

The Importance of Language

The style of the extensively detailed characters and environments, contained in most of Katherine Mansfield's work, can substantiate more of a plot than explicit, factual content. With her idiosyncratic technique, Mansfield manages to engage the reader through the rich suggestiveness of her surroundings, descriptions and language in "The Tiredness of Rosabel" and "The Garden Party". Through evocative imagery and language, Mansfield establishes a focus on a 'slice of life', the portrayal of everyday experience. This is shown in "The Tiredness of Rosabel" and "Garden Party", as an examination of the defining, social classes is conducted entirely with this technique.

"The Tiredness of Rosabel" is based around indicative descriptions, consisting of carefully secreted, implied information, so widespread that they enhance essential aspects of the plot. This is accomplished through the implicit information, which allows the reader to establish their own information that has directly been portrayed towards themselves. Rosabel is a depressing, working lower class person, living in fantasies to escape the pessimistic labour that she encounters everyday. This narrative development is related to the implicitness of her style further, utterly by the unique style of atmosphere and description.

An "opal and silver" mist overwhelms reality to produce a more surreal and intriguing environment, as the "jewellers' shops seen through this were fairy palaces". A fairy-tale entrance through her mind, scarred by blistering hands of the destitute life, shows how the hardships of life have not only altered her vision, but they have changed her state of mind. The imagery of haze engulfs truth and reality, while the "fairy" tale, dreamlike fantasy surrounds Rosabel's lifestyle.

When she proclaims that "she would have sacrificed her soul for a good dinner", an image of her poverty-stricken world is established, as her own "soul", the distinctiveness and the individuality that makes one people, was valued as much as a tantalising meal. The people within her social class never ate complete meals, because many of them could not afford such a luxury, much less tantalising ones. This encourages her "need" to escape reality, as her present situation could not be endured anymore. Sacrificing an essential part of her life for a single, temporary meal shows the extremity of the need to flee from her mysterious and distorted world.

On Rosabel's peculiar bus ride home, "the sickening smell of warm humanity seemed to be oozing out of everybody." Describing the congested journey, Rosabel implies that the extreme proximity of other passengers becomes "sickening", evoking nausea and disgust. The "oozing" describes her attitude towards her fellow people, as the humanity drains out of them like a nauseating slime. The constant sense of claustrophobia implies upon the insecurity of herself and the congestion, with a mere struggle to survive. Without direct factual language the indirect quotation implants the mood of her surrounding, the desired effect, into the story. This effect is the repulsiveness of the people, in which she must escape to survive.

Inside the congested vehicle, the exhaustion and drowsiness that Rosabel encounters seems to contort her vision and reasoning. This is shown through Rosabel's eyes, as "the whole row of people on the opposite seat seemed to resolve in one fatuous staring face." Rosabel's "tiredness" heightens during the bus ride, as her surroundings appear as if she is under the influence of alcohol. Because of this, one can presume that her perspective on her existence is undefined, always vague and depressing, which contributes to her situation within the plot. The fact that all of the other people in the same, low social class feel similarly insignificant shows that the escapist perspective is essential for a decent psychological well-being. Everyone in the lower social class is on parallel paths, which is portrayed through the smiling girl reading her book. While Rosabel escaped reality through fantasising, the girl simply fantasised through reading.

Rosabel's complete lifestyle is conveyed through her flight of stairs leading to her room. This is because "it (the four flights of stairs) was like bicycling up a steep hill, but there was not the satisfaction of flying down the other side. "Oh, why four flights" she pondered, as this diminutive phrase explains her very pessimistic and unjust view of the world, as well as her winding staircase. This also shows how her overall frame of mind throughout the passage is appointed on a single main aspect of her life. This is her deprivation of the fruit that she labours so hard for. The pessimism of the world, through Rosabel's eyes, caused the sense of unclearness and almost, hatred, as she attempted to evade the harsh grasp of reality that she was trapped in.

The lack of factual language within "The Tiredness of Rosabel" and the suggestiveness through extensive detail allows the reader mind to wander freely throughout the ambiguous lines of the atmosphere to their own pleasure or displeasure. As this story has less of a storyline than it's thoroughly descriptive details, the reader can determine several aspects of the plot, entirely on their own judgement. This also means that events of the short story cannot be confirmed nor denied. This triumphantly allows the reader to engage in their own imagination to fill in gaps, left out of the Rosabel's written lifestyle. This technique ensures the reader's own thoughts can progress boundlessly, as the characters in the story.

"In The Garden Party" the plot is basically unravelled concisely in front of the reader, and where necessarily, it clearly explains all that it needs to. The short story is set in the mansion of an Aristocratic family, that has been absolutely sheltered from the real world of poverty-stricken in the Edwardian times. Mansfield has used a forthright approach towards the storylines information; efficiently portray the setting of Laura Sheridan's situation as well as her lifestyle.

After observing the stunning weather, they realised that "they could not have a more perfect day for a garden party if they had ordered." These self-explanatory sentences summarise how flawless the Sheridan's lived throughout the 1910's. This is because most aspects of their pampered lives, in correspondence with the fine weather, can be ordered perfectly from a menu.

Corresponding to their faultlessness, they were taught to believe that “outsiders” or people from the lower social class were actually negative influences. “When the Sheridan’s were little they were forbidden to set foot (outside) there because of the revolting language there.” This is because of the significantly diverse standards of social class in the 1900’s to 1930’s. The refined family believed that commoners were neither humane enough to initiate conversation nor listen to any of their “revolting language.” This belief could only be determined by analysing their style of language.

Contributing to their seemingly ignorance and apathetic views of the lower social class, they confess their lack of concern, subliminally. Without realising their prejudices manners, one of the guests of “The Garden Party” objectifying the band of musicians, of the lower class, no doubt. She would have preferred that they should have been “placed around the pond with the conductor in the middle of the leaf.” The action of “placing” is utilised with objects, such as furniture or decorations. The phrase explains their overall, discriminating view of the people, with less of a communal status.

This same attitude is shared with the mother, as the news of a tragic death shocks the mother, due to the conflict towards her party. Yet once she receives news that the death was not clashing with her social gathering, an ignorant sense of relief overcomes her.

(Mother) - “Not in the garden?”

(Daughter) - “No, no.”

(Mother) - “Oh, what a fright you gave me.”

Her failure to feel the compassion towards a loss of life is not outweighed by the survival and success of her party, which shows the indifference towards the classes.

Laura’s community status of the Aristocrats was never taught about, much less needed to deal with, life-altering situations, thus their literal vocabulary used in expressing her sympathy and sorrow was never familiarised. “Isn’t life just.... Isn’t life.. But what life was, she could not express.” She is left hesitating with communicating her condolence towards a deceased “peasant” in comparison with her standards. Her feelings overcome her verbal expressions, as the high status within her society failed to preach to Laura the inevitable, yet bearable issues of cruel reality.

The same author, Katherine Mansfield, utilises two distinctive, contrasting methods of expression through language, as the styles are in total opposition. They both portray Mansfield’s precise detail with great efficiency. One communicated its expressiveness through simplicity, while the other allows the reader’s mind to simplify and expand the stories. Either method is highly effective in exposing Mansfield’s exquisite technique of expression, although they are formed through opposite principles, their outcomes are both powerful and moving.