

Research Article

Katherine Mansfield & the Trauma of Fractured Intimate Bonds

Najah Mahmi* 

Department of English, Sultan Moulay Slimane University, Beni Mellal, Morocco

Abstract

In “Loneliness,” [1910] as in most of her writings, Katherine Mansfield voices out the darkness and coldness of her nights, because of an extreme feeling of loneliness; thus the silence of life. A great degree of sorrow is explicitly expressed throughout her short story writing journey in which she expresses her estrangement towards life and agony due to her loneliness and permanent hanger for love. With an impressionistic style, polished satire, and an explicit feminist tone, Katherine Mansfield’s characters debate the human existence within the barriers of emptiness and affliction, usually resulted in alienated disproportioned grotesques who are struggling for survival. They are neither alive nor dead. In this context, this paper highlights Mansfield’s representation of traumatic love in male-female relationships. The main focus is on the painful love politics that characterize couples’ lives inside and outside the marital institution, and the way they shape and reshape the modern human experience. Through questioning Mansfield’s incongruous couples’ interactions, the paper envisions the couple’s life question in relation to men and women’s conceptualisations of love that abide by their *advanced civilised* past, present, and future, amid dark shadows of beginnings and endings which shape its psychological and social poisoning features. The scrutiny portrays the painful life of Katherine Mansfield’s lost miserable characters who endure hollowness and emotional withdrawal, suggesting a comparative study of “Mr Reginald Peacock’s Day,” [1917] “Poison” [1920] and “A Married Man’s Story” [1923] written by Katherine Mansfield.

Keywords

Beginnings, Endings, Hollowness, Poison, Withdrawal, Modern

1. Introduction

If only I felt that somebody wanted me, that I was of use to somebody, I should become a different person. Yes, that is the secret of life for me--to feel loved, to feel wanted, to know that somebody leaned on me for everything absolutely--for ever. [The Short Stories of Katherine Mansfield 1964, 3000] [13]

In “The Garden Party,” [1922] Kathleen Mansfield Beauchamp, with the pen name of Katherine Mansfield, questions the very essence of life through Laura’s stream of con-

sciousness that fails to generate a vivid explanation of the whatness of “this product called life” [3] led by soulless advanced grotesque miniatures who serve as “lost and found” [82] and, then, rattled ‘portmanteaux’ in a miserable world of fine savageness, intoning mournfully in chorus: “This life is Wee-ry, A Tear- a Sigh, ... A Love that Changes, And then...Good-bye!” [242]

This gloomy cynical tone is the literary signature that has

*Corresponding author: mahminajah@gmail.com (Najah Mahmi)

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ranked Katherine Mansfield as one of the most famous and controversial female writers of the modernist experience. Her iconoclasm has condemned the patriarchy and hypocrisy of the modern age that have resulted in disruptive human relationships much shaped by confusing hollowness. In this scope, this essay provides a comparative study of “Mr Reginald Peacock’s Day,” [1917] “Poison” [1920] and “A Married Man’s Story.” [1923] It examines couples’ daily interactions within and outside the marital institution, questioning thus the pains and hardships of *modern* love.

2. Male/Female Modern Love Dynamics

For Katherine Mansfield, the intrinsic nature of life goes hand in hand with love, as an action and a reaction to marriage, family and friendship. In this respect, round characters in Mansfield’s stories portray the complexity of couples’ relationships that swing between attachment and detachment, usually epitomised in psychological and physical states of separation and reunion, coldness and warmth, joy and grief, hope and despair, within the marital institution and outside it.

Adopting a highly impressionistic style, polished satire and an explicit feminist tone, Katherine Mansfield debates the gist of love which usually results in alienated female protagonists much oppressed by a male biased dominating gender- specific role model, in which females are lonely disproportioned souls, fastened in betweenness; neither alive nor dead in a valley of emotional withdrawal where “A strange wind flows...then silence.” [1, 6] The wind is a key component in Mansfield’s literature. It utters characters’ dreadful powerlessness, isolation and estrangement, “frightening ... shaking the house, rattling the windows, banging a piece of iron on the roof.” [“The Wind Blows” 1915, 83- 106][14]

Male characters are also suffering in Katherine Mansfield’s short stories; yet, they are usually victims of their own selves, being, first, the result of a male oriented patriarchal apparatus, and, second, due to their perpetual arrogance and selfishness towards females, on the one hand, and on the other, due to their own psychological self-imprisonment and hence extreme disability of self-expression and self-revelation, proving often to be emotionally crippled, self-absorbed and *perfect* role-players. This ineluctably credits the male-female relationship a disappointing destiny under all conditions, be them within or outside marriage, and then attributes to the entire experience of love a poisonous “chill, bitter, *queer*” taste. [5]

The alternate passivity of both genders and their mutual inability to positively relate to each other double victimises them, hectically stabilising them in unexpressed states of loneliness which they even make suffer, as ‘she’ experiences the same sad stagnant state of being, sympathising with them and, then, visiting them at night to blow out their day’s fading light, and shifting them from their provisional socially ascribed realities towards a more fixed and everlasting deeper inner reality in which even loneliness is tired of being lonely in a “Silly world!” [4]

The tragic description of the soul destroying effect of loneliness on characters is explicitly uttered in most of Mansfield’s short stories, as in “The Tiredness of Rosabell” [1908], “Bliss” [1918], “Miss Brill” [1920], “Prelude” [1920], and “Life of MA Parker” [1922], to name a few; reducing them to “nervous icy numb nobodies”. [1, 5, 8, 10, 12]

In “Loneliness” [1910], loneliness is described as:

Motionless sitting, neither left or right
She turns, and weary, weary droops her head.
She, too, is old; she, too, has fought the light.
... Through the sad dark the slowly ebbing tide
Breaks on a barren shore, unsatisfied.
A strange wing flows ... then silence.

For Mansfield, the male and female characters have no possibilities of existence outside the arid cyclic system of never answered questions about the howness and whatness of love, then life. This guarantees their stand-by state of being within their couple relations as well as within themselves.

3. “Poison”: The Fatal Dose

The unfinished business of expecting ‘something to happen’ to redirect the flow of the days and then to intercommunicate the self with others- in permanent hunger for attention and affection, is well portrayed in the abrupt beginning of “Poison” [1920] that declares: “The post was very late. When we came back from our walk after lunch it still had not arrived.” [1]

This highlights Beatrice’s obsession with “the afternoon letters” [5] as her sole allowed hope in life that could uplift her from within her “dark head and thinking of— postmen ... and farewells that were not farewells and ...”, as affirmed through her beloved partner’s stream of consciousness, to “the white road” [1] for which she aspires beautifully and peacefully. Her daily reception of the post would prove her existence as someone for whom people care, while her male partner definitely considers it as hampering his own aspired project of love and intimacy, while they could not really transpire inner reality and effectively establish fruitful communication with each other.

The story’s male protagonist is a young ambitious lover who considers the marital institution as love’s ultimate peaceful nest; however, Beatrice, a twice- divorced beautiful rich young woman, proves high sceptic tendencies towards love and marriage, opting for “absolute freedom” and wishing to lead a bird’s life, as she sings cheerfully:

Had I two little feathery wings
And were a little feathery bird... [2]

One immediate reason of Beatrice’s happiness is her divorce which has allowed her, at last, to experience momentous freedom and joy, though her two former couple relations have bitterly and deeply vexed her, as she reveals through her overtly recalled memories in which she ironically states:

Both my husbands poisoned me ... My first husband gave me a huge dose almost immediately, but my second was really an artist in his way. Just a tiny pinch, now and again,

cleverly disguised—oh, so cleverly! —until one morning I woke up and in every single particle of me, to the ends of my fingers and toes, there was a tiny grain. I was just in time... [5]

She considers then couple's life in general and marital life in particular as a deadly poison which suffocates couples once they take the first dose of the so-called *love*, thinking:

Of the amount of poisoning that goes on ... it's an exception to find married people who don't poison each other—married people and lovers. Oh! ... the number of cups of tea, glasses of wines, cups of coffee that are just tainted. ... The only reason why so many couples “—she laughed—” *survive*, is because the one is frightened of giving the other the fatal dose. That dose takes nerve! But it's bound to come sooner or later. There is no going back once the first little dose has been given. It's the beginning of the end [4]

The words of Beatrice sound echoing Mansfield's own words in reality, as she was surviving a huge amount of emotional deprivation due to lifelong separation with her beloved husband Murry, caused by her health problems due to Tuberculosis which she simply wanted him to ignore, desiring for the miracle of her recovery to be performed. On the other hand, he was much more realistic than her and could never stop considering her illness as the ultimate dividing power that suffocates any possibility for their real existence as a couple; it was the poison that destroyed their couple's life.

A great degree of sorrow is explicitly expressed through their exchanged letters, in which she expresses her estrangement towards life and deep sufferance due to her loneliness and permanent hanger for love, for which she could never stop blaming him.

In one of her letters to Murry, Mansfield expresses her extreme alienation due to illness, war and imprisonment in Paris. She affirms:

... Silence into which I am fallen as though I had fallen into a lake —something without source or outlet --the waste of life, of our love and energy--the cruel 'trick' that life has played on us again— just when we timidly stretched out longing hands to each other. [229]

In his turn, Murry was utterly tortured by his desperate relationship with Katherine Mansfield, much shaped by passion and death. He says:

This love, which devoured her so, demanded for its fulfillment that she should never leave me, nor I her. It meant, in the world of cold reality, that I should stand by and simply watch her die. She could persuade herself, and truly believe, that she was 'only well when we are together: all else is a mockery of health'; but I knew it was only illusion. The ecstasy of love, which she required, was not health, but only a hectic hastening to death. Yet if I stood my ground against her fatal desire, she tore me to pieces, by her suffering and her despair. [*Between Two Worlds* 1936, 485] [15]

4. “A Married Man’s Story”: The Silent Monologue

An empirical reference to poison as a suffocating toxin for the love organism is made in “A Married Man's Story,” [1923] throughout which a married man- an unnamed man, is basically monologuing himself while thinking of possible causes of the coldness of his own life with his “*brokenhearted*” [2] wife. The Married Man relates directly the darkness of his marital situation in the present time to the past; his own childhood for which he has uncertain fragmented memories.

The explicit scene of his mother's death is a shaping scene in his memory and indeed the most shaping scene of his entire life. The Married Man recounts:

“Are you awake?” she said. Her eyes opened; I think she smiled. She leaned towards me. “I've been poisoned,” she whispered. “Your father's poisoned me.” And she nodded. Then, before I could say a word, she was gone; I thought I heard the door shut. I sat quite still, I couldn't move, I think I expected something else to happen. For a long time, I listened for something; there wasn't a sound. ... But even while I wondered what I ought to do, even while my heart thumped—everything became confused. I lay down and pulled the blankets round me. I fell asleep, and the next morning my mother was found dead of failure of the heart. [7]

The Married Man's mother is portrayed in the story as a physically weak passive woman imprisoned inside “one of [her husband's] big colored bottles,” [5] spending her whole life days enclosed in her room, moving between her bed, her hard sofa and the room's window from which she used to gaze at the street while backing up her cheeks with her hand. Her experience of the outer world is restricted to her inner space, showing a high degree of death in life. She is a woman who has never left her room, since she has produced him- as her only baby- after nine years of marriage, for which he even feels guilty as he felt that he “sapped all [her] strength.” [5]

This feeling of guilt would be mixed with prevailing fatigue, sadness, confusion, darkness and cold, the product of which would be a non-identified person nicknamed at school as “Gregory Powder”. This nickname refers to someone who is ‘Gregory’: vigilant and smart, yet ‘Powder’: dry and crushed. Then, he is an intelligent attentive person who, instead of being loved, respected and cared for, stands to be ignored and captivated by his abusive father who has suffocated his existence and diminished his life experience to be the shape and size of a “box” or a “bottle,” [5] and then ridiculed by his friends and companions at school.

The product is then a watchful loose pulverized person with a non-specified identity, the permanent unsolved questions of whom are “Who am I?”, “What is all this” [8] and “Why am I being driven—what harm have I done?” [4]; questions that keep the same despondent rhetorical tone of Beatrice's query in “Poison”: “Why! Why should it have happened to me? What have I done? Why have I been all my life singled out

by...It's a conspiracy," [5] for which all endeavor to answer sounds impossible.

Besides, the kid's guilt towards his mother implies an emotionally destructive parasitic nature of babies- then kids, being suddenly positioned amid their mothers and fathers who formerly used to be simply lovers. This critically repositions love in its usual confusing space shaped by the trinity of affection, pain and loss. Indeed, this is insinuated by the Married Man's portrayal of his failure of accepting and recognizing his baby as his own rather than a baby that someone "brought ... from outside," [2] especially that the Married Man's "wife doesn't seem to [him] the type of woman who bears children in her own body," [2] denying her even the feature of reproduction.

The Married Man's mother is never portrayed as a speaking person; "She says nothing," [5] She only whispers to her kid, and the whisper in the poisoning scene has been her second and last whisper in the whole story. It is a whisper of death: "your father's poisoned me", forerun by another whisper of "sweet repose", as if the only thing she has been wishing all along her *life* journey were a pleasing state of rest that would uplift her state of existence from the tiring death in life to a serene life in death; a desire she could at last fulfill after being poisoned and for which she is going through with "open... eyes" and a "smil[ing] face", portraying a moment of epiphany through which she achieves a high state of comfort and self-content.

The themes of life in death and death in life are also emphasized in "Poison", through Beatrice's passivity towards her present life and escape either to the world of memories to stress her sadness and pessimistic gloomy visions towards love and then life, or to the world of dreams between "lilies-of-the-valley" [2-4] in which she confines herself in her pause moments and which overtly symbolize her as a pure vibrant beauty "dressed in white" [2] who is blossoming in a grisly dark cold "valley".

In the two scenes of whispering, the Married Man's mother is addressing her son, as no communicative act between her and the father is depicted in the story, nor between the father and his son, knowing that this father is never introduced in the story as a husband, a partner or a lover. This restricts the father's state of being to a breathless "cut off image" whose lifelessness is conveyed through the description of his head as being "perfectly bald, polished ..., shaped like a thin egg", and via his "discrete, sly, faintly amused and tinged with impudence" [5] manners. The Married Man's father failed, at all levels, to lead a normal couple life and make a family. He failed to be present for his son and lead a shared life with his woman, either as a couple or simply as human beings, ending up denied not only the attribute of the husband, but even that of the father, to be labeled later by his son as "*Deadly Poison*", or even abbreviated as "old D.P." [8]

The poisoning act is emotional, mental and physical, and it does not affect only the Married Man's mother, but a whole family and then another family that would have its own turn in

the nonstop poisoning series, implying the couple relations' deadly contagiousness that contaminates one generation after the other, and produces out of shape crippled creatures, the grotesqueness of whom lays in their own reception and perception of an emotion named 'love'.

Love is a strong emotion that goes beyond their obscure fake natures, their masks and their own circular personal, social and psychological traumas, cold paralyzed hearts and minds that could never really answer the question "what are the bonds that bind [couples]?" (3) opting for pessimistic sceptic hypocrite *solutions* that worsen their couple's lives, through which they imprison themselves in their permanent asked question: "Why do people stay together?" [3] being quite convinced that couples "do no earthly good together" and that "human beings ... don't choose each other at all," [3] leaving thus no room for hope, change or even escape, as their lives are contoured by "a conspiracy." [1920]

"A Married Man's Story" can be divided into three parts: happy couple's life, doomed marriage and despairing childhood. The Married Man's present life within the institution of marriage is portrayed in four pages, and the same number of pages describes his childhood, whereas only one short paragraph in the midst of both phases presents him and his wife when they were "a model couple." [5] This paragraph functions as a dividing line between his miserable childhood and exhausted adulthood. No much details on the happy couple are given. However, too much stress is put on portraying their happiness in the past, sketched bitterly through the Married Man's stream of consciousness:

We were marvelously, radiantly happy.... If you had seen us together, any time, any place, if you had followed us, tracked us down, spied, taken us off our guard, you still would have been forced to confess, "I have never seen a more ideally suited pair." [5]

Likewise, apart from Beatrice's few words about her former poisoning marriages, no details are mentioned about her and her lover. The reader knows nothing about their past. They totally lay in the present time, as the story is set in a villa in southern France and portrays an upper-class couple who do nothing but romantically eat and shop. Their existence shows no traces for the past, no real plans for the future and no serious discussion of the present.

Beatrice and her lover are simply living on romantic fantasies- as proven by the male character, and painful fading happiness- as portrayed through the female. Their communicative discourses are not meant for any communication. They are simply uttered formations through which Beatrice is questioning her state of being and, on the other hand, surviving "dreamily" [5] her present days with her lovely man whom she thinks "wouldn't hurt a fly!" [5] whereas her lover is quite immersed in unveiling her mystique and understanding her, asking questions like "Who are you?" [2] for which he finds no answer but "Woman."

Beatrice's lover is trying to know her, focusing on her angel-like beautiful appearance and doing his best to ignore her

“dark head,” [5] and she is simply comforting him by saying “Yes, I am yours,” [3] and both are *romantically* submerged by superficiality, passivity and emotional withdrawal.

Ironically, the story is well noted for the use of white and green colors, implying a bright conceptualization of life, amid a bright sphere of light symbolized first by the female’s name ‘Beatrice’ that positions her as a representative of ideal womanhood and a source of joy, and second, through ‘moonlight’ and ‘lamps’ that connote for optimism and happiness; an ironic happiness that constitutes the general mood of the story, based on false suspense and approached from the characters’ sceptic superficial angles.

However, in “A Married Man’s Story”, happiness is a very short phase in the Married Man’s life, as ‘autumn’ has pervaded his entire life, to make gloom the most ordinary sphere for his existence, while joy is but a mere flash that vanishes once the father’s “scarlet ... bald head” [5] becomes visible.

The story’s gloomy mood is introduced through the first sentence: “It is evening.” [1] This is the general mood of the Married Man’s atmosphere as well as all his affirmations and reactions, either in his childhood, or while contemplating about his function and state of being as well as those of his wife and the baby within the marital institution. The gloom is stressed through the raining weather “outside” and “all over the world”, “the cold-dining room” and “the deserted gardens,” [1] the darkness that moves over light in every expression he utters, the static atmosphere as “All is as usual. ... as it were,” [1] the confusing lines of dream and reality, his description of himself in childhood as “the plant in the cupboard” (8), his uncertainty and puzzling memories as he “run[s] from shelter to shelter,” [1] and, especially, the way he stares and discerns his wife.

The Married Man proves extreme feelings of ignorance and estrangement towards his wife, and she rarely exchanges verbal or nonverbal expressions with him. Both exist within their own closed spaces, as she confines herself in a tenderly “*Mother and Child*” [1] relationship and observes her husband’s “everyday little lies” [2] from distance, gazing at him and smiling timidly as he pretends to be “an occupied man,” [1] and then informing him that “[she is] going to ... her cold bed,” [3, 4] after finishing all her household duties and reminding him of his own tasks, while he cannot stop thinking of “How long shall [they] continue to live— like this?” [3] and questioning the need of “their sleeping together,” [3] being totally unable to “inhale” till the “hideous ... cow that is driven along a road” [4] leaves the room and sleeps in darkness.

5. “Mr. Reginald Peacock’s Day”: An Unfinished Love Business

“Mr. Reginald Peacock’s Day” [1917] [11] proves to be more explicit in its portrayal of male-female relationship (s) than the two formerly discussed short stories, as the reader

gets involved in the couple’s conflictual life since the story’s first sentence.

The story begins with:

IF there was one thing that he hated more than another it was the way she had of waking him in the morning. She did it on purpose, of course. It was her way of establishing her grievance for the day, and he was not going to let her know how successful it was. But really, really, to wake a sensitive person like that was positively dangerous! It took him hours to get over it—simply hours. She came into the room buttoned up in an overall, with a handkerchief over her head—thereby proving that she had been up herself and slaving since dawn—and called in a low, warning voice: “Reginald!” [1]

The couple’s emotional detachment is overtly portrayed in this introductory paragraph that sets the general not-at-ease mood of Mr. Peacock’s Day. The first verb used in the story is: to hate. Mr. Peacock does not only hate the way his wife is waking him, but it is one of her “sordid ... morning trick[s]” he mostly hates: “IF there was one thing that he hated more than another it was the way she had of waking him in the morning.” [1]

Mr. Peacock is introduced to readership as “a sensitive person” who is suffering from his “dangerous” violent wife’s attitudes towards him. It takes him “hours to get over it” as her every day morning “low, warning voice ... escapes his energy ... , tak[ing] malicious delight in making life more difficult for him than-Heaven knows-it was, by denying him his rights as an artist.” [10] This over victimizes him and attributes her a powerful commanding quality.

However, the story’s beginning seems to be quite satirical and thus provides an unfinished portrait of the couple. First, because though the story is narrated from third person point of view, it is based on internal focalization, locating the whole perspective of the story within Reginald and restricting all conceptions and perceptions to his own personal visions, while his wife’s point of view is absent. This suggests a high degree of subjectivity towards the story’s characters.

The title of the story implies the husband’s controlling narcissistic personality which positions itself as the world’s center, in total ignorance of others. His last name ‘Peacock’ makes explicit reference to the colored bird who spends the whole day showing off his beauty in whole pride, while his first name ‘Reginald’ implies royal reign and sovereignty, and the two names are emphasized by ‘Mr.’ to stress his honorable distinguished state of being in his own environment. On the other hand, the wife’s name ‘Elsa’ suggests her as a person pledged to God, then some degree of disinterestedness to earthly life.

The first paragraph in the story is then ironically contradicting the story’s title to insinuate the contradictory worlds of the married couple. Furthermore, these contradictions are meant to stress the male’s self-absorbed attitudes towards his wife through which he receives and perceives her actions and reactions. His own vision is *THE* solo vision within which he

confines himself, joining Beatrice and the Married Man in their confinement within themselves, yet, this time with a flavor of selfishness and arrogance, “showing great satisfaction when he saw himself in the glass” as “He was, he decided, just right, just in good proportion.” [2]

Like the Married Man, Mr. Reginald never leads instructive warm conversations with his wife or son, showing, in his turn, a great degree of emotional withdrawal. However, he proves sometimes to be much more explicit than the Married Man, when it comes to condemning his wife for intentionally “humiliating” him by “drag[ing] him down to her level.” [1]

While his wife is financially dependent on him- as he ‘paid for every stick and stone that they possessed’ and she does “not have a penny to her name” [1] spending her day in household to “make [his] room ready for [him]” (3) to receive the angel-like beautiful females for his lessons of music, and motherhood duties “with a handkerchief over her head,” [1] which makes her “not great enough to respond” [3] his rare explicit queries for not quarreling, Mr. Peacock devotes his day to his own romantic fantasies, dreaming of his charming perfumed female pupils, visiting aristocratic families’ houses, reading invitation and thank you letters that make him “that bright bird, lifted its wings again, lifted them until he felt his breast would break.” [3]

As in Beatrice’s case, letters are so much important in the life of Mr. Peacock. They stand as his daily fuel from which he gets his daily energy. For him, letters are the voice of his own shaped mirror through which he receives his most desired praise words from female admirers, as he never gets them from his wife or, even, his own son. He might not be the only to blame, but, still, he never effectively operates for change.

Like the well educated Married Man presented in the story as a writer, Mr. Reginald Peacock is an artist! He, too, never talks to his son, but instead always sings to him, which makes the latter questions himself “why did his father always sort of sing to him instead of talk?...” [2] He never communicates; “Never a word-never a sign,” [1] he is a singing teacher. He is much praised by countesses and Lords for the “emotional quality in his voice.” He is so emotional and kind when he is outside his *family*. He is teaching all people “to escape from life?,” [7] which makes him a man of art and philosophy.

Applying Beatrice’s strategy of escape towards instantaneous happiness, for which the Married Man has proved failure, Reginald actually could well define two separate worlds for him: a world of his career as an artist, in which he achieves “Triumph upon triumph!” [7] and an opposite world of truth: “the truth ... that once you married a woman, she became insatiable”, and “... that nothing was more fatal for an artist than marriage, at any rate until he was well over forty.” [1]

In the first world, the frequent question is “Why weren’t all men like Mr. Peacock?,” [7] whereas in the second one, he usually questions himself “on an average three times a day ... Why had he married her?” [1] and “how could he help the

world escape from life? [being] Tied and bound like this.” [4] The second question is inquired through his own personal perception of reality, while the first is through his chosen agents for artistic interaction, through whom he forges a well-polished image of a prototypical artist and then a gentleman which he sells to people in his outer reality as a means of self-approval, and also to himself as a consolation for his frustrating painful marriage.

The opposition of Reginald’s two different worlds manifests in the opposite moods he experiences while interacting with his wife on the one hand, and with the females whom he is teaching and the people he meets while presenting as a singer, on the other. For him, marital institution is synonymous with weariness and darkness, while the world of art symbolizes ecstasy that fades in the air as soon as he gets back *home*. This is explicitly portrayed in the following quotation:

But as he let himself into the dark flat his marvelous sense of elation began to ebb away. He turned up the light in the bedroom. His wife lay asleep, ... He remembered suddenly how she had said when he had told her he was going out to dinner: “you might have let me know before!” And how he had answered: “Can’t you possibly speak to me without offending against even good manners?” It was incredible, he thought, that she cared so little for him-incredible that she wasn’t interested in the slightest in his triumphs and his artistic career. When so many women in her place would have given their eyes... And there she lay, an enemy, even in her sleep...Must it ever be thus? ... Ah, if we only were friends, how much I could tell her now! [7, 8]

The husband’s grief is so apparent in this passage as he goes back the dark marital nest upon which he couldn’t formulate a single positive view. Like the Married Man’s wife, his wife lays asleep in darkness. All the memories, interactions and details of this miserable world are desperately gloomy. However, while comparing home with his outer reality, the husband shows at this stage, for the first time, his deep good intentions for positive communication with his wife. He is portrayed as a seriously suffering husband; victim of his wife’s disinterestedness towards him and denial of his credits as an artist.

This explains, in a way, Mr. Reginald Peacock’s negative attitudes towards his wife, as he feels living with “an enemy”, and thus unveils the motifs of his enduring search for artistic recognition and emotional affection while being with his socially distinguished audience and “charming” pupils with whom he is often romantically yet miserably singing: “You love me. Yes, I *know* you love me” and “Weep ye no more, sad fountains. Why need ye flow so fast?” [6]

Nonetheless, though he is suffering and though he seems to be really regretful in the coming-back-home scene about his miserable state of being, and then willing to interact with his wife and come closer to her to better their shared marital life, he still proves a high communicative deficiency, namely because he is trying “to win her” [8] while she is sleeping.

The story ends with a scene of continuation that suggests

the impossibility of any change in the life of Reginald and his wife. He could not really communicate with his wife, as the only thing he could utter to her as to the admirers is "Dear lady, I should be so charmed-so charmed!", while she could not even listen to him, keeping the same negative attitudes towards him:

In his emotion he pulled off his evening boot and simply hurled it in the corner. The noise woke his wife with a terrible start. She sat up, pushing back her hair. And he suddenly decided to have one more try to treat her as a friend, to tell her everything, to win her. ...But of all those things he had to say, not one could he utter. For some fiendish reason, the only words he could get out were: "Dear lady, I should be so charmed-so charmed!" [8]

6. Conclusion

Reginald's trauma lays in the fact that he cannot fully recognize himself as an artist, nor can he function as a husband. Like the Married Man, Beatrice as well as all the other partners in the discussed stories, he could not allow himself space for change. They have all imprisoned their states of being either in the sad past, as is the case with the Married Man and Beatrice, or in the present time as does Mr. Peacock, Elsa, the Married Man's wife and the unnamed partner of Beatrice. Instead of positively experiencing life, they have "had lain in the cupboard—or the cave forlorn ... turn[ed] away from the world of human beings." [9] They have killed the flying bird in them, and since then have become mere lifeless painful concretizations of love.

Author Contributions

Najah Mahmi is the sole author. The author read and approved the final manuscript.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

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