mar them, they mouth about them. (Emphases added 373)

Wilde's criticism of the Victorian bourgeois audience's inability to appreciate the new (strangeness) reminds the reader of Pater's remark on the reader's attitude towards the classical (the traditional) and the romantic (the new) in "Romanticism."¹ Although Wilde's comment on the audience's dislike of the new and 'love' of the old is an insightful exaggeration (parody) of Pater's view of the classical and the romantic temper, Wilde's frustration expressed here is sincere and more intense than Pater's because Wilde was an active dramatist. How to connect the audience with drama-- that is, how to commit them to a reality (truth) which drama reveals through aesthetic illusion and how to

make aesthetic illusion affect their view and life-- is Wilde's concern; and his concern would be all the more acute because of his awareness of the stifling force of habit (or the bourgeois hegemony). His concern is both aesthetic and social (or political). The interaction between drama (or art in general) and the audience, especially, the audience's critical, eager response, is necessary for the artist to survive; the artist needs the audience. The audience's taste and critical attitude need to be challenged and cultivated, for no change, no audience: if they never change, the artist cannot fulfill himself or herself; the audience, therefore, has to learn to break with their habitual thinking and being. If they kept their moral habit, society would never change; people would remain vulgar and un- or half-educated; art would remain pastime or entirely irrelevant to their lives; art would never be fully understood or appreciated; the artist and art would remain stifled and unfulfilled; culture would be static and stale; people's lives would remain boring or miserable. Connecting art, life and society would, in this logic, be the only and best way for the artist to be a real artist. Wilde attempted to make the most of the effect of strangeness to break the audience's habits: Wilde's paradoxical reversal (his shock effect) manifests the political possibilities he found in strangeness in beauty and, reflects his aesthetic and political attempt to interact with the audience.

2 Strangeness and Breaking Habit: Beckett (Proust) and Brecht

It seems to me that Beckett and Brecht are among the avant-garde Modernists who made the most of the aesthetic achievement of the two early Modernists, Pater and Wilde. Both Beckett and Brecht, respectively, at about the same time, paid particular attention to the political potential of strangeness in beauty: Beckett published *Proust* in 1931, the main theme of which was habit; Brecht nurtured his idea of the alienation effect around 1930 and coined the term in his essay "Alienation Effects in Chinese Acting" in 1936 (the essay was first published in London). Their shared moral and political concern was habit, and their shared aesthetic solution was strangeness. They, like Wilde, regarded strangeness (aesthetic shock) as the major aesthetic effect which their techniques should produce: their art must shock the audience, estrange them from their familiar setting and expectation--or, break habit. Brecht's and Beckett's consciousness of habit are much more acute than Wilde's-- and the intensity of their consciousness and the intensity of their emphasis on strangeness in beauty are, we can guess, related to the political and cultural threat to the survival of humanity and human existence, which they faced around 1930 and onwards; by 1930, to name but a few, they went through the first World War and the post-war disturbance; they heard the footfalls

of fascism and the growing totalitarianism (Stalinism) of USSR; they were made aware of mind-controlling bourgeois mass media and its growing sophistication. Confronted with habit, that is, our uncritical, static, repressive being which perpetuates and is perpetuated by the fundamentally clogged status-quo of society, they must, we can now guess, have reached a conclusion that the interaction between drama and the audience or the linkage between art, life and society was (and is) imperative.

The following passage from Beckett's *Proust* is at once a remarkable interpretation of Proust's work and an avant-garde interpretation of Pater's famous passage in the "Conclusion" of *The Renaissance*:

But our current habit of living is as incapable of dealing with the mystery of a *strange* sky or a *strange* room, with any circumstance unforeseen in her [habit's] curriculum,

.....
 The narrator cannot sleep in a *strange* room, is tortured by a high ceiling, being used to a low ceiling. What is taking place? The old pact is out of date. It contained no clause treating of high ceilings. The Habit of friendship for the low ceiling is ineffectual, must die in order that a habit of friendship for the high ceiling may be born. Between this death [the death of the old habit] and that birth [the birth of a new habit], reality, intolerable, absorbed feverishly by his consciousness at the extreme limit of its intensity, by his total consciousness organized to avert the disaster, to create the new habit that will empty the mystery of its [reality's] threat-- and also of its beauty. "If Habit," write Proust, "is a second nature, it keeps us in ignorance of the first[nature], and is free of its cruelties and its enchantments." Our first nature, therefore, corresponding, as we shall see later, to a deeper instinct than the mere animal instinct of self-preservation [habit], is laid bare during these periods of abandonment [the brief intervals between the old habit and a new one]. And its cruelties and enchantments are the cruelties and enchantments of reality. "Enchantment of reality" has the air of a paradox. But when the object is perceived as particular and unique and not merely the member of a family, when it appears independent of any general notion and detached from sanity of a cause, isolated and inexplicable in the light of ignorance, then and then only may it be a source of enchantment.
 Unfortunately Habit has laid its veto on this form of perception, its action being to hide the essence-- the Idea-- of the object in the haze of conception-- preconception. . . . The creature of habit turns aside from the object that cannot be made to correspond with one or other of his intellectual prejudices, that resists the propositions of his team of syntheses, organised by Habit on labour-saving principles. (Emphases added 20-23)

Beckett makes the relationship between strangeness and habit clear: his grasp of strangeness as a force of breaking habit is explicit here. Beckett maintains that one can face reality (one's real being-- one's stasis and repressed desires) only when one's encounter with strangeness liberates one briefly from habit. Our "quickened, multiplied consciousness" does not last long (*The Renaissance* 190)-- this stress on the ephemerality of our Aesthetic experience is a new consciousness of Beckett's (as well as Proust's-- and Mansfield's). Pater maintains, in *The Renaissance*, that our life is mortal; therefore, that

“our one chance” (or “success” [189]) lies “in expanding that life [our limited life], in getting as many pulsations as possible into the given time” by means of our “quickened, multiplied consciousness,” by means of our “poetic passion” (190). Beckett’s view quite agrees with this; yet he notes the obstinacy of habit, that is, its vigilant government of and persistent intervention in our consciousness. He points out that not only the way to “poetic passion” but also the way from “poetic passion” to “quickened, multiplied consciousness” is not smooth; and that the way from “quickened, multiplied consciousness” to our break with habit is even less smooth. Wilde’s frustration is intensified in Beckett’s consciousness; and Beckett’s consciousness is shared by Mansfield (just note how ephemeral the revelation of Mansfield’s protagonists is; how stuck they, disillusioned, remain in their old situation) and by Brecht. Pater’s suggestion of the keen interaction between art and life, and Wilde’s suggestion of the tight linkage between art, life and society are valid; there is no question about it. The interaction between art and life, however, seems harder than they expected; the interaction between art and society seems even harder. Pater’s grasp of habit was narrowly Individualist; Wilde’s understanding of habit expanded Pater’s and made it social and political as well as personal. Beckett’s (and Mansfield’s and Brecht’s, yet not Proust’s-- we will discuss it later) habit refers to individual, moral, cultural, social, and political elements that make our being stuck. Beckett is keenly aware that habit, our “animal instinct of self-reservation” or “an agent of security,” encourages our alert consciousness and sensibility (Wilde’s “divine madness”) to sleep; it constantly tries to ward off our ‘insanity.’ We become used to strangeness; what is at first strange gradually ceases to be a “threat” or shock and eventually becomes something familiar to us, namely, habit-- this is a force of life, of time and habit. Also, most of us are “the creature[s] of habit”; we, just like Wilde’s “half-educated” audience, reject strangeness; even when we confront strangeness, our “preconception” (or our “intellectual prejudices”) tends to prevent us from accepting alien elements as they are, and preserve our habitual thinking and being. The importance of strangeness as aesthetic style, under the situation grasped as such, simply grows. Art must bring an impact (a moral shock) to life, and to society; modern art needs new aesthetic style and content which should urge people to connect art with life and society. Art must sting the audience if they try to “mouth about”; art must give them a lump if they try to “swallow” it (Wilde 373). Pater’s remark: “[i]n a sense, it might even be said that our failure is to form habits” (189), comes to mean more than he perhaps meant, for habitual life *is* a failure. Spiritual death is worse than physical death: it brings to life boredom and suffering without joy; it makes life our interval of mere torture, and habit is our only anodyne; our “indefinite reprieve” becomes unbearable prolongation (Pater 190).

Habitual existence is also an easy result of contemporary society; the abuse of power, social inequality, moral and political censorship, political oppression, social restrictions, *moral repression*-- all become habits; they intensify our suffering and pain, but habit comes to our rescue and makes us 'sleep' and keep on going docilely. (We can see an example of this process in Mansfield's *Ma Parker* or Brecht's *Mother Courage*.) Beckett makes Vladimir contemplate in *Waiting for Godot* (1955):

All I know is that the hours are long, under these conditions, and constrain us to beguile them with proceedings which-- how shall I say-- which may at first sight seem reasonable, until they became a habit. You may say it is to prevent our reason from foundering. No doubt. But has it not long been straying in the night without end of abyssal depth? That's what I sometimes wonder. You follow my reasoning? (80)

However, if we trust Beckett's interpretation, Proust's attitude towards art, despite his keen awareness of habit, strikes the reader as rather politically negative. Beckett analyses the relationship between Proust's author-hero and art as follows:

The identification of immediate with past experience, the recurrence of past action or reaction in the present, amounts to a participation between the ideal and the real, imagination and direct apprehension, symbol and substance. . . . But if this mystical experience communicates an extratemporal essence, it follows that the communicant is for the moment an extratemporal being. Consequently the Proustian solution consists, . . . , in the negation of Time and Death, the negation of Death because the negation of Time. Death is dead because Time is dead. . . Time is not recovered, it is obliterated. . . . So now in the exaltation of his [the protagonist's] brief eternity, having emerged from darkness of time and habit and passion and intelligence, he understands the necessity of art. (74-6)

Beckett's analysis of Proust's work suggests that Proust found art's inseparable 'connection' with life, yet that he did not seem to see any particular significance in connecting art with society. Proust was one generation younger than Pater; yet his grasp of habit did not seem to be so much different from Pater's; although his consciousness of habit is more intense than Pater's, it, unlike Wilde's and Mansfield's, remains still personal. His acute awareness of habit did not make him turn to society. Proust's attitude towards art was not Individualist, either: unlike Wilde, his aesthetic experience is not related to the intensification of his personality; at least, he does not give priority to it. Proust ~~seems to have seen~~ more significance in the fugitive nature of Aesthetic experience. Aesthetic (Symbolist) experience brings an ecstasy to Proust's protagonist; yet it does not affect his being deeply enough; it does not change his habitual existence, for "[l]ife is habit" (*Proust* 19); it rather seems to be approving of who he is. Proust's escape from habit is his escape from life. His escape from life does not result from the simple disconnection of art from life-- art is not his easy pastime or distraction; on the contrary, he feels that art is indispensable for his life; art makes him alive. The

author-hero is keenly aware of the overwhelming power of habit; strangeness in beauty (Aesthetic experience), through temporarily, makes him *escape* or saves him from his spiritual death (habit) by giving him the glimpse of the vision of beauty and pain. Is it unfair to Proust to call his Aesthetic experience the condensed moment of sweet pain, or heightened sentimentalism? What is necessary for Proust's author-hero seems to be the 'sweet' effect, rather than the shock effect, of art. Art in Proust, it seems to me, "performs the office of a physician, and gives us an anodyne against pain, and heal the spirit that is wounded, and 'bring the soul into harmony with all right things' " (Wilde 29). Aesthetic experience (Proustian fetishism) gives Proust's protagonist a moment of revelation or a deeper insight into his being; but he does not expect art (aesthetic revelation) to affect or change his status-quo. The connection between art and life, in Proust, consists in a futile or 'disinterested' poeticization of life, or indeed, in the *requisite* disconnection of art (his poeticized vision of life) from life (his actual life). We shall come back to this issue in the last section.

Beckett shows no obvious objection to Proust's lack of interest in society although his use of the word such as "negation" and the expression such as "Time is not recovered, it is obliterated" could reflect his critical attitude. If Proustian "solution" represents the negative (that is, apolitical) edge of Aestheticism, namely, Aesthetic withdrawal from life and society into one's self, we may say that, despite all the pessimistic surface of his work, Beckett-- as well as Wilde, Mansfield and Brecht--represents Aestheticism's positive (that is, politically radical) edge: Beckett seems to have chosen the constant challenge against habit, and his choice seems to be largely due to his even deeper understanding of habit. Beckett's solution consists in the acceptance of time, life (and death) and habit; he preferred to keep breaking habit by means of strangeness in beauty, that is, by means of his Absurdist shock effect-- even if "[l]ife is habit," the only chance of our spiritual survival and even the survival of humanity (Pater's "our one chance" [*The Renaissance* 190]) lie in breaking habit, not escaping from it.

Some twenty years after the publication of *Proust*, Beckett made his own protagonist, Vladimir, in *Waiting for Godot*, speak of the force of habit; the reader can see Beckett's political concern clearly:

Was I sleeping, while the others suffered? Am I sleeping now? Tomorrow, when I wake, or think I do, what shall I say of today? That Pozzo passed, with his carrier, and that he spoke to us? Probably. But in all that what truth will there be? Astride of a grave and a difficult birth. Down in the hole, lingeringly, the grave-digger puts on the forceps. We have time to grow old. The air is full of cries. (*He listens.*) But habit is a great deadener. . . . At me too someone is looking, of me too, someone is saying, he is sleeping, he knows nothing, let him sleep on. (*Pause.*) I can't go on! (*Pause.*) What have I said? (90-1)

Vladimir's awareness of habit as "a great deadener" involves two issues: the political and the aesthetic. The metaphors of the political theme are death and sleep; the theme involves the relationship between habit, loss of memory and political awareness. The aesthetic theme suggested in Vladimir's speech is the political possibilities of art as a vehicle for truth; Beckett's evaluation of art implied by Vladimir's view is related to his appraisal of fiction as opposed to fact and involuntary memory (truth) as opposed to voluntary memory.

Vladimir hints at the close relationship between our spiritual death (habit) and political oppression. He grasps habit as spiritual (moral, intellectual) death; habit does not only hinder our fullness of life; it could even be fatal to our existence. Habit makes our intellect and critical spirit sleep; it keeps us indifferent to and ignorant of our own status-quo and the tactics of the Establishment ("he knows nothing, let him sleep on"); it helps the Establishment to control us and makes us easy victims of political and moral oppression: "The air is full of cries" but "habit is a great deadener" or 'deafener.'

Vladimir's speech ("We have time to grow old. . . . But habit is a great deadener") also suggests that habit brings to our lives intense monotony and boredom. Monotony and boredom-- such as the static, and stuck 'act' (habit) of "waiting" for Godot or 'God,' the one nobody knows-- empowers time, an agent of habit. Time makes us forget the bitter lessons we gained and repeat the same mistakes: it puts our (or Vladimir's) momentary awakening to sleep. The loss of memory ("What have I said?") is a victory of time, habit and the Establishment.

Vladimir's speech, however, implies art's potential to break through this seemingly dead-end situation. His speech, like Vivian's in "The Decay of Lying," challenges our preconception of fact and fiction, and the logical and the illogical. He points out that "voluntary memory" or "the uniformed memory of intelligence" does not help us to penetrate "truth" or the reality of our existential, social or political state (*Proust* 32): in *Proust*, Beckett maintains that "[t]he laws of memory are subject to the more general laws of habit" (18). "Voluntary memory" or the accumulation of chronologically ordered facts is an agent of habit. By reading or listening to a report of well-ordered facts (such as a chronology of events), we might feel as if we grasped reality, but, in fact, we understand nothing: "But in all that what truth will there be?" Even if we cannot make sense of the simple accumulation of facts (or information), the accumulation will give us the illusion that we have understood. Indeed, the act of accumulating information is habit; and it keeps us from seeing the need of making sense. We simply fail to grasp the essence and we do not even become aware of it: another victory of habit. "Involuntary memory," or seemingly chaotic, re- or disorganized, imaginary exposition of events (as in

the work of art) might be able to give us an insight into truth; if the work of art challenges our habits, it will reveal to us reality through its “waking madness” or strangeness in beauty (*Proust* 32); it helps us to break habit-- even if it is an ephemeral awakening.

The second theme reflects Beckett's faith in art, and predicts his aesthetic experiments that challenge our habits. The fear of loss of memory is something Beckett did not deal with in *Proust*; yet the theme is emphasized in his play. It seems to express not only the fear of repeating the same grave mistakes-- such as militarism, wars, and holocausts-- but also our social, cultural, historical, and psychological disorientation or our forced ‘break’ with the past (and the future). Where were we and are we now? Where are we heading for? And who are we after all? The protagonists' desperate, yet stuck ‘act’ of waiting for God or a God-like savior seems to be suggestive of this anxiety and confusion. These new elements seem to reflect Beckett's growing political awareness; his new, keener consciousness could not be irrelevant to his experience of and reflection on the two World Wars.

It is curious that at about the same time around 1930, Brecht, too, paid attention to the relationship between strangeness in beauty and breaking habit. His aesthetic interest as a dramatist and Marxist, was focused on the shock effect produced by deliberately intensified strangeness. He termed his theatrical and aesthetic devices for this effect alienation effects (*Verfremdungseffekt*). John Willett notes Brecht's “almost instinctive predilection for strangeness” in his early writings; but Willett suggests: “The formula itself is a translation of the Russian critic Viktor Shklovskij's phrase ‘Priem Ostranneniija,’ or ‘device for making strange,’ and it can hardly be a coincidence that it should have entered Brecht's vocabulary after his Moscow visit” (*Brecht on Theatre* 99n). Willett's comment is enlightening, for it seems to suggest that the aesthetic interest in “strangeness” was, in fact, shared by European avant-garde Modernist critics and artists in general; their focus on strangeness could have resulted from Romantic and Symbolist tradition of European literature as well as from the “crucible” or the linguistic, cultural, social mobility and interaction of the metropolis (Williams 46). It would be, indeed, possible to track the source of Brecht's ‘discovery’ to Symbolist tradition: Brecht's view on characterization (his preference of flat, yet fully functional characters), his interest in the use and effects of symbols, his idea about epic theatre (he rejected modern setting) could be effectively connected to Wilde's view of and theory on theatre. Brecht's A-effects involves various aesthetic and theatrical techniques to achieve the goal of, first, making the audience break with their habitual attitude towards art, and, then, shaking their habitual thinking and point of view. Brecht might have called Wilde's paradoxical

reversal an A-effect. Although I do not intend to suggest any 'direct' influence of Wilde on Brecht, the connection between Wilde's and Brecht's aesthetic might not be so far-fetched. Ian Fletcher and John Stokes, in their bibliographical study, suggest the possible link between Wilde and German Expressionism. (Brecht started his creative career as an Expressionist.)

The [German academics'] interest in Wilde over those years from 1903 coincided with the rise of German Expressionism; and from several sources we gather that Wedekind, Dehmel, Bierbaum, and other writers of that period found in Wilde a precursor. . . . With the general public, as well as with the publicists, Wilde continued to be popular in Germany; he was read widely, his plays were acted; there was Richard Strauss's opera, and, according to Schlösser [Anselm Schlösser, *Die Englische Literatur in Deutschland von 1895 bis 1934* (Jena, 1937)], before the Second World War he was the most popular English author in Germany, . . . ("Oscar Wilde" 51-2)

Apart from this hypothetical speculation on a closer link between Wilde and Brecht, it is curious that Brecht, as an avant-garde Modernist, regarded the effective use of seeming "contradictions" (or paradox) and its shock effect as one of A-effects. He maintains in "Alienation Effects in the Narrative Pictures of the Elder Brueghel" (written in 1934 (?), first published in 1957): "Anyone making a profound study of Brueghel's pictorial contrasts must realize that he deals in *contradictions*" (emphasis added 157). Brecht, according to Willett,² coined the term A-effects in "Alienation Effects in Chinese Acting" (1936). Strangeness and breaking habit are, as in Beckett's *Proust*, Brecht's aesthetic and political obsession; the essay goes as follow:

This method [A-effects] was most recently used in Germany for plays of a non-aristotelian (*not dependent on empathy*) type as part of the attempts being made to evolve an epic theatre. The efforts in question were directed to playing in such a way that the audience was hindered from simply identifying itself with the characters in the play. *Acceptance or rejection of their actions and utterances was meant to take place on a conscious plane*, instead of, as hitherto, in the audience's sub-conscious.

This effort to make the incidents represented appear *strange* to the public can be seen in a primitive form in the theatrical and pictorial displays at the old popular fairs. The way the clowns speak and the way the panoramas are painted both embody an act of alienation. The method of painting used to reproduce the picture of "Charles the Bold's flight after the Battle of Murten," as shown at many German fairs, is certainly mediocre; yet the act of alienation which is achieved here (not by the original) is in no wise due to the mediocrity of the copyist. The fleeting commander, his horse, his retinue and the landscape are all quite consciously painted in such a way to create *the impression of an abnormal event, an astonishing disaster*. In spite of his inadequacy the painter succeeds brilliantly in bringing out *the unexpected*. *Amazement guides his brush*. . . .

It is not all that simple to *break with the habit* of assimilating a work of art as a whole. But this has to be done if just one of a large number of effects is to be singled out ^{and} studied. (Emphases added *Brecht on Theatre* 91)

Brecht's aim of "breaking with the habit of assimilating a work of art as a whole" is a device to make the audience consciously connect their theatrical experience (art) with their life and society. A-effects attempt to betray the audience's expectation and give them a shock (sense of strangeness); the shock (their sense of strangeness) is supposed to encourage them to acquire a critical point of view. The ultimate purpose of A-effects is to awake the audience from political numbness, that is, to make them break with their habits. He maintains in "A Little Private Tuition for My Friend Max Gorelik" (written in 1944): "The modern theatre mustn't be judged by its success in satisfying the audience's *habits* but by its success in *transforming them*. It needs to be questioned. . . about *whether it manages to interest him [the spectator] in the world*" (emphases added 161). Brecht, too, saw the political potential of art most in strangeness in beauty.

3 Strangeness and Breaking Habit: Mansfield

In the Aesthetic link between Pater, Wilde, and Beckett/Brecht, Katherine Mansfield *must* be inserted. I hope that my analyses of the selected stories of Mansfield have enabled the reader to see the aesthetic, moral and political links between Pater, Wilde and Mansfield. I do not mean to say, here, that Mansfield politically and aesthetically "influenced" Beckett and Brecht just as Pater and Wilde influenced her. Pater and Wilde were not only influential literary figures at the turn of the century when they were active, but their great influence lingered on, even after their death, for early twentieth-century intellectuals and artists; Mansfield's literary status was modest-- or very modest compared with her mentors'-- even though she was an established writer. However, to pay particular attention to Mansfield's works and connect her not only with her senior Modernists but also her junior Modernists is still meaningful; for there *is* a political and aesthetic link between Pater, Wilde, Mansfield, Beckett and Brecht: Mansfield is one of the Modernist writers who enable us to *connect* early Modernist aesthetic with avant-garde experimentalist aesthetic. Mansfield's writing might not have a dominant *or* direct influence on the major Modernist writers who followed her; yet her aesthetic which must have been to greater or lesser degree shared with her contemporaries like T. S. Eliot and Virginia Woolf-- makes us see or trace the rise and development of Modernist aesthetics. Some might see a break between the early Modernists and the avant-garde Modernists, but the study of Mansfield makes us realize a continuity between them, that is, the gradual intensification in theory and practice of shared aesthetic and political concerns; and this discovery of continuity makes us see the validity of grouping various 'modern' artists of different generations and nationalities as

'Modernist.'

I have discussed, in the text, Mansfield's concern about the relationship between art, life and society: political potential is, as in Wilde's, inherent in Aestheticism expressed in the works of Katherine Mansfield. I would, here, like to summarize my argument by paraphrasing it from the point of view of Symbolist aesthetic (strangeness in beauty) and its political possibilities (breaking habit). This summary may help us to understand the significance of locating Mansfield in the Pater- Wilde- Brecht- Beckett line. Madness or strangeness is a chief obsession and state of mind of Mansfield's protagonists. The protagonist's Aesthetic perception responds to strangeness in beauty, which makes her (or him) experience "divine madness" (Wilde 52). Her "madness" (intensified sense of strangeness) enables her to confront her habitual existence and point of view; her awakening suggests her possibilities of change or moral growth even though her attempt to break habit often ends in failure. The protagonist's moral growth is, especially in the case of Laura in "The Garden-Party," linked with her political potential: her 'shock' or estrangement as a result of her encounter with strangeness in beauty gives her a revelation; it makes her become keenly aware of habit-- her accustomed, moral and political restrictions and her habitual acceptance of them-- and it creates, in her, the desire to break with them. The reader also notes Brechtian alienation effects which Mansfield's aesthetic strategies produce. "The Black Cap" has both Wildean and Absurdist A-effects; the sense of 'cruelty' in "Bliss" results from the story's shock effects; "The Garden-Party" has the 'contradictory' structure of a Brueghel's painting which produces an A-effect. The protagonists' sense of strangeness (aesthetic and moral shocks) tends to be experienced as ours chiefly because of Mansfield's narrative strategy: intensified free indirect discourse.

Mansfield made the most of the Wildean A-effect in "The Black Cap." Mansfield's use of the technique of paradoxical reversal in her one-act play gives the otherwise ordinary domestic drama of a middle-class life a sense of madness and strangeness. The romantic protagonist attempts to break with her habitual being by deserting her husband and eloping with her lover. Her disillusionment at her lover's bad taste and utilitarianism, however, makes her turn back to her old habit (her life with her husband); she calls her attempt "madness." Her romantic illusion and Aestheticism are comically exaggerated; her reaction to her lover's ugly black cap is described as hysterical. It is suggested, however, that the protagonist's absurdity, hysteria, or madness is Wilde's "divine madness": it reflects the protagonist's dream of self-realization and her brief but genuine attempt to break habit. Her Aestheticism represents strangeness in beauty in the play:

it alienates her from habit, or her entirely domesticated life and relationship with her husband; it makes her vegetable life appear strange to her. The protagonist's exaggerated Aestheticism produces an A-effect: the absurdity of the plot and, especially, the protagonist's manner would strike the audience as strange; they would find her comical, yet this comicality involves the audience's uneasiness.

In "Prelude," the pattern of the wall-paper, domestic ornament, and Linda's dream (of a bird) as well as the aloe are all Proustian "fetishes" (strangeness in beauty) which make the sub-conscious conscious (*Proust* 36); but the story's central symbol, the most significant fetish, is the aloe. The aloe's singular beauty produces a 'shock' effect on Linda's keen sensibility. The magically moon-lit aloe makes her remember her repressed desire for self-realization; it makes her dream of escaping from her suffocating, conventional female roles. The aloe not only gives her the vision of self-realization, but makes her aware of her own weakness to break with her habitual existence. Disillusioned, she calls her dream madness. The aloe's beauty or strangeness represent an Aesthetic force to break habit. Mansfield's choice of the aloe as a central symbol is deliberate: she must have been familiar with Pater's reference to the strangeness and beauty of the aloe in *The Renaissance*: "A certain strangeness, something of the blossoming of the aloe, is indeed an element in all true works of art: that they shall excite or surprise us is indispensable" (57).

"At the Bay" has many symbols which represent strangeness in beauty: the sea, night, death, the hut, "nemeral" (or 'emerald': a piece of broken glass), and the butterfly.

The butterfly or a butterfly-like falling petal ("something pink, something soft" [224]) which the baby-boy tries to grab at is a beautiful enigma (strangeness in beauty): its strangeness stimulates ('shocks') the baby's curiosity; his "tremendous effort" to catch it makes him roll right over for the first time (224). The aesthetic shock makes him break his habit (laying on his back all day): his childlike (or baby-like) energy and resilience guarantee his growth, which overwhelms habit.

A piece of broken glass stirs the children's imagination and curiosity: it brings them an aesthetic shock. Their 'nemeral' looks so big, beautiful and mysterious: they believe that it is from the treasure box in a sunken wreck; the 'nemeral' seems to invite them to an adventure. It is a symbol of Aesthetic self-realization: a force to break habit.

The hut symbolizes the children's dream of independence and adventure-- their challenge to habit (their habitual dependence on and forced obedience to the adult). The shabby hut is strangely attractive: it seems to urge the children to break with their master (adults) and set themselves free. The children secretly shut themselves up in the hut; yet nightfall makes them scared and feel, acutely, the burden which independence

involves: they are willing to get back to their old, habitual role.

The death of Uncle William is, in Kezia's mind, tinted with an Aesthetic colour; the 'life and death' of her adventurous uncle is Kezia's favourite 'story' ("Kezia knew [it] perfectly well but she wanted to be told again" [226]). Death is, for her, at first presented as too vague; but her conversation with her grandmother suddenly makes her realize that death comes to everyone including her grandmother and herself. The mysterious power of death startles her-- its strangeness shocks her: the new meaning of death makes her break with her childlike, yet habitual idea that life lasts forever. Kezia's revelation of mortality signifies her growth. Her grasp of death is far from full, for she challenges death (she determines to not to allow death to take her grandmother). Her determination suggests that she is still unable to fully break with her childlike idea of life (life's eternity); but her act of challenging to death shows her ambivalent acceptance of mortality, too. Her vigorous energy also seems to hint at her potential to break habit.

Night makes Beryl feel different: the stillness and darkness of midnight has strangeness and beauty. Night is, in a way, non-habitual: it at least liberates us from daily chores and routine work (habit). In "Prelude," the strange stillness of night makes her reflect on her false self, that is, her habitual, conventional, worldly self. Likewise, in "At the Bay," the darkness of night encourages her to break through her hard shell of bourgeois conventionality (habit).

The sea in "At the Bay" is an ambiguous symbol: it could refer to both strangeness and beauty, *and* habit. The sea attracts the children, Jonathan, Beryl and Mrs. Harry Kember. The enormous expanse and depth of the sea, and its dynamic movement of waves and tide represent freedom and adventurous spirit, or strangeness in beauty. The sea invites the children to break habit: it encourages their growth. However, for the adult characters, the sea could represent self-indulgence, that is, bad habits. The movement of tide is, in a sense, habitual: it is monotonous (regular and cyclical); it is, despite its expanse, a clogged fluidity. Tide may seem independent and free, but, in fact, is dependent on the gravity of the sun and the moon. The sea hides, like bad habits, a destructive force under the relatively calm surface which gives us sensuous pleasure. Beckett suggests in *Proust* that there is no point in distinguishing between good habits and bad habits: habit is simply habit. Both good habits-- that is, socially acceptable habits such as regular exercise which Stanley loves-- and bad habits-- often illegal and socially unacceptable (sometimes anti-social) habits such as drug addiction-- equally numb our sensibility and critical spirit. Beckett argues that bad habits represented by the slogan "Live dangerously" (which reminds the reader of Mrs. Harry Kember's advice for Beryl) is nothing more than a "victorious hiccough in vacuo" (*Proust* 20):

An automatic adjustment of the human organism to the conditions of its existence has little moral significance as the casting of a clout when May is or is not out; and the exhortation to cultivate a habit as little sense as an exhortation to cultivate a coryza. (*Proust* 20)

Perhaps bad habits could be a more ingenious trap: indulgence in forbidden, bad habits give us an illusion that we can break with social propriety, rigid morality and moral and social suffocation simply by violating 'laws'; whereas he or she is escaping from social and political reality and still under the perfect control of the Establishment, the addict believes that he or she is effectively rebelling against it. The addict depends on the existing social structure and bad habit; and bad habit gradually exhausts the addict and makes him or her mentally and physically unfunctional, until he or she is incapable of giving one slightest blow or threat to the Establishment.

In "Bliss," the pear tree, the central symbol, represents strangeness in beauty. Its 'perfect' beauty is an enigma, or strangeness. It is rare for the tree to be in perfectly full blossom; the rareness gives Bertha an aesthetic 'shock.' The strangeness of the pear tree stimulates Bertha's imagination and makes her attempt to read the hidden meaning; its enigma as well as her sense of bliss intensifies her consciousness and perception: it enables her, temporarily, to break with her habitual response and point of view. The strangeness in beauty casts a spell on her intensified perception and consciousness, which brings her a revelation (a vision): it makes her aware of her repressed sexual desire and her desire for full self-realization. The effect of the story's plot-- the moment of revelation (climax) coincides with the moment of great psychological fall (anti-climax)-- produces not only the shock effect close to that of Emily Dickinson's death (anguish) in bliss (mirth), but also the effect close to Brecht's A-effect. The height of Bertha's fall: her abrupt break with her partner and her special female friend, her sudden estrangement from the lingering blissful air of the party, her intensified sense of estrangement and isolation which results not only from the fact that no one but herself knows her hard blow and fall, but also from the total indifference of *her* pear tree to her misery. The effect of this fall equals the A-effect which Brecht observes in Brueghel's *The Fall of Icarus*: "Special beauty and gaiety of the landscape during the frightful event" (*Brecht on Theatre* 159). Bertha's disillusionment brings to her another, painful revelation: the relative meaning of the symbol: the pear tree belongs to no one, or anyone.

Isabel, in "Marriage à la Mode," represents strangeness and beauty for William: his wife is a beautiful 'stranger' for him. The changed, "new" Isabel becomes all the more attractive to him because she is, now, an enigma, and represents his 'passion for the impossible' (her beauty is "cool" and "fresh" [311]). The "new" Isabel is a painful yet somehow strangely sweet 'shock' to him. Isabel's newness (strangeness) makes him

reflect on their past life (old habit), that is, modest, yet cosy (because accustomed), petit bourgeois life. Her change makes him wonder what has made her to break with their old life. The newness of his wife disturbs him; shakes his conventional point of view and being (his habit). William's letter represents strangeness and beauty to Isabel: it is both beautiful and strange because of its sincere tone. It shakes her; it makes her even estranged from her dilettantish friends; it allows her to take a glimpse of her dilettantism and self-indulgence, or her new habit. Yet the lure of this new, bad habit is irresistible; she prefers the new one to the old.

"The Daughters of the Late Colonel" is Mansfield's Proustian story of habit. The sisters' perpetual fear of their menacing father, their social and moral repression (their docile acceptance of conventional values), their closed, narrow social circle (their social isolation or 'voluntary' alienation), and the resultant lack of stimulation-- have made their life clogged and boring. Habit and boredom (habit's "adequate performance" [Proust 28]) engulf them so completely that they even do not realize that they have been bored and become boring. Habit has made them "sleep before evening" (*The Renaissance* 189). Their fear of Father has become so habitual that they cannot be fully free from it even after his death. Proustian "involuntary memory" (the stream-of-consciousness-like act of remembering) helps Aesthetic Con to keep on living; but even her "involuntary memory" is dominated by habit: her absent-mindedness has become her habit or her "agent of security" (Proust 21). As in Proust's *Le Temps Retrouvé*, "[t]he source and point of departure" from habit to a revelation are provided by Aesthetic feticism, that is, "by the physical world, by some immediate and fortuitous act of perception" (Proust 36). The direct trigger of their "divine madness" is the barrel-organ music :³ it makes the sisters realize, for the first time, that their father is dead and that they are free. Their "waking madness" is deepened by their encounter with their fetishes (strangeness in beauty) (Proust 32). The dead mother's sun-lit photograph, like Proust's madeleine, brings Jug a chain of involuntary memories: the photo is beautiful because it belongs to their mother; but it looks strangely old because of the effect of the soft sunlight (its unexpected oldness gives Jug a shock). Jug's momentary 'madness' reveals to her that her life has been empty: that she has had a spiritual death long time before. Con's favorite, enigmatic statue of Buddha represents strangeness in beauty: Con's gaze of her Buddha gives her a chain of involuntary memories, which make her realize that she has, like Jug, failed to 'live': that her life has not been "real" (or substantial) at all (284). Strangeness in beauty also reveals to them the grim fact that this brief, yet intense sense of their lack of self-realization has come too late: they have missed the chance to live; and they will, like the photo of their mother, only gradually fade away in the current of habit.

The only beauty which Ma Parker's present life has is Lennie, her fair grandson; death, however, estranges her from her beautiful, pure Lennie. The death of Lennie represents strangeness in beauty in "Life of Ma Parker." The forced estrangement from her grandson overwhelms her: it challenges her habitual repression, that is, her resigned acceptance of hardship. Her "hard life" has been a cliché (and it *is* a cliché in the story: the expression is deliberately repeated, until it comes to mean nothing more than a flat fact of life): the idea of her having had a hard life has become habitual; the meaning becomes empty since she has so accustomed to oppression that she ceases to 'feel' the pain. Repression has become her second nature (habit). The death of Lennie, however, awakes her consciousness; it makes her acutely aware of her past and present sufferings. The acuteness of her pain makes her attempt to rebel against her exploited state of being. Although she fails to break with her repressive second nature-- the exploitative system is not something that one can personally cope with-- her awakening is still an indicator of her political potential.

In "The Garden-Party," the young workman's dead face represents strangeness in beauty. Death is strange because it is unknown to Laura and unknowable to the living; but the solemnity of death arouses her sense of wonder. Laura finds this beauty of death superior to any material beauty she has been familiar with (such as lilies and her hat)-- the beauty of death gives her an aesthetic shock: it challenges her habitual sense of beauty. The unfamiliar beauty of death also challenges her habitual social attitude, that is, her unconsciously patronizing attitude towards the working-class. Her encounter with strangeness in beauty deepens her aesthetic, moral, and political consciousness: her growth suggests her responsive, yet unyielding spirit to keep challenging habit. Laura's constant intensification of her personality will not allow her to be an easy victim of habit.

From a structural point of view, Laura herself represents strangeness and beauty in the story. Laura, "the artistic one," is a 'stranger' among the female Sheridans: she 'disturbs' the Sheridans and challenges their habitual sense of values. Laura is the only Aesthetician among the dilettantes who prefer to disconnect art from life and society. Laura's moral objection against the party breaks the Sheridans' false harmony which is habit-- for do we not tend to habitually expect that the family members share the same values? Laura 'shocks' her family members; and their shock shocks her. Their shock does not change them (they keep their habit); but Laura's shock makes her discover the difference between herself and her female family members (Laura breaks with her habitual preconception).

The structure of "The Garden-Party" has, like that of "Bliss," a Brechtian alienation effect: the story reverses the moral scale of importance. Death (the funeral) is usually

regarded as a graver matter than the party; in the world of the Sheridans where the privileged are the only human beings, the garden-party, their luxurious pastime, is regarded as more important than the poor neighbour's funeral. The reader might associate this technique of reversal with the paradoxical reversal of Wilde's *The Importance of Being Earnest*: Mrs. Sheridan's tone of speech: "And it's not very sympathetic to spoil everybody's enjoyment as you're doing now," indeed, reminds the reader of Algy's. However, the crucial difference between Mrs. Sheridan and Algy, and the implied criticism of Mrs. Sheridan's attitude lie in the fact that Mrs. Sheridan is not aware of her moral superficiality (that is, she *is* amoral, flippant, and a creature of habit) whereas Algy is fully aware of his flippancy and using his flippant mask to criticize the amorality of conventional morality (that is, Algy's morality is shrewder; he is an acute critic, not a creature of habit). The picture of "The Garden-Party"-- the picture of this reversed importance-- produces the A-effect that Brecht notes in Brueghel's *Road to Calvary* or *Christ Carrying the Cross*: the distraction-- common people's festive mood and clamour, Mary's self-absorption, the luxury of the aristocratic lady-- in the foreground of the canvas; and the main subject-- the Passion of Christ who is almost anonymous, and totally forgotten-- in the background. The picture of "The Garden-Party": the distraction or the garden-party-- the roses, the lilies, cream puffs, fifteen kinds of fabulous sandwiches, the band, Mrs. Sheridan's hat, party-dresses -- in the foreground; and the neglected graver matter or the funeral of the workman-- the reaped, shrunken daisy plants, the dead man in the bed, his grieving family and the mourners-- in the far background.

4 The Political Potential of Aestheticism and Symbolism: Will, Curiosity, Self-Realization and Habit

Proust, according to Beckett, had a negative view of curiosity and will: he believed that both curiosity and will are contaminated by our utilitarian, lower self-preserving instinct: they are, in short, the agents of habit. Beckett observes in *Proust*:

Curiosity is a non-conditioned reflex, in its most primitive manifestations a reaction before a danger-stimulus, and seldom exempt, even in its superior and apparently most disinterested form, from *utilitarian* considerations. Curiosity is the hair of our habit tending to stand on end. It rarely happens that our attention is not stained in greater or lesser degree by this animal element. *Curiosity is the safeguard, not the death, of the cat, whether in skirts or on all fours.* The more interested our interest, the more indelible must be its record of impressions. Its booty will always be available, because its aggression was a form of self-defence, *i.e.* the function of an invariable. (Emphases added 30-1)

He [Proust] is almost exempt from the impurity of will. He deplores his lack

of will until he understands that will, being *utilitarian, a servant of intelligence and habit*, is not a condition of the artistic experience. When the subject is exempt from will the object is exempt from causality (Time and Space taken together). And this human vegetation is purified in the transcendental aperception that can capture the Model, the Idea, the Thing in itself. . . . The Proustian stasis is contemplative, a pure act of understanding, willless, the 'amabilis insania' and the 'holder Wahnsinn.'" (Emphasis 90-1)

Beckett argues that, in a Proustian world, curiosity and will are "utilitarian" and belong to the sphere of habit, because they are calculating and self-preserving. Curiosity is "a danger-stimulus": it reflects our instinctive, self-preserving will, "the will to live, the will not to suffer" (*Proust* 43). Will is also an agent of habit because it is related to preconception; will is a force to stereotype the object which one sees. This Proustian will, again, refers to "the will to live, the will not to suffer." This will prevents one from observing the object as it is, thus, from grasping and appreciating the essence of the object: it hinders us from having a 'disinterested' Aesthetic revelation which often involves suffering as well as mirth. This instinctive will to live safely, or "the will not to suffer" might be a "reflex," an automatic response, and, therefore, an agent of habit or habit itself.

Proust's understanding of will and curiosity is unique and insightful. Yet if he rejects will and curiosity due to this particular view, he cannot escape the criticism that his view is one-sided. Will is usually not a reflex because a reflex is automatic, therefore, independent from will. Will is an agent (so it could be "utilitarian"); yet will itself is entirely "disinterested," for it is nothing as it is (so it cannot be "utilitarian"). Also curiosity is the desire to know the unfamiliar; although the new knowledge (which curiosity enables us to acquire) might help us to cope with our situation 'wisely,' it is not curiosity's direct effect or its intention. If we trust Beckett's analysis, Proust's denial of curiosity and will results from his denial of life: for him life is not merely habitual: life *is* habit, and life *is* a failure. Life is, according to Proust, condemned not because it is mortal, but because we are born and we must live on. Therefore, from Proustian point of view, Aesthetic experience *must* offer an escape from life which is habit. His denial of life as well as his intense, yet limited grasp of habit (his grasp of habit is intensely personal, but neither social nor political) might explain the extremely introverted Aestheticism of Proust's author-hero.

Paterian, Wildean and Mansfieldian Aestheticism are as "disinterested" as Proustian Aestheticism: they reject materialism and utilitarianism. Paterian, Wildean and Mansfieldian Aestheticism are, however, not "disinterested" in a Proustian sense. They *are* interested in life, that is, the constant intensification of one's being or growth. (Then, is it possible to say that the Proustian Aesthete is interested in the intensified

fugitive moment, but not life?) Aestheticism, for Pater and Wilde, denies neither will or curiosity because *it exists for life*. They attributed a positive value to “disinterested” (non-utilitarian) will and curiosity: curiosity and will play the crucial part in their Aestheticism. Pater, as we saw, states:

It is the addition of strangeness to beauty, that constitutes the romantic character in art; and the desire of beauty being a fixed element in every artistic organisation, it is the addition of curiosity to this desire of beauty, that constitutes the romantic temper. (“Postscript to *Appreciations*” 57)

Pater observes that intellectual and aesthetic curiosity allows one to appreciate the new and alien (or strangeness in beauty): it is indispensable to the Paterian way of breaking habit. The desire for beauty is a premiss of Pater’s “romantic” curiosity; and the desire (or any desire) involves will: aesthetic experience is a conscious (that is, desired or directed) experience.

Pater and Wilde, like Proust, objected the utilitarian view of art; utilitarianism is, in their mind, linked with self-seeking materialism. It meant, for them, an easy moralization of art, that is, a debasement of art to a servant of the bourgeois cultural hegemony: especially, in Wilde’s logic, the utilitarian socialization of art is synonymous with the depoliticization, demoralization, therefore, true decadence of art: utilitarianism is not compatible with Aestheticism. Aesthetic curiosity is linked with breaking moral, cultural, social and political habit not only in Pater’s work, but also in Wilde’s and Mansfield’s; it is linked with Aesthetic self-realization. Aesthetic desire, like other kinds of desire, involves one’s conscious orientation for the desired object, that is, will. Not only for Pater, Wilde and Mansfield but also, perhaps, for Beckett, Aestheticism is a highly demanding critical “act” of mind and senses; Aesthetic appreciation requires the full, cooperating performance of all the intellectual and sensuous faculties. Gilbert and Vivian emphasize ‘the importance of doing nothing’ to attack the Victorians’ utilitarian view of the superiority of acting over thinking; they are defending intellectual and aesthetic activities or ^{the} careful, committed act of contemplation against the utilitarian appreciation of the rash practice of often whimsical and shallow ideas. Gilbert concludes: “the contemplative life, the life that has for its aim not *doing* but *being*, and not *being* merely, but *becoming* -- that is what the critical spirit can give us” (Wilde 45). Becoming means the constant intensification of one’s self through Aesthetic experience; and both Wilde and Pater regarded this constant change which results from the passion for the impossible (“*Amour de l’Impossible*” [Wilde 29]) as the only possible force to break habit. Mansfield’s view of curiosity and will is as positive as Pater’s and Wilde’s: especially the children’s resilient will and vigorous curiosity are connected to their constant ‘growth’ which is an act of breaking habit. (We saw the typical example in Kezia, the baby-boy,

and Laura.) Mansfield's child (or adolescent) figures often symbolize the uncorrupted, disinterested, non-habitual will and curiosity of Wildean and Paterian Aestheticism: they are Pater's "the wisest, . . . , among 'the children of this world' " (*The Renaissance* 190). The child (or the baby) is the most non-habitual creature because of his or her lively spirit and amazing potential for constant change (rapid, physical and mental growth); his or her will and curiosity could be "disinterested" even in a Proustian sense: the child's reckless will and curiosity often disregard danger; they often overwhelm his or her self-preserving instinct.

The total disapproval of curiosity and will would lead to the nihilistic disapproval of life, which colours Proust's author-hero: in Proust, everything that is related to our consciousness is habit; only the sub-conscious can (not always-- note the case of a reflex which is unconscious but habitual) be non-habitual. Consequently, Proustian way of dealing with habit is, as we discussed in the section on Beckett and Brecht, not to deal with it: to bear the force of habit and take momentary refuge in unpredictable aesthetic experience-- the Proustian aesthetic experience is unpredictable, for it is not a conscious act: it is aesthetic fetishism-- it comes, like a "thunderbolt" (*Proust* 43), unexpectedly; one's casual encounter with the object, occasionally and suddenly, brings to one a moment of revelation or the moment of intense suffering and ecstasy; and one must live on it:

"I did not know whether this painful and for the moment incomprehensible impression would ever yield up any truth. But I knew that if I ever did succeeded in extracting some truth from the world, it would be from such an impression and from none other, an impression at once particular and spontaneous, which had neither been formed by my intelligence nor attenuated by my pusillanimity, but whose double and mysterious furrow had been carved, as by a thunderbolt, within me, by the inhuman and supernatural blade of Death, or the revelation of Death." But already will, the will to live, the will not to suffer, Habit, having recovered from its momentary paralysis, has laid the foundations of its evil and necessary structure, . . . (*Proust* 43)

Proustian Aestheticism is different from Paterian or Wildean Aestheticism; Proustian Aestheticism is not the kind of attitude one can nurture but has much to do with one's innate temperament, whereas Paterian and Wildean Aestheticism lie in one's conscious cultivation of one's self. Mansfield tends to regard aesthetic temperament as innate-- in this sense, her view is close to Proust's; but she does not deny the need of cultivation: her understanding of aesthetic temperament is closer to Pater's and Wilde's. Kezia's and Laura's aesthetic sense might be, for example, described as innate; but they are, at the same time, described as far from perfect. Kezia's aesthetic temperament is fully suggested in "Prelude"; but the aloe only shocks her: she cannot fully appreciate its

singularity. Laura is described as Aesthetic in “The Garden-Party,” and, at the end of the story, has a glimpse of Symbolist beauty; but her aesthetic grasp is yet too vague. Mansfield suggests their potential of *and* need for growth.

Proustian Aestheticism, and Paterian and Wildean Aestheticism are, however, interrelated. Paterian, Wildean and Proustian Aestheticism see the importance of Keatsian “negative capability”: they share the *basic* appreciative attitude. Also, Aesthetic fetishes are quite familiar objects to the Paterian or Wildean Aesthetician: Aesthetic experience could be sometimes conscious and even expected (his or her conscious study of an accomplished work of art might bring to him or her “divine madness”: Linda’s ‘study’ of the aloe or Bertha’s of the pear tree brings each protagonist the moment of Aesthetic revelation); but it could be, in other occasions, unconscious in nature and unexpected (a daily object-- such as Con’s and Jug’s barrel-organ music or Linda’s wallpaper-- might trigger off “waking madness”): the Paterian or Wildean Aesthetician surely has many moments of Proustian ecstasy. Pater hints at his own Aesthetic fetishism in *The Renaissance*:

While all melts under our feet, we may well grasp at any exquisite passion, or any contribution to knowledge that seems by a lifted horizon to set the spirit free for a moment, or any stirring of the senses, strange dyes, strange colours, and curious odours, or work of the artist’s hands, or the face of one’s friend.
(Emphases added 189)

One, in other words, rarely has a Proustian revelation without the cultivation of one’s self even though one is born to be a reflective introvert; in this sense, a Proustian fugitive can not deny the importance of self-cultivation (the conscious or “habitual”-- in a Proustian sense-- engagement)-- and after all, Proust *chose* to entirely engage himself in intellectual and aesthetic activities (his choice and writing are the act of his conscious will): his ‘legend’ goes as follows: “PROUST, Marcel, 1871-1922, French novelist, began as early as the mid-1890s preparatory work for the novel that came to fill his life and its waking hours: *À la recherche du temps perdu*” (*Modernism* 633). Indeed, Proustian Aestheticism is relevant to the intensification of one’s self. A Proustian moment of revelation consists in Aesthetic experience where fetishes connect one’s past and present; the ecstatic moment is bound to involve pain and suffering because the moment of revelation is that of learning, that is, a deeper grasp of one’s self. Although his author-hero’s Aesthetic experience strikes us as rather sentimental and too self-absorptive, Proustian Aestheticism is still an aesthetic *and* moral pilgrimage, and, therefore, related to life.

Then, perhaps, the difference between Proustian Aestheticism, and Paterian, Wildean or Mansfieldian Aestheticism is the difference in emphasis and attitude. But this

seemingly inessential difference is rather significant: Proustian Aestheticism leads to one's withdrawal into one's self and one's denial of and escape from disorganized life and corrupted society, while Paterian, Wildean and Mansfieldian Aestheticism lead to the possibility of connecting art, life and society. The Proustian solution of habit or Aesthetic escape from habit and life might guarantee one's ephemeral subjective freedom. The Proustian fugitive will, nevertheless, have to remain socially stuck (he or she will continue to be morally, socially, politically habitual being); and his or her social stasis is, as Wilde notes, most likely to limit the quantity and quality of his subjective freedom. (Mansfield's Constantia could be one of the most unfortunate examples.) The Wildean (or Paterian or Mansfieldian) solution of breaking habit, or the constant challenge to habitual forces, does not guarantee one's break with moral, social and political habits; indeed, the passion for the impossible is most likely to become the Passion. But, if we become aware that the one and only chance of our one and only life lies in breaking habit, and that "our one chance" of breaking habit" lies in "expanding that interval, in getting as many pulsations as possible into the given time" (*The Renaissance* 190), dare we not choose to do it?

And yet, Wildean, Paterian or Mansfieldian will, curiosity and self-realization might not fully satisfy the Proustian Aesthete: however non-materialistic and disinterested they might sound, will, curiosity and self-realization cannot entirely escape a utilitarian colour. What is, for example, the difference between ambition and Aesthetic aspiration? What is the difference between Stanley's desire for success and Linda's dream of self-realization? We can perhaps answer: they are two different kinds of self-realization; the former is worldly, material, self-seeking, and habitual whereas the other is disinterested, spiritual, non-habitual; also, the former is limited because it represents the passion for the obtainable while the latter is unlimited because it represents the passion for the unobtainable: Stanley's concern is "having" and "acting" or 'swelling' while Linda's concern is "becoming" or 'growth.' Yet Proust would not be satisfied: he would say that Wildean (or Paterian or Mansfieldian) 'art for growth, growth for art' does not deny the fact that art *is* an agent of growth. Wilde would, then, answer: art and growth are one: art is *the* agent of growth, and growth is *the* agent of art. Aesthetic will, curiosity, and self-realization must be disinterested; their only interest is in one's perpetual growth: in the resilient, committed, passionate attempt to break with one's moral, social, political habits.

Notes

- ¹ Pater remarks in "Romanticism" or "Postscript to *Appreciations*":
When one's curiosity is deficient, when one is not eager enough for new

impressions, and new pleasures, one is liable to value mere academical proprieties too highly, to be satisfied with worn-out or conventional types, with the insipid ornament of Racine, or the prettiness of that later Greek sculpture, which passed so long for true Hellenic work; to miss those places where the handiwork of nature, or of the artist, has been most cunning; to find the most stimulating products of art a mere irritation.(57)

² See *Brecht on Theatre* 99n. Willett says in the note for "Alienation Effects in Chinese Acting": "Almost certainly this, . . . , is the first mention in his writings of the term 'Verfremdungseffekt' " (99n).

³ Proust's protagonist in *Le Temps Retrouvé*, self-mockingly, calls his artistic aspiration which surpasses his artistic talent "that insane barrel-organ that always plays the wrong tune" (*Proust* 68). Mansfield's use of this fetish (barrel-organ music) might not be a pure coincidence. Mansfield must have been quite familiar with Proust's work by the time she wrote "The Daughters of Late Colonel" (first published in May, 1921): it is very likely that Proust's work inspired her. Sydney Schiff, a patron of London's literary circle and the publisher of *Art and Letters*, was a Proust's acquaintance and translated part of his *Le Temps Retrouvé*; according to Meyers, Mansfield first met him in April, 1920 and contributed her stories ("Pictures" and "The Man Without a Temperament") to his journal. In summer, 1921, Mansfield and Murry was in Montana, Switzerland, for her cure; they "spent two entire weeks in the summer discussing Proust while Murry was writing about him, and he was immensely stimulated by Katherine's conversation" (Meyers 220).

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