

Ain Shams University
Women's College for Arts,
Science and Education

**Modernity in Katherine Mansfield's
Short Stories**

**A Thesis
Submitted to
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**In Fulfilment of the Requirements
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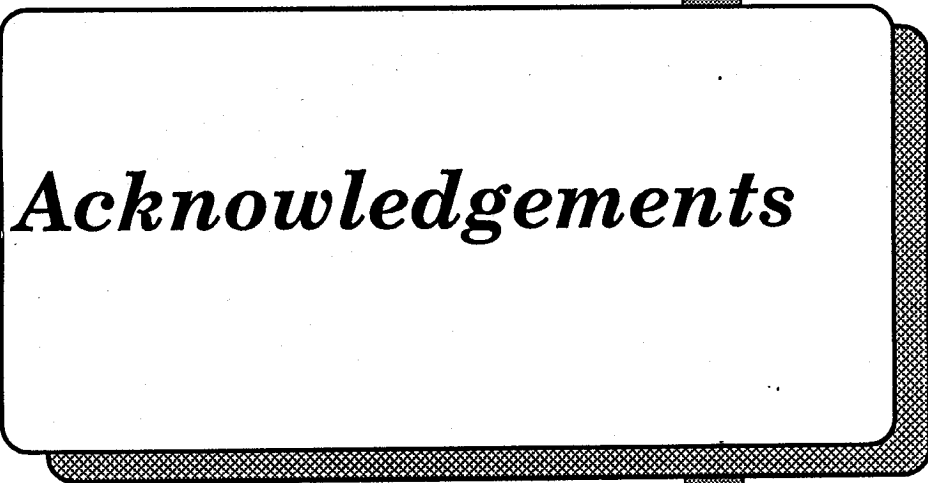
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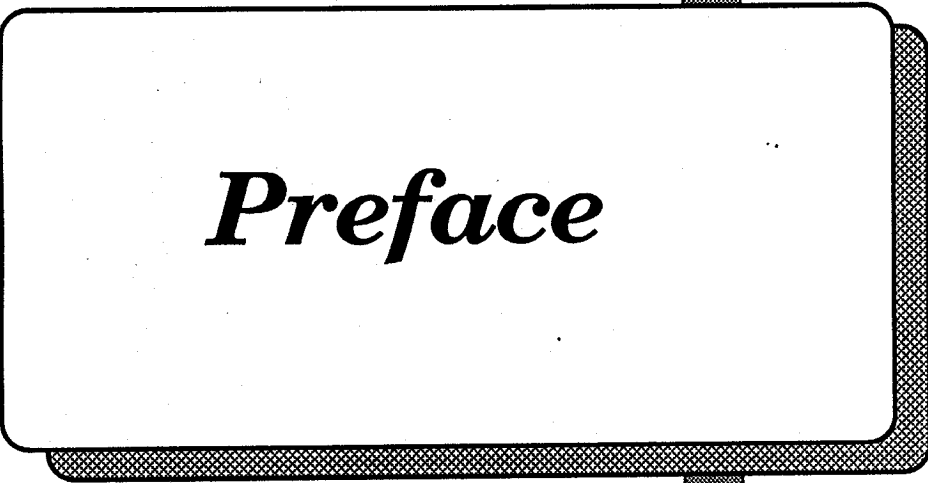
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**"To Acknowledge the Presence of
Fear is to Give Birth to Failure"**

**"Happy People are Never Brilliant.
It Implies Friction"**

K.M.





Preface

Preface

Katherine Mansfield, the third daughter and middle child of Harold and Annie Beauchamp, was born Kathleen Mansfield Beauchamp on the 14th of October 1888. She was brought up in New Zealand but as a teenager, she rejected both her family and the country of her birth to seek her future and fortune as a short story writer in London.

In the history of English literature it is for Mansfield's innovatory contribution to the development of the short story that she is today best remembered. However, her greatest gifts are her ability to express in writing her almost spiritual enjoyment of the natural world, to create a mood, and capture the essence of a swiftly passing moment and, above all, a subtle endearing humour.

The objective of this study is twofold: first to relate Mansfield to the culture of modernity and secondly, to examine her works in the light of the modernist aesthetic movements in vogue in her day. Inevitably thus, the thesis necessitates a critique of modernity that would act as a framework for the examination of the modernist aspects of Mansfield's work. This is the focus of the Introduction, wherein the thematic reading of this great cultural ideology reveals it as basically made up of two main inseparable and interdependent themes; namely, rationalization and subjectivation.

In Chapter One, the autobiographical aspect of Mansfield's life is investigated with the purpose of

relating her experience to that of modern man. In addition, a brief note about the triumphant emergence of the short story, and Mansfield's adoption of this genre as a medium through which she could voice her perceptions, is provided.

Besides, the thesis intends to convey a comprehensive overview of Mansfield's writing talent. Therefore, a consideration of the major influences at work in the process of shaping this talent is in point. Chapter Two presents the reader with a detailed examination of the extent to which some modern writers like Oscar Wilde and Anton Chekhov, have exerted an influence on her.

As for Chapter Three, it presents some of the modernist concepts and techniques manifest in a selection of Mansfield's short stories. Main among these are the concept of the "Self" and the concept of "Time". As for the techniques she handled, we find that she adopted several objective techniques, main among them is the 'free indirect' one, by means of which Mansfield managed to probe into the secret inner wells of her characters and to create them by maintaining the characteristic aspects of their natures through a stream or a flux wherein the present is contained in the past and the past is a clue to the future.

The thesis then concludes with an assessment of the extent to which a selection of Mansfield's short stories discloses a number of fundamental characteristics of the modern culture.

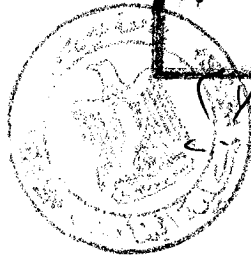
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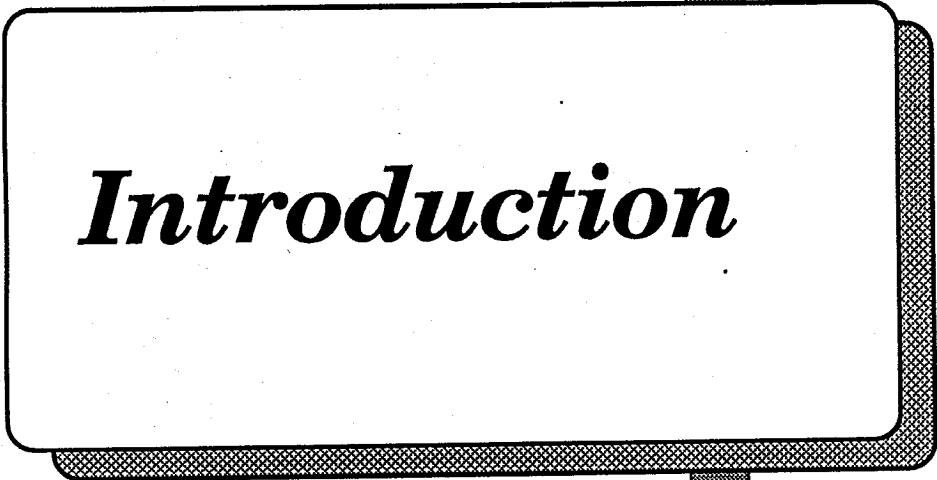
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Introduction

Introduction

Generally speaking, modernity could be defined as the history of the combination of two complementary rather than contradictory components; namely, rationalization and subjectivation. These have survived as the shaping factors at the core of modern culture.¹

Of the two, rationalization is the element given primary importance as the force that triggered transition from a pre-modern world view, based on belief in the metaphysical existence of a divine "logos", stability and finalism into a characteristically modern conception. This modern view stands at odds with the first; as one characterized by the glorification of man as a transcendental being, modernization and secularization.²

Rationalization and subjectivation survived under different guises along different historical contexts. The primary aim of this introduction is to make a short survey of the main ideas involved in each, focusing as might be expected, on the early phase of the Twentieth century that witnessed the emergence of Katherine Mansfield, the writer and the individual. The Introduction extends to include a brief survey of the main concepts and techniques embraced by modernism acting as the "aesthetic logic"³ of the modern culture that favours internal reality and pays close attention to the depiction of the human consciousness that is "essentially and primarily

temporal in nature."⁴ It stands at odds with mimesis and representationalism in art.

By rationalization is meant the emphasis on the ideological stance adopted by reason towards the past; perceiving it as the locus of superstitious beliefs. It identifies with an empirical mode of knowledge whereby reason assumes the important function of triumphantly destroying a general atmosphere of irrationality; experimental science replaces belief; and an endogenously changing society substitutes a typical reproductive one wherein man and object were inseparable.⁵ All this happened as a result of some revolutionary scientific discoveries. However, the central role of reason is not limited to the scientific and technical activities of the modern individual. It extends to encompass the domain of the government of human beings as well as the government of things. In this sense, rationalization means the construction of the rational society on a number of institutions and laws that are legitimate in so far as their mechanisms of working are grasped by reason, and their validity is verified by all humanity. Hence, legitimation came early to figure out as a characteristic feature of modern laws.⁶

Rationalization, thus, acts as a liberating force that stands at the opposite pole of the medieval outlook that smothered the individual; meaning therein the 'indivisible', with a host of irrational practices meant to attain salvation in the afterlife.

In historical terms, rationalization can be dated

with Renaissance humanism. The date is rather tentative because it is sometimes claimed that the root of rationalization goes still further back to the Greeks and associates it with the spirit of inquiry and skepticism characteristic of Socrates who started with knowing nothing and began early to question the taken-for-granted idea that God is the source of the good in the universe.⁷ Nevertheless, the fact remains that humanism became a major impact since the Renaissance wherein it worked hand in hand with The Protestant Reformation for the intellectual as well as moral liberation of the individual.

Under the impact of humanism, man came to be perceived as the centre of the universe. The humanists broke away from the medieval preoccupation with theology towards a lively enjoyment of natural beauty as well as the earthly accomplishments of Renaissance intellectuals. Characteristically, they were scholars interested in the art of oration and in reviving Greek and Latin literature.⁸ Theirs is the spirit of challenge to accepted authority that outlived the Renaissance context and extended to the present moment of historical time.⁹ Therefore, the primary meaning of subjectivation in the Sixteenth century is individualism whereby man assumes a transcendental stand towards the universe.

In the Seventeenth century, individualism came to be defined in terms of the self-assertion of the individual's free will which resulted in the establishment of the modern State. It comprises the idea of a contract by means of which the individuals,
