

## **Katherine Mansfield's Alternative Selves in 'Bliss' and 'The Garden Party'**

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### **Abstract:**

This paper explores the notion of 'crossing' in the space between Wellington, the capital of New Zealand, and London in terms of Élan Vital and Bergson a concept that will be applied to Katherine Mansfield's alternative selves and intuitive memories. It will assess certain related key elements concerning the nature of Mansfield's professional self-image as a writer expressed in a specifically modernist fashion in her fiction. Such aspects include: the effects upon her understanding of the aesthetics and formal properties of her own writing; the role of her conscious experiences as a woman in society; and how both of these were reflected and interpreted in her stories, 'Bliss' (1920) and 'The Garden Party' (1922), with reference to Henri Bergson's *Creative Evolution* (1907).

Also the paper draws a comparison between Mansfield and her Edwardian aunt, Elizabeth Von Arnim, considering how they both cross from the new world into the old, a transition explored particularly through their subjective experiences. Mansfield's feminist consciousness was indirectly represented through her short stories and fictional characters, while Von Arnim deals with it directly through her autobiographical writing about herself, predominantly in *Elizabeth and her German Garden* (1898). In this text, Von Arnim turns to her inner life directly by describing how she created a garden, a process judged in its opposition to her dissatisfaction with the Prussian aristocrat she had marred after crossing from New Zealand to Europe. A key figure – albeit now largely a forgotten one – in turn-of-the-century feminism and women's writing, she was an extremely popular writer whose influence on the following generation such as Mansfield was strong. Arguably, she lived out her élan vital more directly than the succeeding generation – with the exception of such figures as Gertrude Stein.

My argument will focus upon and explore Mansfield's use of modernist stream of consciousness within omniscient narration in contrast with Von Arnim's autobiographical narrative technique, how it relates to characters in the texts and also in respect to elements of the gendered value of the subjective versus the social, public selves determined by patriarchy.

پوختہ:

نهم تویزینه‌هیه تیگه‌یشتی (په‌رینه‌هی) دووری له نیوان (ویلنجتون) پایتهختی نویسله‌ندا و له‌ندهن له رهوی تمکه‌یشتی پاله‌ر مکانی ژیان و بیروکه‌ی برغسونی که جیبه‌جی دهیت له جینگره‌وهکان و یاده‌هه‌ریه رهوداویه‌هکانی (کاترینمانسفیلد) نهم تویزینه‌هیه هسلسنه‌گادنی بنه‌ره‌تی دهکات بُو سروشته و یته‌هی خودی و پیشنه‌ی بُو مانسفیلد و هک نوسه‌ریک که به شیوه‌ی سه‌دهمینه‌ی تاییمت ده‌ریده‌یریت له ره‌مانه‌که‌میدا و نهم باهه‌تنه‌ی خواره‌هه له خو ده‌گریت :

شوینهواری ریکخراو بُو تیگمیشتن له جوانی و تاییه‌تمهندی روکهشی له نوسین و رُولی تاقیکردن‌نه‌مکانی و هک نافرمنیک له کومهملگاوه چون وینهی داوتهنه له رومانه‌مکهی (السعادة) (1920) و (حفلة الحديقة) (1922) ووه پهیوندی (بالتطور الأبداعي) هنری رجسون(1907) ، وه همروهه‌هانم نویزینه‌موده هستاره به براورد کردنی له نیوان مانسفلد و تلیزاینیس له روروی چونینیتنی تپیه‌ر بونیان له جیهانی تازه بُو جیهانی کون له ریگه‌ی تاقیکردن‌نه‌مکانیانهوه، پاشان نواندنی زیره‌کی نافرمانه‌ی مانسفیلد به شیوه‌ی ناراستمومخو له ریگه‌که چیره‌که کورتمکان و ئەمکتمره خامپالییه‌کانی .

## الخلاصة:

يتناول هذا البحث مفهوم "العبور" في المسافة ما بين ويلنجتون عاصمة نيوزيلندا ولندن من حيث مفاهيم الإنداون الحياني والمفاهيم البرغسونية التي سيتم تطبيقها على الذوات البديلة والذكريات الحدسية لكاثرین مانسفيلد. ستقوم هذه الدراسة بتقييم بعض العناصر الأساسية المتعلقة بطبيعة الصورة الذاتية المهنية لمانسفيلد ككاتبة والتي تم التعبير عنها بطريقة عصرية خاصة في روایاتها. وتشمل هذه الجوانب: الآثار المترتبة على فهمها لعلم الجمال والخصائص الشكلية لكتاباتها ودور تجاربها الواقعية كامرأة في المجتمع وكيف تم إنعكاس وتقسير هذه التجارب في روایاتها "السعادة" (١٩٢٠) و"حفلة الحديقة" (١٩٢٢) في ما يتعلق "بالتطور الإبداعي" لهنري بيرجسون (١٩٠٧). ويقوم هذه الدراسة أيضاً بإجراء مقارنة ما بين مانسفيلد وحالتها الإدواردية ، إليزابيث فون أرنم ، من خلال التمعن في كيفية عبورها العالم الجديد إلى العالم القديم خاصة من خلال تجاربها الذاتية. تم تمثيل وهي مانسفيلد النسائي بشكل غير مباشر من خلال قصصها القصيرة وشخصياتها الخيالية ، في حين أن فون أرنيم تتعامل مع ذلك مباشرة من خلال كتاباتها الذاتية عن نفسها ، وبالاخص في "الإليزابيث وحديقتها الألمانية" (١٨٩٨). في هذا النص ، تنتقل فون أرنم مباشرة إلى حياتها الداخلية من خلال وصفها كيف أنها قامت بإنشاء حديقة كمعارضة لعدم رضاها عن الأرستقراطي البروسي الذي أفسدته بعد عبورهم من نيوزيلندا إلى عالم أوروبا القديم. كانت شخصية رئيسية - وإن كانت الآن منسية إلى حد كبير - في مطلع القرن النسوي وكتابات المرأة ، كانت كاتبة تتمتع بشعبية واسعة وكانت لها تأثير كبير على الجيل التالي مثل مانسفيلد. يمكن القول بأنها عاشت إنداونها الحياني بشكل مباشر أكثر من الجيل التالي ، باستثناء شخصيات مثل جيرترود شتاين. ستركز حجة هذا البحث على استخدام مانسفيلد لتيار الوعي الحديث في السرد كلي العلم على نقىض تقنية السرد الذاتية لفون أرنيم ، وكيف إنها ترتبط بالشخصيات في النصوص وأيضاً فيما يخص عناصر قيمة النوع الاجتماعي للشخصية الذاتية مقابل الشخصية الاجتماعية العامة التي تحددها النظام الذكوري المتسلط

## Introduction

Katherine Mansfield's stream of consciousness and the non-fictional autobiography of Elizabeth Von Arnim are effective ways to closely examine how the worlds of their characters are constructed and how they perceive those worlds. In 'Bliss' and 'The Garden Party' Mansfield explores the articulation and navigation of the plural chaos of both internal and external voices in London and New Zealand, employed in these stories as a means of navigating the inner self in the multifarious perception of two cultures; the gendered journeys to alternative selves from New Zealand to Britain and Europe. Besides, Mansfield's aesthetic approach is to act self-reliantly by imagining her own consciousness through the vital impetus before bonding it with the external world. At the same time, Elizabeth Von Arnim's narrative feminist perception to some extent helps Mansfield develop her fictional form by focusing on the value of subjective experience and chronicles the thoughts that are passing through her characters' minds.

Henri Bergson (1859-1941) has had a major impact on the creation of modernist fiction, especially feminist writers, and developed aesthetic theories that focus on a redefinition of the importance of such principles as the value of subjectivity and memory that modernists found equally significant. Besides, he argues about the formation of one's personality and the change of self-initiated through the concept of *Élan Vital* particularly within a conscious duration:

'For a conscious being, to exist is to change, to change is to mature, to mature is to go on creating oneself endlessly.' (*Creative Evolution* 8)

It is therefore my argument that Mansfield – and indeed her relative Von Arnim - used Bergsonian terms in a gendered fashion and that this philosophy allowed modernist feminists like Mansfield to further explore issues directly connected with alternative, independent selves and the question of self-organization as a white colonial woman from New Zealand living at the heart of Bloomsbury in London.

The French philosopher Henri Bergson developed theories that led artists and writers to emphasize the value of the subjective and their inner worlds. Bergson defines immediate experience as a zone where one's intuition may guide and subvert supposed rational thinking at the level of the subject – rather than accede to the public and therefore, for feminists, a patriarchal, bourgeois world. He deals with the concept of intuition as opposed to intellect and his inclination is for flux over constancy, which explains why the modernist writers are most influenced by his theories that emphasize texts that are disturbed and fragmentary, rather than the seamless creation of nineteenth century realism.

Bergson's major book, *Creative Evolution* (1907) was widely circulated in the early modernist period. His concept of *élan vital* is an immaterial force that continually creates and expands the growth of life by dealing with the instinct of the human mind as a creative impulse. It continually emphasizes life as something coming into existence, and furthermore, Bergson insists that the *élan vital* requires intuition (in the sense of subjective experience) and in a rather Romantic way imagination, in order to create knowledge on reality. Both intuition and *Élan Vital* create an alternative approach to how

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we can see subjectivity, as for feminists it sets up the possibility that one should be authentic to one's inner feelings and in opposition to the hardened social conventions of patriarchy.

Mansfield's use of Bergson's theories occurs through the subtlety of individual characterization by means of focalization and free indirect discourse, within ostensibly omniscient narration: it can be considered Bergsonian in its impetus also concentrates on small, everyday events. In the case of 'Bliss', which will be considered at greater length below, one might say that what is at stake is the seriousness of inner life amidst what seems to be the superficiality of a modern, deeply affected by partly Bohemian life in the story which shares Mansfield's characteristic use of stylistic techniques. At the beginning of the story she establishes an overwhelming euphoric desire, with Bertha Young, one of the characters, facing unstated conventions that limit her joy: 'How idiotic civilisation is. Why be given a body if you have to keep it shut up in a case like a rare, rare fiddle?' (142). In a general sense implicitly, her inner desires are inhibited by a range of external social forces, in primarily what is chiefly still a male domain. For Walter E. Anderson this represents precisely a very particular image from which as readers "we receive an insight into Bertha's stifled feelings. [ ... ] The idea would bring Harry to mind, simultaneously forcing her to acknowledge Harry cannot be blamed for her sexual indifference. The real issue that Bertha will not pursue is the origin of this indifference" (399).

Typically, Mansfield's feminist consciousness was indirectly represented through her short stories and fictional characters. In contrast, however, her English Edwardian aunt Elizabeth Von Arnim deals with it directly through her autobiographical writing about herself, predominantly in *Elizabeth and her German Garden* (1898). In this text, Von Arnim turns to her inner life directly by describing how she created a garden in opposition to her dissatisfaction with the Prussian aristocrat she had married after crossing from New Zealand to the old world of Europe. She was an enormously popular writer whose inspiration on the subsequent generation such as Mansfield was strong and she lived out her *élan vital* more directly than the succeeding generation – with the omission of such figures as Gertrude Stein. An example of her *élan vital* could be seen when Elizabeth has the likings for pilgrimages and describes their journey as liberating:

I have always had a liking for pilgrimages, and if I had lived in the Middle Ages would have spent most of my time on the way to Rome... How cheerful my heart would have been, starting on a fine morning, with the smell of the spring in my nostrils, with every step getting farther from the suffocation of daily duties, out into the wide fresh world, out into the glorious free world, so poor, so penitent, and so happy! My dream, even now, is to walk for weeks with some friend that I love, leisurely wandering from place to place, with no route arranged and no object in view, with liberty to go on all day or to linger all day, (*Elizabeth of the German Garden*, 62)

Elizabeth portrays her subjective emphasis on the value of her private perception by wandering from one stop to another without any patriarchal external influences. Through her *élan vital* she will be able to expand and develop her intuitive qualitative experiences in relation to her public time within a fluid and poetical language. The novel then is considered to be a proto-modernist story that deals with private and subjective experience of Elizabeth's gardening and her interaction with her friends.

## ‘Bliss’ (1918)

‘Bliss’ was initially published in *The English Review*<sup>1</sup> in August 1918 and at stake is the seriousness of the inner life amidst what seems to be the superficiality of a modern, deeply affected and partly-Bohemian life. Suffering an accompanying confusion of the ‘self’ of an individual, its protagonist Bertha is as much affected by her inner life, as the alternative self that is created by her qualitative self-perceptions as any of Mansfield’s other female characters. Bertha is apparently content and satisfied as a dutiful mother to her child, and as a wealthy wife with a large social circle of friends. However, in contrast to this traditional role led publicly as a mother at home with servants and a household to maintain, through Bertha’s stream of consciousness the reader encounters her inner life reflecting upper middle class women who dream of being more rebellious, adventurous and who are drawn to a non-traditional world. Mansfield’s view of Bohemianism in London is as complex and ambivalent as her view of the British upper-middle and upper classes, and the story suggests her outsider’s satiric view to the superficialities of even the Bohemian class.

The story opens with Bertha Young’s inner life being represented as wonderful in the form of an epiphany that uses the language and games of childhood, but also as a state of intuitive being she seldom experiences anymore. Her public life and time, from the Bergsonian point of view, is interrupted: as since she walks home and she is overwhelmed by a feeling of an uncontrollable, epiphany experience of bliss that would be unusual in a woman on the cusp of what would be considered middle-age at this point in history:

‘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, nothing, simply.’ (Mansfield, ‘Bliss’ 174)

Her laughter is instructive as it is adults who always laugh at something and children who will happily laugh at nothing, spontaneously. Bertha’s bliss is simply glittering since the text describes her ‘dancing steps’ and walking like she owns the external world. This is both child-like and also in Bergsonian terms she is un-self-consciously almost overwhelmed by her inner sense of personal, qualitative time and its opportunities for spontaneity as opposed to public time and habit.

Despite her apparent happiness at her privileged, pseudo-Bohemian life - Bertha is unable to recognize her lack of sexual fulfillment in her marriage and the strength of her physical attraction towards Miss Fulton. Since patriarchy is what limit her alternative and true self because it does not allow her to recognize her own lesbian sexuality. Earlier in the story Bertha’s suppressed lesbian

<sup>1</sup> *The English Review* was an English-language literary magazine published in London from 1908 – 1937, founded by Ford Madox Hueffer in 1908 and edited by him for just fifteen issues. The magazine published an interesting mixture of Victorian and Edwardian authors like Thomas Hardy, H. G. Wells, and Joseph Conrad, along with younger writers Ezra Pound, Wyndham Lewis, and D. H. Lawrence. Cliff Wulfman further notes that ‘*The English Review* is one of the most celebrated of the “little magazines,” though with its plain blue covers and generous girth it hardly resembled one, so much so that Hoffman, Allen, and Ulrich do not include it in either portion of their foundational *The Little Magazine: A History and a Bibliography*’ (2009, 26).

impulses are hinted at but this becomes much clearer later on when she has a chance to meet Miss Pearl Fulton<sup>2</sup>:

‘They had met at the club and Bertha had fallen in love with her, as she always did fall in love with beautiful women who had something strange about them.’ (Mansfield, ‘Bliss’ 177)

Therefore, Bertha has an alternative self, but she can barely sense her inner life because it is centered on a barely-acknowledged about lesbian desire and it is her conformist compromise that Mansfield is particularly interested in exploring – because her consciousness still remains very largely disengaged from any Bergsonian inner life.

Furthermore, after Miss Pearl Fulton arrives for dinner, Bertha stares at her guest and the story’s first description make of her a rather exotic object of erotic desire where Bertha imagines an unspoken intimacy and connection with this other woman, previously unknown to her. As outlined in the story an underlying connection emerges of a sexual nature, at least implicitly:

Miss Fulton did not look at her; but then she seldom did look at people directly. Her heavy eyelids lay upon her eyes and the strange half-smile came and went upon her lips as though she lived by listening rather than seeing. But Bertha knew, suddenly, as if the longest, most intimate look had passed between them—as if they had said to each other: ‘You too?’—that Pearl Fulton, stirring the beautiful red soup in the grey plate, was feeling just what she was feeling. (Mansfield 181)

Pearl’s unusual dress and heavy hair associate her with the moon, and their intimacy correlates with the Roman Mythology of Diana, who was the goddess of hunt, moon and birthing. The goddess is also connected with wild animals and kind of having the power to control other species, as in this case, where Pearl appears to have controlled over Bertha, drawing her into Pearl’s own world. Subsequently, Pearl asks about the garden and Bertha is able to take her out to look at the pear tree in a scene that hovers between a narrative of seduction and one where the reader intuits that Bertha’s inner intuitive self has found a kindred spirit – and this aspect demonstrates that a lesbian counter-narrative is the central focus of the narrative.

On one level, the pear tree represents the image of phallus since it has to ‘stretch up,’ and ‘point’ characteristically, creating the illusion that it stretches until it reaches the ‘silver moon’. Also, it is noticeable that when Bertha feels full with desire for Miss Fulton she can only recognize this intense feeling through a sudden sexual longing for Harry (even though she is clear that she has never desired Harry before). Bertha’s internal thoughts emphasize her being on fire with passion for her husband as Mansfield repeats the word ‘ardent’ or its cognate parts: ‘But now—ardently! ardently! The word ached in her ardent body! Was this what that feeling of bliss had been leading up to?’ (Mansfield 183)

<sup>2</sup> ‘Pearl’ which is the given name of Miss. Fulton is a name derived from lustrous gemstone. However, in this context the idea of a precious stone concealed within a fleshy mollusc which may have implicit sexual connotations, which places so much emphasis on objects with female gendering such as the moon, and also the blossoms of the pear tree where Mansfield emphasises their openness and femaleness. While Pearl Fulton like the moon is dressed all in silver. This might be the underlying use of a feminist counter-narrative within the ostensible text.

While Bertha is still confused about the reason for her bliss,<sup>3</sup> nonetheless she links this word, which has strong sexual connotations, to sexual desire. In a sense Mansfield has taken a phallic image and re-contextualized it for a feminist purpose, for even though Bertha lacks the bravery or perhaps even the full understanding to recognize lesbianism as part of her own qualitative self-perception and that of Miss Fulton, yet that desire persists.

Additionally, the pear tree symbolizes different people at different times in the story; first, Bertha's potential for a new alternative life which opens up her sexuality and the possibility of desire: 'And she seemed to see on her eyelids the lovely pear tree with its wide open blossoms as a symbol of her own life' (145). For Anderson "The flowering pear tree is a composite symbol representing in its tallness Bertha's homosexual aspirations and in its full, rich blossoms, her desire to be sexually used" (400). Certainly, the emphasis on the openness of the flowers is non-phallic, but rather suggests female symbolism that can be associated with Pearl – and what complicates the nature of the image is the complexity of lesbian desire. Both women are connected to each other through the tree as it unites them to sexual life, or at least this is how Bertha perceives the situation.

### **'The Garden Party' (1922)**

First published by the *Saturday Westminster Gazette*<sup>4</sup> on 4<sup>th</sup> of February 1922, 'The Garden Party' later reappeared in the *Weekly Westminster Gazette* on 18<sup>th</sup> of February 1922. The story is predominantly autobiographical, based on Mansfield's childhood memories, and dominated by conflicts about the divisions of social class in New Zealand,<sup>5</sup> her perception of which is perhaps sharpened by her exile in England. Protagonist, Laura Sheridan's personal experiences are foregrounded, including her relationship with members of her family and her concern for gender and class. She is laughed at for being over-solicitous over a labourer's death. Her conscious, qualitative perceptions are questioned by her mother and elder sisters as being fundamentally silly and childish:

'Jose, come here.' Laura caught hold of her sister's sleeve and dragged her through the kitchen to the other side of the green baize door. There she paused and leaned against it. 'Jose!' she said, horrified, 'however are we going to stop everything?'

<sup>3</sup> The word 'Bliss' according to the Oxford English Dictionary means delight and enjoyment, and its etymology comes from the Old English described as strong feminine.

<sup>4</sup> The *Saturday Westminster Gazette* was the literary weekly of the *Westminster Gazette*, an influential liberal London newspaper, and included short stories and sketches by writers such as D.H. Lawrence and Katherine Mansfield. It was founded by E.T. Cook on 31 January 1893 and ceased publications on 31 January 1928. John Murry, Mansfield's husband, was an art critic for the *Westminster Gazette*. (Boddy 1988, 40).

<sup>5</sup> In a letter to her father, Sir Harold Beauchamp on 18<sup>th</sup> March 1922, the dying Mansfield advocates New Zealand over London: '[t]he longer I live the more I turn to New Zealand. I thank God I was born in New Zealand. A young country is a real heritage, though it takes one time to recognise it. But New Zealand is in my very bones. What wouldn't I give to have a look at it!' (Murry, *The Letters* Vol. 2, 456).

‘Stop everything, Laura!’ cried Jose in astonishment. ‘What do you mean?’ [...] ‘Mother, a man’s been killed,’ began Laura [...] To Laura’s astonishment her mother behaved just like Jose; it was harder to bear because she seemed amused. She refused to take Laura seriously. (407-409)

Set in rural New Zealand, the story shows Laura supposedly to help manage a garden party for her prominent and wealthy family. Nakano argues that the story does not need the New Zealand setting, since Laura’s experience of the death of a person ‘could happen in any country’ (2002, 87). However, the mixture of upper middle class liberalism and class-consciousness of the gulf between gentry and workers, while distinctly British, is perhaps sharpened by the colonial background of inventing Britain overseas.<sup>6</sup> The third person narrator focuses on the weather, focalized through Laura’s consciousness, and the use of indirect free speech suggests Laura’s voice:

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 sky 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 [...] (401).

The language stresses that this wealthy upper-middle class family would habitually buy and order things (part of a series of processes whereby their class controls society), demanding an archetypal English summer day reminiscent of the pre-war Edwardian idyll of the country house, with its well-ordered garden, a paradisiacal setting, recreated in New Zealand. There is perhaps no more potent image of Englishness than the country house garden, especially in settler colonies, an image that is also associated with female creativity in the modernist period, such as in Vita Sackville West’s famous Sissinghurst Garden.<sup>7</sup>

Laura is nominated the hostess because she was the ‘artistic’ one and ‘loved having to arrange things; she always felt she could do it so much better than anybody else.’ (402) Laura’s new experience of creating the party matches how Bergson believes the universe, like any artistic product continually grows and changes: ‘The universe *endures*. The more we study the nature of time, the more we shall comprehend that duration means invention, the creation of forms, the continual elaboration of the absolutely new’ (*Creative Evolution*, 1911: 11). From a gendered point of view the party is a female art form (as with Mrs. Dalloway’s party in Virginia Woolf’s *Mrs. Dalloway* 1925), where qualitative experience must be combined with quantitative experience. Laura’s stream of consciousness is initially shown focusing on her subjective intuition into how elements can combine to best effect for the visitors.

Laura’s qualitative life is usually filled with images that are light, fragrant and fresh, such the pink ‘canna’ lilies on crimson stems, which the mother has bought from the florist for their garden party.

<sup>6</sup> Christine Darrohn (1998) connects the death to war-time death and grief.

<sup>7</sup> Vita Sackville-West (1892-1962), aristocrat, writer and briefly Virginia Woolf’s lover, created the famous garden at Sissinghurst. See Matthew Dennison (2015), Sarah Raven and Vita Sackville-West (2014). On country houses and modernist literature see Christine Berberich (2009). For colonial/post-colonial contexts to Mansfield’s story see Emmanouil Aretoulakis (2013); Rama Kundu, (2007).

These huge-flowered, exotic bulbs from South Africa were popular in the sub-tropical world of colonies such as New Zealand, suggesting a link to the Empire which moved people, cultures and plants and animals around its vast territory. Laura's consciousness creates both a conservative, traditional life and an alternative, more individual life within the terms of Bergsonian ideas of memory – that is to say, a brief phase of independent female thought. Any such ideas, found in the image of the dead body, are quickly obscured by the public world. Mansfield satirizes gently Laura's inability to really fulfill the intimations of her desired alternative life, despite her liberal claims. Both the death and her subsequent visit to the cottage is intended as some kind of epiphany, but remains largely a negative, unfulfilled one, as in 'Bliss'. Kaplan argues Mansfield's purpose is to search 'for methods to convey the interconnectedness of individual's sense of reality as well as the pressures of the "moment," the sudden breakthroughs into deeper levels of consciousness' (1991: 167). What's more, Karen L. Shaup explains that "the instances of aestheticization in the story may be linked to Mansfield's sustained interest in the aesthetic theories and practices of Walter Pater and Oscar Wilde, writers Mansfield discovered, admired, and imitated as a young woman. Throughout 'The Garden Party,' Laura experiences episodes of decadence: intense, extravagant, and erotic responses to her environment" (pp. 222-223).

Therefore, her related use of the epiphany, Mansfield deploys stream of consciousness and qualitative experience in an unusually focused way at the level of characters, framed to offer a series of very particular, intense, although at times even ambivalent insights.

### **Elizabeth Von Arnim**

Examining the origin and development of an image of the New Woman in the context of a growing sense of feminization at the end of the nineteenth century and the consequent expression of altering female values are explored in the case of Mansfield, while Elizabeth Von Arnim (1866 -1941) has qualitatively expressed her intuitive thoughts through her autobiographical subjective experiences by representing her reaction against the domestic role. Through her ideal garden Elizabeth challenged her feminine subjective consciousness against her Prussian aristocratic marriage by representing her *élan vital* in conjunction with her inner independent self. Her chosen alternative self, allowed her to distinguish between unhappy and unsatisfying marriage and woman's desire to follow and choose her own future. She rejected the social traditional marriage that supposedly represented romantic dominant desire and rather focused on the personal conflict within her alternative heroines between the need for independence social achievements and the representation of a New Woman.

Elizabeth Von Arnim was cousin of the subsequently better known writer Katherine Mansfield, born, also known as, Mary Annette Beauchamp in Australia in 1866, she was the daughter of an English merchant. She moved to England when she was three years old with her family and in due course studied at the Royal College of Music where she won a prize for organ playing. While exploring in Italy, she met the German Count Henning von Arnim, whom she married, and rendered as 'The Man of Wrath' in her three memoir-novels (*Elizabeth and Her German Garden*, *The Solitary Summer* and *The Benefactress*) or the man who always invades her space while writing in the garden. Though later, she escaped to her German garden and found beauty within a repressive existence, thus

through plants and flowers Elizabeth was fluidly expressing her own subjective opinion about the external world, as the story opens up with her first person narration:

May 7<sup>th</sup> – I love my garden. I am writing in it now in the late afternoon loveliness, much interrupted by the mosquitoes and the temptation to look at all the glories of the new green leaves washed half an hour ago in a cold shower. Two owls are perched near me, and are carrying on a long conversation that I enjoy as much as any warbling of nightingales. The gentleman owl says, and she answers from her tree a little way off, beautifully assenting to and completing her lord's remark, as becomes a properly constructed German she-owl. They say the same thing over and over again so emphatically that I think it must be something nasty about me; but I shall not let myself be frightened away by the sarcasm of owls. (1)

The passage shows her independent space that recognizes her own qualitative spirit and explicitly represents her subjective duration in the garden. Similarly, to Woolf's idea that every woman needed a room of her own to express, Elizabeth would have said every woman needed a garden since here she fluidly and poetically represents her existence within the garden towards the external world. Through her intuitive emotions and moods including loving the garden and 'late afternoon loveliness' Elizabeth is consciously drawing a line between herself and the external natural tunes, since living and working in her German garden is different from the interruption she perceives by the 'mosquitoes' and 'owls' that somehow represents the traditional society toward women.

Her biographer Jennifer Walker further says that Elizabeth is a practical gardener and a romantic one as:

'Mary gives voice to Elizabeth, the writer, the romantic, the rebel and gardener. Elizabeth is Mary's consciousness and her book gives her a voice. Thus she is able to explore the consciousness of a woman in a new way,'

...and

'...her spirits are never dampened...by looking at the views of the fields and forests by which she is surrounded.' ('1896-1898: From Berlin to Nassenheide.' *Elizabeth and her German Garden* 50)

Hence, both Mansfield and Elizabeth Von Arnim's work show the utilisation of a gendered Bergsonism, which emphasizes the value of the creativity of the subjective and the importance of alternative lives, as well as technique of a new fluid writing utilising stream of consciousness and which made use of the autobiographical mode – in von Antrim her books are intended to be genuine autobiographies, while in the case of Mansfield, the writer draws on the use of the autobiographical mode to create characters whose inner voices and subjective thoughts take on extremely powerful life within the narrative. 'Bliss' is almost like the autobiography of the character Bertha, yet its intensities are significant in other ways with an underlying Bergsonian message for the reader to interpret. According to Shaup (drawing on the author's opinions of the text expressed in letters); "For Mansfield, Laura's inexperience prohibits her from understanding that life is essentially diverse, which, in this context, means that life and death occur simultaneously just as joy and despair can co-

exist as conflicting, but equally real, emotions" ( 225). These women writers are both shifting from the stereotype of 'The Angel in the House' that Virginia Woolf later attacked in memorable fashion being independent individuals. Therefore, the connection between the way a woman lives her actual life in the feminist mode and its formal relationship to stream of consciousness as an exploration of the Bergsonian *élan vital*, are central preoccupations. Mansfield and Elizabeth represent a particular example of a gendered Bergsonian reading of subjectivity as well as a modernist feminist. Their intuitive experiences also show how their gendered alternative selves crossed from the traditional lifestyles to their independent states particularly in terms of social classes and even borders.

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