

## Interpretation of Vera in Dill Pickle from the Perspective of Feminism

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**ABSTRACT.** As one of the most famous short story writers of the early 20th century, Katherine Mansfield devotes herself to feminism by presenting her feminist views in her short stories, developing in-depth analysis of women's psychological oppression for their liberation, exploring the way for women's protest against sexual discrimination. Her works full of beautiful language, rich connotation and strong feminist color. *Dill Pickle* is one of her masterpieces, which was written in 1917. The main content of the novel is composed of ideological activities of Vera and her direct words. This paper analyzes the heroine Vera from the perspective of feminism, and characterizes the public a modern female image who dares to love and hate, yearns for love and pursues freedom bravely, which arouse readers to think more about the female theme.

**KEYWORDS:** Feminism, *Dill Pickle*, Katherine Mansfield, Vera

### I. Introduction

Katherine Mansfield (1888-1923) is one of the most outstanding English short story writers in the early 20th century, known as "Chekhov of England"[1]. She dares to break the stale in her creation and focus on depicting the inner world of the characters, which has obvious modernistic characteristics. Mansfield describes the obstacles of her peers in the struggle to break into the world, depicts the loneliness, disillusionment, fear and rebelliousness of women under the pressure of capitalist social life, expresses their deep thinking and silent sigh, and deliver their feelings of rebellion and resistance.

*Dill Pickle* is one of Catherine Mansfield's important works. This article describes a couple who meet again in a restaurant when they broke up six years ago. After experiencing the ups and downs of life, the hero lives an exquisite life with a successful career. But the heroine Vera has gone through the bitter reality, whose youth and beauty are fading away, but she is still sensitive and reserved. The two people in a small coffee shop recall the good old days. The whole meeting is almost all about the male protagonist talking about his trip to Russia and their garden trip.

The heroine Vera has few words. However, the author describes Vera's inner world in a delicate and vivid way. Readers can clearly understand Vera through the author's delicate strokes. Those dusty feelings wake up in Vera's heart a little bit. When she finally finds that she can't walk into his heart to share her feelings about life, the heroine ends the conversation resolutely, leaving the hero in a daze.

This novel originates from the real-life experience of Mansfield, who is rebellious and has a huge gap with her family. In order to get rid of her parents' control, she married a violinist in a hurry. However, the marriage was doomed to end in tragedy. She left on the night of the wedding. Since then, she had made a living by herself in various ways, deeply feeling that life is not easy. A year later, she met and fell in love with a young man named Francis Heyman. He was handsome and Mansfield liked him very much. At that time, they fell in love with each other, planning their future together. But Hayman's family did not accept such a married and solitary woman, so he resolutely ended his relationship with Mansfield. Shortly after the break-up, Mansfield found out that she was pregnant. She wrote many times to ask him come to see her, but he never appeared. Mansfield had to face it alone. She went to Germany to rest and give birth, but unfortunately, she miscarried. Mansfield suffered a great blow to her body for the rest of her life. Six years later, they met in a restaurant. This is the prototype story of *Dill Pickle*.

## **II. Overview of Feminism**

Physiological gender and social gender are the essential concepts of feminist theory. Gender is a sign given by society to explain the gender difference between men and women. Gender differences are influenced by social culture, the role division of men and women, social expectations and behavior norms[2]. The evolution of feminist thought has experienced three stages. The first is at the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century. The original demand of feminists is to pursue women's equality with men in education, economy and legislation. The writing background of this paper is in this period. The second wave is from the beginning of the 20th century to the 1960s. During this period, with the two world wars, feminism evolves into several branches: Radicalism Feminism, Liberalism Feminism and Socialist Feminism. The former two advocate women's "sexual" liberation, while the latter emphasizes women's equality with men in class struggle and positive aspects. The third wave of movement, from 1960s to 1980s, is called the Post-feminist era, which aims to eliminate the gender discrimination in real life, achieve full freedom and comprehensive development for women, and lay emphasis on the equality and freedom of differences.

For a long time, women have been regarded as the existence of "second sex" to a great extent, either in the macro fields such as politics, economy, and ethics or in the micro private fields like family. The formation of the second sex generates from the unequal binary opposition. The first sex uses language and ideology to exclude and control the second sex. The second nature is often marginalized for various historical reasons and loses the right to speak [3]. The patriarchal thought holds that the gender order of hierarchy and inferiority is naturally formed and will not be

changed, and they expect women to be their accessories and tools. However, the feminism holds that the gender order is artificially constructed, not unchangeable, but the difference has been imperceptibly influenced into our subconscious[4]. Feminism always believes that the pursuit of equality must regard rights as a sign of equality. The fundamental point of feminism is the demand for all kinds of legitimate rights of women, that is, the demand for all kinds of rights of women as human beings [5].

### **III. Interpretation of Vera from the Perspective of Feminism**

#### ***3.1 Feminism in the Novel***

The setting of the novel is from the end of the 19th century to the early 20th century, when human beings were entering a highly developed era of material civilization. With the rise of the women's liberation movement, the old customs in Victorian era had been greatly challenged, and the idea of liberation spread all over the world. Mansfield, the author of the novel, was born in New Zealand. Her whole life was not smooth. At the age of 20, she left home alone to write in England. She was independent in character. Influenced by her original family, Mansfield, who lacked love, pursued happiness in her heart. Several unfortunate marriages did not destroy her[6]. We can see an independent image from her, who wanted to break up the stale. In *Dill Pickle*, the author combines her own experience to create a great female image who yearns for freedom, independence and the courage to pursue love. Although the heroine's words are not many in the full text, the author shows the inner feelings of the heroine to the readers by describing the psychic activities and behaviors of her[7]. These changes deeply reflect the heroine's feelings. The brave choice is made after wandering in the struggle. However, compared with the heroine, the author's description of the hero is shown through his voluble self-report and behavior description. The author only uses the word "he" to replace the heroine in the full text, consciously shaping a man who is fickle and self-interested, exposing and criticizing the hypocritical ethics of patriarchal society. In the stream of consciousness of patriarchal culture, women usually appear as objects and are observed. In order to change the status as "second sex", women must have self-consciousness and be able to actively refuse the awakening of objectified subject consciousness in the first place; secondly, women should have a sense of action that transcends themselves and exist as individuals with independent significance and value.

In this article, Mansfield reverses this traditional discourse strategy of men and women with female consciousness, and Vera becomes the main body of the novel and the observer to observe and think about the performance of the hero. The hero becomes the nameless "he", the other party in the novel, an individual without thought, just an abstract concept, and Vera becomes the focus of the novel.[8]. Through Vera, the author shows psychological activities in details, and narrates from the perspective of feminism.

### ***3.2 Interpretation of Vera from the Perspective of Feminism***

In Dill Pickle, Vera is delicate and sensitive. When she meets the hero again six years later, she doesn't forget the fragments of their interaction, that unforgettable afternoon or the name of the hero's dog. When the hero talks about his journey to Russia, Vera recalls a tragic song of boatman, floating in the dark river. She shivers and she seems at that moment to be sitting on the grass beside the mysteriously Black Sea. How fragile she is; Vera is affectionate, and she is eager to have a thoughtful lover and can comfort each other. On hearing the seemingly amorous confession of the hero, she begins to doubt and even regret her decision; Vera is independent and brave. When she unveils the real face of the hero, she would rather leave angrily than compromise to the man. At this moment, Vera, has been awakened from the consciousness as an independent man and she is in willingness to transcend the status quo, transcend themselves, and take the first step to find themselves and freedom [9].

#### ***3.2.1 The Delicate and Sensitive Vera***

Vera is a delicate and sensitive woman. She cares a lot about the details of her relationship with the hero. Six years later, when the two meets again, Vera recognizes her former lover at a glance and smiles at him, while the man looks at the woman who smiles at him, confused and frowned and then he says: "You've changed. You've changed very much. I've never seen you look so well before." [10] But Vera responds that she doesn't feel well. The above dialogue reveals that Vera is so disappointed that she never gives any excuse to him and the hero is utterly selfish and cruel in return. When the hero interrupts her for the first time by tapping on the table to ask the waitress for help, she laughs and remembers his tricks he often used to provoke her six years ago. What he could do was nothing but repeating Vera's words. It is easily seen that he is a selfish person who cares nothing but himself. When he talks at length about that unforgettable afternoon, the author uses an emphatic sentence: "What had remained in her mind of that particular afternoon was an absurd scene [11]."

The fragments left on Vera are embarrassing and absurd. When the hero mentions about his trip to Russia, he utters an exclamation that Vera is a quite remarkable audience. Although the man succeeds, he is still conceited and self-centered. He keeps interrupting her words. He doesn't care about her fear of cold and poor health. He doesn't even ask why Vera sold her favorite piano and what had happened on her in the past six years? He just keeps talking about his fast journey, which is her favorite Russia. On hearing this, Vera perceives a hint of mockery which carries no past affection and it paves the way for her indignant departure. Before she left, Vera could no longer force herself to cooperate with the hero's deceitful performance, but she manages to squeeze out a smile and says, "Yes, I am afraid I must." This reaction reflects her delicate emotion. What an elegant and decent woman!

### ***3.2.2 Expecting Sweet Love***

Vera is looking forward to love, hoping to find a man who can understand and comfort her. When she meets the hero again six years later, she smiles while he frowns. She comes towards him but he closes his eyes an instant. When he finally recognizes her, she takes out her warm little hand from the leather tube and hands it to him, indicating that she was eager to be close to him at this time. It can also be imagined that she has not forgotten her old love for six years. This unexpected encounter makes the heroine very happy and eagers to be able to repair the old with him[12]. When the hero mentions that he has completed their dream trip to Russia, Vera begins to struggle in her heart. "She felt the strange beast that had slumbered so long within her bosom stir, stretch itself, yawn, prick up its ears, and suddenly bound to its feet, and fix its longing, hungry stare upon those far away places[13]. "That beast is her deep desire for love. His narration of traveling in Russia revives her desire for love. She longs to know each other. With the advancement of the dialogue, on hearing the seemingly affectionate expression of the hero, Vera even has a little regret for her decision to break up. "Ah, God! What had she done! How had she arrived to throw away her happiness like this!"[14]

However, true love needs mutual understanding and care. Although Vera expects for sweet love, their personalities and life experiences are too different. Six years later, there are still many things that could be changed, but the only thing that does not change is the selfish nature of the hero. This difference makes two people unable to be loved by each other no matter six years ago or six years later. The different characters of them were doomed to an irreparable love.

### ***3.2.3. Independent and Brave Vera***

Vera is a brave woman. Six years ago, despite the crazy love of her old lover, she left the man by no means for she unveiled the true color of the man, selfish and arrogant. When they meet again six years later, Vera determines to leave again because he is still the same. Although Vera is longing for love, she is independent and brave. At the end of the story, she chooses to be alone, she would not easily compromise to men. In the article, Vera leaves the image of a woman who is struggling for life, but her spirit is rich and royal. Even in the face of such struggling life, she would not like to cling to men.

In the article, when the hero interrupts her several times, Vera also interrupts his conversation in turn, which is a positive response. When the hero believes he knows Vera well, he says, "and then the face that you never had made friends with people. How I understand that, for neither had I. is it just the same now?" [15]The readers can easily comprehend the determination and courage of Vera. At the end of the article, the hero can't believe that the lonely Vera unexpectedly leaves him, the rich and successful one. Mansfield satirizes the selfishness, indifference and egotism of men vividly, and delivers us a strong and independent image of modern woman.

#### 4. Conclusion

It can be seen that under the control of the patriarchal society, women are regarded as accessories of men and exist without independent personality and social status. As a female writer, Mansfield has always been aware of women's thoughts and living conditions in her writing career, endowing the article with strong feminist thoughts, and expressing her in-depth thinking on women's issues. The careful arrangement made by the author is in order to make women speak for themselves and have independent subjectivity. In this article, Dill Pickle, Vera has both gentle and kind-hearted femininity and brave and decisive masculinity. She is unwilling to compromise with men and is in the position of oppressed "second sex". She bravely says no to fate through her own choice. Vera's characters subvert the stereotype impression of women as inherent dependent, passive and subordinate at that time.

With her keen brush strokes, deeply explores the delicate and sensitive inner world of the heroine-Vera. Vera is full of expectation for love and fantasy about her former lover. Finally, she bravely makes a choice and leaves resolutely. The development of her mindset reflects her growing experience as a new independent woman. Although their relationship eventually breaks down, the break itself is a rebirth, the first step for women gets away from attachment to independence[16]. In Mansfield's time, this spirit was precious. Because of this, Mansfield is regarded as one of the greatest novelists at the beginning of the 20th century. Her works show the spirit of women's love of life and brave pursuit of freedom, guiding the readers to experience the loneliness, warmth and disappointment in their lives. It has successfully shaped the new realm of modern women's pursuit of independence and freedom.

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